



**LAST NIGHT BBC 1 TELEVISED BIG CAT DIARY LIVE FROM GOVERNORS' CAMP IN MASAI MARA. CONGRATULATIONS TO THE BBC IT WAS A TREMENDOUS SUCCESS. CATCH ALL THE LIVE ACTION ALL WEEK ON BBC 1 AND AT <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bigcat/>**

### **Game Report September 2008**

September brought hot days (midday temperatures averaged 28 C) with cool mornings averaging around 17°C. On the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September a heavy rainstorm with strong winds swept dramatically across the plains bringing many trees including lots of Warburgia (African greenheart) crashing down. The rest of the month brought a few rain showers and the grasslands are now drying with much of the savannah grasses eaten and trodden down by the huge herds of the wildebeest migration that have come through our area.

The wildebeest continued to cross the Mara River throughout September, with a huge crossing of around 100,000 individuals recorded at the start of the month. On the 28<sup>th</sup> there was a dramatic crossing when a large herd crossed back to the conservancy and ten animals were taken by crocodile. By the end of September many wildebeest had crossed over to the west, and good numbers could be seen on the Posse and Burangat Plains. Many Zebra can still be seen in the Musiara Marsh and Bila Shaka.

The resident families of Elephant are thriving and adding to their numbers as some family units have very young calves ranging in age from a few days old to a few weeks old. The families are often feeding within the Musiara marsh and Riverine woodlands of the Mara. Large Topi herds are gathered, grazing on the ridges and plains. Many of the Topi cows are heavily in calf and should be calving sometime within the next month. Small herds of Eland have also been reported out on the plains and the large resident breeding herd of Cape buffalo can be seen in the Bila Shaka and Rhino Ridge areas. Good numbers of Maasai Giraffe are resident within the Riverine woodlands of the Mara River often moving out to the acacia woodlands to supplement their diets.

Early in the month, the Warburgia trees were laden with fruit much to the delight of the resident troops of Olive Baboons who spent a lot of time feasting in the branches. In the early mornings and late evenings shy Bushbuck have been gathering in small groups with their calves in the clearings of the Riverine Forests.

Many Thompson and Grants Gazelles are grazing on the short grass plains. The Thompson Gazelle mothers have to be extra vigilant at this time of year as their many young fawns are easy prey for hungry Black-backed Jackals. Female Thomson Gazelles have a relatively short gestation of five and a half months, so in good times they can have two fawns in a little over a year. The short grass plains are also home to many warthogs, who are seen on their knees grazing with young piglets of 9-10 months old. The boars are mostly solitary but they will associate with females when in oestrus. Many of the sows are pregnant and should have their young in around a month's time when the short rains arrive.

The Wart Hogs are a delicacy for the lion, who frequently dig them out of their bolt holes.



**This months wonderful photos are courtesy of Darren Wood who stayed Il Moran on his honeymoon and was lucky enough to see this Aardvark out on the plains. Thank you Darren!**

The shorter grass has meant that Serval Cats have been seen more often, much to the delight of our guests. On two occasions in the early morning in September there were sightings of the African Wildcat in the longer grass areas around the marsh. The African Wildcat hunts grass rats, mice, insects and hares, so the fringes of the Marsh are a perfect hunting ground. The early mornings have also brought sightings of Aardwolves for some of our delighted guests. Aardwolves are like miniature striped hyenas, and have a specialised insectivorous diet which comprises mainly harvester termites. They can consume up to 200,000 insects a night. Being a specialised feeder their pre-molars and molars are just mere pegs yet they have a full set of incisors and canines which they use as weapons of defence. The Aardvark, or Ant Bear, seen above, also feeds on ants, but bears some resemblance to a pig, with a long tapering muzzle and pale, yellowish-grey sparsely haired body. It is almost exclusively nocturnal, and Darren Wood was lucky to spot the one he photographed above.

The Bila Shaka/Marsh pride of three males, three sub adult females, four breeding females and their nine cubs of varying ages have had a month of mixed fortunes. Early in September the young three-month-old cub was tragically killed by a nervous buffalo. They have been hunting Ostrich, Zebra and Wildebeest, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> they killed a young one-month-old elephant at Bila Shaka provoking mixed reactions from clients and guides alike.

The Ridge/Paradise Pride, which is a large pride with eighteen members, has been making the most of the migration moving through their territory. The pride has often been seen feeding down at the wildebeest favoured crossing sites..

In July an extraordinary event took place: one of our resident cheetah, Shakira, gave birth to six cubs. With such a high infant mortality rate among cheetah, Shakira's cub litter is really significant. We recognised the vulnerability of this little family and set about immediately to assist the Masai Mara Reserve Rangers to protect them. The Reserve rangers do not have enough vehicles at their disposal to monitor animals such as this cheetah, so we provided them with a vehicle and our former head guide who knows the Mara intimately and has a deep understanding of the ecosystem and its fragility. They established an exclusivity zone to protect the cheetahs and monitored their movements without interfering in their lives at all. This was done to ensure that we helped to give them the best possible chance of survival. Females normally give birth in cover and do not bring their young out until they are around a month old. Shakira proved herself to be a very active mother, hunting Thompson and Grants Gazelle successfully every second day. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September tragedy struck and one of the cubs was killed by a buffalo. A second cub was missing after the incident with the buffalo but we are happy to report that the following day the little lost cub was reunited with Shakira, unharmed. She has been moving her cubs regularly finding perfect cover for them in thickets and gullies. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September the family had a terrible fright when they were chased by a male lion and two female

lionesses. In the ensuing panic the cubs were scattered but thankfully all were reunited later and none had come to any harm. We will keep you updated with Shakira and her family's progress.



**These wonderful photos are courtesy of Angela Scott of BBC Big Cat Live and Darren Wood, Thank you both.**

The other cheetahs of the Musiara area of the Mara are also thriving. The nomadic males have been feeding well, their coalition of 2 and 3 giving them a tremendous strength in numbers.

The leopards of our area are doing well. Kijana, the young male, has been moving about his territory around the marsh. The young female is often seen in the gullies on the edge of the plains areas, and earlier on in the month she had the remains of a Greater Bush Baby in an acacia tree. A shy male and female have been seen close to the crossing points, and a male and female estimated at eight months old have been seen often on the south side of the Talek River. The male is quite a lot bigger than the female and we think they are Bella's offspring. Recent sightings of Bella, the magnificent female leopard whose family we have had the privilege of following over the years, indicate that she is now beginning to show her age.

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



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