

WILDLIFE ACTION GROUP

THUMA TELEGRAPH MARCH 2021

BY LYNN CLIFFORD



March 2021

Dear donors, friends and supporters

Its been some time since we have given some news.

2020 was a very tough year for us all due to COVID. We saw increases in wildlife poaching and in particular forest crime rocketed, driven by the demand for charcoal.

Rangers opted to go into lock down to try get a handle on the illegal activity for part of the year and also to reduce possibility of getting or giving COVID.

At the same time conservation donors stepped forward offering support through funding for COVID care packages for rangers, and funding for masks and soaps for our community projects and schools. We are very grateful to you all as your support and assistance enabled us to continue our work.

Amidst this backdrop we were able to maintain our normal operations and also continue to push forward to achieve our goals.

We employed and train 12 new rangers, extend the solar powered fence a further 16kms, maintain all community income projects, relocate one rescued crocodile, collar 3 elephants, conduct the 6th law enforcement work shop introducing the newly amended Forestry Act, took part in the TUSK World Ranger Challenge race, rescued and rehabilitated 4 pangolins, helped conduct the 3rd forest inventory, designed and launched our new web site, maintained the road from the gate to Base camp and planted over 23,000 trees with communities, and lastly another year with ZERO elephants lost to poaching.

2021 started with a second wave of COVID hitting Malawi and the rest of the world, Our COVID policy was tightened. A storm ripped through our camp, tearing roofs off many buildings, and many trees fell down. Despite this rangers have been very active with 17 arrests so far this year, we have just introduced nyala to Thuma, rescued and released over 40 snakes and 2 baby hedgehogs by early March. And lastly we were delighted to have our first sighting of a stunning pygme kingfisher in Thuma.

2021 is going to be a interesting year.

In this newsletter we will show you some of the new and positive wildlife stories so far in 2021.

We hope you enjoy the photos and little stories

Warm regards and much thanks

Lynn and the Rangers

AFRICAN PYGME KINDFISHER - FIRST RECORDED SIGHTING IN THUMA

On the 3rd March one of the workers came up to the office with a tiny, colorful bird in his hand which he had found on the ground near the vehicles. This little creature was an African pygmy kingfisher. At only 12 cm (4.7 in) in length and bright blues, oranges and yellows, it was stunning. This is a common intra African migrant, but difficult to see. It must have flown into the wall or something, was a little shocked but after some time we released it. It flew away and landed on a nearby tree giving us a chance to get some photos.



GARDEN OF EDEN

There are over 3000 different snake species in the world but unfortunately are one of the most feared creatures by most humans. In most cases snakes are killed, if seen even if they are harmless. This is a terrible shame as most snakes are not dangerous and in fact snakes are extremely beneficial, eating unwanted rats and mice around the home, the same rodents who harbour ticks bearing lyme disease. They play a very important role in the food chain as their ambushing techniques allow them to prey on otherwise elusive pests like the grasshopper.

Just 1km on the main road there is a new development of a solar plant. Wildlife found there is being caught and relocated. Specialist snake catchers have been brought up from South Africa to assist in the relocation. However, they had nowhere to relocate them to. So we offered to step in to help. To date we have taken and released approx 40 different snakes

Reto who has himself a certificate in snake ID, snake bite treatment and venomous snake handling has been managing this nicely.

We have had puff adders, Mozambique spitting cobras, Herald snake, Rufus beaked snake, Brown house snakes, Eastern African egg eaters, Python and Olive grass snakes.

All have been released here in Thuma ensuring they continue to live in the wild.



Fantastic photos by Reto



PANGOLINS

2020 saw a massive surge of arrests of poachers trafficking pangolins from Mozambique and Zambia into Malawi. Pangolins are the world's most trafficked mammal, accounting for as much as 20% of all illegal wildlife trade with approx 80% decline of their global population and are now threatened with extinction. Under International laws pangolins are given the highest level protection through CITES

Appendix I. There are eight species in the world. They are threatened by illegal wildlife trade due to demand for their meat, scales and body parts for medicinal purposes and superstitious values. Malawi is a range state for the Temminck's Ground Pangolin, the only pangolin species found in Southern Africa. Solitary and active mostly at night, they range from the size of a cat to around a meter long.



Pip, an adult female was the second pangolin that arrived and needed a lot of medical care. She was badly injured by a panga, with a large open wound which was infected and she also was very traumatized by her terrible ordeal. Some of her scales were hacked

17 pangolins were confiscated in Malawi and rehabilitated back into the wild. We have been providing long term care and rehabilitation for two females before they will be released to some park. Ruby was the first to arrive. Weighing in at 2kg she was very small and normally would have been still with her mother for at least another 7 months. She was unable to dig nor knew how to find food. Two care givers took on the role of looking after her every need, including finding and digging for ants and termites, cleaning her, making sure she was warm and safe. Some months later little Ruby is now very active and has put on a lot of weight. She is now capable of finding and digging her own food and will be almost ready to release to a National park.



off by the panga and she also had her front left leg missing from what we believe was an old snare wound. She was very under weight. Today pip is doing well, her weight is up and stable and the wound healed nicely. Soon she will be ready to release also.

None of this could have been achieved without the ongoing guidance by Lisa and Ellen from Tikki Hywood Foundation and expert veterinary advice from DNPW/LWT Vet Amanda Lee Salb and Torrie.

NYALA INTRODUCED INTO THUMA

Hot off the press we have just introduced Nyala into Thuma. Nyala is a spiral-horned and middle-sized antelope, between a bushbuck and a kudu. These are very attractive and shy animal.

In 2020 we conducted some habitat surveys to ensure there is enough and the right type of food here for certain new species, having been granted approval by DNPW as a site to relocate seven species that are not currently found here. Our findings indeed show Thuma is a prime release site and a perfect habitat for all seven species - nyala, impala, waverbuck, impala, sable, roan, eland and zebra.

A private owner of Nyala contacted us asking if we could removed some animals from their current location as the area was too small for the number living there. On Sunday and Monday we moved 6 female nyala to Thuma and two males to Kutu. A Kutu male will be moved to Thuma later in the year to introduce a new blood line. A small boma was prepared so we could keep an close eye on them the first night and ensure they were all healthy and ready for release. On Tuesday the 9th March early morning we opened the boma and they walked out into their new home.

In true Malawi conservation style several partners came together to assist in this relocation to ensure its success sharing advice, equipment, expertise and knowledge. We wish to thank DNPW,LWT vet Amanda Lee Salb, Bruce Carruthers (game capture expert) and Kutu for making this possible.







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