



# Expedition: No Water No Life – The Mara River Basin

## Field Study: Conservation Photography

**Summary:** No Water No Life is a long-term documentary project that raises awareness of the values and vulnerability of our freshwater resources by combining the powers of photography, science and stakeholder knowledge. Founded by Alison M. Jones in 2006, this expedition-based project documents six case study watersheds in North America and Africa, studying water quality, water usage and sustainable watershed management solutions. On this 11th NWNL expedition, its team followed the Mara River from its source in Kenya’s Mau Forest to its Tanzanian terminus at Lake Victoria, 254 miles downstream. The Mara River Basin – considered an “Eighth Wonder of the World” due to its vast biodiversity – is one of six watersheds in North America and Africa being researched and documented by NWNL.

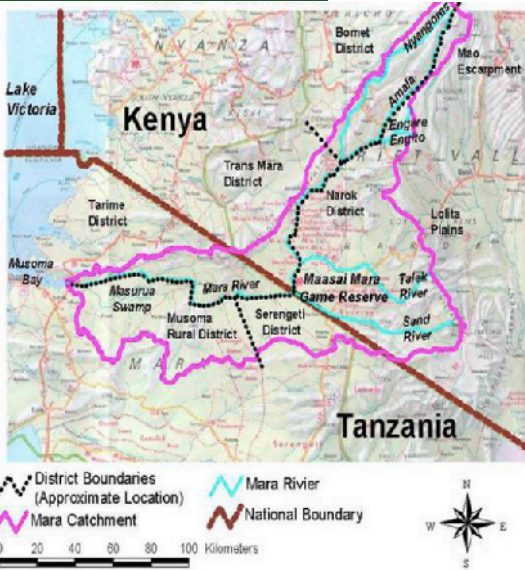
### THE EXPEDITION

The methodology for this expedition involved:

- In-house research on freshwater issues in the Mara River Basin and its key scientists and stewards
- Six weeks to photograph and video Mara River headwater forests, tributaries, savannahs and estuaries
- On-site interviews with scientists, farmers, fishermen, Ogieks and Maasai, and stewards
- The publication of threats to the Mara River; impacts of degradation and drought; and sustainable solutions
- Ongoing monitoring of resource management, population growth and climate change in this watershed



Children collect water from the Masurura Reservoir



Mara River Basin

### EXPEDITION GOALS

The main goal was to document the availability, quality and usage of the basin's fresh water resources and the ongoing three-year drought in order to analyze threats, consequences, and potential sustainable management solutions. The focus was on the need for reserve flow data, water extraction, and land use regulations. Related issues examined included the:

- Ongoing deforestation of the Mau Forest headwaters
- Value and impacts of tourism and agriculture
- Over-grazing and drought impacts on pastoralists' cattle-based livelihood
- Treatment of municipal and tourist lodges' waste
- Possible development of migratory corridors for megafauna
- The need for watershed education and scientific studies
- The international community's role in this transboundary watershed

### WHO

Alison M. Jones, NWNL Director, Conservation Photographer

### WHAT

The documentation of the Mara River Basin's values, threats and management from headwaters to terminus

### WHEN

Sept. 15 – Oct. 15, 2009

### WHERE

Mara River Basin, from Central Kenya to Western Tanzania

### WHY

To use photography and science to raise awareness of the vulnerability of freshwater resources



Alison Jones

## CHALLENGES FACED

- The itinerary was a constant “work in progress,” as sources of valuable information appeared unexpectedly, and often one contact led to another, necessitating detours.
- Pre-departure planning for Africa is difficult because its culture tends to preclude planning ahead. Emails with East Africa were not always reliable. Skyping, when available, was more effective.
- A significant budgetary increase occurred due to unexpected expenses, including a Kenyan film license; a pilot switching to a more expensive plane for our aerial documentation; and unexpected videography costs.
- Our original videographer was diagnosed with a serious disease three weeks before departure, requiring a last-minute search for a credentialed videographer available for six weeks in Africa.
- Being a foreign locale, several days were needed before departing to the field for cultural adaption and orientation.
- A dental emergency complicated transfer from Kenyan vehicle/driver to Tanzanian vehicle/driver and a case of the flu reduced time in the field.



Maasai elders overwhelmed by loss of drought-stricken cattle

## EXPEDITION RESULTS

- Information collected on water usage and quality, upstream and downstream
- New partnerships with stakeholders, stewards and scientists
- Comparison of the Mara River with other East African watersheds
- Study of Mara River as a sub-basin of the Nile River Basin
- View of Mara River Basin issues in relation to other NWNL watersheds

The expedition captured over 4,000 photographs and 53 hours of video documenting natural freshwater resources, conservation efforts, degradation and change. In traveling 1,650 miles, a great variety of ecosystems were covered, beginning with the indigenous Mau Forest and its ravines of rivers that have spread across Kenya for eons. The team also documented the increase in human population, agriculture, livestock grazing and fishing - which each create a heavy demand on habitats and hydrologic features.

The team's 35 taped interviews (about 1 hour each) reveal that environmental issues in the Mara River Basin are being better understood and addressed thanks to efforts of international watchdog and stewardship agencies, Kenyan governmental task forces, Internet research, river user associations, beach management units and a school in wildlife training for Maasai.

With that support, communities are facing David-and-Goliath struggles against climate change, commercial agriculture, government corruption, lack of sanitation and destructive land use. But despite downward spirals of decreased resources and increased poverty, unregulated extraction of water and poaching, the team found many reasons for optimism due to increased environmental, vocational and technological education – as well as international support of socio-economic security for the stakeholders.



Wildebeest and zebra walk the drought-lowered Mara River, safe from crocodiles

### EXPEDITION FUNDING

The expedition was funded by two Scott Pearlman Field Awards, a Towbin Foundation Grant, and private donations and in-kind donations by James Roberson of Ker & Downey Safaris and other organizations. WINGS WorldQuest and the Explorers Club supported the expedition by awarding it their Expedition Flags. WINGS WorldQuest served as the fiscal sponsor for NWNL for many years.

### ABOUT THE FLAG CARRIER

As a conservation photographer, Alison M. Jones has documented ecosystems and resource management for over 25 years in Africa and the Americas. While copiloting a small Cessna over thousands of miles of sub-Saharan Africa, she photographed the rivers and lakeshores of eight nations. Then, after trekking past Mt. Kilimanjaro's melting glaciers, Alison founded NWNL as a means to share her focus on our freshwater resources. Alison is a Senior Fellow of The International League of Conservation Photography and International League of Conservation Writing. She is a member of The Explorers Club, Society of Environmental Journalists, Society of Women Geographers and National Arts Club; and a former Board Member of the North American Nature Photography Association. With an Honorary Master's Degree in Photography from Brooks Institute, Alison studied at Columbia University's Center for Environmental Research and Conservation and The International Center of Photography. Her images and essays have been published in numerous books and magazines.

### EXPEDITION TEAM

Director and Lead Photographer: Alison M. Jones  
Videographer: Alison Fast  
Driver-Guide in Kenya: Tari Wako  
Driver Guide in Tanzania: Joash Romeo  
Camp Manager in Kenya: Simon Mturi  
Project Manager and Researcher: Jasmine Graf, NWNL

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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