PREDATOR POST

CHEETAH CHAT - 24TH EDITION

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Updates by the Mara Predator Conservation Programme on cheetahs in Maasai Mara



PHOTO © MPCP

Winda & Olonyok

The last remaining Musketeers are now about 10 years old, an impressive milestone for cheetahs in the wild. However, with age, we have observed them sometimes struggling during hunts and even switching their prey selection. Rather than targeting larger animals like topi and wildebeest, they have shifted to hunting impalas.

They continue to roam the vast areas of their traditional territory, often crossing the Talek River and venturing as far as Olare-Motorogi Conservancy.

In August, after crossing the Talek into the Olkiombo area, the two males unexpectedly separated for nearly two weeks. Strangely, neither seemed to search for the other, which is unusual behaviour for cheetah coalitions since they typically reunite quickly after being apart. One male eventually crossed back over the river, while the other remained on the opposite side, hunting separately. The two males eventually reunited and are currently in the National Reserve.

Kara & Subs

At the beginning of this year, we were thrilled to record the re-appearance of one of Sila's daughters around the Lemek Hills. She had disappeared for a while, soon after separating from her sister, Namunyak and their brother, who had not been sighted since their separation. After evading us for a while, we were finally able to find her and her three sub-adults, two females and a male.

We are happy to report that the sub-adults successfully dispersed towards the end of July and recently one of the females was seen around Mara Bush Houses in the northern part of Mara North and Naboisho conservancies, which means the sub-adults have dispersed to start their solitary life. It was, however, an unusual early dispersal at only 12 months of age. The average dispersal age for Mara cheetahs is 16 months, according to our data.





Kayioni, the remaining Ripoi Male

With the appearance of three new male cheetahs in Ripoi Conservancy early last year, it was looking promising for our Mara cheetah population, having another male coalition.

Unfortunately, this optimism was short-lived as one male disappeared soon thereafter. Earlier this year, one of the two remaining males also disappeared leaving just a single cheetah.

After speaking with rangers and the local community, we learned that the three males had been causing significant conflict in the areas bordering the conservancy, preying on sheep and goats. As a result, we suspected that the cheetahs may have been killed in retaliation.

To track his movement and hopefully avert any further conflict, he was fitted with a GPS collar so we can monitor him in real-time using our Earth Ranger platform.

Mwanga

Mkali and Mwanga were a coalition of two males first spotted in the Mara Triangle towards the end of 2020. Shortly afterwards, they crossed into the National Reserve, where they settled. Their territory overlapped with that of the Musketeers, and they occasionally encountered each other. However, tragedy struck the coalition toward the end of 2021 when Mwanga was found alone and injured near the Olkiombo area.

A veterinary team treated him, but Mkali was never seen again. Since then, Mwanga has been thriving on his own. He has established a territory in the southern part of the Reserve, and we recently spotted him around the Daraja ya Pili area, where he appears to be doing well.



Ruka

The famous coalition of Rosetta's boys, Ruka and Rafiki, came to an end. Born and raised in the National Reserve alongside their sister Risasi, the brothers dispersed and eventually settled in the Mara Triangle. They were known for frequenting the Serengeti-Triangle border, often crossing back and forth.

In March of this year, after crossing into the Triangle, Ruka returned alone, calling for his brother, who appeared to have been killed there. By August, Ruka crossed back into the National Reserve and has since been covering vast areas including Mara North and Olare-Motorogi Conservancies, where he currently is. He is six years old and still in excellent condition and successfully adapting to this new chapter in life.



Kulete

Kulete has recently faced challenges in raising cubs or even bringing them out of the lair. At her prime age of six years old, she has successfully raised only one litter to independence in 2022.

In December of last year, she emerged from her lair in Olare-Motorogi Conservancy with three cubs, but unfortunately, she lost all of them soon after. This year, we observed her going in and out of a lair on top of a hill. She finally presented us with three cubs but has already lost one.



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