

Thuma Telegraph

Feb/Dec 2010

Wildlife Action Group



Dear All

Time is flying by, we have the first rain and the forest is changing dramatically from being dry and dull, to becoming several shades of green. The heat is suffocating except if you stand on top of Pride rock where you are caressed by a cool breeze. Bliss!

Over the past month we have been having nightly visits from our huge friends. We are beginning to recognize some of them and they these ones seem very at ease with us each morning as we all sit and watch them. Two in particular we have named "Notail" (due to half his tail missing) and "Tuskless" seems to like the attention and stays close to camp and watch us as we watch him! Notail and Tuskless are creating havoc by pushing down trees along the road almost as if they are trying to stop us from leaving!

It is hard to imagine Europe now getting ready for Christmas, the snow and buying presents! We plan to have a big dinner here (maybe goat although I dream of a Turkey!:) in Camp some dancing and singing songs! We would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and best wishes for the New Year from us all at WAG.

Thank you for reading.

Best regards

Lynn Clifford

7 ARRESTED IN ONE DAY BY WAG !

Sunday 21st of Nov, exactly 2 months since our attack! As I spoke to the scouts before going on patrol we knew we had poachers back in Thuma, we had been hearing the gun shots on and off for 2 weeks! but we just couldn't seem to catch them! We camped out several nights in ambush, we changed the times of patrols, but we just couldn't get a sight or even a smell of them! We decided to split into two groups of 4, one group head towards the river and possible exit of the poachers and the other group would try flush them out! We were all getting pretty disheartened and I could see it in their faces as they left.



Shortly after they left I received a call from Kennedy at our Namwili camp... they found a dead elephant, only a few days old and all that was left was bones! I asked Kennedy to go to the nearest village and see if he could find out some information and I would be over later that day to check it out.

Just 30 minutes later my phone flashed (a flash is when someone just calls you but does not give you time to answer so you must call them back)! Richard, our assistant senior scout! My heart leapt! I called him back "We got two armed poachers, please call the other group of scouts to come help us we need assistance". One hour later they arrive back in camp with two poachers. One very small older man and the other very big younger guy in combats! One muzzle loader (a man made gun), very dangerous with several very large man made bullets, big enough to kill some of our larger animals.

The smaller of the two had resisted arrest and actually attacked Medson with a panga knife cutting his shoulder blade. They had struggled with the panga and the poacher had cuts on his

hands and wrists. Medson also was bleeding. I cleaned everyone up, took details and brought them to Salima Police station.

We continued on to Dedza and arrived at 2ish. Kennedy was still not back from the village but when he arrived he told us there was elephant meat on sale in a village and he also knew which houses the meat was in.

I contacted the Department of Wildlife and Salima police asking for assistance to do a night raid on the village. If you are found in possession of meat or any trophy of any protected species you can be prosecuted.

We left camp at 8pm to go collect the police and armed rangers that were being sent from Lilongwe. At 11pm under cover of darkness we stopped the car just half a kilometer from the first house.

I stayed in the car waiting for a call which would indicate the car was needed to go pick them up. In Africa going into a village at night in an unmarked vehicle is very dangerous as the villagers most times will all attack the car. So we needed to be very careful.

Some 15 minutes after we heard screams and wailing of women from the village... it was a very tense moment.. we got the flash... we started into the village, saw our men.. turned the car to make a quick get away.

As they loaded 2 men into the car someone came out of the bush and spoke to one officer...



pointing out 2 more houses.... A rotten smell reached my nostrils as bags were tied onto the car.. elephant meat! More screams as we entered the other houses and men were being dragged out of their houses! The smell got worse!

Everyone got into the car and we left for Salima... car lights on again!

Once we were far enough away everyone started talking at once.. the tension was gone from the air.

We had done it.

5 men arrested.... Elephant meat both dried and raw with skin on it had been seizedOur operation was very successful!

7 people in just over 12 hours! Not bad going!

But this is only the start of it.

Now, the hard part! We need a successful prosecution!

NAMWILI CAMP GETS FACE LIFT

On the edge of Dedza-Salima forest reserve Wildlife Action Group has its second camp from where we do daily patrols. Driving to this camp you feel like you are just going up and up and then all of a sudden you arrive at camp. It is perched on the side of a hill and surrounded by larger mountains. There is a gully with a stream to the side where the elephants often come to drink and wander down to the local villages under cover of darkness.

The feel in Namwili Camp is very different than Thuma. Where Thuma is vast and open and light, Namwili is small surrounded by the towering mountains. The light early in the morning and late in the evening is magical, with dark shadows and then beams of light. The shower is icy cold in the mornings and a guarantee to wake you up!

The camp is very close to the local villages and the local population are very friendly and pro the project. Many houses have paintings with flowers and elephants eating trees in comparison to the villages surrounding Thuma who have elephants and men with guns!

We have 8 huts, a kitchen area, an office/store room and shower and toilet which were all in a state of disrepair and nowhere near water tight.

REA once again have come to the rescue and have sponsored a complete refurbishment for the camp!

We have been able to completely rebuild all the buildings with additional shower area with a 200lts water drum.

We have also restocked the kitchen area with new bowls, pots and pans, spoons, cups.. its like the Ritzs! ☺ But cheaper to stay there!

We used different types of grass for the walls and roofs. Poles for the structure, rope from tree barks cut into strips and soaked in water to make it pliable to tie the grasses. Plastic sheeting between the two layers of grass to make in very water proof. Although the men did the building, woman were very involved with supplying the materials and where the hardest bargainers!

Besides helping WAG this project has brought vital money to the local population whom have supplied us with local materials and have built the camp. This money has come at a very good time as everyone is preparing their fields with crops before the rainy season. This is an expensive time of year as they purchase fertilizer for the crops. Without this project many families would not be able to afford this. Thank you on behalf of the local population and WAG would like you thank REA from the bottom of our hearts for their kind consideration and donation to enable us to do this.

Here are some photos of work in progress!



New houses looking fresh



Tidying the roof – cut with panga and stick



Using rope made from tree trunks



Black plastic used to waterproof roofs



Thatch grass for the roof



Rope from tree bark before being soaked in water



Finished Camp!

ILLEGAL CHARCOAL BURNER SENTENCED

12TH Oct 2010 Orphan appeared in Salima District Court for the illegal cutting of trees and then using the wood to manufacture charcoal within the protected Reserve of Thuma. Orphan was arrested on 19th of Sept by WAG scouts in the north of Thuma Reserve.

This area has been ruined by the local population of Chimombo and over 6kms of forest has been destroyed.

The judge Mr Hilary Chilomba visited the area in question before passing judgement and was shocked at the level of deforestation. (see below)

After considerable consideration His Worship Chimomba passed sentence of 8 months in prison.



Mr Orphan had pleaded for leniency from the court as he cares for his two elderly parents and has a family who depended completely upon him.

Mr Orphan was kept in Salima Police station up until 31st Oct before being moved to the notorious prison nKhota kota.

We used to visit him each time we were in town to make sure he was ok and also brought food and water to him.

Although Mr Orphan was arrested for breaking the law

we in Thuma, WAG believe that to show some humanity to those we have arrested is very important. This man will one day be released and his family still live along the boundaries' of Thuma. We will live with this people for a long time and it is vital that we have good relations with them.

On Sunday the 31st Oct I visited Orphan who looked very frail. I brought him some food and bought him a cold coke and chatted. His clothes were the same ones he wore when we arrested

him and he had no shoes. He told me he was scared to go to prison and had heard it was very difficult. I gave him some small money and asked him to take care of himself and as I went to leave he asked me "Madam, when I come out please could I find a job with you"! I was shocked at first but on reflection this is a real winning case for WAG. We hope Orphan manages to stay well and serve his sentence without too much suffering.

ELEPHANTS CROSSING THE LINTHIPE RIVER

Over the last few weeks we have had to rush to the rescue to local villagers who have reported sightings of elephants outside of the reserve. We have had to drive the elephant back into the reserve by shooting in the air and using fire crackers. The elephants are walking around the fence which ends at the

Linthipe River(see photo) and around into the villages to eat the local mango trees. This job is not as easy as it seems and sometimes the elephants are so hot or tired they do not move and it is possible for them to charge us. WAG have had several meetings with the local chiefs who have requested that the fence be extended to reduce this elephant-human conflict. WAG is currently looking for funding



to extend the fence and protect both the humans and elephants in the area. Please visit our web site www.wag-malawi.org and donate what you can.

A SPECIAL 50TH BIRTHDAY IN THUMA by Jerry Coles

Five of us gathered on the morning of Oct 19th at 7.30 am at Thuma Base Camp to commence a 4 hour hike through the reserve. Accompanying us on the hike were 5 Thuma scouts led by Mr Polla and joined by Medson / Lemmeck / Edward and Felix.

We began the walk heading in single file with 3 meters between us in the direction of the Big Hill behind the Base Camp to the sounds of barking Baboons. Approximately one hour later whilst going through Elephant grass we surprised a Klipspringer which darted off to our right.

A further 20 minutes walking and approximately 400 meters to our left down the Valley the Scouts spotted a lone Kudu bull in the shade of a tree. This was a truly great spot by the Scouts and we were able to observe the Kudu for 10 minutes from our elevated vantage point.

We pressed on up the escarpment and were soon to observe 3 warthogs some 200 meters ahead of us.

We continued to climb and from a rocky ledge at the top of the hill we had the pleasure of seeing a herd of some 25 to 30 Elephant in the Valley below. Again we were able to watch these Elephant for 5 to 10 minutes from various viewing points.

By now the sun was high in the sky and we were experiencing a typical Malawian October day with blue skies and temperatures in the high 30's so we decided to head back to Base Camp. The walk back to the Base Camp was approximately 3 Kilometers and we surprised several Guinea fowl along the way stopping 15 minutes from the Base Camp for a refreshing and much needed dip in a spring rock pool.

We then went onto the camp where we enjoyed a few drinks and a Braai. The Hike was a great success and we were all impressed by the professionalism of the Scouts and all Personnel associated with Thuma.

Being born and brought up in Malawi it was wonderful to see such pristine Malawian wilderness not too far away from the main Lilongwe - Salima road. It was also a great way for me to spend my 50th Birthday. Let's hope Thuma continues to flourish and please keep up all the good work. We look forward to our next visit.

SOME PHOTOS TO ENJOY!



Herd of Buffalo spotted last Saturday.

Old "Tuskless" has been a regular visitor most nights last month. Sometimes he has one or two younger bulls with him but most of the time he is alone. He is huge and looks very old. He just hangs around camp at night and seems to enjoy us watching him early in the morning. I was delighted to hear the scouts saw him two days ago with a very large herd of females. The group comprised of over 40 and we could hear them trumpeting greetings to each other from camp! He hasn't been to camp since so must be walking with his friends and family.



"Tuskless" – giving himself a dirt bath and then knocking a tree down

Law Enforcement/ Patrol Activity

Thuma

This is a busy time of the year for us all in Malawi. With the rains due any time now we need to reroof all the buildings, maintain the roads and still carry out patrols. October patrols showed us good results. November we carried out patrols which allowed us to move further afield and we stayed out for 2 or 3 nights at a time.

You will notice the number of patrol days are smaller than the previous months due to maintaining the road to the gate from camp and also doing some vital maintenance on the main camp and chasing elephants back into the reserve took up some days as they are getting out on a daily bases by walking around the fence and up to the mango trees surrounding the villages. Over 20 elephants were out on two particular days and our local villagers were scared and asking for help. Children could not go to school and people were not moving around freely.

On the morning of 21st Nov we arrested two poachers in Thuma with a man made muzzle loader. That same day we headed over to investigate the death of a dead elephant in Dedza. We arrested 5 men who were in possession of elephant meat.

It costs us approx 32 euro per day to carry out daily patrols in both reserves with 12 full time scouts. This allows us to conduct daily patrols on foot. Ranger costs are additional as are operations like the one we did in Dedza. Currently we have 8 out of 12 scouts sponsored for the next year! For WAG to continue its patrols it is imperative that we find additional donors/ sponsors so we can continue do daily patrols within these reserves and protect these wonderful animals.

	Poacher foot prints	Daily Patrols	Snares	Knives/ pangas/ axes	Arrests	Destroying charcoal ovens	Dead Elephant
July	2	15	19	1	0	0	
Aug	2	16	1	10	0	0	
Sept	3	24	33	15	4	10+	
Oct	4	30	84	14	2	2	
Nov	2	21*	4	2	7	0	1

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

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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

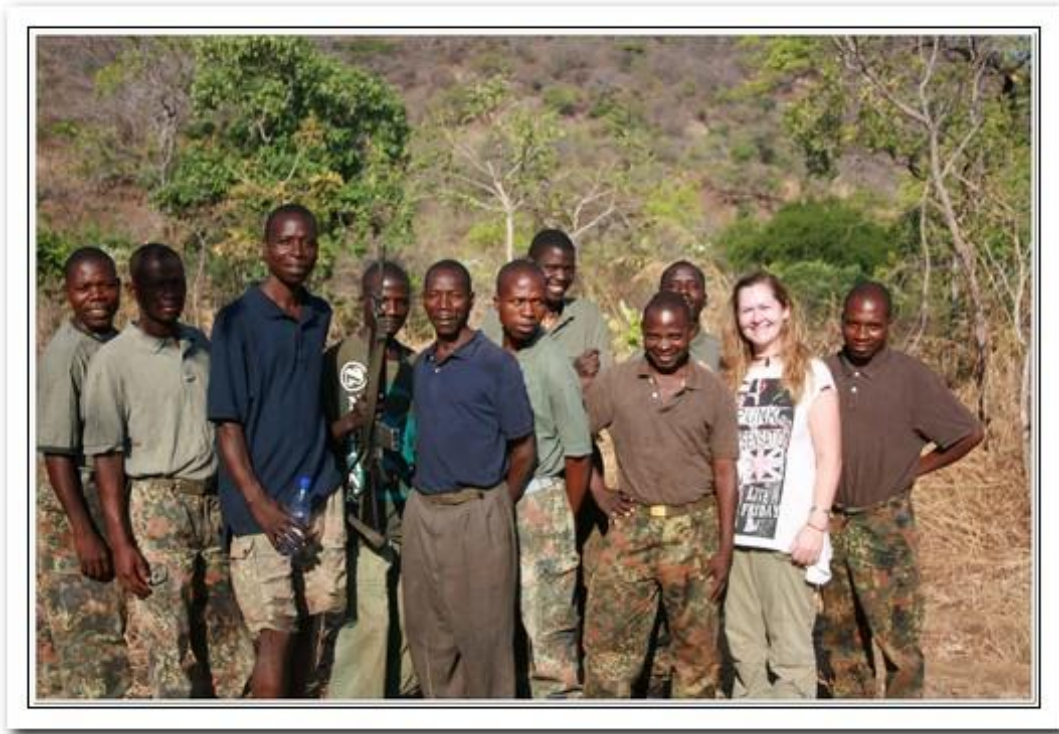
Our main goal is:

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



Lucius and Majomeka thatching roof at Thuma



LEFT TO RIGHT: Medson, James, Majomeka, Felex (ranger), lucius, Watson, Sam, Polla, Edward, Lynn and Bitson

**Best Regards and a big thanks from us all at WAG
And not to forget
“Merry Christmas”
to you All.**