Project Update: March 2018

A. Introduction

This study, which commenced in July 2017, and is expected to be completed by July 2018, is aimed at giving a meaningful understanding of potential conflicts and/or benefits of small carnivores, and hereafter referred to as mesocarnivores, to people living on the edges of Mau Forest, Kenya. The information will be used to raise awareness and/or enhance positive perception of these understudied and often misunderstood species. The study involves live and camera trapping of mesocarnivores across different habitat types and land uses. Additionally, it also involves sampling mesocarnirvore diets as a way of understanding the roles they play in forest regeneration, trophic structures and among local communities within and around Mau forest.

B. Project progress

I. Camera trapping

Thus far, a total of 2,120 pictures of mesocarnivores have been recorded in the 15 camera traps for 5,760 camera trap hours. From the pictures, 11 species are identifiable and these include; the servalina genet (*Genetta servalina*), Egyptian mongoose (*Herpestes inchneumia*), honey badger (*Mellivora capensis*), caracal (*Caracal caracal*), serval cat (*Leptailurus serval*), African civet (*Civettictis civetta*), *Ichneumia albicauda*, *Galerella sanguinea*, *Genetta maculata*, *Canis adustus*, and the Near Threatened Jackson's mongoose (*Bdeogale jacksoni*). The camera traps can capture and record an image as far as 30 m out. From our 8 months of data collection, the cameras have been successful in capturing the mesocarnivores. The 16GB-SD Cards that are used in the cameras are replaced once per month.

II. Community Surveys of Conflicts

This project component is yet to commence. However, we have developed comprehensive questionnaires to be used in the coming months to investigate human – small carnivore conflicts. We will employ a student from Maasai Mara University and an assistant from the local community to help with community surveys.

III. Posters of Mau Forest Mesocarnivores

Currently, together with my advisor, Dr Adam Ferguson from the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, USA), we are developing a poster on the Mau Forest mesocarnivores using the Field Museum Field Guides program/template http://fieldguides.fieldmuseuim.org/to help raise awareness of these species among the local communities. We plan to print 50 posters and distribute them to primary schools in communities surrounding the Mau Forest.

IV. Tree Nurseries

As part of this project, we are working with local communities to establish tree nurseries in selected project areas. So far, two different local wellwishers have offered their land for establishing tree nurseries. These will be established in the next couple of months. The nurseries will be owned by the local communities and seedlings emanating from the nurseries will be planted by local community members with the project support. Additionally, we will link up with a separate ongoing project at Mau on bongo

(*Tragelaphus eurycerus*) surveillance, alongside more community members to set up more tree nurseries.

Unanticipated Challenges

Our large and serviceable 4WD field vehicle that otherwise had no issues, has since broken down severally, presenting logistical challenges of accessing far flung and remote areas of Mau Forest. Consequently, we have been forced to hire motorbikes for camera trapping activity (for setting cameras, replacing camera batteries and during collection of SD cards from deployed cameras for analysis). Unfortunately, given the wet weather and the inaccessibility (on motorbikes) of some of the remotest parts, field trips have either been postponed or cancelled altogether, delaying the project progress.

In addition, the prolonged election period in Kenya, precipitated some tensions in the project area, with advisories by the local Kenya Forest Service and Kenya Wildlife Service personnel against camping in designated camping sites for the live trapping exercises.

Way forward

Currently, we have 10 camera traps deployed at the Transmara portion of the forest and five camera traps at Mau Narok portion of the forest. We have also in touch with scientists from the Bongo Surveillance Project, who have donated mesocarnivore camera trap pictures of mesocarnivores from portions of the Mau where they are trapping. The live trapping activity will continue in the coming months because the security situation has improved. The field vehicle has also been fixed and fieldwork will thus continue to completion.

Left: Camera trap team with Kenya Forest Officers. ©Molly Mcdonough. Right: Setting camera traps with my advisor Adam Ferguson of Field Museum of Natural History Chicago. ©Molly Mcdonough.


Left: Setting cameras at Transmara Mau Forest. ©Adam Ferguson. Right: Setting Cameras with Maasai Mara University 3th year student Dorothy Jebet. ©Molly Mcdonough.