

# Thuma Telegraph

Feb 2011

Wildlife Action Group



Dear All

*Hope you all had a great Christmas and New Year! It seems like it was long ago now!*

*So much has happened here since our last newsletter, with our German visitors and so much law enforcement challenges.*

*Durning this period there has been a lot of news about Ivory. In December 92kgs of raw ivory was discovered at Kenya Airport. The two men arrested had boarded a plane here in Malawi with the illegal ivory undetected. In January and Febuary carved ivory was seized on the streets of Lilongwe and at the airport. It was reported that the elephant population in Kusungu NP is far less than they thought (this is a park that several years ago had approx 2000 elephants, today they have less than 500!). So, Malawi is being hit hard by the eastern influence and is facing challenges of having to deal and cope with the huge demand of ivory.*

*Since 1994, WAG has worked tirelessly to protect and encourage the return of the elephant populations within these Reserves. They have with your help, enabled the elephant herds to return and roam freely. But we now must be prepared to step up our work here and now more than ever our elephants need our protection.*

*On the 26<sup>th</sup> December our scouts were treated to the very rare view of the meeting of almost 100 elephants in Thuma FR, up near the Saltlick. There have been several sightings of up to 45 together since then on different days. There are many babies within these groups. This suggests our elephant population is thriving and we must do everything to keep it this way. Saying that in the last two months WAG also have felt the pain of losing two of our magnificent elephants and one buffalo.*

*In 2011 WAG is committed more than ever to protect the flora and fauna of our Reserves.*

*Wildlife Law enforcement, Stakeholder sensitization, WAG scout training and being armed in both Reserves, human-elephant conflict are our priorities, however, community sensitization and education will also be included.*

*Kick starting our "sponsor a scout" program and to find funds to have some of our scouts trained to be rangers and carry fire arms is vital as without our scout we are unable to function. There is also the need for funding to cover our basic functionality of things like fuel etc.*

*In this issue we would also like to introduce you up close and personal to our WAG family and well as some other news.*

Thank you for reading.

Best regards

Lynn Clifford

## DEAD ELEPHANT FOUND IN THUMA FR

On the 11<sup>th</sup> January 2011 while on patrol up around the plateau area, WAG scouts were on their way back to camp when they got the scent of rotting meat. With Mr Pollah up front they went in search of the source. Some 15 minutes later they were shocked to find the rotting carcass of one of our large female elephant. This beautiful animal was shot and her tusks removed. Her body was carelessly left to rot.

WAG scouts believe that the carcass was approx 1 month old, which would mean she was killed sometime in December.

Historically, December and January is the season for poaching of large mammals. As the grass is so long the smaller game cannot be seen, plus the seasonal financial demands are at a high. This



and the increase in guns being readily available in local villages and the large influx of eastern influences leads to the death of our largest earth mammal.

Despite us doing several 3 and 4 night anti poaching patrols camping out to try catch poachers, having armed rangers present we realize we need to do more. Back in December we started to enroll informers outside the reserve from surrounding villages. By gaining information from outside the Reserve this will allow us to react and plan more effective patrols inside the Reserves and also activate operations in co-operation with DNPW to the villages outside the reserve.

This kind of information gathering is very effective, however it is not safe and informers and scouts alike could be putting their lives in danger.

But this is our job and we have a lot of work to do.



## THE FAMOUS FIVE!



On the 26<sup>th</sup> December despite the snow in Germany bringing everything to a halt five dedicated WAG friends managed to arrive in Malawi! Their bags however didn't arrive along with 29 pairs of new scouts boots, a new lap top, digital camera, 4 new GPS, mobile phones, t-shirts, socks and so many other donations to WAG. Our famous five (Hubertus 1 & 2, Frank, Micha and Torsten) didn't let this dampen their spirits nor enthusiasm for being here. We were delighted to

welcome them here but little did we know about what they had in mind for us! 27<sup>th</sup> December it was operation "action stations". These five incredible men had ideas for us! Still in the same clothes they travelled in the work began. Within 4 days the bags had arrived and Thumas now has a pump and generator that is able to move the water from the spring some 400 mtrs from camp to the large 2500 ltr tank at Thuma base camp (another kind donation from Germany). The tank is filled within 2 hours and this supplies us with just over 1 week supply of water to everyone in camp! Amazing! This stops us having to fill over twenty 25ltr containers very second day and carrying them up to camp. Mean while our trusty steed (our fantastic car) was getting a

complete health and beauty treatment along with maintenance training for our driver Chifundo. It was a pleasure to watch two people work together with neither of them speaking the same language but they managed with much gesturing and signs! Grease guns, radiators, lights, filters... you name it, she got it. Our doctor Hubertus got his hands dirty and created a new shower for our scout village. Until then the scouts had bucket showers.. now they have a European type shower which they are delighted with.



Our Doctor also gave some very educational medical training on first aid and others topics. The scouts were delighted They really enjoyed the role play and as seen above even pretended to phone for an ambulance!. Torsten our engineer and Hurbertus 1 managed to fix the pump system when no one in Malawi could! And Frank oversaw all work and managed to create the most amazing dinners each and every night for us all! And even gave some cooking training to some of the scouts. He also managed to find every spider, scorpion and snake in Thuma! We also made a small bit of time to do some hiking, fishing and saw some elephants just before they left!



I have never known a group of men to be so knowledgeable about so many things. The group work ethic is outstanding and the easy friendliness was incredible. Every day was filled with hard work and lots of laughter. We cannot thank you all enough for all the work and fun we had while you were here. We are looking forward to your promised return at the end of the year! We need to inform Salima bottle store you are coming so they can get extra provisions of Captain Morgans spiced and beer!

thank you to REA and everyone who donated all the wonderful gifts. We are once again able to upload our daily patrols with the GPS received. The new shoes and socks make patrols a lot more comfortable.

The pens and stuff were donated to the local school who are very happy.

Thank you Thank you Thank you.!:) A special thank you to Kristina who we know put so much work into organizing this all for us despite her own very busy schedule!







New boots!



Torsten & the pump



Frank!



New shower!

## VOLUNTEERS AT WORK

Most NGO's have facilities for volunteers and WAG has been very lucky with volunteers in the past. Volunteers play a very important role in any organization, they bring and leave many new skills and ideas. Since I have been here we have had four volunteers. Two from Germany (Paula & Sebastian) and two from England (Ellie and Emma).

Sebastian was here only for a few days while I was here so I have no photos. Paula did amazing work in the form of an information board, free hand drawing all the animals of Thuma (see photo), and went on some exciting patrols, one where an arrest was made. Ellie and Emma spent several days in the local village with the school. They did some conservation education, made some fantastic elephant masks which the children coloured and then wore and did a drawing competition. Both of them were very lucky to awake most mornings and able to view elephants from camp.

I have managed to contact some previous volunteers but we would love to make contact with any others please. Contact me on [lynardc1@gmail.com](mailto:lynardc1@gmail.com).

Thank you all for your help in the past and we are hoping we will make contact soon.



Elephant masks



Ellie and Emma at local school



Paula

## WILDLIFE LAW ENFORCEMENT

Wildlife law enforcement is pretty complex with many stages and many stakeholders involved from the beginning to the end. In most African countries is not taken very seriously and very lenient sentences are passed for these law breakers.

Over the last few months WAG have made several very successful and important arrests, however the outcome has not been what we expected.

- Sept 2010 - Our poacher with unlicensed gun and dead bush buck was released on bail for some made up skin infection, the files have gone missing and so has he.
- Sept 2010 - three men accused of attacking and looting the camp spent 3 months in the local police cell (that in itself is no joke) were released on 23<sup>rd</sup> December – suspended sentence.
- Nov 2010 – a night time operation in a village raid arrested people with elephant meat in their houses. All five were given a suspended sentence.
- Nov 2010 - 2 people were arrested in the Reserve with a man made gun, these also were released with a suspended sentence.
- January 2011 - while on patrol we met two armed poachers, one is a notorious poacher and known to both police and ourselves. We made a raid on his home in the village that same day and found 34 used cartridges. This was brought as evidence to the police. A warrant for his arrest given to us to deliver but he has not gone into hiding somewhere in Lilongwe.

These kind of results are very disappointing however Wildlife law enforcers all over Africa have not only to deal with the poachers as the enemy but corruption also plays a very large role and lack of understanding of the issues.

To deal with some of these issues WAG intend to hold a stake holder workshop with the aim to bring together the relevant wildlife law enforcement partners and improve cooperation in the enforcement of wildlife protection laws. By doing this we will create awareness amongst our partners and discuss our current challenges and remove barriers.

More to come on this over the next month or so.

See below an overview of patrol activities.

	Daily Patrols	Poacher foot prints seen	Snares found	Knives/ pangas/ axes/ saws confisgitated	Poachers with gun escaped	Gun Shots heard	Arrests made	Elephants killed
<b>Nov 10</b>	21*	2	4	2	0	5	7	1
<b>Dec 10</b>	24**	7	1	0	0	6	2	1
<b>Jan 11</b>	27	6	12	2	2	4		0

\* days used to maintain Fence/road/camp plus chasing elephants outside of reserve

\*\* 7 days used to work around the camp with the German visitors

## GET TO KNOW THE WAG FAMILY!

We have put together some photos of our WAG family so you can get to know us a bit better. Some of our family is with us a long time and we also have some very new scouts that have just joined us. Each of our dedicated scouts and workers give up a lot to protect both Reserves and its Flora and Fauna plus they face danger each and every day in different facing elephants, buffalo, people with guns, bows & arrows plus maybe injuring themselves while out patrolling in the difficult terrain. We have two camps where we live together for 25 or 26 days every month, with we have 5 or 6 days off. Our camps are basic but functional, in very isolated areas and somewhat extreme conditions. Each one of us live away from our family and loved ones which can be difficult especially if there are troubles at home and you cannot be there. For the above reasons we are especially close and depend on each other completely. We are together 24 hrs per day. On patrol we rely heavily on someone to back you up if chasing a poacher.

We are kick starting our Sponsor a scout Program in 2011 and are looking for sponsorship to cover salaries and other necessities for the year and enable us to recruit additional scouts.

### *Sponsor a Scout Program*

*Your chance to make a big difference!*

The Wildlife Action Group (WAG) is registered in Malawi as a non-government, non-profit organization under the Trustee Incorporation Rules since 1994.

Its main objectives are to protect Malawi's wildlife and environment, and to assist and support the Malawi government in the management of Protected Areas.

The WAG family currently stands at 11 scouts. In order to support our conservation efforts in Thuma Forest Reserve and Dedza-Salima Forest Reserve we wish to initially increase the number of scouts to 16.

WAG launched the Sponsor a Scout Program some years ago, which has been to date very successful. We are currently looking for people to renew their

sponsorship and hoping to find some new donors for 2011 to allow us to increase our field staff.

We are sure that individuals, companies or other institutions and organizations are keen to sponsor a scout – either for the full amount of 750 Euro per year or for a smaller amount suitable for you – and to make that important and highly appreciated contribution to the preservation of the rich natural resources of Malawi.

With your 750 Euro per year, WAG will be able to employ another scout and equip him or her with uniforms, boots, sleeping bag and other necessary equipment. This strengthening of our field team will enable us to conduct more wildlife protecting patrols which will have a direct positive impact on the reduction of illegal activities in both forest reserves. And, besides your direct contribution to the conservation of wildlife in Malawi, you also give a Malawian (the scout) the opportunity to get trained in conservation and to earn a steady income. This will enable him to feed his family, and to send his children to school or to the doctor: a win-win-situation indeed!

### **So what is in it for you?**

- This is a unique way for you to contribute to conservation and poverty reduction in Malawi at the same time.
- Every Euro-Cent will be used directly for the purpose it is meant for, and that is: having a scout in the field protecting wildlife!
- To keep you updated about the work of “your” scout(s), you will receive the regular WAG-Newsletter by email. And direct correspondence with “your” scout is also possible if you wish.
- If you want to visit Thuma F.R. in Malawi, “your” scout will be available full time during your stay for hikes and guidance in the reserve.

### **Some more about us**

WAG is an NGO, who co-manage two governmental protected areas Thuma Forest Reserve and Dedza-Salima Forest Reserve which are located in the Central Region of Malawi between Lilongwe and Lake Malawi on the escarpment of the Great Rift Valley. Together the 2 forest reserves cover an area of app. 500 km<sup>2</sup>.

Generally, the topography is rugged. Slopes are steep although there is some flatter land at the foot of the escarpment. The upper levels of reserve are covered with *Brachystegia* (miombo) woodland whilst the lower levels are characterized by mixed low altitude woodland with patches of bamboo. Along the many streams within Thuma F.R., the habitat can be typified as riverine forest. Both reserves fulfil an important water catchment function for the area.

Thuma FR and Dedza-Salima FR contain significant numbers of the remaining large mammals of Malawi, including several key populations identified by the



IUCN. Thuma F.R. and Dedza-Salima F.R. are one of the few protected areas in Malawi which give still home to elephant and buffalo. Other (larger) game include greater kudu, bushbuck, baboon, vervet monkey, bush baby, leopard, serval, spotted hyena, genets, African civet, warthog, bush pig, porcupine as well as a number of smaller antelopes like Sharpe's grysbok, common duiker and klipspringer. But Thuma F.R. is not only of interest for these mammals. There is a variety of trees and plants, birds, insects, and other animals which make the two reserves an important biodiversity hotspot in Malawi.

The most immediate threat to most elephant populations in Malawi is illegal hunting for ivory. And WAG is working very closely with DNPW and other government agencies to bring about the effective enforcement of these laws. This activity will not only curtail the operations of those illegal forest/ wildlife exploiters who are prosecuted, but as awareness spreads it will act as a deterrent and reduce the overall level of illegal hunting and trade.

However uncontrolled illegal activities in the two reserves (mainly poaching, charcoal burning and illegal harvesting of bamboo and timber) threatened to destroy its precious habitats and the environmental services it provide for the region and the nation which is why our scout work and presence is so important. Most NGO's working in conservation receives funding for starting micro-projects in villages, for putting up an electric fence to keep elephants out of the fields of farmers, for putting up direction signs, for buying GPS's for mapping natural forest resources, for conservation awareness projects and so on. Most people acknowledge that these activities are extremely important in conservation, and so do we, at the same time often hardly any funding is made available for paying the staff, who are crucial for actually doing all this work. And even more important, and where it all starts with, the primary task of scouts and other field staff is to protect and to secure the wildlife in the reserve; micro-projects and direction signs are of course utterly useless, when at the same time, the wildlife in a reserve is poached to extinction because of the lack of field staff.

We hope this programme will raise your interest to contribute directly to the conservation of Malawi's wildlife and environment.

If you have any other questions concerning our work in Thuma F.R. and Dedza-Salima F.R., please, do not hesitate to contact us.

You can follow the latest developments of the programme on [www.wag-malawi.org](http://www.wag-malawi.org) or contact me directly on [lynardc1@gmail.com](mailto:lynardc1@gmail.com).





**Mr Pollah – Senior Scout  
Joined WAG 1997**



**Mr Richard Banda – Senior Scout  
Joined WAG 2002**



**Mr Sam Thom  
Joined WAG 2007**



**Mr Medson Gelard  
Joined WAG 2006**



**Mr Bitson Mwale  
Joined WAG 2006**



**Mr Kennedy Asan  
Joined WAG 2007**



**James Kazembe**  
Joined WAG 2008



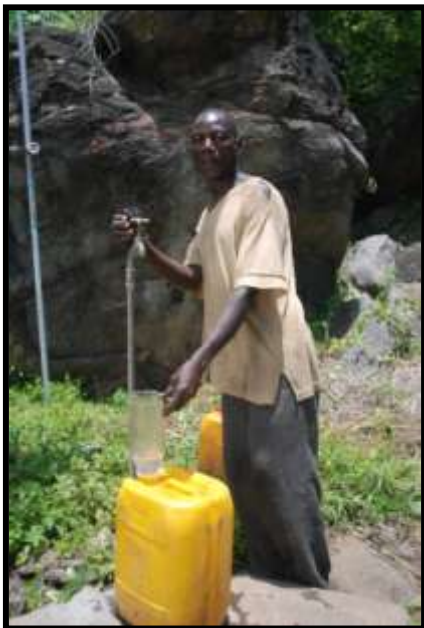
**Edward Thom**  
Joined WAG 2009



**Geoffery Umali**  
Joined WAG Jan 2011



**Kafele Kwachera**  
Joined WAG Feb 2011



**Lucius Mwayiwatha**  
Joined WAG 2007



**Lynn Clifford**  
**Field Manager**

## SOME SEASONAL FLOWERS



### **Wildlife Action Group – Malawi**

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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.

**SPONSOR A SCOUT  
OR  
DONATE WHAT YOU CAN :**

**[www.wag-malawi.org](http://www.wag-malawi.org)**

#### **Our main goal is:**

To protect the reserves flora and fauna, and to restore its ecological balance in co-operation with the communities around Thuma F.R. and Dedza-Salima F.R. and enforce the Forestry Act of Malawi.

[www.wag-malawi.org](http://www.wag-malawi.org)