



PRESS STATEMENT

AERIAL TOTAL COUNT OF ELEPHANTS, BUFFALOES AND GIRAFFES IN THE TSAVO-MKOMAZI ECOSYSTEM IN FEBRUARY, 2017.

JUNE 21, 2017

The Tsavo-Mkomazi aerial census is a regular cross border survey undertaken every three years within protected areas and their immediate neighborhoods in both Kenya and Tanzania. The protected areas covered during the census include: Tsavo East, Tsavo West, Chyulu and Mkomazi National Parks as well as South Kitui National Reserve, while the adjoining neighborhoods include Taita, Kulalu and Galana Ranches.

Jointly, all this area forms the largest conservation area in Kenya, covering an area of over 49,611.4km². The 2017 dry season aerial census was carried out between February 12, 2017 and February 21, 2017.

The census commenced with a training component where all participants and especially the observers underwent rigorous

training to ensure that they were able to capture the right data during the census. The objectives of the census were:

- (i) To determine the number and distribution of elephant carcasses, and calculate a carcass ratio as the key indicator of mortality trend,
- (ii) To determine the impact of poaching on the elephants population in the Tsavo-Mkomazi ecosystem
- (iii) To understand the distribution of elephants in relation to distribution of available water,
- (iv) To map human activities inside and outside the protected areas, for example, logging, settlements, farming, and charcoal burning,
- (v) To document the distribution and number of livestock, that is, cattle, camels, goats and sheep , and donkeys, in relation to elephants and other large mammals in the ecosystem
- (vi) To interpret the information obtained and deduce sound management decisions to guide management of elephants and other wildlife in this fragile ecosystem.

Nine light aircraft, 4-seater and 2-seater planes, fitted with observer calibrated streamers were used for the counting exercise. Data was captured by observers in the aircrafts using GPS and digital voice recorders. Flights were made along pre-established transects at altitudes between 300-400ft above ground across the Ecosystem.

During the census, a total of 12,866 elephants were counted; 12,843 in Tsavo Ecosystem and 23 in Mkomazi National Park. Overall, the elephant population in Tsavo-Mkomazi Ecosystem increased by 14.7% over the last three years, that is, 2014-2017. This represents an annual increase of 4.9% over the period.

A total of 1,167 carcasses were recorded during the survey. The 'very old' elephant carcasses had the highest proportion with more than 53.4% (numbering 623) of the total carcasses, followed by old carcasses at 44.0% (numbering 514). Only three and 27 fresh and recent carcasses respectively were encountered during the survey. Overall, there was 8.3% carcass ratio for the Tsavo-Mkomazi ecosystem.

The population of buffalo counted in Tsavo-Mkomazi ecosystem during the February 2017 census was 8,623, which is about 46% increase compared to 5,912 buffalo recorded in the same ecosystem in 2014.

The 2017 Tsavo-Mkomazi census indicated that the ecosystem supports a large number of giraffes totaling 4,323 compared to 2,891 giraffes counted in 2014 census. Group sizes of up to 80 individuals were recorded in 2017. This represents an increase of 49.5%, which is a very good result considering the threat giraffes are under due to poaching for meat.

The census also established that there was an increase in human activities within and around the protected areas compared to the situation in the previous years. Incidents of charcoal burning are on the rise, as well as the number of livestock in the ecosystem, both of which pose a threat to wildlife and their habitat.

KWS therefore plans to carry out further investigations on elephant poaching threat levels in Galana Ranch and Tsavo East National Park northern side where a high carcass ratio was found with a view to taking corrective measures.

The aerial survey was supported by several partners including: Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Tanzanian Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), David Sheldrick's Wildlife Trust (DSWT), World Wildlife Fund - Kenya (WWF-K), International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Marwel Wildlife (MW), African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Tsavo Trust (TT), Lewa Wilderness (LW), Farmland Aviation (FA), and Private Pilots (PP). KWS appreciates all these partners for their contributions that ensured successful completion of the exercise.