

Project Update: April 2015

The following is a summary of the data collected in the earlier months of the project

Indigenous Maasai knowledge on weather

The Maasai were found to be very knowledgeable about the weather and the following were some of the signs that informed them about weather changes

- a) Appearance of vultures and eagles in larger than normal numbers. This indicated the start of severe drought as it signalled the start of death of their animals
- b) Appearance of red ants. This indicated that the rains were nearby.
- c) Entrails reading. This was done by a specialised family of experts who slaughtered a goat or a cow opened the intestines to read the content. From these they could tell the type of vegetation eaten thus the seasons of the year and thus predict the next season that will follow.

The Maasai have a good knowledge of when the wildebeest will move in and out of the Mara by simply observing nature. What appeared to baffle all the people interviewed though was the current weather changes which they all agreed was changing in a rapid and confusing manner and their experts could not easily predict.

General Effects of Climate Change on bio diversity and eco-tourism in the Maasai Mara

Poor climate is resulting in poor breeding of livestock and increased deaths of the livestock which is depleting the stocks and affecting the Maasai cultural activities such as graduation of morans this is expected to escalate resource conflicts including human wildlife and wildlife livestock conflicts which are already on the rise as competition for water and pasture rises. The recent burning of the Mau Forest to create more space for farming is a case in example as fluctuating rainfall and increased crop failures and reduced yields begin to bite.

Due to reduced rainfalls and the destruction of the Mau Forest the Mara River water levels have dropped drastically in the recent past which has significantly reduced the crocodile populations in the river. This is expected to reduce the spectacular 'survival for the fittest element' during the crossing of the wildebeest as the preying crocodiles will be fewer.

Maybe of great concern is the *Parthenium hysterophorous* weed that is slowly spreading in the reserve. This is a weed that no animal seems to be feeding on thus its growing freely and spreading rapidly along the banks of the Mara River. This may result in reduction of pasture in future if it's not checked.

Finally, at this point it's a bit difficult to tell the effects climate change is having on eco-tourism in the Maasai Mara but it's clear that the sudden rapid changes of the climate in the Maasai Mara are affecting the flora and fauna in this great biodiversity hot spot.



The Maasai in their traditional attire



The Mara river (notice the low water levels)



The wildebeest newly migrating into the Maasai Mara