

Environmental Review 2000

The year 2000 was one of the driest experienced in over six years. The total rainfall measured at the lodge on the Crater rim was only 531mm as opposed to the annual average of 1500mm. Just 26mm fell in the four months between July and October.

The saddest loss, and certainly the greatest disaster of the year, was the death of three of the Black Rhino living within the Crater (another two deaths occurred in January 2001). These deaths have come as a big blow to conservationists and researchers, as the current population has now fallen to thirteen, back to what it was in 1992. A male calf belonging to one of the females which was introduced from South Africa was killed by Lions in May. A female died of natural causes in August, and another was found dead to the east of Ngoitoktok in November. One of these females had also been reintroduced from South Africa. Blood and tissue samples from these and other rhino living in the Crater have been sent to laboratories in Europe, the United States and South Africa in an attempt to establish if the deaths are related and if any other animals are at risk.

The Maasai suffered great cattle losses during the drought and were forced to take their livestock into the Crater daily for water and pasture and this resulted in heavily eroded cattle paths and obviously impacted tremendously on our game drives.

Hundreds of animals - particularly Buffalo - died in the Crater as a result of the drought. This was probably due to poor grazing, for most of the affected animals were old bulls, lactating females and calves. A number of hippo suffered the same fate. By the end of November the NCAA was forced to remove the large number of carcasses from certain areas. The Hippo Pool could not be used for viewing due to the incredible smell. Approximately 1 000 carcasses were removed, about 800 of them Buffalo.

A number of African Elephant also died, presumably as a result of the drought. Sixteen were found in the Crater environs, and a large amount of ivory was collected by the NCAA (some tusks were over 30kg each).

The Ngoitoktok-Gorigor wetland system was badly damaged by roadworks which drained about half of this important wetland. Attempts were made in November to address the problem, and fortunately the Crater is experiencing good late rains.

Water availability on the Crater rim was a problem during the drought. Our maintenance team were constantly repairing damaged fire hydrants at the lodge that had been pulled out of the ground by elephant in attempts to get water. Elephant could also be seen drinking from the water tanks behind the workshop on a daily basis. The resident zebra learnt how to open a tap with their snouts!

The condition of the roads on the Crater floor remains a problem, as do the number of vehicles. Fortunately the NCAA closed a number of the small roads that have been formed by drivers moving off road, although more policing is clearly required in this regard. Discussions regarding the forming of a 'Crater Tours' company continues, as this aims to regulate vehicle numbers and use. The need for better managing tourists visiting the Crater floor was highlighted this year with as many as 300 vehicles visiting a day during the peak months of July and August. In contrast, the management plan for the Crater suggests a maximum of 75 vehicles per day.

On behalf of the Ngorongoro Crater Lodge ranging team I would like to express our appreciation and thanks to the staff of the NCAA, in particular Israel Naman (Assistant Conservator:Tourism Services) and Asantael Melita (Assistant Conservator:Natural Resources).

