

Thuma Telegraph

Nov 2012

Wildlife Action Group



Dear Friends and supporters

As I write this I dream of a cold wind blowing in my face, goose pimples on my arms, the feel of ice cold finger tips as you make a snow ball and snowflakes landing on my nose!

November in Malawi is painfully hot with temperatures over 40 degrees which sucks every bit of energy you have. By noon nothing moves, and it is necessary to rest! If you can manage to sleep you wake up completely soaked with sweat and feel worse than before. By 4pm it starts to cool down a little and your body and mind starts to be able to function again! At night it is the same! It is just not comfortable with no breeze and this dead weight of heat!

We are all waiting for the rain to come; people are in the fields, the normal panic to find money to buy fertilizer by every Malawian for their fields; do you grow soya, maize, ground nuts, tobacco??!! Where can they get money? Fields are being prepared and there is a flurry of activity for a few hours every morning from 5am to about 8am, THEN it is necessary to find shade and sit out the heat of the day!

Over the last few months we at WAG have had many highs and double the number of lows!

We have been challenged to the nth degree but in true WAG spirit we pulled together, worked harder and dealt with each issue and are once again on track and things are beginning to show for all our hard work and energy.

We have made many arrests, been attacked by charcoal burners, building the fence extension, elephants have been out in record numbers, camp was robbed, to mention but a few things!:)

THIS IS AFRICA!

Please read on find out what we have been doing and enjoy the many photos.

Thanks for all your support and for taking the time to read our newsletter.

Yours sincerely

Lynn

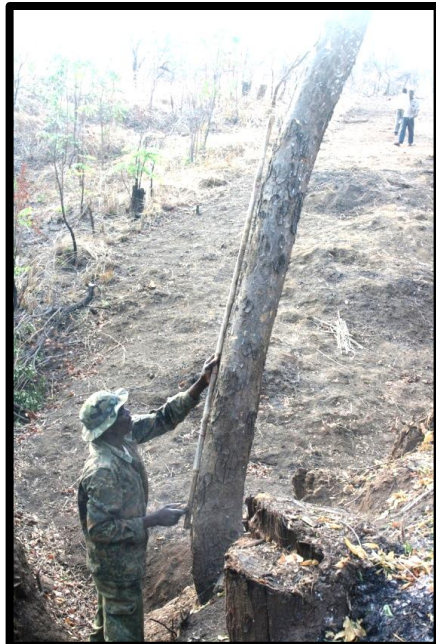


New fence line - Cutting trees

2012 FENCE EXTENSION

In June 2010 I first heard about WAG and the need to raise funds to extend the fence to assist with the huge human-elephant conflict. WAG wrote proposals requesting financial assistance from various donors in 2010 and 2011 and was unsuccessful each time! In the mean time the elephants were going out more often and in June 2011 a man was tragically killed by a bull elephant and food security became a serious issue.

Something needed to be done urgently.



Measuring wire height

We applied for more funding in

August 2011, **Putting wire across the Linthiphe River** and then in

January 2012 we got good news to say funding had been approved and we could at long last start plans to extend the fence. We were delighted. It was full steam ahead and we confirmed with suppliers our requirements, walked the fence line again and again, marking, measuring, and discussing boundary issues.

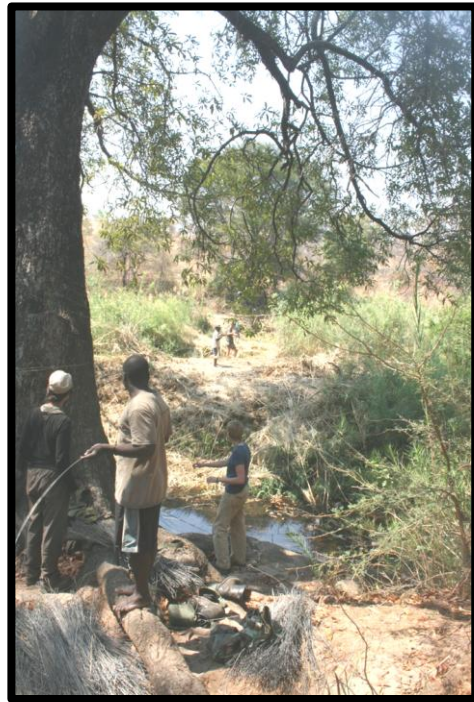
Then we were hit in April/ May with the devaluation of the kwacha, shortages in fuel supplies and we were very concerned about how we could build the fence line and costs as most goods were sourced from South Africa and what effect these problems would have.!

Despite all of the above and many other setbacks

we started the fence on 26th September 2012!

Over 180 people assisted us to clear, burn, cut trees, build the fence and make chains for the ditches. Men, women and children arrived everyday with their tools, always smiling, lots of chat and hand language and a lot of sweat! ☺

During this time we also had to make sure that all elephants were chased inside before the new





fence line was built and they were not locked out... so we had 2 National parks rangers also working full time up and down the fence line to make sure all elephants were inside.

During this time we were blessed to have a camp full of amazing volunteers who assisted in every way possible. It was like the united nations with Germans, Dutch, French, Swiss, British, Malawian and (of course myself) Irish!

The fence is a duplicate of our current fence built by George Kloble in 2009, which has shown to be successful. It has four wires, two positive two negative. The current is pumped from an energizer along the 1st wire and returns making a circuit on the 3rd wire. Earthing poles are placed every 500 mtrs to protect against lightning strikes and protect

the energizer, cut out switches placed every 1km to help us find faults on the fence and fix them. We also have had to place flood gate controllers at every large ditch which has water in the wet season. These sense if water or a river that rises and touches the fence line and cuts out the power to that area hence saving the fence from being damaged.

I can't put into words what this fence means to our local population or the difference it has made to our relationship them! Everywhere we went people stopped us and thanked us for doing this! I felt very humble and ashamed that these people have suffered so much over the years. The hope and relief we saw in their faces. They spoke of hope for the upcoming

season crop. We were welcomed to camp in villages and shown the real warm heart of Malawi where we were given water, food, welcomed and made feel very comfortable everywhere we camped.

We finished the fence on 3rd November and managed to build a bit further than planned. We finished approx 1 km past our Dedza camp making a total of 14kms of new fence built.



Uwe and Aubery cranking the wire

On behalf of WAG we would like to thank the Norwegian Embassy for donating the money to enable us to build the fence and to LEAD, DOF and DNPW for all their assistance and partnership in this project and to all our local population who worked so hard to



Ilona, Nora, Lucius, Uwe, Najat, Sam, Spohie, Bit, Richard

make this happen. Thanks to TNH fencing for supplying all materials and all technical assistance before and during the build. Our wonderful volunteers who worked so hard to help us (Nora, Marrion, Uwe, Ilona, Andy, Sophie, Ben & Pinks, Chris, Christoph, Najat. Claudia.

WHAT A TEAM! :))

And last but not least all our amazing team of scouts who worked tirelessly and without complaint, even though at times I asked and pushed you so much. You really are the best! :)

So what next you might ask!?? Well we still have a further 13kms or so to secure on eastern side and then we also have the northern boundary to seriously consider.

So now we start all over again with looking for funds for next year to continue this very



Lady working on fence line, her child below left



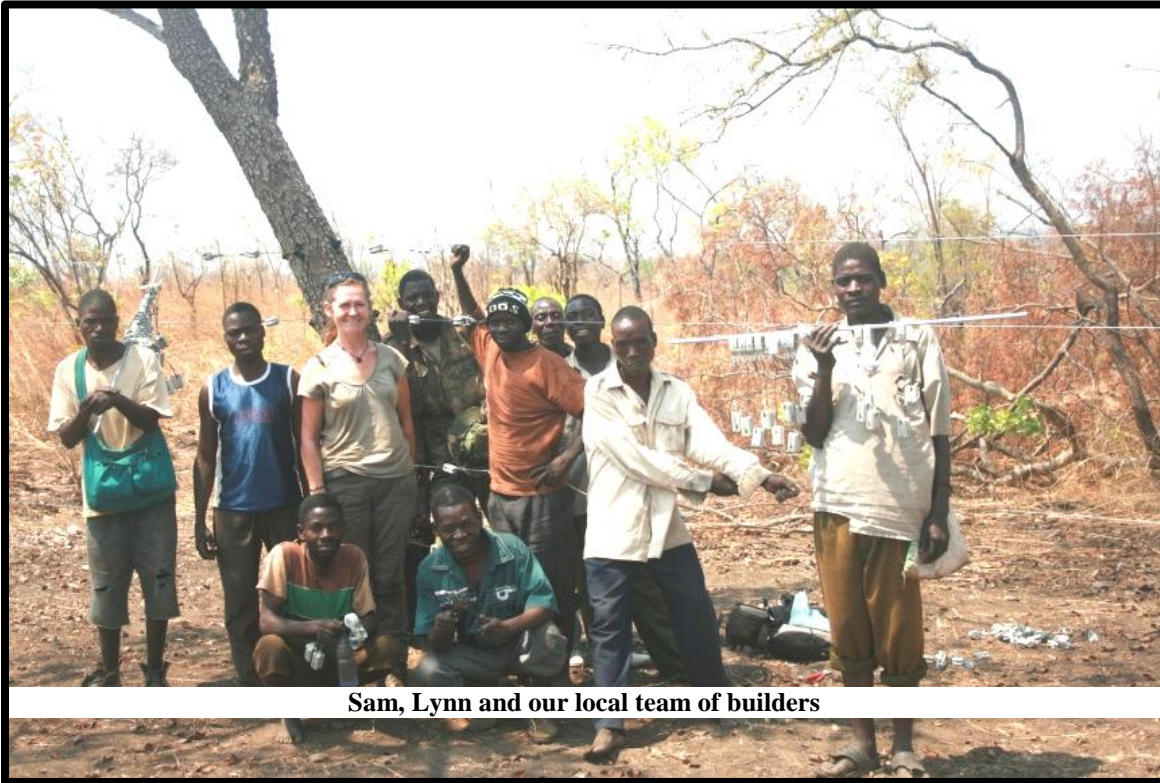
very important project that will not only provide personal and food security to everyone living around the forest reserve but also give this protected area a chance to be secured and to protect the elephants and other animals living inside the reserve.



Teaching how to make sections



Adding chains to large ditch to stop elephants going under the fence



Sam, Lynn and our local team of builders

WAG SCOUTS SHOT AT! GUN POACHERS ARRESTED



Warthog killed by poachers

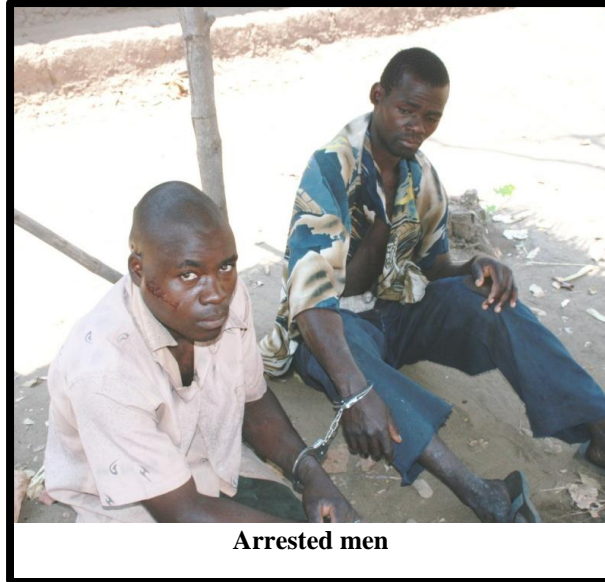
August 2012 just after Thomas from REA left we started hearing gun shots again in Thuma! Despite WAG scouts doing long over night patrols trying to arrest these people for almost 2 months we were unsuccessful. We heard gun shots, we found tracks, saw signs of killing but we could not find the poachers! On 21st September the scouts went out again this time prepared for 4 nights to try and catch these people! I had a feeling that maybe our movements were being watched. So on late Saturday afternoon I sent out a second team to camp over night in a different area! Sunday morning the second team heard an elephant trumpet and directly after a gunshot! They followed where the sound came from but could find or see nothing. They climbed a hill and sat hidden from view

and waited for just over one hour!

Then they saw 4 men, one carrying a gun climb up a hill close by and disappear over the top. At last we sighted them now we had a chance. WAG scouts and a NP ranger followed quickly. As they reached the top of the hill they heard a second gun shot from below and saw that the poachers had just killed a large male warthog.

Just then the holder of the gun turned around and sighted the scouts on top. He raised his rifle and shot directly at the scouts. They returned warning fire and unfortunately two poachers were injured and arrested! The owner of the rifle and his son who was carrying the gun escaped. On return to camp the two arrested were given first aid and brought to the police and hospital for treatment.

On questioning of the arrested people, they named the other two and told us that they come in to kill every weekend. The meat is then sold in the market in Salima at approx 500mk per kilo. The warthog weighted approx 60kgs which means they are making approx 30000mk per weekend which is approx 75 euro!!! That is a lot of money over here!



Arrested men

We managed to get a warrant of arrest for the other two suspects. One has disappeared and has not been seen since and the other was kept in the police for 2 days and released on bail.

The family in question is the same people who were involved in a similar arrest back in 2010 where we arrested a gun poacher with a dead bushbuck and the case files went missing twice and the case never got to court!

We are waiting for the case to reach court... the details of the case and the history have been reported to Lilongwe, DOF, DNPW, Attorney General and Chief Police prosecutor. SO we are holding our breaths to see the outcome which will be very important to us.

Keep your fingers crossed for us please.

Patrol Activity over the last few months:

Month	No.of Patrols	Snares collected	Panga /spoons etc collected	Human/elephant conflict	Signs of hunting	Elephants sighted	Illegal charcoal activity	Illegal bamboo activity
Aug	43	64	4	17	4	93	4	0
Sept	34	0	5	1	54	35	3	5
Oct	32	45	130	4	24	105	10	12



Some of the many spoons confiscated from illegal poachers inside the reserve along with pots snares and panga knives

LOTS OF ELEPHANTS

Over the last few months we have seen plenty of elephants both inside and outside the reserves. Here are some photos of them. We have a new very very large bull that we can identify who has a very short tail and who we now know to be very aggressive. We have had several very close encounters with him and he is not to be messed with! We also found and lost an injured female elephant. Possibly injured by a gun shot! The poor young female looks like she was shot on her left front upper leg (possibly poacher tried to shoot her in the heart but missed). Despite searching for several days and trying to follow her tracks we have not since sighted her again! We hope she will be ok and we are still looking.

All our female groups have youngsters and we have been treated to watch babies who cannot even control their trunks yet! 😊 So sweet. I think elephants or most wild animals when seen in a natural environment give an instant high to anyone who is lucky enough to be watching. The scouts who see more than me still get so excited to see these wonderful animals and all break into wide open smiles while watching! We still do not know exactly how many elephants we are protecting. We hope to find funding to do a census next year.



Large bull walking in Thuma

Elephant injured by poachers!

See below some photos of our poor little injured elephant who we found and then lost track of. The scouts saw her while out of patrol and reported back to me. I went directly to see her



and watched her for some hours and took some photos. She was obviously left behind by her family and was very distressed. She could walk but you could see it was very painful for her.

I went back and tried to see if we could manage to get a vet to come look at her and maybe we could assist her by darting her, cleaning out the wound and giving huge dose of antibiotics. REA once again came to the rescue and pledged financial support to do this operation. We found a vet and all the medicine however we went out early the next morning to find her and she had gone. We tried looking for her for 5 days going out morning and evening but to this day we still have not been able to locate her.

We have since heard rumours that a poacher from the west of Thuma shot her and missed her heart. He uses a muzzle loader (man made gun). The threat to our elephants is very real and alive today! For us to continue to protect them and to up our protection of these animals your donations are needed. Salaries need to be



paid...camp and car maintained, equipment replaced. Please continue to support us in any way you can.... Sponsor a scout, give a donation....

It is tragic to see any animal suffer but I have to say to watch this beautiful female suffer like this is heart breaking. We have to stop this wanton killing and injuring of our animals and with your support we can do this.

See swollen front leg with visible bullet wound!



I was lucky enough to watch as a family of 19 elephants came across the hill and into view. Only 14 showing here!



Two bulls being chased back into Thuma



This elephant turned to mock charge us as we tried to get him back into the reserve!



Mother and baby just near Thuma Base camp near the road

VILLAGES VISITS, JUDO AND ANTS

We have been going into villages a little more than before and each time I am delighted to say I learn something new each and every time. Volunteers also



Me fishing for termites

love to see real village life and the villagers especially the children love to see the “muzungu” white strangers!!:) In one village we watched some children sitting in a field looking into a hole! I went over to investigate and found they were fishing for termites! This is something I



Success, one termite!

know and have seen wild chimpanzees do but have never tried myself, so the children showed me how to do it and how to kill them before eating them. Termites are a good source of protein or so I have been told.... They tasted of nothing and I really can't imagine how many one would need to eat to be full! But I tried a few to the delight of the children! :)



Claudia with local children

scouts, playing with village children, out on anti poaching patrols, helping and camping out in villages while building the fence, driving the car, planning a new volunteer garden, building maintenance, organizing the camp and helping with admin work. She is a wonder!



Lucius, Blacks, Claudia and Sam preparing the roof for the rainy season



Claudia takes Geoffery down!



Ring-a-Ring a Claudia!



Dearest Uwe sharing sobo juice at small party for finishing fence clearing

THUMA BASE CAMP ROBBED

The knock on affect of our gun poacher arrest was very surprising to us but showed two things:

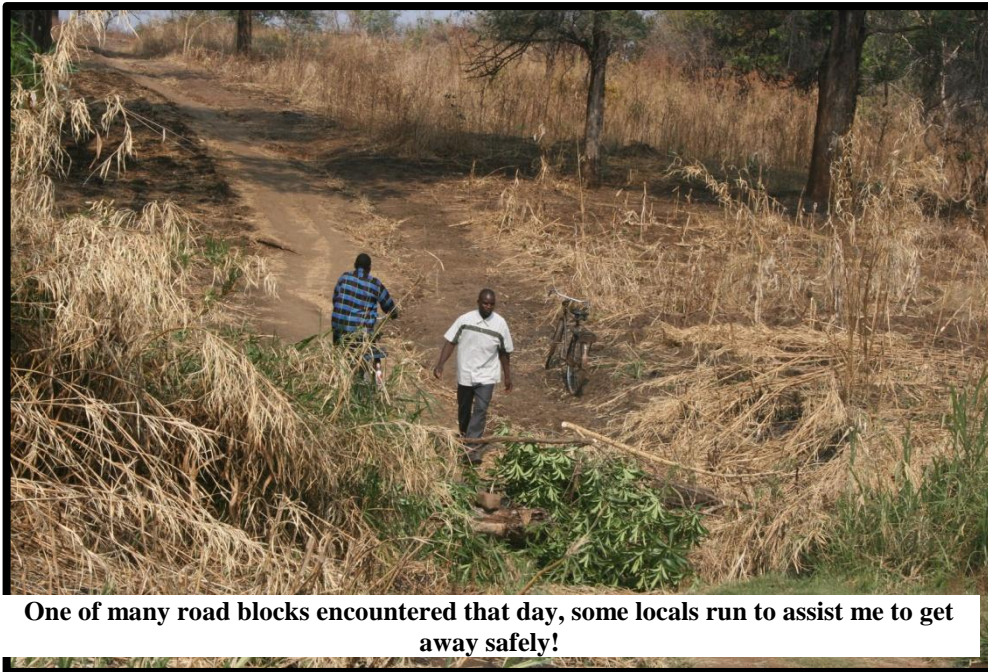
1. The man arrested is very important and has a lot of power in many places
2. We are making a difference and obviously ruffling some people's feathers and they are feeling the pressure we are applying inside the reserve. The things that took placed next were carried out by only a handful of known criminals & poachers.....

The arrests were made on Sunday 23rd Sept. Monday 24th and Tuesday 25th; myself and two scouts started receiving phone calls at night threatening us.

On the Wednesday I was driving from the new fence line and found that the road was blocked at over 10 dry river beds and some people tried to attack the car.

I drove direct to the police and reported everything and they in turn made one arrest that day and 5 more over the following days! The two main instigators

escaped and have been told they are no longer welcome in their villages.



One of many road blocks encountered that day, some locals run to assist me to get away safely!

I was receiving calls from some of our local population telling me that the two men were seen here one day and there the next... they were planning

to attack me and try to make trouble for WAG. People warned me not to drive in the car alone and not at night.

On the Sunday 6th Oct morning I woke to the sound of gunshots very close to camp coming from the north (which was very strange) plus it was several shots one after the other. When that stopped and a second round of shots was heard south of the camp, suggesting there was two people out there on either side of camp and I felt they were trying to intimidate us!

One hour later I received a phone call from a local to say that one of the men had just been seen just outside the reserve fence near the gate.

That day I along with some staff left to go to the fence line.

On the morning of the 7th at 5am I received a call to say that Thuma base camp had been robbed during the night and that all solar equipment, 2 laptops, our external hard drive, the router, some speakers, a jungle hat, regulators, inverters etc had been stolen! Several people were taken in to assist the police with their enquiries however, no one has been charged and no items have been recovered to date!

So we are back to square one needing to replace lap tops, internet router, external hard drive for back up records, regulators, inverters etc. Of course all of these can be replaced, however all my photos, all the photos belonging to the volunteers are gone! This hurts most!

Also it is a serious lesson to me... maybe I have been a bit complacent regarding security up here. Although we are in the bush we are still very vulnerable to attack and being robbed! We have upped our security with night watchmen now, a little too late but better late than never!

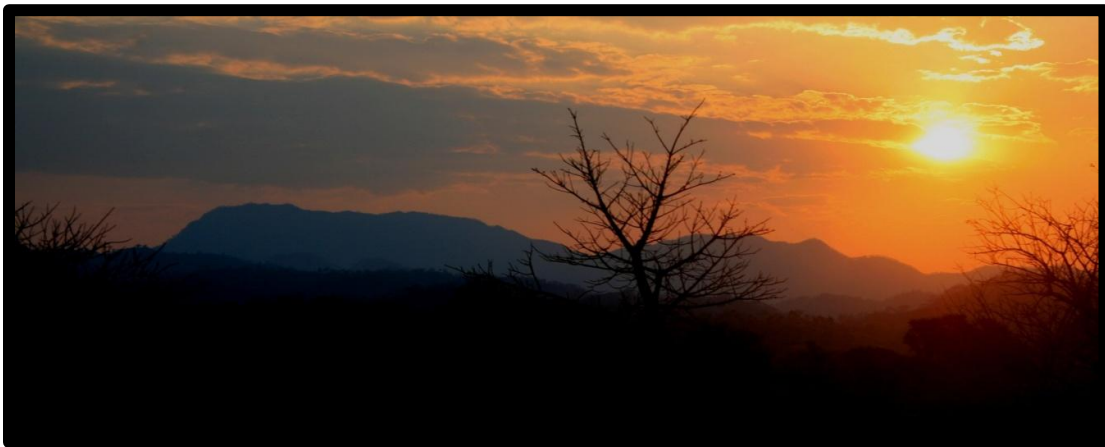
NEW DONOR SUPPORTING WAG

Wag would like to welcome The Abraham Foundation to our small but growing family.

The Abraham Foundation is dedicated to conserving the environment and to defending indigenous wildlife with an emphasis on protection of endangered species.

In mid September 2012 WAG was delighted to learn that the Abraham Foundation would be joining us in our effort to conserve and protect Thuma Forest Reserve and its wildlife, especially our elephants.

Thuma Forest Reserve late evening!



One of the main areas we both felt needed most urgent attention was to increase the number of scouts patrolling the area. So after some discussions funding was released to enable us to increase the number of scouts from 12 to 20! That means eight new scouts! ☺ This will make a huge difference to how we patrol and how much area we can cover each month, increasing the protection of our forests and animals.

Abraham Foundation have promised funding over a period of five years which shows not only their true vision and dedication to making a difference to vulnerable wild spaces and their wildlife but also it shows us their trust and faith in our ability to do the job.

Up until now WAG has been funded mainly by our long time donor REA in Germany who have stuck with us through thick and thin over the years.

WAG will continue to work hard to protect these ever decreasing wild areas and will not let either of you down.

We are looking forward to meeting in person both Mrs Nancy Abraham and Eleonor Content who plan to come visit us early next year.

Thank you both so much for all your support from us all at WAG.

More on Abraham Foundation over the coming months.

SOME OTHER PHOTOS



Road maintenance in Thuma



Black Mamba snake



Banana tree destroyed by elephants near Lifidzi River



Kanaga tours (a large tour operator) from Spain visit Thuma for educational tour



Water storage tank in Thuma which provides water for us to drink, cook, and wash for 4 days before having to refill. We wish to purchase another in 2013 to meet our increasing demand as our family grows!



Mr Blacks and other workers fill and distribute all water from Tank by hand. We need to buy a very long hose to assist us with this very physical and time consuming job.

Preparing water up to takes hours to fill



to pump tank, this approx 4 the tank



Planning patrols



Richard meets Moses, the baby elephant who is being hand reared in Lilongwe

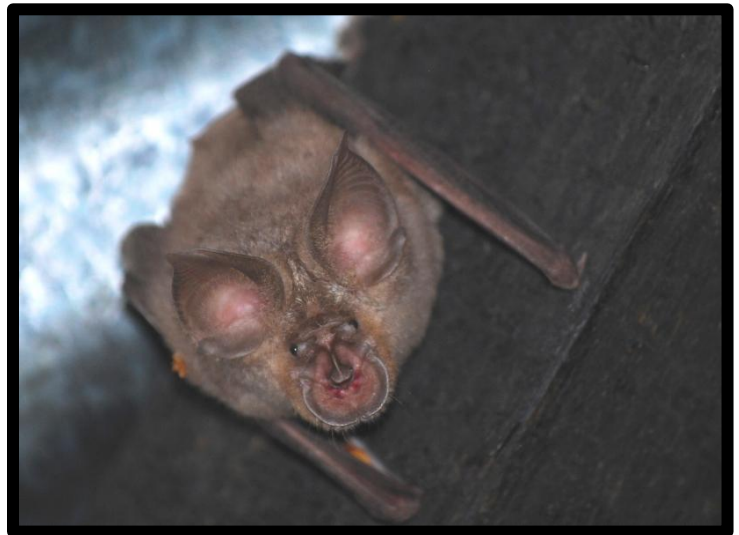


Scouts out on patrol

**A bat who lives in the volunteers camp, it has kept a few volunteers awake ☺
Does anyone know what type of bat
this is pls?**



Scorpion





Fredia our (big) friendly spider in the store room! What type of Spider is this pls anyone?



Beautiful photo taken by Sam from the UK!

WISH LIST FOR 2013

With Christmas around the corner we all still secretly wished we still could write to Santa and get some things we want! ☺ So as it is this time of year it is a good time to think of things we need and just maybe someone out there will get something new for Christmas and then they will not need the old one. So here is a list of things that would be very useful to us and maybe Santa will come this year! ☺ Any donations received means we could also use it to purchase some of this equipment.

2013 WISH LIST

Six scouts to be sponsored for next year
40 army uniforms – army trousers, army shirts, army backpack packs, sleeping bags, army rain jackets,
Good quality torches with rechargeable batteries
Laptop x 2 with long life battery
External drive to store our back ups
Oven gloves x 4
Good quality pots and pans
Night vision goggles
Digital camcorder
Digital camera with good lens
(OR: DSLR with good HD recording)
Night camera to record animals (camera trap)
Good quality second hand mobile phones (quad band) x 30 (these are needed for fence attendants, scouts, informers etc (unlocked if poss)
Walkie talkies good quality
Power drill rechargeable battery
Solar chargers for phones for on patrol
4 ANDROID PHONES FOR NEW GPS USE
A large plastic water tank and fittings
Very long water hose to assist with filling our showers etc

We hope to have some volunteers coming out next year who can assist to get these things over to us. We would really appreciate if anyone can donate any of these items. Thank you so much in advance.

Best regards
Lynn and Scouts
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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
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EXTEND OUR ELECTRIC FENCE
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