

# Thuma Telegraph

Oct 2013

Wildlife Action Group



Dear Friends and supporters

Its been a long time since we have given some news about our work in Thuma and Dedza FR. Things have been hectic here and we are working harder than ever to protect these majestic forests and the remaining wildlife.

We had many volunteers assisting us and who have worked so hard with us and left many changes for the better.

The year has flown I can't believe it is already Oct .... Christmas is only around the corner! And we still have so much work to do before the rains come.

Over the last few months we have had to fight for the survival of our elephants. We have been hit with an ultimatum to completely fence both reserves or remove the elephants from here to somewhere else, we have also been hit with a killing spree of gun poachers from Malawi and Zambia who killed three of our elephants, we have managed to arrest 3 gun poachers. We help organized and taken part in the first ever peaceful march/ demonstration for wildlife in Malawi and many other things. And we have a new donor US Fish and Wildlife Service, which is fantastic news. Thomas from REA came for his yearly visit leaving new boots, uniforms, hats, binoculars and many other goodies. We have got new sleeping bags from Abraham foundation started building a new camp and funding to build a fence extension, which is amazing. We have recruited new scouts and our numbers are higher than ever before so we are moving in a new direction and it's the right one.

Our donors and supporters have been amazing throughout all these highs and lows and it is you that gives us the courage, strength and conviction to continue our work here.

Hope you enjoy this catch up on our work.

Yours sincerely

Lynn



# Lights, Camera, Action!

The Summer of 2013 has seen the first camera trap survey of Thuma Forest Reserve. The pilot project joint funded by WAG Malawi and Hadlow College in the United Kingdom has been conducted by WAG working group member and Hadlow College lecturer John Pemberton along with WAG staff and volunteers Simone and Marie. Camera trapping is a low intensity and non invasive survey technique for terrestrial fauna and is particularly useful in identifying the presence and distribution patterns of cryptic or nocturnal species.



This pilot project has a number of aims including identifying patterns in species



distributions within different habitat types of the forest but primarily is to assess the effectiveness and usefulness of this type of surveying in the conservation and management of Thuma Forest Reserve. This pilot project concluded on 11<sup>th</sup> August and analyzing the large volume of data will take considerable time but already it looks very promising with a wide range of mammal and bird species recorded, including two previously unrecorded

species of carnivore. Ad hoc checks of some of the cameras have shown cryptic species such as serval (*Leptailurus serval*), African civet (*Civettictis civetta*) and two newly discovered species in Thuma. We have also “trapped” a number of images of elephant

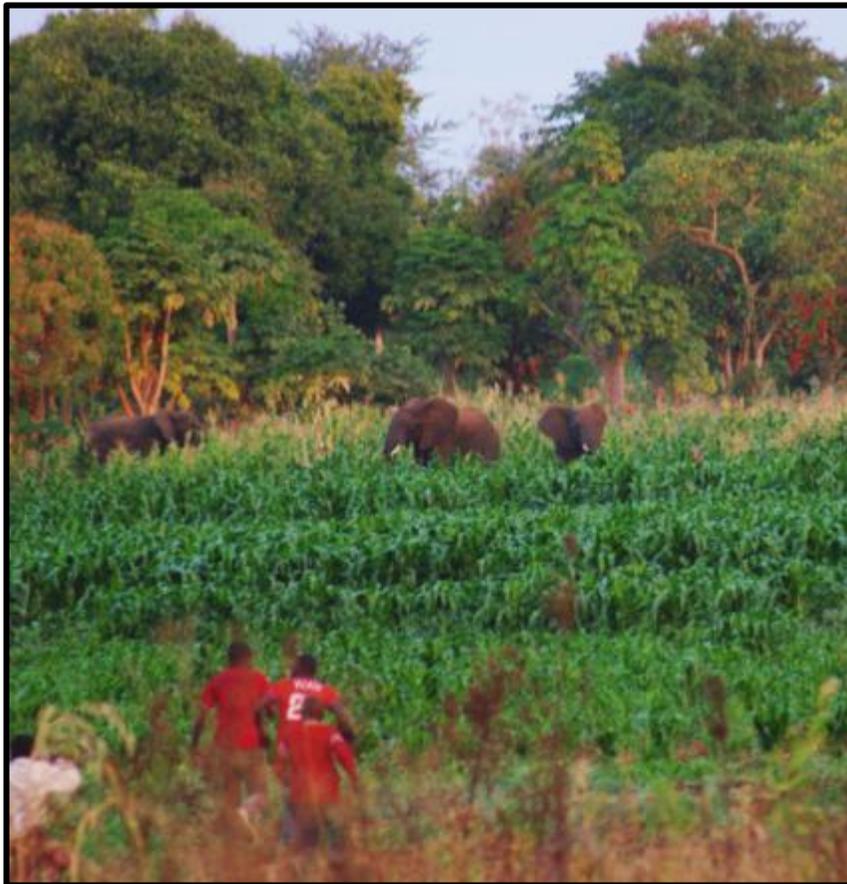
which are invaluable to our elephant identification records. This highlights the importance of not just research and monitoring but also of Thuma Forest itself.



*First ever sighting of caracal in Thuma FR.*

# Elephants chased into Salima Town

On Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August we received a telephone call informing us that people were driving elephants from Thuma Forest Reserve to the town of Salima! We rushed immediately to town with a Department of National Parks & Wildlife game ranger along with our own team of scouts and rangers. Upon arrival at the scene we were horrified to discover a crowd of over 1000 people screaming and shouting at the four elephants. The situation quickly deteriorated as the crowd became more excited at our arrival and they completely ignored instructions by Wag and the police to clear the area and stay back. As rangers and scouts entered the field towards the elephants the crowd became more excited and broke forward into the field. Men women and children charged the four



terrified elephants. The elephants remained remarkably calm and faced the crowds. Adults and children were even running up and touching the elephants while posing for photographs. Two men ran at the elephants with their arms out and one elephant lost its nerve and charged. We watched helplessly as the elephant tossed the man into the air and as he landed the elephants head lowered to the ground. Heroic and

quick thinking DNPW ranger Mr Phiri with over 30 years experience sprinted towards the elephants and started shooting in the air, the elephant stopped and all four started running away back in the direction of the reserve. The 22 year old man is now recovering in hospital and is so lucky to be alive. He suffered a broken leg in two places and an intestinal injury. Local accounts and eye witnesses of this event tell that the elephants had left the reserve and found themselves surrounded by local villagers from the Katelera town who then started to stone them!. They were then driven and herded to the edge of Salima town.

Our team have worked tirelessly 24hrs per day, tracking and chasing these elephants, trying to secure the safety of these elephants and local people. The quick thinking of our scouts and rangers saved many lives but this terrible incident highlights a very worrying trend across Malawi where we are seeing increasingly severe conflict situations with local communities.

This increase in conflict across the country is most likely due to the growing human population putting increased and unsustainable pressure on natural resources, often illegally. For Thuma & Dedza Salima Forest Reserves the clearest solution is to increase the length of electric fence. Our existing sections of fence line have been successful in alleviating human elephant conflict in the communities neighboring the fence line. Our Forest Reserves do not share connectivity with neighboring wild areas. We are surrounded by human settlements, therefore fencing the reserves will not prevent our wildlife from accessing other safe areas, but will reduce the elephants and local population coming into direct contact, and protecting animals, people and their food supply in the agricultural land beside both reserves. We ask of anyone who is in a position to support our fence extension to please do so. We are in no doubt that our existing fence sections have saved both human and elephant lives.

## INTERNATIONAL ELEPHANT MARCH

On the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2013 in many cities all over the world people joined together to raise awareness of the current plight of elephants worldwide.

The David Sheldrick trust spear headed this idea as the illegal trade and demand for ivory continues to rise and last year's death figures shows that every 15 minutes one elephant was killed in 2012. Over 36,000 elephants were killed last year! At the current rate elephants will be extinct by 2025, only 9 years away!

One of the most worrying aspects of these frightening statistics is that in many cases when a poacher or ivory trafficker is caught and brought to court the sentence is far too lenient and not really much of a deterrent.

This march not only was to raise awareness of the current situation but also to lobby



governments all around the world to impose harder sentences on those caught to try defer this illegal practice.



Malawi joined millions all over the world, petitions signed and handed over to the Honourable Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Culture Rachel Mazombwe Zulu MP outside parliament buildings on the day. The honorable Minister in her speech welcomed the ideas and promised that the Government was taking these issues seriously and would do everything to protect its precious wildlife. The Wildlife Act of Malawi would be looked into especially concerning the serious trends now brought to her attention. Malawi is thought to have only 2000 elephants remaining despite just over 20 years ago being able

to boast well over that in one of her reserves alone.

Malawi's president Madam Joyce Banda was in USA

when the Clinton foundation pledged 80 million USD to save elephants from extinction. WAG joined forces with Lilongwe Wildlife Centre, Department of National Parks and Wildlife and WESM to make this march happen in Malawi.

WAG volunteers, scouts and local schools made banners, huge ivory tusks and masks for



the day. Songs and poems were made by school children from around Thuma and many other schools in Lilongwe. Great fun was had by all. Check out our web site and facebook to see photos from the day.



## **LOOSING ELEPHANTS, OTHER ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE LAWS**

Despite all our hard work this year we have found 4 dead elephants in and around both reserves.

The first one this year was found in a pit trap, an arrest was made within 24 hours of a local man and the ivory retrieved. The case was presented in court and the man

admitted to the charge. We were sure of a good sentence. He was given a fine of 20,000mk(50 euro) and released.

Then on July 27<sup>th</sup> we were hit by a planned spree of killings which we managed to stop before it got out of hand. Unfortunately we lost two of our elephants within 12 hours before we managed to ambush them. One of these elephants was Kit, a female known to us very well. She was the matriarch of a family of 8. The poachers

escaped leaving the ivory and bags which enabled us to track one of them down and made an arrest 3 weeks later. This man was from Kasungu, who told us that Zambians are recruiting Malawians to assist them to poach elephants for ivory. This man again did not deny that he killed elephants in Thuma and as this was his first offence he was fined 40,000mk (less than 100 euro) which he paid



and is free to kill again. A baby elephant was found dead in a local well. It was very young and looked like it fell down the well which was over 8 mtrs deep and drowned. The in August an elephant was shot in Dedza Salima FR, some 100m from the fence line. Its tusks were missing and local population had already started to remove the meat. This was we feel a revenge killing as at the time there was a lot of negative press about elephants leaving the reserve and damaging small gardens. No one has been caught for this.



With this in mind WAG have started to hold Wildlife law enforcement workshops, were the police and magistrates come to Thuma. The goal of these workshops is bring together the relevant wildlife law enforcement partners and improve cooperation in the enforcement of wildlife protection laws with emphasise on the Thuma F.R. and Dedza-Salima F.R. area.

We wish to create awareness among the wildlife law enforcement partners of the importance of the conservation of biodiversity and the uniqueness of Thuma F.R. and Dedza-Salima F.R..

By providing an extensive overview and discussing the relevant laws, its provisions, offences and penalties we can understand the challenges we all face at each stage and work to try improve the system. On 27<sup>th</sup> September we held our first workshop with our partner law enforcers from the Dowa District, Mvera. The meeting was a great success highlighting many misunderstandings, sharing of new ideas and weakness in the current acts that need to be looked in to by DNPW.



Dan who killed one elephant last year but was released with a small fine was found and arrested inside the reserve within six months. We brought the local magistrate up to Thuma for a workshop and 2 weeks later Dan was arrested again. He was sentenced to 4 years in prison with hard labour!

We have other workshops planned in different areas to strengthen our partnerships with all our wildlife enforcers.

We are very hopeful that this will make a difference with future cases. But unfortunately is too late for some of our elephants!

## **GUN POACHER ARRESTED AFTER KILLING A KUDU NEAR OLD HOSPITAL**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October as we were preparing for that days patrol we heard a gun shot coming from somewhere near saltlick road. We jumped into the car, me and ten scouts. I dropped them close to Lake View were they split into 2 teams and spread out. About one hour later one team sighted two men walking with a dead kudu and a gun. They moved closer to them but at the last minute the poachers saw them. One of the poachers started to run. Two scouts followed leaving 3 to tackle the one with a gun. The man with the gun turned around pointing the gun directly at Geoffery who shot warning shots in the air... but Flaxon (the poacher) aimed at him.... Selix a new scouts only with us 2 weeks charged him and managed to knock him to the ground and he was disarmed....The other escaped. This poacher admitted to coming in to kill animals in Thuma for some years. He is from over the west and this particular day was inside hunting with 3 others. They come from

over in a area called Nkhoma... near Lilongwe and the area who have caused so much distruction to Thuma West that there are no long any trees or animals.

Flaxon was brought to Mvera police and was presented in court. One week later flaxon charged, either pay 30,000mk (almost 100 usd) or face 3 years in prison! If he is caught again he will go directly to prison for 3 years! This is a first for us... and normal fines are 3,000 mk (10 usd) so it showed that the law enforcement

workshop has made a difference and is a good warning to poachers that if caught they will face harsh sentences.

We wish to Thank the police at Mvera and the Magistrate for their work and dedication to protecting Malawi' wildlife and forests.

And our brave scouts for the dangerous work they do day in day out. Bravo WAG scouts!





## PRICKLY PORCUPINES

Late afternoon the scouts were returning back from patrol when they saw a porcupine crossing a track and it looked like it was having difficulty walking. They called me so I picked up some things to help us catch it and headed into the bush.

The sight of 6 scouts running after a lame porcupine was very funny! But we managed to catch it and brought it back to camp. I examined it and found it was a she... and she had terribly swollen front and back right feet. I cleaned both to get a better look what was happening and found several sores that when pressed were full of pus! So I lanced them, cleaned and disinfected them and bandaged them. I gave her a long acting anti biotic injection along with a multi vit injection and we put her in a room with water and food. She was very weak and hardly put up a fight. We fed her for two days and nights and on the third night just as she was looking a bit stronger she escaped somehow.! We were so upset. Some 24hrs later we found her on the road out of camp,



collapsed... so we brought her back to camp and started all over again, oral hydration administered, cleaning, dressing etc. This time we started oral anti biotics. After 2 days she is looking much better and I am covered in pricks as she is

now strong enough to raise she spines and back very quickly into me!

WAG is dedicated to protecting the forests and we talk mostly about the elephants but every animals here is important to us and we are very hopeful that COURTNEY (her new name) will recover and be returned to the wild which we work so hard to protect.

## Baboon Rock



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**

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

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