

# Thuma Telegraph

July 2011

Wildlife Action Group



Dear All

*Sorry for the delay with news. Although we have had little contact, things here still move, sometimes slowly, sometimes too fast. As you are far away we always try to include lots of photos so you can really get a feel for this special place and what we do here day to day. We hope you enjoy the photos, it might even encourage some of you to decide to come visit us?!*

*My first rainy season in Malawi is over and we are now in the cold months! There is a very cool breeze that blows daily and early morning and at night it is surprisingly fresh. Long sleeves, coats, Sleeping bags, and blankets are used and it feels like Europe in autumn. Fires are lit every night.*



*The crops are in and most larders are full for now.*

*For just over one month there has been a fuel crisis, with most fuel stations throughout the country running dry of fuel and creating many problems for everyone.*

*I suppose for us the most important things that have happened are the human-elephant conflict issues that have been on going in and around Thuma and Dedza Salima. This is causing so much hardship and grief to our local population. Relations between us have been put to the test and our elephants are still wandering out of both Reserves at random making things very difficult for everyone.*

*In this news letter you will see how important it is that we extend the fence for two reasons, first to protect the people who lives around the boundaries of the reserve and secondly to continue protecting the elephants of both Reserves.*

*I think it is important to note that just less than ten years ago the elephants population here was almost depleted and with allot of hard work and dedication from many people both here and abroad, the elephants have returned and the population has increased.*

WAG is completely reliant on the help of donations from all of our friends abroad who assist and enable us to be here doing this important work. We trust you will continue to assist us and thank you for all your help over the years.

Best regards

Lynn Clifford

## **ELEPHANT KILLS A MAN IN SALIMA**

It was reported that a 35 year old man was kill tragically by an elephant while out looking for his goat in the T/A (traditional authority) of Kambwiri, close to the reserve. He was out early in the morning while it was still dark. He came face to face with a bull elephant that chased him and attacked him. The deceased was tragically and brutally killed by the lone bull. The goat was never found.

This of course has caused a lot of anger and so many complaints about the elephants and WAG. The District commissioner, Traditional Authorities, local chiefs, villagers and police were involved and many public meetings took place.

Villagers are lobbying to have the elephants removed or destroyed and are very angry that the fence has not been erected/ extended to help control the elephants from leaving the Reserve. Last year WAG did submit proposals looking for funding to help us to extend the fence but were unfortunately not successful.

WAG is once again looking for funding this year. If we are successful we hope to get enough funding by early next year and the fence construction can begin just after the rainy season.



*Scouts fixing fence down near Linthiphe River*

## **ELEPHANTS DESTROY 4 HECTARES OF CROPS IN SALIMA**

In early April elephants from Thuma and Dedza-Salima Forest reserve left the reserve and destroyed four hectares of crops belonging to 28 smallholder farmers in the Group Head Village of Ndola, T/A Kambwiri area near our Dedza camp.

The elephants destroyed many gardens of maize, sweet potatoes, and tobacco and ground nuts. These families rely on these crops to sustain them for the next 6 to 8 months. The food is used

to feed their families and the tobacco is a cash crop, and caused much concern for many families putting them at risk of hunger.

WAG sent a game ranger to the area to chase the elephants back.

The local population was very angry and asking for elephants to be destroyed or relocated. Last year two people were killed in similar incidences and the local population requested the fence be extended.

Currently there is 12 kms of electric fence but it needs to be extended further to stop the elephants walking around the fence.

## THUMA ROADS MAINTAINED FOR FIRST TIME IN 2 YEARS

The 9km dirt track from the Gate to base camp was in a state of bad repair especially during and after the rainy season. Large parts of the road had been washed away by the rain and we were really struggling towards the end of March to leave camp and return after going to town. Luckily our car is strong but she was pushed to her limits at times.

REA kindly made some funding available to allow us to employ some local labor to maintain it.

In April just after the rains we started the work. Twenty six workers arrived with slashers, picks, hoes and shovels and the work commence. We had some volunteers from Sweden here at the time who also lent a hand.

To repair the road you have to first slash back the 7 foot grass, make some drain always to enable the water to flow from the road. We then collected stones to fill the very large holes and gullies. Once this is done we cover the holes with soil and level off the track.

It is very manual work but was done with a lot of sweat and good humor.

We also took this opportunity to open up the old road to the Linthipe River and some of the old Hyena Road. We plan to open some other roads around Thuma that will allow us to move around by car and also open up some driving opportunities for tourists who visit.

We now travel to and from town with ease and it takes half the time.



# WAG SUPPORTS LOCAL WILDLIFE CLUB



With the appointment of a new headmaster Mr Joseph Mthumba in the local Kabvunguti School WAG became involved in a new wildlife club for the children.

The club has over 40 members of both sexes and all were very excited to get their hands dirty.

The school children wanted to plant some trees.

A nursery area was created, seeds bought by WAG along with seedling black bags to plant them in.

WAG staff went to help with the planting.

We planted over 1000 seeds which are lovingly watered daily by the children.

WAG also spent the day in the school talking about the importance of trees worldwide and to this area in particular.

Most villages

have cut all trees in and around their villages to clear the land for crops or to use for fire wood, which leaves the protected areas of Thuma and Dedza-Salima the only available source of the natural resource.

WAG and some volunteers have also supplied exercise books, coloring pencils, environmental educational materials/ books and take part monthly with lessons in this school.

There are many other schools around the boundaries which we hope to become involved in over the coming months.



## THE PYRIMID CERMONY – sharing natural resources

On the 12<sup>th</sup> July WAG staff waited at the gate to greet villagers from Mvululu Village to come collect fire wood from Thuma for a very special yearly ceremony called Pyramid ceremony taking place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July. This ceremony takes place once a year and is the time when tomb stones are placed on the graves of those who are having died. The names are etched onto the stone to remind loved ones who are left behind of the dead person. Sometimes there is a religious blessing and the relatives of the dead people prepare food and beer for all who are there (this is why they need a lot of fire wood).

Around 12 women arrived and were escorted in to the Reserve by WAG scouts. WAG scouts were there to ensure the protection of the ladies and we together collected fallen wood and put it

into bundles. While collecting the fire wood the ladies were singing and dancing with a lot of energy. We assisted them to carry the wood back to their village in the WAG car.



The sharing of the natural resources with our local villages is something that WAGS is delighted to do. For years this land has been used for such activities along with honey collecting, cutting bamboo and poles for building their houses and many other things. As it is now a protected area they have been excluded from freely using these materials which is a cause for a lot of bitterness towards WAG. The sharing of these natural resources in a regulated manner shows that it is possible for conservation projects and local

communities to work together and share the resources to the advantage of both. And also gives us a chance to meet, talk and help our neighbors but it also gives them the opportunity to get to know us and see us in a very positive light.

WAG plan to continue with this policy were possible.



# FOOTBALL MANIA

We had two great guys from Holland volunteer with us for 12 days last month. While they were here they arranged a football tournament between the school children from villages around the eastern side of the fence. They had brought some donations from Europe and spent the money on exercise books for everyone (over 500), footballs, pens, football shirts with THUMA on the back of them and many more things. They arranged a football competition between two schools – Kabvunguti and Namachete Schools. There were ten teams and five games played. They then did penalty shoot outs with 20 children from each school. Eight girls took part which was fantastic. The winner won a prize of a foot ball. Everyone from all the villages turned up for the day's events, and proud parents watch their children take part. The day was a great success for all involved. Thank you Bram and Dan.



**Some Great photos taken by our Swedish and Dutch volunteers**





**Bird or Twig Snake just caught a chameleon  
– This is a highly poisonous snake**



**Bamboo Spider who lives in my shower area**



**Red Bishop Bird**



View from Camp

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The Wildlife Action Group (WAG) is registered in Malawi as a non-governmental, non-profit Organization since 1994.

Its main objectives are to protect Malawi's wildlife and environment, and to assist and support the Malawi government in the protection of areas like the National Parks, game and forest reserves.

**Please help us save**

**MALAWI'S ELEPHANTS  
SPONSOR A SCOUT  
EXTEND OUR ELECTRIC FENCE**

**DONATE WHAT YOU CAN:**

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





**Our main goal is:**

To protect the reserves flora and fauna, and to restore its ecological balance in co-operation with the communities around Thuma F.R. and Dedza-Salima F.R. and enforce the Forestry Act of Malawi.

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