



## **PRESS STATEMENT**

### **AERIAL TOTAL COUNT OF ELEPHANTS, BUFFALOES AND GIRAFFES IN THE MASAI MARA ECOSYSTEM (MAY 2017)**

**JUNE 21, 2017**

The wet season Mara total aerial census is a regular survey which was previously undertaken every year from 1984 to 2007 and thereafter every three years to date (2007-2017).

The current survey was done within protected areas; Masai Mara National Reserve and Mara Triangle, Conservancies and their immediate neighborhoods or dispersal areas in the Mara ecosystem. The 2017 survey was carried out between May 15 and 28, 2017 covering an area of 11,681 km<sup>2</sup>, as part of long-term ecological monitoring aerial censuses.

The census data analysis was done based on four management regions namely: Masai Mara National Reserve, Mara triangle, Conservancies and Wildlife dispersal area.

The objectives of the census were:

- (i) To understand the distribution of elephants, Buffaloes and giraffes in relation to human activities and water resource,

- (ii) To map human activities inside and outside the protected areas, that is, fences, logging, settlements, farming, and charcoal burning,
- (iii) To document the distribution and numbers of livestock including cattle, camels, goats and sheep (shoats), and donkeys,
- (iv) To interpret the information obtained to guide management of elephants and other wildlife in the Mara ecosystem.

Two aircrafts were used to overfly the observers who captured data using GPS and digital voice recorders. The census aircrafts comprising of 4-seater and 2-seater planes, were flown along established transects at altitudes between 300-400ft above ground across the Ecosystem with North-South orientation.

The observers recorded the numbers and positions of elephant, buffalo and giraffe groups. Various human activities were also recorded during the survey; they included manyattas, tin roofs, wire fences, charcoal kilns, logging and domestic animals such as cattle, shoats and donkey.

A total of 2,493 elephants were counted compared to 1,448 elephants counted in 2014. This represents an increase of 72.2%, which is a very good result considering the threat Mara elephants were under due to poaching for trophies and spearing due to human-elephant conflicts. Migrations from the Serengeti ecosystem could have also contributed to the high

number of elephants recorded during the 2017 aerial survey. Overall, there was an average elephant density of 0.21 elephant km<sup>-2</sup>. A total of 45 elephant carcasses (26 very old; 18 old and 1 recent carcasses) were encountered during the survey, representing an overall carcasses ratio of 1.8% for the Mara ecosystem.

A total of 9,466 buffalo were counted compared to 7,542 recorded over the same season in 2014, representing a 26% increase in the population. The distribution though remains the same.

A total of 2,607 giraffes were observed in 2017 compared to 1,619 recorded in 2010, which represents a 61% increase in the population. More giraffes were observed in the Conservancy region (1682 giraffes) while the Mara Triangle had the least number giraffes counted (143 giraffes). The Dispersal area recorded the second highest number of giraffes (490 giraffes) while the total number of giraffes observed in the Mara Reserve was the lowest (292 giraffes).

The results of 2017 indicate an increase in human activities within and around the protected areas. These include electric and plain wire fencing as well as tin roofed households in the ecosystem which pose a threat to the wildlife habitat.

The aerial survey was supported by several partners including: Kenya Wildlife Service, Narok County Government, World

Wildlife Fund - Kenya, Tsavo Trust, and Olaro Conservancy. KWS appreciates all these partners for their contributions that ensured successful completion of the exercise.