

Thuma Telegraph

Nov 2014

Wildlife Action Group



Dear Donors, Friends and Supporters,

In light of the recent International Global March's that took place worldwide to raise awareness of the plight of Elephant and Rhino poaching, this newsletter will give you a little overview of WAG's proactive work to combat poaching and our efforts to find new ways forward to build relations and strengthen partnerships around both Thuma and Dedza Salima Forest Reserves.

There have been many highlights since our last newsletter including receiving funding from Save the Elephant and Wildlife Conservation Network which we are delighted about.

We have had Anti-Poaching training from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, built a new camp, helped organize and took part in the Global Elephant March 2014 Malawi, employed more new scouts, received funding for more firearms and held a Law Enforcement Workshop with magistrates, prosecutors and police investigators from around both reserves, arrested - for the second time, Dixon from Kasungu the notorious elephant poacher, had visit from Dani of REA and a visit from Suzi who co- founded WAG exactly 20 years ago.

Our social economic survey is on-going to monitor the effects of the fence and we have seen a shift in our local communities' attitude towards the project. The survey around both reserves helps us to assess peoples' knowledge and feelings about the reserve pre and post fence construction and so far it is very positive. This is also a very useful tool to help us to know the needs and challenges of people living close to protected areas. It will also help us to work closely with them in the future.

As the year 2014 pushes to a close we are up against time to extend the fence again with funds left over from last year. This part will start from the beginning of the first section of phase one along the northern boundary of Thuma in the district of Dowa.

Please read on and enjoy

Yours sincerely

Lynn and Scouts



GLOBAL ELEPHANT MARCH 2014

On Friday 3rd Oct 2014, Wildlife Action Group along with other conservation Partners such as Lilongwe Wildlife Trust and WESM joined forces in supporting the Department of National Parks and Wildlife to request the Government of Malawi to intervene in the elephant and Rhino poaching crisis by amending relevant legislation that governs the bail applications and the prescribed sentence for the crime of contravening Parks and Wildlife Act 2014

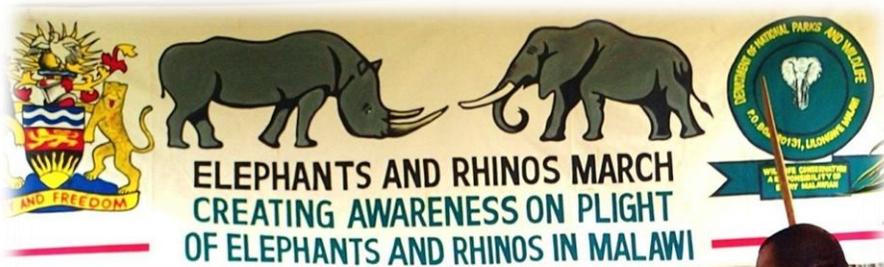
We met at 8.30am as many as 700 people marched over 1.5km to meet the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Information to hand over petitions totaling over 3500 signatures.

With the current legislation poachers are easily released on



bail and the lenient sentences imposed make their criminal efforts well worth their while. The risk of being caught is low and the risk of being imposed a sentence of long term imprisonment is equally low.

The Minister for Information Tourism and Culture, Mr Kondwani Nankhumwa responded very positively after receiving a petition. See a copy of his speech on line at www.wag-malawi.org



USFWS & REA FUND WAG SCOUTS ANTI POACHING TRAINING

Protecting a forest and the wildlife is not just a job. Some would call it a vocation or a calling. For WAG scouts it is a way of life!



By investing time and education in staff any employer will reap so many rewards including higher moral, improved work output and gaining a skilled work team.

I can honestly say that when I first arrived here four years ago the scouts considered this as only a job.

Our scouts are now so proud of their work and skills, and they believe in what they do which is why we work so hard day in and day out.

Now I can tell you that working as a scout is a highly sought after job far and wide.

How many people can day in day out walk in the

heat, over difficult terrain where there are dangerous wild animals? And where there is a high possibility of being shot at or being injured.

With funding from US Fish and Wildlife Services and Rette Die Elefanten Afrika, WAG continue to invest in our staff education and development and in turn our scouts show their dedication to protect Thuma FR and Dedza Salima FR by undergoing further training.

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife carried out an intensive 6weeks para military training in Anti poaching.

This course was very tough both



physically and mentally. Topics covered ranged from learning the Code of Conduct, physical fitness, basic anti poaching skills, musketry, minor tactics, arrest procedure, patrol planning and deployment, field craft, map reading and GPS, court procedure, wildlife management techniques, policy and legislation amongst some.

In true WAG spirit the scouts rose to the occasion and threw themselves into every aspect.

Our rangers who trained back in Dec 2011 received additional Problem

Animal Control training that will assist us when dealing with animals outside the reserve.

We also conducted a long patrol over to the West of Thuma Forest and managed to arrest over 17 people who were burning charcoal. ☺

We held a graduation day on 16th July with honored guests being the Director of Parks and Wildlife Mr Brighton Kumchedua along with Deputy Director of Forestry Mr Ted Kamoto. We also were privileged to have many of our local Group Village Headmen and Chiefs there along with scouts families to join us on this special day.





It was a fantastic day and I am so proud of each and every one of them for their hard work and determination. Having watched each one of our scouts sweat, bleed and push themselves to achieve this training confirmed we have the best team in the world. I am privileged to

work with this number of great guys!
We wish to thank USFWS and REA for giving us this opportunity to conduct the training and the director of National Parks and Wildlife for helping arrange the training. We have raised the skill set of our scouts and therefore continue to protect both these forests and their wildlife.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE! TUESDAY TRUST SUPPORTS CONSERVATION EFFORTS

All over Africa protected places are under immense pressure from the population growth and need for land.

Most NGOs and Government bodies place a lot of effort into education and sanitization but the bottom line is poverty which is the main driving force behind most poaching. In many cases it is the people living nearest the protected areas who are some of the poorest without job opportunities or income and who are forgotten. If people have jobs, money, food they will not need to enter into the forest and take its precious resources.

WAG also helps with education and income generating activities but sometimes this is not a fast





enough way of making a difference.

Over the last year we have been trying to cement partnerships with other Development NGO's encouraging them to bring development to villages and communities around Thuma forest.

Our first partner is the Tuesday Trust, a small Irish humanitarian agency who are helping to increase food security, income generating potential and general well being. They are firmly in the agriculture sector – providing starter kits, training and business support to the most vulnerable rural women.

Mphizi village was identified as a village facing crippling poverty along with a daily reliance on forest produce.

With a assistance from Tuesday trust almost 50 ladies are benefiting from training, farm inputs and sustainable farming methods to increase their crop production which will deliver better nutritious food and cash for surplus crops.

This village of 296 is challenging for all the wrong reasons – poverty, HIV, malaria and lack of education.

WAG assists by facilitating in their activities. The local communities link the benefits of the project and see WAG as part of that process.

The Ladies Group comes from Mphizi village, a local village close to Thuma

forest reserve.

A portion of land has been allocated to the ladies for use. It is close to the village and alongside the forest boundary, and close to the Linthiphe river.

The first planting season we planted maize, soya, sorgum and cassava.

Around May 2014 a second planting season was started. A new garden was prepared and new vegetable and farming techniques taught. They planted tomatoes, cabbage, rape, onions and orange peel sweet potatoes. This has never been done in this area before. Irrigation promoted through treadle pumps to assist through the dry season.

A lot of effort has been put into training such as leadership skills, group dynamics, bio pest control measures & making of Mkazinga fertilizer.

The harvest of these crops have been very successful and most ladies and families have benefited by having additional food and improved nutrition during the dry season in addition to which they have been selling the tomatoes and cabbage locally as cash crops and started a savings scheme.

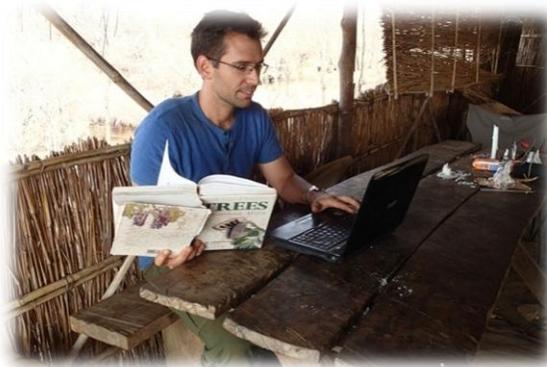
Mphizi is described as at the “end of a long dusty road”! Unfortunately not many travel down these types of roads and their more prosperous neighbours sometimes forget those who live in such villages.

As this is the first year there have been many challenges and many lessons learnt, however this project has really assisted many families and is making a difference.

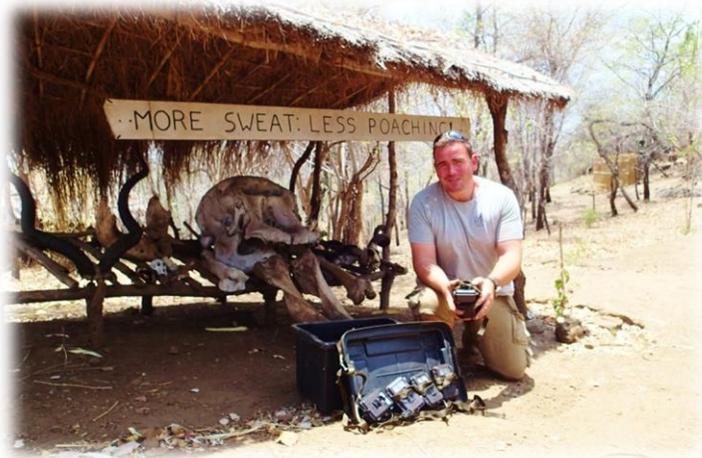
For more info check out www.tuesdaytrust.ie

VOLUNTEER PROJECT ASSISTANTS

James Randle, from Wales joined the team back in August 2014 for six months. James is a graduate in Countryside Conservation from Aberystwth and has a degree in International Development from Liverpool. He has a strong back ground in woodland management and is documenting tree species in



Jim



Derek

both reserves as well as researching habitat management and land cover mapping.

Derek Dwane has just arrived from cold UK and come to join the WAG family in Thuma.

He has recently graduated with a BSc Applied Zoology (Hons) degree from the Plymouth University in the UK.

Derek is qualified safari field guide with FGASA (Field guide ass southern Africa) and has worked on conservation projects in Namibia.

Derek plans to stay in Thuma for 6 months to kick start research in some of

the different species found in here He has brought with him 26 camera traps and has already begun a feasibility study of a possible Serval (*Felis serval*) re-introduction into the reserve by identifying distribution, population and habitat of the illusive cat.

Also Derek will be recording signs of other carnivores known to be present in Thuma such as the Spotted Hyaena (*Crocuta crocuta*) and Caracal (*Felis caracal*).

Alongside these, Derek is compiling a comprehensive mammal and bird guide for Thuma and is working alongside the scouts to share knowledge and improve the understanding of Thumas wildlife.

So far we have managed to capture some amazing footage on elephants at a local water source. We are looking forward to what comes next.

CHIMUTU BECOMES SENIOR GROUP VILLAGE HEADMAN



Chimutu a local chief was promoted to be a senior group headman in August 2014. We were invited to the day's ceremonies. This is a very important day locally and every chief including the Traditional Authority was there. Chimutu is a very influential person and is somewhat pro WAG and the forest. On the day we witnessed his promotion plus the traditional celebrations that go with these events.



There were over 10 gulu wamkulu dancers there providing

much entertainment.

We congratulate Chimutu and wish him success in this new position.

NEW ADDITON IN THE FORM OF HOPE AND BABY REA

June 2014 while out with some scouts and volunteers I was delighted to see what looked like two family groups on the most perfect Sunday Morning.

Everywhere we looked we saw elephants, and they were pretty close.

The grass was still pretty high so we climbed higher so not to disturb them and also to try get some good shots. The groups were aware we were there but obviously felt safe and continued to play and eat. As we watched a female came into perfect view and we saw she had a very new baby with her. We managed to get this great photo of her and the baby who we have called REA after our donor Rettet Die Elefanten Afrikas (REA) and the mum Hope.



Hope and Baby REA

TWO BIG BULLS — ABRAHAM AND CHAKA

We also have been fortunate to have monthly visits from a large bull who we have called Abraham. He seems to love being around camp and tends to hang around for days. Some three days ago he was joined by a family of 5 and we watched as one female in particular seemed to real interest him. He followed her everywhere and they left together. She was quite young so we think she may have been in season.

Chaka has also been around but not shown himself in day light. We got some photos at a local spring at night. But we are very happy to see he is doing well.



Abraham

CO FOUNDER OF WILDLIFE ACTIONGROUP RETURNS ! BY SUZI

It has been so exciting coming back to visit Thuma. A couple of years have passed since my last visit and I was really anxious but looking forward to see how the project has developed.

And it is great ☺ signs of animals everywhere, well maintained roads, an improved scouts camp and a grown, dedicated team expected me.

Already on my first day in camp I could watch elephants not far from camp.

I am so proud of Lynn and her scout team.

They are doing a fantastic job.

When WAG Malawi was founded 20 years ago we initiated the Thuma Project to save the remaining small elephant population and their environment.

Today Thuma is one of the best protected areas in the country.

I would like to thank everyone for supporting the project over all of the years.

And please.... Continue to do so...

Suzi☺



Suzi with Mount Thuma in back ground

TWICHING TIME IN THUMA!



Myers parrot

Birding is something that more and more people are interested in. It is relaxing to sit on top rock or in fact anywhere around camp and watch the coming and goings of the birds.



White crested helmet Shrike

TWO NEW CAMPS

With the increase in the number of scouts it allows us to expand operations and patrol further in both reserves. We have built a new camp in Dedza Salima reserve and this is allowing us to patrol new areas and have a 100% presence. Kaimbe camp was completed in Sept 2014 and has already proved its worth.

Placed on the edge of the reserve, up high it has an incredible view of the lake and easy access to the forest. It is also placed beside our power



supply system for security for solar panels and energizer.

Elephant snare

There is a high rate of snare trapping over there and we have been removing snares all over. One of the most worrying things is we have found is several huge snares which seem to be meant for elephants. These snares can do so much damage even to large animals. We know of at least one elephant who somewhere in the past must have been caught and has a damaged trunk and is now living with a disability.

We also found people using the old hunting technique of placing large semi circle nets in the forest and over 40 people and dogs driving the animals into the net.

We plan to do a sensitization program with locals as soon as possible.

So far this year we have collected over 200 snares from both reserves.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

On my way to Lilongwe I was delighted to see at the local road block a truck carrying planks had been stopped and the full load confiscated. I stopped to congratulate the police and forestry based at the road block. I also spoke to the driver to find out where the planks were coming from. My heart sank when he said Thuma! How could we not know about this if the planks came from Thuma! I spoke further to him asking exactly where in Thuma. He answered close to Mua Mission turn right and follow the path towards the forest.. So not Thuma or Dedza Salima – phew! Meanwhile in Thuma we have been struggling with our own deforestation. The charcoal burning situation has been bad this year. It started off slowly and after making many arrests we thought we had won a small battle. However, in July and Sept we did a long patrol to assess the situation and found that these people have moved to a new area. Many more were arrested and the battle is far from over. But we are pushing them away from Mount Thuma and we have seen fresh kudu and elephant tracks up there for the first time in years!





Dixon our elephant poacher from Kasungu entered Thuma and Dedza Salima again in Oct. We spent over 2 weeks tracking him and his friend and despite our best efforts he managed to kill another two of our elephants. On November 1st the time came and we found him tracking a herd of elephant towards the Linthipe river. Before he was able to kill again an unarmed team caught and



disarmed him. He is currently awaiting trial and we are very hopeful of a prison sentence.

DONATIONS FROM REA

Christmas arrived twice this year in Thuma in the form of donations from the very generous members of REA. The equipment such as trousers, boots, shirts, name tags, night vision binoculars, rain coats, handheld GPS, t-shirts, back packs and much more! The uniforms and name tags in particular have made a huge difference.



The scouts are so proud when they wear them.



So a big thank you from us all to everyone who has helped us ! 😊



Next Month we will have a special edition which celebrates Wildlife Action Groups 20th Year working to protect forests and wildlife of Malawi.
Thank you for photos from Retto, Derek, Lynn.

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS AND SUPPORTER FOR ENABLING US TO CONTINUE OUR CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN 2014 AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO SUPPORT IN 2015.

REA
Abraham Foundation
USFWS
Save the Elephant/ Wildlife Conservation Network
Ron Ulrich
Friedman-French Foundation (Emanuel Friedman, Kindy French)
Steven Stone
Judith Friedlaender



Wildlife Action Group
P.O. Box 84
Salima, Malawi
info@wag-malawi.org
www.wag-malawi.org, lynardc1@gmail.com
Phone (Lynn Clifford): +265 991 224599,