

Thuma Telegraph

Feb 2011

Wildlife Action Group



Dear All

Working and living in the bush is a dream come through for me, however it has its down sides and is at best of times very challenging but when your sick ah... it is tough.

Having just recovered from two bouts of malaria within 3 weeks of each other it takes its toll and while sick the bush just ain't quiet so cool anymore!

That is of course until you feel better!

Today I get up at 4.30am... Chaka and one of his friends have been around all night and I have been listening to their shakes and moves... I feel real good for the first time in 3 weeks! I am hungry!! ☺ No headache and the sun is rising and I am watching elephants from camp!

The world is all right again!

This is Africa!

A lot has happened since our last newsletter! Read on and enjoy.

Best regards

Lynn Clifford



Kit's Group

Have called this group KIT's Group In memory of my mum who died earlier this year!
We can recognize Kit from the large tear in her left ear. She currently has one young calf with her and five others in the group including another young calf.

WAG SCOUTS GO FOR RANGER TRAINING

With the increasing pressures of armed poaching in parks all over Africa it has become very important that WAG intensify its presence in both reserves.

WAG has always worked closely with armed Rangers from DNPW which has been very successful however there is a huge financial cost to having these rangers work with us full time plus additional logistical issues.



WAG spoke with DNPW late last year and we asked if WAG scouts could be included in the Government Ranger training program. It was agreed however, the date of training had yet to be confirmed.

At the beginning of September 2011 I wrote again asking about the training only to be told it would start in Oct 2nd 2011! We only had less than 1 month to arrange things and prepare!

By chance Thomas of REA was visiting at the time and was very excited and supportive for us to attend this training and pledged that REA would cover the costs involved of sending two scouts to be trained plus cover the costs of buying our first rifle early next year.

WAG also had enough funding to send one additional scout which made it up to three scouts to be sent.

The training takes place in Liwonde National Park normally once a year and is a really tough course. It is 8 weeks of intensive training (paramilitary style), physical fitness, practical field work, animal behavior, ambush techniques, GPS, map reading and orientation, extension work (education and community work) plus much more. On the first two weeks they are pushed to the limits – woken at 2am to go running 10 kms, lifting rocks or people and running and up and down hills and then up again at 6am for class room work! and anyone that cannot keep up is sent home! The following six weeks is learn learn learn... weekly tests... Its motto is **ONLY THE FITTEST SHALL SURVIVE** and **SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST!**

We held an in house written test based on the lessons we have been having over the last year. The test had 50 odd questions and they had 1.5 hours to complete it. The questions covered many subjects ranging from animal behavior, writing a statement, how to make an arrest, to discipline etc. Whoever passed this would then be sent on to an interview by our Chairman Mr Alex Bulirani. At the end



of this process we had our men chosen and we are delighted to tell you that Mr Medson Gerald(top photo with him giving salut), Mr Richard Banda (below) and Mr Geoffery O Mally(above right) have been chosen and sent to Liwonde NP and are now over half way through their training.



Mr Banda having to secure the safety of the rifle

This really is a mile stone in the history of WAG. It shows our dedication to continue to help protect and preserve the areas in Malawi were we work.

We aim to send a further 3 scouts for training next year and another three the following year!

WAG scouts are I believe are amongst the best in Malawi, mainly due to the difficult conditions that they work in, both Thuma and Dedza FR have a lot of hills and mountains and anyone would be pushed to go out daily and work here. Our scouts are hardy, skilled and very experienced and this additional training will bring us up to a much higher level plus will give us the added security of having a fire arm. This is our first step to having a dedicated, trained specialized anti- poaching unit!

We are all so proud of our three recruits and are waiting to go to collect them at the end



of their course when they are passed out as trained Rangers. Thank you to everyone who has made this possible for us.

LETTER FROM KAVANGUTI PRIMARY SCHOOL HEADMASTER by Joseph Mthumba

Kavanguti Primary School is one of the richest primary schools in the district in terms of receiving visitors. Some of the visitors are coming from the Ministry of Education and 76% of them are from Wildlife Action Group (WAG). With the coming of Lynn Clifford as field manager for WAG we have had many visitors from different countries such as UK, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland to name but a few.

With encouragement from WAG some visitors have become donors and we have crayons, footballs and many more things. We received so many things such as, pens, paper, copybooks, table tennis set, colour pens books etc.



We also got a donation of learning materials worth 120,000mk from volunteers at WAG Bram and Daniel from Amsterdam in Netherlands which we are very grateful for.

WAG has also introduced a tree growing project in our school where by with money donated we bought polythene tubes and seeds. The trees grew very well and were ready for transplant by the close of term in July and each child was given a tree to plant at his or her home as part of replacing those that were cut a few years ago.

The Wildlife club as agreed to sow some fruit trees so we can have a school orchard. We tried to plant some pawpaw seeds and it has worked so we now have started an orchard for the school.

Our schools have a large number of orphans attending. WAG has been taking special attention to the different students and their exam results. Most children do not have the chance to go on to secondary school for financial reasons. One child in our school achieved top results in the whole district which allows him a place at a very good local secondary school. However, his mother cannot afford for him to go. With the assistance of Lynn we have managed to get his first year of secondary school paid for, some new clothes, a blanket etc and Moses started secondary school in September. Fortunately God blessed the learner to start form one at Chipoka Secondary School. And remember God bless the hand that gives.

Thanks to all that hold and shake hands when I produce by hand. WAG you are a source and part of our worth. Thank you. God bless my fellow teachers and all visitors and donors and God bless Mother Malawi.

Written by: Joseph Mthumba – Head master Kavanguti Primary School

REA VISITS MALAWI

Unfortunately Thomas's already short stay had been cut shorter by almost 24 hours due to aircraft engine trouble. But we were delighted to see him walk through the doors at Kamuzu International Airport arrivals at some ungodly hour in the morning. We whisked him off into the bush so he could at least wake up to the sounds of the bush, we were very happy he had arrived. We arrived at base camp Thuma at 2.30ish am! WAG scout all jumped out of bed to welcome him.



Thomas with WAG scouts
Top left to right: Geoffrey, Bitson, M'Antonio DNPW Ranger, Thomas, Kickar, Richard
Bottom: Oliver, Kennedy, Aubrey, Samuel

Next morning Thomas started his yearly visit to Malawi. We had a treat for him and not only did he get to sleep in the newly built traditional "Thomas Hut" but we had been tracking elephants for a few days and were able to bring Thomas directly to see them.

This was my second time to meet Thomas but the last time we met for a few minutes while he checked in at the airport and I had just arrived as a volunteer so really this was our first time to meet!. I was looking forward to spending some time with him.

It was a pleasure to be around someone like Thomas who is so enthusiastic about wild places and their animals and who has had great experiences of elephants and different places in Africa... but someone who is a 100% conservationist! Thomas is driven and consumed with conserving wild places and its remaining wild populations of elephants. He and his dedicated REA team work tirelessly to raise money for three projects they support in Africa. They visit each project once a year to see what has been done and discuss the future.

While Thomas was here he went on two hikes per day in the morning and then again in the afternoon. Each and every time Thomas was able to track, find, watch and photograph different groups. A first time for Thomas while visiting Thuma!

But the highlight of the visit for us and I think Thomas was how we learnt to behave around elephants! Up until then when we spotted elephants we would watch from a very respectful distance and then move away very quickly. With Thomas here he showed the scouts that Elephants, once respected and once you observed their behavior and reaction to your closeness, allowed you to get close to them close. It was an eye opener

for the scouts and they were so happy that their teacher was Thomas who they love and respect so much. This was a new dimension for them!

Being able to get a bit closer on occasions will assist us to be able to identify our elephants and build a portfolio on each and every one of them and their movements, their families and this will assist us to continue to protect them!

The time flew and next thing we knew it was time for Thomas to leave us again until next year!

Thank you for taking the time to visit us. We hope you enjoyed yourself, we look forward to you and maybe some of your REA members visiting us next year and we are looking forward to an even closer (if that is possible) partnership over the coming months. Thanks REA and Thomas.

A short while after Thomas visited we had Kristina and Hubertus come to visit. It was great to welcome both back here. This was the first time that they were both here together so it was a pretty special time for them also! Both tackled the car and many other little jobs around camp. The car got a good look over, luckily not much needed to be done and she was given the all clear until next year!:) The generator got a service



and Hubertus had brought some piece of equipment so we could tune in the CB radio antenna! Kristina went on a good few hikes, revisiting old haunts and churning up plenty of great stories and memories for all. We had plenty to talk about and ideas to share. There is nothing this couple cannot achieve! Together they are a fantastic team and each evening after a day of hard work they would sit on Pride rock and take in the view (see photo above).

Thank you both so much for you tireless work and energy and we look forward to you returning mid next year.

BIRDS OF THUMA

Photos by Wim Werrelmann of Safari Beach Lodge

Down in Senga Bay by the side of the lake is a little bit of paradise called Safari Beach



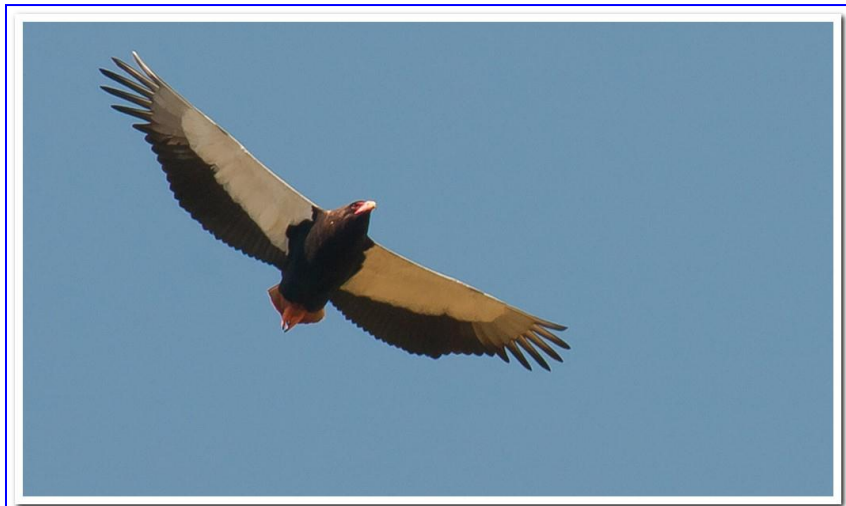
Lodge (SBL)! SBL has beautiful accommodation with spectacular views, a private beach and small swimming pool set in a beautifully manicured garden. The food there is top class and they are building a new platform where you can

sip cocktails and eat in the evenings suspended over the lake!

Bliss!

Thuma and SB have a long and lasting relationship over the years. It was first started by our founder George Kroble who used to own SBL.

The current owner Wim a Dutch man also has a love for the bush and is an



excellent and very keen photographer with a particular interest in birds. He and his son came to visit us in Thuma earlier this year.

I took the time to go meet Wim last month when he happened to be back in the country and I was delighted when he kindly agreed to send me some of the photos he took while at Thuma... which are amazing so we have put them here for you to see. The first photo is of the African grey Hornbill singing its heart out, , the second photo is of a Bateleur, the next beautiful photo is I think of a Western Banded Snake Eagle or African Hawk eagle but I am open to correction?!:) and lastly is the Three banded Plover spotted down by the Linthipe River.



Thank you Wim for sharing these photos with us and we are looking forward to your promised visit in 2012 and the kings chair is waiting for you!:)

MALAWI'S ARMY JOIN THE FIGHT FOR CONSERVATION



When the Combat Support Battalion from SUPPORT situated close to the northern boundary of Thuma lead by Matthews Nyirenda arrived in Thuma base camp you could see that they really were not too sure what to expect. We welcomed them, arranged places for their tents and things and started planning the first patrol! The Department of Forestry had requested that the army

assist WAG with the ongoing issue of charcoal burning. WAG had some time back reported the severity of the problem in certain areas around Thuma and requested assistance. Two teams of twenty soldiers were sent to Thuma one to the West and one to the East. Over the next five days we worked hand in hand



with the army who were very energetic and interested in what we were doing here. Operations and patrols were carried out both inside and outside the reserve and every bag of charcoal along the road and from villages around Thuma were confiscated. (see photo).

We explained our work we are doing here and of course while they were on patrol inside the reserve they saw the rich wildlife we are trying to protect but they also saw the destruction that the charcoal burning is doing to the protected area.

Of the twenty posted here at base camp approx ten men saw some elephants up close and personal but it was our old friend Chaka our big Elephant with no tusks that captured their hearts and imagination! They were thrilled and all said it was one of the best moments of their lives to see these animals here in Thuma and they will never forget it!

They all promised to come back to assist us in the future with patrols and that they loved Thuma and all it stood for.

Thank you to DOF and the Malawian Army for their assistance the forest has been pretty quiet since then to date!

WAG WEB SITE

Many of you will receive a copy of our newsletter directly and that's how you know what we are doing over here.

Over the last few months we have also been working hard to get our web site updated with news and some new features.

We have been able to do this with the expertise of Stefan our German web master who works tirelessly to make this work for us. Thank you Stefan, I don't know what we would do without you!:))

We have a new gallery of various photos, a volunteer's information page, details of how to sponsor a scout, all our newsletter are there, you can donate via pay pal and many other interesting things.

We are also on Facebook and twitter.

Check out our web site on www.wag-malawi.org.



Kudu in Thuma – some of the animals that are hunted a lot with guns and snares



One on three bulls spotted one day

**THANK YOU ALL FOR READING AND
PLEASE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT US!**