

WILDLIFE ACTION GROUP

THUMA TELEGRAPH APRIL 2018

BY LYNN CLIFFORD



© Wildlife Action Group



April 2018

Dear Donors, Friends and supporters

First quarter of 2018 is coming to an end and 2018 thus far has been full of action.

January we were busy with conducting orchid surveys. We are delighted to be able to show our findings in this newsletter.

February kicked off with refresher training for the rangers and the darting of Chakuse (meaning of the elephant clan) a huge bull who has been identified as the culprit breaking through the fence to raid crops.

We also carried out a reintroduction assessment with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife to assess if we could reintroduce species that used to be in Thuma but have become extinct many years ago due to poaching.

March we continued our work over in the West of Thuma, working with communities, setting up Natural Resources Committees (NRC) and income generating activities. The charcoal burning has stopped over this side, and community relations are growing stronger.

April we found Barack our friendly bull who is always around camp limping badly. He was darted and treated but is still not doing well.

We have started to reconstruct the road from the main gate to our base camp, creating piece work for over 150 people, who are doing a really great job.

We have been successful in winning some funding to extend the solar powered fence line on the west which will help stop elephant leaving the reserve and raiding crops, so this is really good news.

And also in April we discovered that eland are living free in Thuma! The first time it has been seen since 1981!

We hope you enjoy this brief newsflash and thank you for your continued support.

Warmest regards as always

Lynn and Scouts



ORCHIDS IN THUMA

As part of ongoing research funded by CEPF we started conducting orchid specific research from December 2017 to March 2018.

These beautiful flowers are found all over but of course like specific places.

Two main orchid groups were found, terrestrial and Epiphytic orchids. Four epiphytic orchids were found, mainly along main rivers and 21 terrestrial orchids were found.

During the identification process we were in most cases able to identify the genus, however, species proved more complicated and we are still waiting for confirmation for some of the findings.

All orchids genus found are classed under two subfamilies:

- Subfamily Orchidoideae - Habernaria, Disperis, Satyrium, platycoryne
- Subfamily Vandoideae - acampe, calypstrochilium, microcoelia, Eulophia, Aerangis

13 out of the 25 orchids found belong to the Habernaria subfamily were found in TFR and a further 2 habernaria orchids not found in TFR were found in DSFR which although was not involved in the orchid survey was found by rangers and reported so have been included in this report (see maps)

One area at the old hospital we found orchids however we missed the flowering time of these orchids and were unable to ID them. This area will be returned to starting Nov and Dec 2018.

2 Satyrium orchids were found, 1 in TFR and 1 in DSFR.

.Orchids found ranged in altitude from 762mtrs to the highest at 1547mtrs.

Finding experts to assist with identification was our next challenge.

This process is still ongoing, however we have managed to 100% identify 15 of the 25 to date. One (sp no 9) could be a new species or abnormal sample of habernaria debeerstiana, we are still waiting for confirmation.

This research will be continued this year.

After 15 years Thuma is still producing extremely interesting and new discoveries.

Big thank you to Reto, Monja, Jack and scouts for all their hard work.

Photos credits Reto , Geoffery and Richard



ORCHIDS OCCURRING IN THUMA & DEDZA SALIMA FOREST RESERVE



Sp.1 *Microcoelia* sp.



Sp.2 *Acampe pachyglossa*



Sp.3 *Calyptrochilum*
shabanensis



Sp.4



Sp. a *Diaphanthe pulchella*



Sp.5 *Habenaria leucotricha*



Sp.6 *Habenaria debeerstiana*



Sp.7 *Habenaria zambesiana*



Sp.8 *Habenaria praestans* var.
umbrosa



Sp.9 *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.10 *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.11 *Habenaria pilosa*



Sp.12 *Habenaria humilior*



Sp.13 *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.14 *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.15 *Habenaria uncicalcar*



Sp.16 *Habenaria filicornis*



Sp.17 *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.18 *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.19 *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.b *Habenaria laurentii*



Sp.c *Habenaria* sp.



Sp.20 *Eulophia horsfallii*



Sp.21 *Satyrium* sp.



Sp.22 *Satyrium anomalum*



Sp.23 *Disperis Johnstonii*



Sp.24 *Platycoryne* sp.



Sp.25 *Platycoryne* sp.

Species found in past

Species found during the 2018 orchid survey

CHAKA IS OFF THE HOOK!

For many years now Chaka our tuskless bull has been blamed for breaking the fence line and raiding crops and killing people.

In 2017 we identified another bull on camera traps who looked just like chaka, however the only difference was if you looked closely this other bull has a stub of a broken tusk on his left side. We called him Chakuse, which means "of the elephant clan".

With funding from friends of Wildlife Action Group International, and Rette Die Elefanten Afrikas e.V. we purchased 3 satellite collars from Savannah Tracking which we planned to place on elephants known for breaking the fence and crop raiding.

In February we had a spate of fence breaking and rangers tracked the elephant. We still thought it was chaka. We were able to hire the helicopter from African Parks and get veterinary assistance from Dr Amanda Salb and went to dart Mr Chaka!

I can't tell you my surprise when from the air I realized it was not Chaka but Chakuse!!

He was darted and the collar placed on him.

Using an Apps created by Save the Elephant we are now able to track his whereabouts and try stop him leaving the reserve!

Chakuse is huge! He is most likely also blind in one eye and is a pretty old boy! This charismatic, clever bull has been giving us the run around ever since! But with this new technology we are able to prevent him eating communities maize and pumpkin!

A huge thank you to all our conservation partners and supporters.

WAGI, REA, Save the Elephant, Elephant Crisis fund, African Parks and Dr Amanda Salb and of course our rangers who are always on the ground and working so hard.



Eland in Thuma!

In April 2018 one team of scouts returned from patrol and said they saw a strange animal near a stream. We have camera traps placed nearby so we went to check the photos.

When we looked at them we found what looked like Eland! Not believing our eyes we started checking books and sure enough the animals on the photos were 100% eland.

Hearsay, tells of large herds of eland roaming Thuma many many years ago. The last sighting was supposed to be in 1981 when they were poached to extinction in Thuma.

We believe that these three that have been seen could be a few who have managed to live here, but hiding very well in the hills.

We were able to tell one is a female but we are not sure of the sex of the others.

We hope that maybe next year we can reintroduce some more of this species so this species can once again been seen roaming the landscape of Thuma Forest Reserve.



Reintroduction:

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife carried out a assessment to see if Thuma would be suitable for reintroducing some wildlife. We are delighted to let you know it has been approved and next year we hope to reintroduce six species , zebra, impala, roan, waterbuck, sable and eland.

Great news for Thuma of course it will greatly boost tourism.



The Wild West is no longer so wild!

It is hard to believe that just one year ago, WAG rangers were unable to patrol on the western side of Thuma Forest. It was like something out of a wild west movie, where rangers were attacked and chased away. In some cases rangers injured. The army has come to assist us over the years but illegal activity continued and the war raged on.

In 2017 we changed patrolling tactics and bombarded this area with hit and run operations. Arresting and prosecuting. Court sentencing at last was consistent and most sentences given were custodial, without any chance of a fine! A clear message was being sent. This area is protected and anyone found inside conducting illegal activities and caught would most likely spend some time in jail!

At the same time, WAG rolled out a large awareness campaign to every traditional leader of the laws and acts of Malawi.

This was one really great way to meet and interact and empower local leaders and instigate relationships.

We also discussed human elephant conflict and explained how we could assist to drive elephants back into the reserves and how they could communicate with us. We also listened to the challenges that communities were facing as we could get a better understanding of their needs.

In most cases communities are desperately poor with no way to find money. The total dependency on the forest in the Lilongwe district was terrifying. However, everyone now saw that the forest was destroyed, so they could not manufacture charcoal any longer, they also were able to link the deforestation to the lack of rain fall and the drying of the streams coming from the forest.

Communities who used to chase and beat us now were asking for assistance.

With funding from USFWS we were able to introduce some new projects which would bring some hope, and income to this area.

We conducted some social economic surveys to assess what it was people needed and what was their interest, and then tried to match activities to villages.

Natural resource committees have been established and income incentives set up, including bee keeping, tree planting, irrigation gardens, pass on a goat. This is just the beginning. We are now friends and very welcome in the villages and the scouts are patrolling the 70km² of forest which was previously out of bounds.

The two most striking things I have noticed is the trees are already growing and the forest regenerating and the elephants have moved back into this area, reclaiming their rightful place!



Barack

Poor Barack one of our friendly bulls who is always around camp was seen limping in early April. The vet was called in and we managed to dart him.

The vet found an infected wound at the back of his front right leg but were unable to find a wire snare. The wound was very deep and the whole foot extremely swollen.



He was treated and a tracking collar placed on him so we could keep a close eye on how he progresses.

Unfortunately Barack is still limping and he is now losing condition of his body.

The infection must be very bad and we plan to dart him again this coming week.

We will keep you informed on his progress.

ROAD MAKE OVER

Thuma has approx 30kms of road infrastructure which we maintain yearly after the rains.

The road from the main gate to base camp this year was in particularly bad disrepair.

But not for long.

End of April with the help of our closest villages we have started to rebuild the 9km to base camp.

Over 150 people have been given piece work to help clear, mark, dig and finish this road to make it good again.

So far it looks amazing and we cant wait for it to be completed.



Sponsor a scout

Thousands of KM are patrolled each and every year by Wildlife Action Groups rangers.

These men are all employed from surrounding communities and they work day and night to protect the habitat from being destroyed and also track , monitor and protect the wildlife living here, especially the elephants.

These well trained, well equipped , motivated rangers are the only thing stopping these two protected areas and the wildlife from being killed or destroyed.

They also remove snares which kill and injure wildlife.

They put their lives at risk daily.

Maybe you wish to help us to continue this work. If so please go to www.wag-malawi.org and donate what you can, or WAG is working in collaboration with The Abraham Foundation to raise salaries for our invaluable anti poaching rangers. The Abraham Foundation is pleased to offer American donors a 100% tax deduction for contrubitions made throught them. Please note in the memo section that your donation in intended for WAG rangers <http://abrahamfoundation.org/donate/>

Join us in protecting Malawi's protected areas and some of the last remaining escarpment elephants in Africa.



