

Environmental Review 2000

The past year was one of mixed fortunes at Klein's Camp. The relationship with our landlords, the Ololosakwan Maasai, led to improved land management practices early in the year, but this was somewhat undone by a severe drought during the latter months of the year. The short rains of November 1999 were very sparse and this made us reliant on good long rains in April and May. The situation was aggravated by a very hot and dry February. A total of 139mm of rain in March provided some relief but the long rains never arrived in April and May, with just 21.5mm falling during the two months. The scattered rainstorms of July and August also failed to materialise. The number of animals migrating up the eastern Serengeti to the Mara was certainly less than in 1999. By the middle of November the drought had reached a critical stage with large numbers of wildlife and Maasai cattle perishing due to the lack of both food and water. The local Maasai report this to be the worst drought in this area in living memory. The result was that we experienced a major problem with large numbers of Maasai with their cattle crossing over into the Klein's Camp concession from Kenya. The area was over-grazed by these cattle, which congregated around salt licks and the little remaining water. The wild animals were pushed off the concession and the wildebeest-zebra migration never came anywhere close to Klein's. The bulk of the wildebeest and zebra returned down the north-western part of the Serengeti.

By the time the rains finally began on 16 November, there was no ground cover or leaves on the trees, and only two freshwater springs were seeping weakly. To our relief, 260mm of rain fell during the following six weeks. This greatly alleviated the drought but still left us over 200mm below average for the 2000 calendar year. So, as the year ended, the wildlife of Klein's was once again reliant on scattered showers. As a result of the drought the Maasai livestock over utilised the salt licks and watering points. This resulted in sheet erosion around watering points. Gully erosion has started along the cattle paths in some of the saddles between the mountains and on routes leading to and from salt licks and watering points.

Earlier in the year a planned burning programme was introduced. In conjunction with our landlords we managed to limit the burning of the Klein's concession from 80% every year to less than 50%. We hope to continue this trend in 2001. However, the burning had to be scaled back dramatically due to the drought and there are now some areas around the camp that have not been burnt since 1992 where a lot of moribund vegetation is perhaps impeding new grass growth.

Buffalo numbers are on the increase again and African Elephant herds contain a high proportion of sub-adults and calves which is indicative of a growing population. During the height of the drought, elephants increased their usage of Acacias, stripping bark and knocking over large trees. Some dense stands have been opened up and the felled trees have provided cover for new seedbeds. There have been no further sightings of the young Black Rhino bull which was in the area last year. Leopard sightings improved during the drought due to improved visibility, while the Lion population in the valley has remained stable. We speculate that hunting in the region was of shorter duration than normal in 2000 and a buffer zone existed between Klein's and the trophy hunters this year. Although this zone was narrow it appears to have had a positive affect. Unfortunately, the increased Maasai presence in the second valley around the airstrip and beyond appears to have resulted in Lions vacating this area; how many were killed by the Maasai is unclear.

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