



Governors Guide to February in Masai Mara

February is marked by cool mornings, hot days and scattered rain showers. Mornings start around 14 degrees Celsius, moving to 30 degrees Celsius by midday. The grass on the open plains begins to dry out causing the red oat grass to turn golden brown.

In the forests around the Governors family of camps the Warburgia trees continue to fruit, drawing in **elephants** and **baboons** to feast. There are young calves amongst the elephant herds. Elephant families go back and forth between the grasslands and forests around our camps. There is much trumpeting as young males come of age and are pushed out of the maternal herds to live on their own, increased testosterone levels lead these young males to misbehave and be raucous, behaviour that the matriarchs do not tolerate. One February we were incredibly privileged to witness an elephant give birth right next to the bar tent at Little Governors Camp, the mother elephant wandered into camp followed by a group of other elephants, the mother settled herself close to the bar tent and the other elephants disappeared, after much trumpeting and effort she gave birth right in front of a group of newly arrived guests! The other elephants reappeared, surrounded the mother and calf, there was much excitement in camp and throughout the month mother and calf were frequent visitors to camp. On windy days or after a storm elephants come into camp to pick up the Warburgia fruit that has dropped to the ground.



The elephant born at Little Governors Camp



If the rain has been good we begin to see the arrival of the herds of **wildebeest** and **zebra** from the Loita plains and hills outside the Mara. They graze inside the reserve during the day and move out of the reserve at night where lions are scarcer and they feel safer. As the month progresses huge herds begin to move across the plains, coming to the Musiara marsh to drink during the day and moving up to the Mara River where they attempt to cross often put off by the numbers of waiting crocodiles. Sensing a change in the seasons the wildebeest begin to calve most of them moving outside the boundaries of the reserve where pressures from lion are less.

Families of **giraffe** are seen throughout the woodlands close to the Governors family of camps feeding on the leaves of Warburgia trees. Often these families will spend days within the Governors Camp grounds. Eland herds are scattered across the plains. Defassa waterbuck occupy the grasslands around the marsh feeding on grasses and herbs. The big **Cape buffalo** herd of around 500 individuals occupy the Bila Shaka grasslands and slopes of Rhino ridge where the coarse grasses they like to feed on grow. There are many calves amongst the herd and calving often happens in February. **Topi** and **Cokes hartebeest** are found in all areas of Musiara, the male Topis expend much energy protecting their Leks and get tired and often doze off during the day, lion and hyena have learnt to exploit this and often hunt Topi during February. Bushbucks are seen in the early mornings and at dusk in the fringes of the forest.

Crocodiles are seen basking on almost every bend of the Mara River. They are opportunistic waiting for an animal to come to the water to drink.

We have good sightings of **Serval Cats** with many seen on the grasslands and flats of Paradise Plain. Servals feed on mice and grass rats, often leaping into the air to catch ground birds and doves. **Spotted Hyena** with young cubs in their dens are seen where concentrations of plains game are good, they group together in large clans able to compete aggressively with lion over food, often chasing lionesses off a meal in large numbers. Male lions will kill hyena when they get the opportunity.

Martial eagles, a large savannah bird of prey fly above the plains preying on banded mongooses and Thomson Gazelle fawns. **Warthogs** with young piglets are seen in many areas where there is open ground, they leave their burrows early to forage but remain cautiously close to boltholes for safety. **Banded and Dwarf mongooses** make their home in the Governors Camps grounds each family sleeps together in a communal underground den (in our camps they like the drainage pipes), they emerge from their dens at sunrise spending the days foraging together until sunset when they return to their dens. Females synchronise their births to the same day and families raise the young communally.



The **Marsh Pride of lions** often has cubs within the pride, who are often very playful. The pride feeds off waterbuck calves, buffalo and warthog.

Cheetah often climb on the game drive vehicles to get a better vantage of their surroundings, they stalk and catch Thomson Gazelles, mother cheetahs often teaching their sub-adult cubs to hunt. They move around large distances trying to avoid lion and hyena. We have good sightings of **leopards** close to our camps some guests even treated to sightings of leopard on arrival before checking in to camp. Leopard often have cubs at this time of year and they have to work hard not to lose their kills to hyena In February 2014 we had an amazing sighting of a leopard sharing its kill with a pack of hungry hyena.



Birds

The birding in February is fantastic; we have good sightings of **Ground Hornbills** travelling in trios they feed on large grasshoppers and scarab beetles. A lot of the European migrants are still around, the abundance of life in the Musiara Marsh draws a crowd of water birds; Storks, Herons and Hammerkops hunt frogs and catfish. With food a plenty many birds have nested and either have eggs or chicks. The weavers build their nests overhanging the riverbanks some are still building and some are looking after chicks. Plovers, Longclaws and other ground nesting birds have eggs and chicks hidden in their nests in the long grass. A white backed Vulture likes to nest close to the laundry in Governors Camp she often raises a scruffy single chick in this nest.

The invasion of caterpillars we had in the forest in the last few months has turned into the most brilliant display of thousands of different kinds of butterflies and moths who flit from one wild flower to another.