

Thuma Telegraph

July 2012

Wildlife Action Group



Muli Bwanji

About time you had some news from the bush and Malawi! ☺

As you all know over the last year or so we have experienced many challenges in our day to day lives. Fuel shortages which involved at times queuing for up to 24 hours, daily power cuts in town, increase in transport costs, shortages of a lot of food items etc.

Since our last newsletter Malawi has experienced some major changes.

In April the late President Bingu suffered a heart attack and sadly died. The vice President Madam Joyce Banda has stepped up to the mark and is the first Lady President in Malawi and the fourth president since independence, and also the first Lady president in the Southern African Region.

In line with IMF advice, due to the state of the economy the Malawi Kwacha (local currency) has devalued 49%, and with that the cost of most consumable items have also risen in price, including fuel, maize, sugar.

This with the lack of rains last season means many Malawians are suffering major challenges in their day to day lives. Already there is a lack of maize available and what are available are over three times the costs this time last year.

Malawi is classed as being in the top five poorest countries in the world and today in some villages there are food shortages and some people are going hungry.

This of course affects our work, and elephants going outside the reserve more than ever come into direct conflict for the very precious food that is in the fields. And people coming into the reserve to illegally take natural resources to subsidize their income or lack of income causes more conflict.

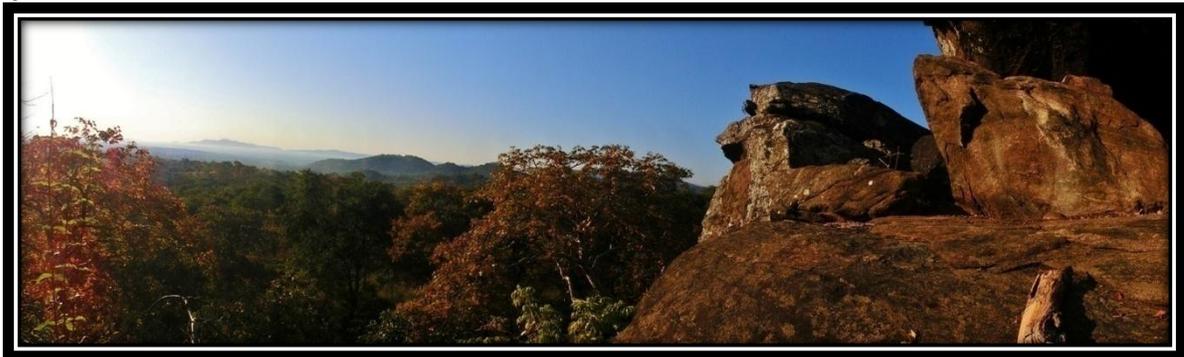
However, the future is bright and we do our best and will continue to try to find some balance to protect these areas, the people and animals plus assist the local population with small projects that will in turn help them to make some money so they can support their families which should in turn reduce the dependence on Malawi's natural resources and protect it for future generations .

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



CHASING ELEPHANTS

The Human-Elephant conflict has escalated over the last month.

However, this year the elephants are leaving the reserves at the end of June and not only are they leaving the reserves, but they are travelling further away from the boundary and moving through villages and getting closer to town.

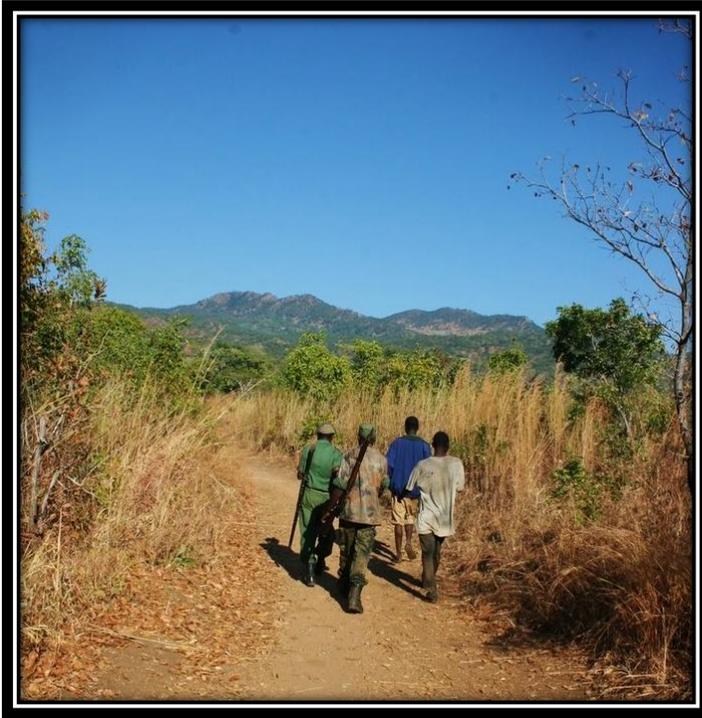
We got a call at 5am Sunday morning to say that a group of elephants were in the grave yard of Zigamanda Village. They reported that there was a very young baby in the group and people were flocking to the area to see this baby! We left immediately despite not have any firearms and only 10 firecrackers



which we hoped would help us chase the elephants back inside the reserve. When we arrived we found only 2 large bulls in the village and managed to chase them inside. The following week we received another call from a local village close to the gate saying that over 11 elephants were out and actually walked through the village! We had a ranger in camp which would help us to do the job, or so we thought! We went

down and found 11 adults with two young. Unusually when we started to drive them south towards the end of the fence they turned on the scouts and charged them! We tried again and were unsuccessful. We contacted National Parks requesting further assistance from a trained problem animal control hunter, Mr Phiri. Luckily he was available so I collected him and brought him back to the area. By the time we got back the elephants had moved and were following a different route towards Dedza-Salima Reserve. This may explain why they did not want to move down towards the Linthipe River and back inside Thuma! It was getting late and we had to stop and decided to track them the next day and continue to drive them back inside.





We were up early next morning, about to start the car when we got a call to say there was over 20 elephants in a village over near the boundary of Dedza-Salima FR. They reported an elephants had charged a child and the villagers were very angry and upset.

We changed plans and decided to rush over to the new site and try assist. On arrival we indeed did find well over 20 elephants around the village. The village is only half a km from the boundary. They were in smaller groups with 3 here, 11 there, and 7 or 8 in another place. We found out that the elephant had not charged the child but they had been close to the where the child was. Mr Phiri DNPW hunter along with WAG

scout Richard Banda were armed and managed to chase all elephants back inside in a prompt manner.

So we headed back to the village near Thuma to track the herd from the previous day! They had moved far and the scouts and DNPW rangers followed for over 24 hours, managed to drive them inside and also found a further 12 elephants out and drove them back in too.

Driving elephants is not an easy job and is dangerous and demanding. However, with expert help and our own scouts knowledge and skills we manage. We are all looking forward to the new fence consturction so these episodes will reduce, securing both animals and people.

MEET SOME PEOPLE DOING ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

Since I came back from Ireland in June I have been more aware than ever of the amount of natural resources being used by what seems everyone!

The Ministry of Natural Resources reports in the Forestry Policy⁴ that 90% of energy requirements in Malawi are met from by wood-fuels derived from natural and planted forests and trees planted on farm or surroundings.

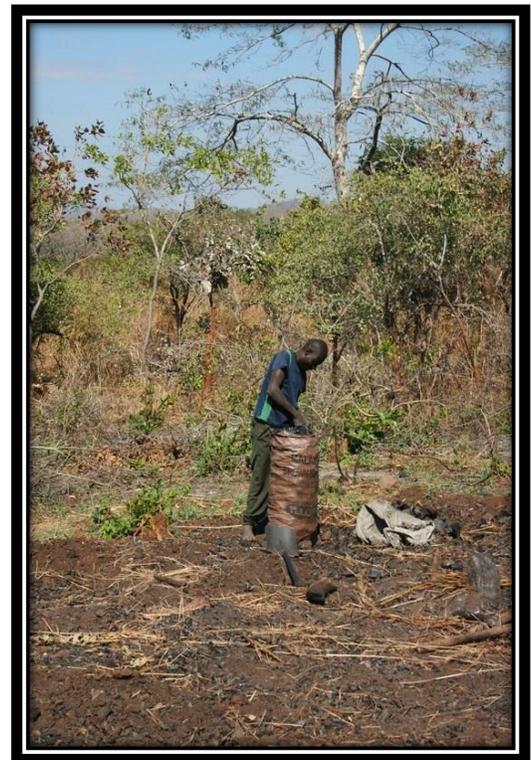
The rural population depend entirely on forests and trees for their fuel-wood, timber, poles and traditional medicine.

Our forests are a Source of energy, supply construction materials, wild foods, including fungi, fruits, insects and game animals.

Driving around the small roads in and around Thuma and Dedza Salima, nearly every person you see is carrying some sort of forest product.

Today I stopped and spoke to some to try understand more.

I first met Mr X, a 40 something year old man. He was sitting in the middle of an old charcoal oven just outside the gates of Thuma!. He was breaking up the charcoal



pieces and putting them very neatly in the bag. When I spoke to him he told me his garden is very small and is unable to supply enough food for him and his family which is why he does charcoal burning from March to Aug. He has been doing this for almost 26 years! Every August he concentrates on preparing his garden and growing food for the following year. He told me that making charcoal is not an easy job... but he has no other choice.

He showed me that to fill one bag of charcoal he needed to cut 3 trees (see photo). And it could take up to one month to complete the whole process to get a few bags, he works alone. I looked at his clothes, they were thorn, he had no shoes, and he was skinny! The energy he uses to do this must far out weight the actual benefits, so I asked how much he sold one bag for He said 500 MK which is approx 1.50 euro! But this is the only cash he can get in Malawi today. As I drove on I saw two ladies walking down the road with huge bundles of fire wood. They had entered the reserve illegally by going under the fence to collect fire wood! This is dangerous to them as they may meet elephants! We do



allow local women to enter the forest to collect firewood but they must use the gate entrance! So I stopped. We exchanged greetings, and I asked where their village was. They told me and the village is over 5 kms away from the forest where they had just come from. I asked what they needed the firewood for. They told me it was for cooking and the bundle they had now would last them 3 days cooking. I asked if they realised that what they did by going under the fence was illegal and

dangerous! They said yes but the gate was father away for them ! I was very impressed at their strength... you or I would not be able to carry this 100mtrs on our heads and these ladies could carry it for over 5 kms! We laughed about their muscles and mine!!(Non existent) and they told me that normally they would carry double the amount they had today. As they moved on I saw some other plants amongst the wood so quickly asked what it was and how they used it. It is a red flower like plant which they use for relish (like our veg) they remove the leaves and boil it and then it is good to eat.... we said good bye and they carried on.





In the majority of cases Illegal activities on forest lands arise due to poverty. People really do not have a choice. They have nothing and have no way to get some cash! Now more than ever I realise that if we are to try reduce or slow down the destruction of our forests we need to assist the people who depend on it so they can have something else besides the forest products and maybe this in turn will then help us to protect the natural resources.

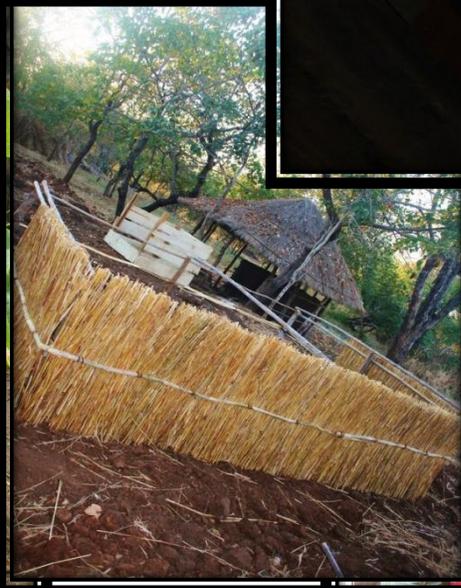
WAG has started working in several villages doing small projects but we need to do more!

WORKING VOLUNTEERS

I was a volunteer for many years in Cameroon, and really enjoyed my time and experiences. Volunteers come from all different back grounds and they spend their free time or



yearly holidays to come help in projects like ours. Their work, ideas, time and friendship is invaluable to us and others like us. Many bring donations to help local school's which helps our local population and also helps to with relationships between WAG and local people. We have been lucky to have great people join us and they all have left their mark or stamp on our hearts, in our memories and most important here in Malawi. Here are some photos of some of the work they have done.



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR TEAM!

You met some of the team in the last newsletter, so let's meet some more of them. They have written this themselves no input from me!:)

Name: Richard Julius Banda

Nationality: Malawian

Words from Richard: My name is Richard Julius Banda. I was born on 18th January 1981 at Ndawambi Village in the District of Dowa. I am the second born of a family of 4 children (3 boys and 1 girl). In 1996 I passed my primary cert and was selected to Robert Blake Secondary school and was there from form 1 to form 4.

In November 2002 I joined WAG as a scout. I have been here ever since.

I have seen many changes and improvements. Especially I have noticed an increase in the number of wildlife here.

One of my best memories was in December 2010 when we were out on patrol and we saw more than 100 elephants in the middle of Thuma FR near the Saltlick area. We have never seen this before.

Besides elephants we have many other animals here such as Buffalo, Kudu, bushbuck, bush pig, warthog, hyenas, and hyrax, to name but a few.

A lot of things have changed for the better around camp, the number of staff has increased, we have a new camp funded by REA, and new scout houses funded by WFWS and we all now have beds and mattresses in each of our houses donated by our friends in Holland. And this year we have a new volunteer camp.

Of course we still have problems inside the reserve and our main challenges are trying to stop deforestation and killing of our animals.

The lack of ownership from the community living around the boundaries of the Reserve is also a problem, but we continue to educate in the local schools and also try to assist villages with small income generating projects.

Lastly I appreciate WAG for sending three scouts for Ranger training last year, especially as I was one of them and everyone's support to help WAG and our Forests and wildlife and I hope you will continue to assist us to protect these special places and its wildlife.

All in All I really enjoy the work I do.

God bless you all

Yours

Richard



Name: Beatson C Mwale

Nationality: Malawian

Words from: I would like to introduce myself. I am Beatson C Mwale, originated in Dowa District in Malawi. I am 29 years old. I have one sister in my family and my parents are farmers. I am married with three children. My schooling I have junior certificate.

On 15th June 2006 it was the time I was employed as a scout. Since that time I like the job up to now. I like it because I like to protect the flora and fauna. We do recordings of elephant's

sightings by recording the number in the group and we have some we now recognize. One bull likes to move around camp a lot is Chaka, he has no tusks.

If we protect our wildlife and forests it will make people from different countries come to see what we have. From time to time we get visitors here, which I like because we do chat and share ideas. It is good because we know more things from other countries through them, and we share what we know and do here. When we have visitors we sometimes go to the natural swimming pool to swim or we play football.

My favorite game is Bow. It is traditional board games from Malawi and we play this a lot.

Thanks

Yours

Beaston

Name: Medison Gelard

Nationality: Malawian

Words from Medison : My name is Medison Gelard, aged 30. My original village is Mwambula Village T/A Chiwere, Dowa District, central region of Malawi.

I have my junior certificate and didn't go further because of financial problem.

I am married and have two wives and six children (4 sons and 2 daughters).

I joined WAG in 2006 1st December as a scout. Thuma forest is very beautiful and one of the only forest reserves in Malawi which is still home to Elephants. Besides elephants, we

have buffalo, kudus and other small animals. We have names for certain areas like Buffalo view, Capitol Hill, which are some of the places were we bring visitors so they can try see some animals. We also have a natural swimming pool were we can go to cool down if we are too hot.

I am one of the fastest scouts in WAG and have been involved for arresting gun poachers, plank cutters and others who are doing illegal activity inside the reserve.

I remember one day we were 4 scouts out of patrol when we saw a gun poacher. I chased him and he also had a panga knife, and he tried to cut off my neck. However I managed to block him and he only cut my back. He was arrested along with his gun and panaga.

Last year WAG choose and sent me to have training with National Parks to be a ranger. I passed after 3 months and am sure once we manage to have fire arms here, Thuma will be better protected.

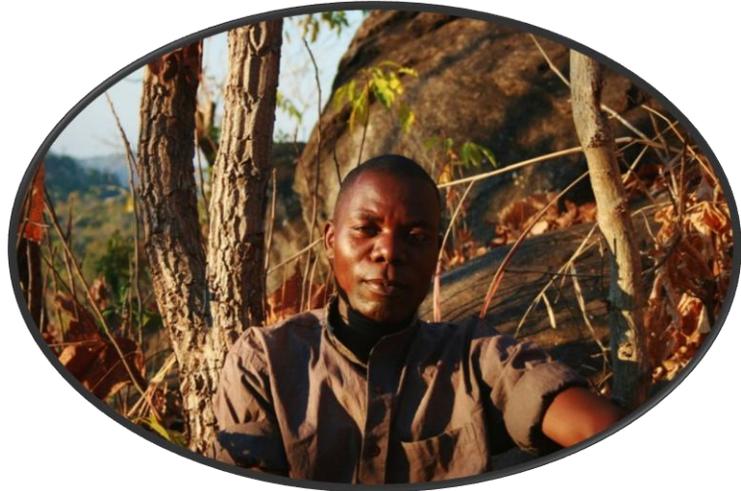
I like my job, and I get a salary each month. My family also gains. I know we are protecting the wildlife of Malawi and keeping them safe.

I like to chase poachers and me doing this I know the new generation can see animals like elephants, even my children they will able to see wildlife.

Thank you so much for doing a great job by supporting WAG. God should replace where you take my salary.

I wish you all the best and your work should be blessed by God.

Medison



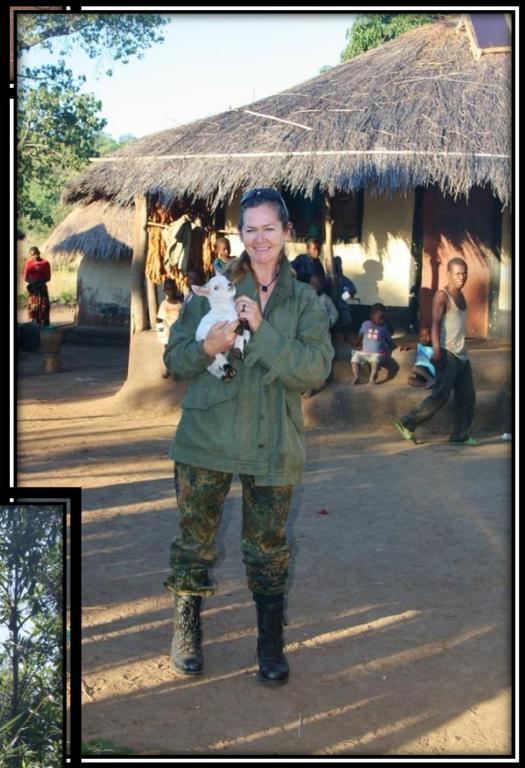
FENCE EXTENTION

The end of April we set off on a three day two night mission to walk to have a look along the new fence line plus meet the Group Village Headmen (GVHM). Our fence attendants have

started making the wire chains which we will need to use across the Linthiphe River (see photo). We started walking and marking from the end of the current line and within 1 km we came across so much illegal activity we spend the whole day destroying piles of logs and charcoal ovens. We also found over 30 cannabis plants which we destroyed (see photos). We camped out that night

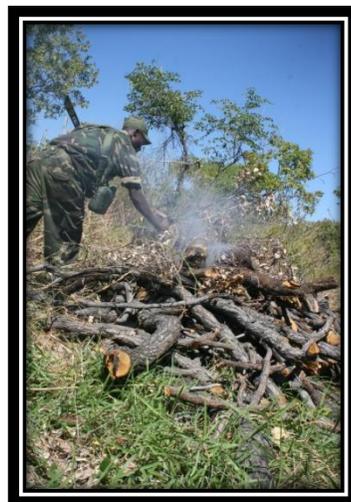


listening to the sounds of drums coming from the local villages (photos right Lynn made friends with baby goat) and watch a full moon rise. Pure bliss. Over the next two days we spent time in the field and in meetings in the various villages, talking to the Group Village headmen (GVHM) about the various issues they face with daily raiding elephants and the construction of the new fence. Each GVHM is 100% supporting this fence and promised to speak to all their population regarding law



enforcement issues we face daily in the reserve. (Photo left - where we need to stretch the wire to cross the river to start the new fence line).They promised a reduction in illegal

Activity. WAG will build the extension fence along the boundary of the Dedza- Salima Forest Reserve running over 12.8km which will bring us up to our other Camp. Over 40 villages will benefit from this fence and we hope a reduction in elephants leaving the reserve. While





building the fence over 120 local populations will be employed to assist us clear, burn and build the fence. The fence is being funded by the Norwegian Embassy.
 (photo below - WAG meeting with Local GVHM)



DONATIONS FROM WAGI AND SOME PHOTOS FROM THE FENCE

A big thank you for donations received from Wildlife Action Group International. We received a fantastic pair of Nikon Binoculars at a time when we had none. A pair of hiking boots, one mobile phone and an external hard drive so we can back up all of our files. All are so useful and very much appreciated. Thank you. ☺





WAG CAR GETS COSMETIC SURGEY☺!

I can't explain how much the WAG Land cruiser means to us. She (I call her a she!) is so powerful and reliable and we appreciate and rely on her so much. So we do try look after her as best we can and have had expert help along the way with the famous five dropping in giving her a complete overhaul from time to time. However, some years ago the car had a little accident (before my time I may add!!:) and the side was damaged along with the air filter. Then when I was away she had another accident inside the reserve and went into a tree. When I came back she really looked a sorry state on one side. So earlier this month we had some work done on her, some panel beating, a lick of spray paint, a lift and tuck and few stitches later and she looks great. She also on the same day reached 100,000kms!



LOCAL COMMUNITY PLANT TREES

Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD SEA), World fish Center and Forestry Department represented by Forestry Research Institute of Malawi are assisting and supporting WAG through funding from the Norwegian Embassy to “Scaling up climate change mitigation and adaptation to enhancing livelihoods of vulnerable



communities in Lake Chilwa Basin and Thuma”. One of the projects involves the planting of trees by local villages surrounding Thuma FR to try help relieve the pressure on Thuma. Poverty is the major driving force behind deforestation and the unsustainable use of natural



Above : new village forest started in Chimutu village

Resources in Malawi. Deforestation rates in and around Thuma are high and the demand for wood energy in particular areas is huge. Rehabilitation through tree planting is one of the ways we are trying to address these challenges. This first stage was done hand in hand with the District Forestry Officers who supplied seeds. It requires a lot of labor input. Incentives will be provided to those communities that will ensure good survival rates of the trees. Forestry provided guidance and training on the tree planting. Communities will be paid for seedlings raising, sale of seedlings, clearing and site preparation and management of trees planted. One such village is Chimutu Village (Chief Chimutu above) who has done an excellent job and they are looking after their plot in a very professional manner.

In our next newsletter we will have news and photos of our new fence extension.!



Wildlife Action Group – Malawi

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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**

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