

Gathering of Fish Eagles

In mid November, heavy and consistent rains in the catchment brought the Mara River down in flood. This was a most welcome event, as the river had been reduced to little more than a series of stagnant pools. When the flood waters receded, hundreds of fish were seen to have become stranded in shallow pools on the surrounding sand flats and soon attracted large numbers of fish-eating birds. To my amazement, a total of 19 African Fish Eagles were seen in close proximity to one another, pulling fish out of the pools, tearing them open with their talons and beaks, or perched nearby. The majority of the eagles were adults, with just six immature-plumaged birds. The fish they were feeding on appeared to be mostly catfish.

Also present at the feast were about 50 Marabou Storks and similar numbers of Open-billed Stork and Sacred Ibis. Interestingly, there were no vultures present, perhaps due to the abundance of carrion on the plains at the time.

Joseph Sigei

Ambitious Lion Attack

A large male Hippo which was on its way back to the Mara River in the early morning (after 7h00, which is much later than usual) encountered two male Lions in its path. The Hippo seemed startled and trotted past the Lions, which immediately sat up and gave chase. The Hippo then tried to run faster (not easy for such a bulky animal) and - sensing an opportunity - one of the male Lions leaped up onto the Hippo's back. The big cat clung on for about 50 metres as the Hippo made for the safety of the river. To our surprise, the Hippo took a detour through a stand of dense *Croton* bushes, and the Lion released its grip to slide onto the ground. With its tormentor now dusting itself off, the Hippo reached the river.

Paul Kirui

Another Victim for the Kichwa Black Rhino

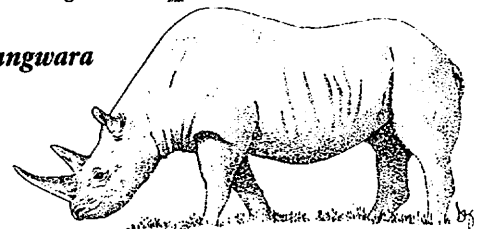
The aggressive nature of the female Black Rhino which resides close to Kichwa Tembo has been described in the *Ecological Journal* (it killed a male Lion and a Common Zebra during 1999) and we are constantly keeping an eye on her for other unpredictable behaviour. When approaching camp after a balloon ride with Heriberto and Heidi Matzer (regular guests at Kichwa Tembo) in early December 1999, we met with David Nganga who had just witnessed the rhino charging down and killing a young Wildebeest. As we watched, the rhino examined, sniffed and stamped at the dead wildebeest with her front foot, before lying down on top of the body! We are not sure what provoked the attack.

Joseph Masibo

Kichwa Rhino Chases Lions

In late February, the Kichwa lion pride were seen feeding on a zebra which they had killed in the Kalului Area of the Masai Mara. Suddenly, they were attacked by the aggressive Black Rhino which was hidden in a *Croton* thicket. The rhino rushed to the scene, forcing the pride to scatter and nearly stamping on one of the cubs. Some of the lions retreated up trees, while others kept their distance from the enraged rhino, not wanting to relinquish their half-eaten meal. After about an hour of holding its ground, the rhino lost interest and ambled off, allowing the lions to return to their prey.

Kambuni Nyangwara



Environmental Review 2000

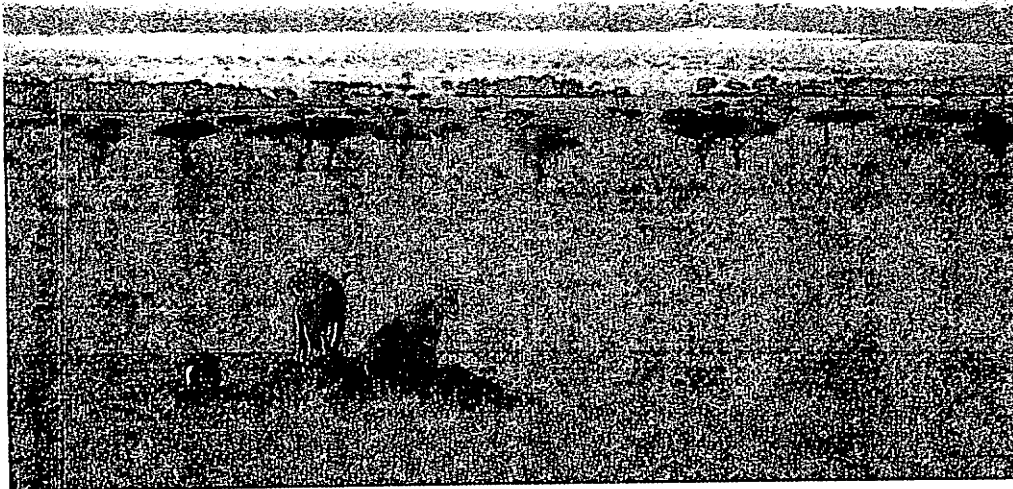
The first year of the 'New Millenium' proved to be as interesting as ever in the Masai Mara and particularly for Kichwa Tembo and the surrounding Maasai community.

The year was noteworthy for the shortage of rain which, by November, had led to desperate drought conditions throughout much of the country, as well as in neighbouring Tanzania. Worst hit were the Maasai pastoralists who lost tens of thousands of cattle and were forced to graze their weakened animals inside the reserve's boundaries. This, of course, led to conflict with lions and several stray cows are known to have been killed by the Kichwa pride during the year. Of the Masai Mara's resident animals, the Hippo were probably most affected by the drought. Even though the Mara River still contained numerous water pools, hundreds of the semi-aquatic hippo died of starvation and it was at times heart-breaking to see these animals wandering around in the heat of the day, eating elephant droppings as the only source of food. Large numbers of resident Buffalo, Topi and Wildebeest also perished during the drought, and this led to an enormous influx of carrion-eating vultures. The annual migration of wildebeest from the Serengeti was thrown off course due to the failure of the rains, and the herds crossed back and forward across the Mara and Sand rivers in a state of apparent confusion.

In October, the first light rains of the year took place but it was only in early December that proper downpours began. Within days, the miracle of nature was there for all to see - the dusty bone-scattered plains had become carpeted in a flush of green grass and meadows of wild flowers!

Wildlife viewing throughout the year was - despite the drought - as remarkable as ever. The Kichwa Lion Pride afforded continual good viewing, as did the resident Black Rhino cow which occupies a home range in the Mara Triangle. Excellent Leopard and Cheetah encounters were enjoyed on a regular basis, and there were also frequent sightings of Serval during daylight hours.

Members of the Kichwa Lion pride scan the tree-dotted plains of the Masai Mara for prey



Duncan Butchart