



The Wildlife Action Group (WAG) is an NGO, who co-manage two governmental protected areas Thuma Forest Reserve and Dedza-Salima Forest Reserve which are located in the Central Region of Malawi between Lilongwe and Lake Malawi on the escarpment of the Great Rift Valley. Together the two forest reserves cover an area of approx. 500 km<sup>2</sup>.

# On The Right Track

[www.wag-malawi.org](http://www.wag-malawi.org)

**T**he main project of the Wildlife Action Group is the “Thuma Forest Reserve Eco-system Rehabilitation Project” which began in 1996 and in 2007 was extended with the “Dedza-Salima Forest Reserve Eco-system Rehabilitation Project”.

It hasn't always been and sometimes still isn't easy but we are on the right track, W.A.G. emphasizes on training its own scouts to assure 100% dedication and efficiency. And in 2006 W.A.G. has reached the target of employing one scout for almost every 15 km<sup>2</sup> of Thuma; a very high protection level compared to most other reserves in Africa. And our scouts

do spend their time in the field: about 25 days per month in a row, because that is where a scout should be: in the field, protecting wildlife, however these scouts are unarmed risking their lives to defend their wildlife.

As a result, in the last 10 years poaching pressure in Thuma F.R. has reduced significantly, wildlife numbers are increasing, elephants returned to Thuma F.R. in 1999 after they left the area due to severe poaching in the 80's, and buffalo, previously split up in small groups of 3 to 4 animals to escape the poaching pressure, now form herds of up to 30 animals.







However we still suffer significant problems with poaching and elephant crop raiding due the reserve only being partially fenced, this has significant impacts on local communities; loss of crops, injury & even death as well as impacting education as it is not safe for children to travel the long distances to school when elephants are present.

We have come to rely heavily on international volunteers who have been deployed to supervise and assist with the construction of roads, scout- and volunteer accommodation as well as conducting game counts, biological surveys and taking part in the scout training.

By implementing conservation micro-projects in the communities around Thuma, W.A.G. targets to make its conservation efforts to be of the benefit of both people and wildlife.

#### An Important Biodiversity Hotspot In Malawi

Thuma FR and Dedza-Salima FR contain significant numbers of the remaining large mammals of Malawi, including several key populations identified by the IUCN. Thuma F.R. and Dedza-Salima F.R. are one of the few protected areas in Malawi which give still home to elephant and buffalo. Other (larger) game include greater kudu, bushbuck, baboon, vervet monkey, bush baby, leopard, cerval, spotted hyena, genets, African civet, warthog, bush pig, porcupine as well as a number of smaller antelopes like Sharpe's grysbok, common duiker and klipspringer. But Thuma F.R. is not only of interest for these mammals. There is a variety of trees and plants, birds, insects, and other animals which make the two reserves an important biodiversity hotspot in Malawi.







## Poaching Of African Elephants

The most immediate threat to most elephant populations in Malawi is illegal hunting for ivory. WAG works very closely with Department National Parks & Wildlife and other government agencies to bring about the effective enforcement of these laws. This activity will not only curtail the operations of those illegal forest/ wildlife exploiters who are prosecuted, but as awareness spreads it will act as a deterrent and reduce the overall level of illegal hunting and trade.

However uncontrolled illegal activities in the two reserves (mainly poaching, charcoal burning and illegal harvesting of bamboo and timber) threaten to destroy its habitats and the environmental services it provides the region and the nation, which is why our scout work and presence is so important.

Primary Task Of Scouts And Other Field Staff Is To Protect And To Secure The Wildlife

Most NGO's working in conservation receives funding for starting micro-projects in villages, for putting up an electric fence to keep elephants out of the fields of farmers, for putting up direction signs, for buying GPS's for mapping natural forest resources, for conservation awareness projects and so on. Most people acknowledge that these activities are extremely important in conservation, as do we, at the same time often hardly any funding is made available for paying the staff, who do a crucial and dangerous job.

We hope this programme will raise interest to contribute directly to the conservation of Malawi's wildlife and environment.

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