



## Governors Guide to April in Masai Mara

Many people think of April as rainy season and whilst this is true the rain mostly falls in the evening and overnight leaving mornings and afternoons clear to explore the Masai Mara. Typically thunderstorms build in the late afternoons, bringing dramatic skies and wonderful photo opportunities and cosy nights are spent in camp tucked up in tents with the hypnotic pitter-patter of rain on a canvas roof.

The combination of sunshine and rain brings on a burst of growth, grasses on the plains grow long and lush, the Marsh reeds begin to flower and there is a profusion of **wild flowers** amidst the savannah grass. *Cyrtium Tubolosum* or the “Tissue Paper Flower” covers the grass verges and the forest edges nearby *Abutilon Mauritanium*, a yellow Hibiscus type flower blooms, in the gullies the beautiful blue *Ipomoea Cairica* bursts into flower we are treated to the magnificent sight of the flowers of the yellow and red Flame Lily (the aptly named *Gloriosa Superba*). Out on the grasslands and hidden between the grasses the beautiful red *Klennia Abyssinnica* flowers.



With the arrival of the rains, the resident **Marsh Pride male lions** spring into action patrolling the boundaries of their territory continuously scent-marking the area as each rainstorm washes the previous scent marks off. Long grass makes their prey more difficult to find and they roam further in search of food. The lionesses and cubs tend to spend most of their time near the Marsh and airstrip feeding mostly off warthog, a staple food source at this time of year.

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As the males spend more and more time away patrolling the boundaries of their pride lands we often see new males appear at this time of year hovering on the edges in anticipation of a moment of weakness to exploit and challenge the resident males.

We see large numbers of **elephant** throughout the Marsh and Bila Shaka plains. In the forests around camp the Warburgia trees stop fruiting bringing less elephant visitors to camp and the new growth on the grasslands draws the families of elephant out from the forests. Large herds of elephant with up to 30 members of related family units with very young calves feed on the tender young shoots on the plains whilst males in musth wander from one family herd to another mating with females in oestrus. The abundance of soft grass keeps the elephant herds well fed and provides them with a needed change of diet and a wealth of necessary minerals. This in turn gives the precious trees of the riverine forests and the acacia woodlands a much-needed respite. On the ground between the elephants legs **cattle egrets** busily feast off the rich pickings of insects disturbed by the elephant's mighty round feet as they trudge along the marsh edges and grassy plains.



**Topis** congregate on the short grass plains, there are heavily pregnant **impala** and new fawns and **eland** and **waterbuck** are resident in the marsh grasslands and plains. **Thomson Gazelles** also give birth at this time of year and we see lots of female **warthogs** with 2 or 3 piglets, warthogs also begin to mate at this time of year. As the ground gets wetter so the resident **buffalo** herd move to higher ground with better drainage and coarser grasses which they love.

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Rain fills up the Musiara Marsh and causes the Mara River to rise. **Hippos** bask on the edges of the Marsh drawn out from the river with the abundance of water in the Marsh and many hippos are born.

### **Birds**

With the rains come a profusion of insect life, frogs and catfish and birding in April is often extraordinarily good. The Musiara Marsh is an important area for many bird species and in April they come out in force. Tens of thousands of **European Barn Swallows** on their migration to Europe roost in the swamp every evening, and at dusk we witness huge clouds of them diving and swooping over the grasslands hunting grass-hoppers, crickets and small insects. **Fish eagles** perch in the trees surrounding the Marsh and dive into the waters to catch their prey. **Lesser Kestrels** fly in large flocks over the plains hunting grasshoppers and mice.

**European White Storks** and **Cattle Egrets** comb the fringes of the Marsh feeding on grasshoppers and frogs, **Ground Hornbills** are out on the plains feasting on frogs and grass snakes. **Yellow-billed Storks**, **Saddle Billed Storks** **Grey Herons** and **Sacred Ibis'** feast in the swamp.



Male Speckled weaver building his nest



The first rains bring on a growth of grass which then matures and produces seed, drawing in the seedeaters to feed and breed.

The abundance of nutritious food heralds the mating season as the chances of conception are increased, and we have been privileged to witness **Red Collared Widow-birds, Fan Tailed Widow-birds, Pin Tailed Whydah's** and **Yellow Bishop** all transformed from their dull plumage into their magnificent breeding plumage.

With the growth of the long grass the **Village Weaver** birds come out to harvest grass to build their new nests. If the hen doesn't like the new nest she dismantles it and makes the male rebuild it until she is happy with it and agrees to be his mate. The **Widow birds** do the same and the females also inspect the male's long breeding plumage tails to identify a good mate.

We often see a solitary **European Roller**, a migrant from Europe and Asia; they visit this area between October and April before beginning their long migration north. This small bird has a magnificent bright blue head, throat, belly and wings.

The **ants** and **termites** begin to reproduce. The king and queen mate, then the queen lays the eggs, some of which are reproductive's, some soldiers, and some are workers for the colony. The reproductives have wings and when they are ready they fly out of the nest, find a partner and then dig down into the ground to start their own colony. During the rainy season the ground is softer and for this reason the ants fly out during a rainstorm and then dig down into the soft earth. This whole reproductive cycle provides a feast for the birds, and we see lots of **Sooty Chats** parked on termite mounds waiting for these ants and termite reproductive's to emerge.

The **butterflies** come out and we have had lovely recent sightings of the Narrow green-banded swallow tales and Citrus swallowtails, whilst back in camp fireflies light up the night.