

# **WILDLIFE ACTION GROUP**

## **THUMA TELEGRAPH MAY 2019**

BY LYNN CLIFFORD



## May 2019

Dear Donors, Friends and supporters

Malawi was blessed with long rains which started in November 2018 and ended in April 2019.

The forest is still lush as we head towards the end of May, rivers and streams **are** still flowing and our wildlife population **is** enjoying.

We were shocked to the core of the tragic accident and subsequent death of our dear senior ranger, Geoffrey Umali. Geoffrey was a brilliant ranger, with the heart of an elephant. He is sorely missed by us all. May he rest in peace.

At the end of March we found a dead elephant. who had been poached by a snare poacher late 2018. Three suspects have been subsequently arrested and prosecuted.

Not a great start to the year!

However, April we were awarded several important funding opportunities which will strengthen law enforcement , Human Elephant co-existence and community development. All vital to the ongoing efforts to protect the wildlife and their habitat.

We dedicate our work this year to the memory of Geoffrey. His spirit and work ethic continues in our work, and he will never be forgotten.

Warm regards

Lynn and Scouts



## OUR FINAL RESPECTS TO A WILDLIFE WARRIOR

I met Geoffrey one day as I was driving out to town. He ambushed us :), as the car reached the main road. He asked for a job. This was in 2011, we had 11 scouts, no fence, no firearms, no official ranger training. He began working for us the next day. Geoffrey quickly showed himself to be a hard worker, quick learner and was physically fit. Within 6 months we got an opportunity to send 3 scouts for intensive anti poaching ranger training at Liwonde. Geoffrey was one of three to be send. He returned, with something in his head, keener, and was extremely proud of what he had learnt and



as he threw himself into protecting the forest and its wildlife. Geoffrey was a born leader, and was very much a peoples person, sociable. This made him extremely successful at getting information and he was well known and liked by all who met him. He was an all rounder, he was a skilled ranger, with many excellent arrests under his belt. His hunger for knowledge made him excellent in many other aspects of our work, including fence building,



community work, research and car mechanics to name a few.

In March while off from work, Geoffrey was travelling from home to town in a mini bus. There was a terrible accident and Geoffrey sustained fatal injuries, with a broken neck and spinal cord. Despite the best efforts of all involved, Geoffrey lived for 3 weeks after the accident. He was able to speak, but paralyzed from the neck down. The last time we spoke he asked when he could return to work. It broken my heart.

Geoffrey was brought home and laid to rest close to his house. Our rangers carried his body to his resting place, in



their final patrol together. Geoffrey, our brave, dedicated ranger, we carry you in our hearts forever, may you rest in peace.

### **ELEPHANT RECLAIM THEIR FOREST**

With funding from Africian Elephant Fund, in late 2018 we extended the solar powered electric fence for 15 km on the western side of Thuma. This area has seen terrible deforestation over the years through charcoal burning. However, in late 2017 we managed to bring this illegal activity under control and in 2018 the fence was built and a camp was built there to secure the area. The forest already was showing signs of regrowth and with the presence of a large river and some marsh areas it is reverting back into a perfect haven for wildlife. Only weeks after the fence was erected we had our first reports of elephant visiting the new camp. Since then we are delighted to say that we have many sightings of different herds in that area. The good rains have assisted us and this side of the forest is growing fast. The human elephant conflict in this area has reduced by 100%. And with the additional security and rehabilitation of the forest these giant have reclaimed their place.



### **LAW ENFORCEMENT WORK SHOP**

April 2019 saw our 5th law enforcement work shop take place in Thuma. This is a time to sit down with our law enforcement stakeholders, a chance to share any change/updates in national regulations, present overview of our arrests and courts outcomes from the previous year, discuss the

challenges and most important to find ways to work closer together to protect Malawi's environment. We were delighted to see many new faces and also the return of some old timers from four different stations around both forests. Police criminal detectives (CID) who assist us when suspects are first arrested , Police prosecutors who are the ones to institute legal proceedings and magistrates who administer the law. The Department of Forestry and Department of National Parks and Wildlife also attended and shared additional expertise. The days discussions were lively and passionate, very open and all in all successful. We ended the day agreeing on how to work closer to ensure the protection of Malawi's forests and Wildlife.

We thank Save the Elephant and Wildlife Conservation Network through Elephant Crisis Fund for the funding to carry out this important meeting.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

This year is our second year supporting alternative income generating activities with local people on the western side of Thuma. One of the most successful projects has been irrigation gardens, where people are supplied with seeds of different vegetables which they eat themselves and sell for cash, improving nutrition and at the same time giving people a chance to earn some money. All gardens have started transplanting from the nurseries.



The bee clubs hope to harvest honey in June and the poultry and goats projects are producing babies. The vaccination of the chickens is proving its worth with zero deaths due to new castles disease, but there has been a few losses due to predators such as mongoose.

This year we will sponsor 5 young people to learn apprenticeships, motor bike mechanic, dress making for ladies and one other to learn to work with tin so they can make buckets and watering cans. All these projects are at grass root level, asked for and driven by the communities.

On the eastern side of Thuma and Dedza Salima Forest we are do have some bee projects but we are putting much effort into the schools. Two schools had much damage to the roofs of class rooms, so we were able to assist to replace the roofs allowing children to sit in a class room to learn. Another two schools will received assistance with building additional class rooms.

And last but not least over 250 people have so far benefited from temporary employment inside the forest, helping with infrastructure development.

All in all our relationship with our communities is strong. By working with our communities we are seeing positive impacts on the ground and the communities are seeing benefits coming directly from the forests. A win/win for all.

## **SNARES**

In March we found a dead elephant, which had been tragically killed due to a snare wrapped around its trunk. The area had been littered with snares, killing and maiming wildlife unlucky enough to get trapped. Three men were subsequently arrested selling ivory and prosecuted. One getting twelve years sentence, the other two five years each.

Shortly afterwards, In a different part of the forest far from the dead elephant, we managed to arrest a man placing snares around watering holes. He received a sentence of 2 years hard labor with no option of a fine.

Snare poachers are normally very skilled at their craft. Snare poaching is a way of living for most, were they kill wildlife and sell the meat in local markets. Most times the bush meat is cheaper than domestic animal meat, which also makes desirable for many people.

Finding snares is no easy job, especially at this time of the year, the grasses are high, and with so many water sources available for wildlife. Saying that we are working hard to sweep each area and every area to remove any snares.

To date we have removed 51 snares this year.

## **BUSH HYRAX**

Anyone who has visited our Base camp will know our resident hyrax. They are most likely the most photographed hyrax in the world. Yellow spotted rock hyrax.

The hyrax also called rock rabbit or dassie, is a small furry mammal. It looks like a oversized guinea pig.



These herbivores are most closely related to elephants and manatees due to several characteristics, flattened nails of the tips of their digits, lack of scrotum and their testicles remain tucked inside abdominal cavity, the tusks of a hyrax develop from the incisor teeth as do the tusk of a elephant.

There are five species, and we always thought we only had one here. But we have just managed to get photos of a second species , Rock hyrax. Isn't it beautiful





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