

Prestaigne Charter provides facilities for 'Big Cat Live'



The Masai Mara National Reserve lies within the Great Rift Valley in south-west Kenya on the border of Tanzania. Over the Tanzanian border lies the Serengeti and the two plains serve as the migration route for many African animals, making it prime prey land for the big cats.

BBC's 'Big Cat' has followed the lives of the lions, leopards and cheetahs in the Masai Mara for twelve years. Going live this year meant three weeks of live webcasting following the country's biggest predators and their prey 24-hours a day. Live webcams, daily videos and reports from the crew's mobile phones and a week of live television broadcast directly from the Masai Mara game reserve revealed the big cats lives as never seen before.

Prestaigne Charter provided some of the facilities for the 'Big Cat Live' programmes broadcast in the UK in October. Mike James, Project Engineer Prestaigne Charter, was responsible for implementing the five camera OB and for other Prestaigne Charter provided infrastructure supplied to the BBC. In addition, the operation also incorporated nine mini cameras watching the wild animals 24 hours a day for eight days over a ten mile range.

A total of 12 tons of broadcast equipment was flown to Nairobi and then driven to Governors Camp along dirt tracks. Eight large tents were erected for the production village and as there were no fences around the site, three miles of cables were dug into the ground to prevent the supporting cast of hyenas and jackals chewing on the cables.

Continued overleaf

Presteigne Charter provides facilities for 'Big Cat Live' continued

To reduce the weight, Mike used Evertz VIP-8 and 12 input multi-viewer cards displayed on eight 52" and four 40" Sony LCD Bravia monitors for the viewing stacks. A Thomson 4-ME Kalypso mixer was used for the live shows while the five live WEB streams running 24hrs a day were switched from the 128 squared matrix.

The area covered was so large that the radio communications for the in-ear monitors were run at high power through a filtered combiner of 25 watts. Not something usually done on an OB but it reduces the number of transmit and receive aerials and minimises the chances of mutual interference between channels.

Graham Collett, programme engineer commented, "The one thing we thought about most in such a remote location, is the fact that you can't just replace equipment or get that missing something overnight as freely as on a 'domestic OB'. But this is what Presteigne Charter are best at – organisation combined with the expertise of the engineers etc, so we never had any major facilities related issues."

So much so that from the vision mixing perspective it was 'business as usual', apart perhaps from the mongoose running in and out of the tents and the spectacular backdrop of the Masai Mara.



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