



'THE MIGRATION' July & August

The weather & the plains:

We have had a fairly cool and dry couple of months leading up to mid August. The wind came up and dried out the long grass which had grown so high the month before, picking up the dust with it. We had a few of our guests coming back from game drives looking like they had great tans. Mid August brought with it a few showers, settling the dust and bringing steady rains in the evenings, this lasted for five or six days.

The grassland around the marsh was steadily grazed by the majority of the Loita migration of wildebeest and zebra in July. Towards the east where they originate from did not receive the rain that the Maasai Mara benefitted from in the April/ May rains. They have gradually moved back into Maasai country after having their full, making way for the Serengeti migration.

The Migration:

The first large groups came up into the Maasai Mara in early to mid July, moved up through the sand river and on to Keekarok fairly rapidly. Then feasting their way through the long lush grass eastwards and westwards towards the Talek river. Large numbers were around 'look out hill' and there were some early crossings. This all seems like the typical run of the mill migration, but they then surprised us by heading back south towards Tanzania for a while out of our reach. This did not matter too much to us at Governors' as the Loita migration which was still very concentrated, were right on our door step enjoying the marsh.



Part of the migration eventually made up their minds to move on up back to the Talek River, hop across as the river was low and in some places dry, and come towards Rhino Ridge. In the mean time the other part of the migration heading in our direction had crossed the Mara River either in Tanzania or on the southern end in Kenya.

The first couple of weeks of August we saw some incredible herds moving up through the Mara triangle on the west side of the Mara River and some large, but scattered herds coming up over Rhino Ridge. At this stage the Loita migration had left us.

There are some good numbers of wildebeest and scattering of zebras up near Little Governors in the Mara triangle, but many of the large herds are moving back into Northern Tanzania. They have recently had good rains, and as any good, quick witted wildebeest knows there will be water and food. With our recent bout of showers we are sure they will be back.

News flash: There has just been a crossing in front of the bar at Governors' Camp over lunch time.

Wildlife:

Our resident herds of wildlife are still settled around the camps, the waterbuck have had calves, very hairy and inquisitive and the warthogs have tiny pocket sized piglets. The Thompson Gazelles have been rutting and have seen some strong fights with a few flesh wounds and tears.

The buffalo are not as plentiful as when the grass was high and the elephant are moving further distances in search of nutritious leaves and branches. We have had more **elephant** in the camps recently, browsing in the forest as the grass has dried out and has mostly been grazed. There is still some lush broad leafed grass on the river banks which is usually harder to get to, but with the river being so low the elephants are grazing it with ease. There is a theory that elephant are not so keen on the cacophony of noise that the wildebeest produce and prefer peace and quiet else-where, this may be true, but I always think food is their priority.



Photos courtesy of Chala Cadot and Mrs. Valdivieso

Some of our guests have been lucky enough to have spotted **Black Rhino**, they have definitely made themselves more invisible as they are of a solitary sort. With the increase in animals they are probably happier sleeping the day off in a thicket and having the odd bite to eat. Black Rhino are the only indigenous Rhino to Kenya, white rhino which can be found elsewhere in Kenya were brought in from Southern Africa as part of a conservation effort. In fact the last time a Northern White Rhino roamed through Kenya of its own free will was 8000 years ago.

The Quinine trees (*Rauvolfia caffra*) started fruiting in late July, flocks of Olive pigeons which have the most beautiful markings came in to the big mature trees to feed. As the fruit became riper, Ross' & Schalows' Turacos, Double toothed barbets, Black and white Hornbills, Speckled mouse birds and bull bulls have all come in to take advantage of the season. Governors' Camp have been lucky enough to have welcomed the arrival of 5 new Jacksons Francolin chicks, which are a rare sight in the Mara.

Jackal & Hyena:

Both these animals have been very active, hunting as well as recycling what is left by everyone else. They have also been denning throughout July and August, making use of old Aardvark and warthog burrows, the Jackals preferring termite mounds with the larger chimneys which the pups can retreat into whenever there is danger. Yes, hyenas can be cute, to a certain age anyway. They are very small and black when they first arrive on the scene and after a few weeks become quite fluffy and develop their spots. There is only one type hyena in the Mara the spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*). There are three types of jackal, the common black or silver-backed Jackal (*Canis mesomelas*), Side-striped Jackal (*Canis adustus*) which has a wolf like face and a white tip on its tail and the Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*), this being a very rare sighting.

Lion:

The lion have been particularly happy that the migration is at full steam, gorging themselves on wildebeest. Lion mostly prefer to hunt during the night as it is cooler and they have the advantage of being able to see better than prey animals at night. Nocturnal animals have an extra sensory layer which allows the light of the stars and the moon to be absorbed and refracted through their retina a second time, giving them better night vision. As there are huge numbers of wildebeest always on the move it is not infrequent that a lion may try her luck at any time. This just requires patience.



Photos courtesy of Chala Cadot and Mrs. Valdivieso

The Marsh/ Bila Shaka pride: The 4 older lionesses are still doing very well with their 9 cubs, which have grown very rapidly and are already about a year and a half old. The younger lionesses (daughters), one having 2 one year old cubs, another having 2 one month old cubs and the third without. They have not had such luck. There was a serious fight between three of the lionesses an older one and two of the younger, during this skirmish one of the 1 year old cubs was badly injured on his right back leg. He is still doing ok, but has a very bad limp. The lioness with the 2 one or so month old cubs, lost one and actually left her other one with the lioness with the 2 one year olds. She has since been seen mating again, obviously having gotten over her loss and coming back into season. The same two pride males are still with them and in good condition, this is very good news for the continuation of the pride and the youngsters.

The Paradise pride: The 3 lionesses all have cubs, one with 3 two month old, one with 3 three week old and the last with only 1 remaining two month old. The lioness with only one cub has strangely been seen mating with Notch's one son, picture attached. This is very unusual, as she should not be coming into oestrus at this stage. She will leave the cub, mate and then return. Notch and his son

seem to be the dominant males of the paradise pride. The other 4 sons having moved across the river and are not seen on a regular basis.

Cheetah:

The 3 brothers have been moving large distances, not interested in mating with any females at this time, just hunting. An easier life in comparison to any female cheetah, having to live a solitary life, and put food on the table.

Shakira, with her 3 cubs who are now nearly fully grown has been in the area during July. She has recently been seen going down the river.



Photos courtesy of Penny Adamson and Dave Richards

There has been a new female in the area, presumably 'Kikes' daughter as she jumped up onto a vehicle just yesterday. Cheetahs do not ordinarily jump onto vehicles, unless they have been taught by their mother.

There has been another stranger through the area recently, a female which may have crossed over from the Mara triangle as the Mara river is so low.

Leopard:

Our local beauty queen has been seen fairly often between Governors' and Ilmoran. 'Kijana' the young male has not been seen recently, maybe preferring the other side of the river.

There are three active Leopards near the river. A seriously large male who has been mating with one of the females, and another female. Male leopards, especially a large one tend to try and overlap their territory with as many female territories as he is able, increasing his chances of reproducing.

We hope to share the magic of our corner of the Mara with you sometime soon.