

Thuma Telegraph

April 2012

Wildlife Action Group



Greetings from Thuma!

I have just been looking back on the newsletters from this time last year and remembering writing them! I was here only a few months! To put it mildly it was tough!

Hearing and dealing with the killing of elephants and the many human-elephant conflicts and not being in a position to assist or promise assistance was the hardest!

Now one year on we are in a very different situation! We are delighted to see we have made giant steps forward.

Although the elephants are still coming out right now, we have managed to secure funding to extend the fence a further twelve kilometers later this year. This will lead to more food and personal security for the local population and the knock on effect should mean our elephants having reduced contact with humans also!

Thanks to your generous donations this year we have some new scout sponsors, which is fantastic! We are looking for 3 more sponsorships for this year so please if you know anyone or a group of friends that can pool together or a business this would be really appreciated. We will introduce our scout's to you in each issue this year so you too will get to know them better.

Despite all of positive results we still need to keep on top of things, keep pushing to improve the protection of the reserves and their wildlife now more than ever. A vital part of conservation is to include the local population in our work. We are assisting them this year with many projects that they have requested.

As I am sure you have seen or heard in the news the demand for ivory as well as Rhino horn is increasing and there has been uncountable slaughter of these beautiful animals in several countries so we must be on high alert as it could arrive on our door step at any time.

We also need to look forward at other hot spot areas where our elephants are causing untold damage such as the northern boundary of Thuma and maybe extend the fence next year.

We have new challenges to deal with and some old ones!

Thanks for all your support and for taking the time to read our newsletter.

Yours sincerely

Lynn



One of our male elephants moving through the long grasses

NATURES GIFT - JATROPHA TREES

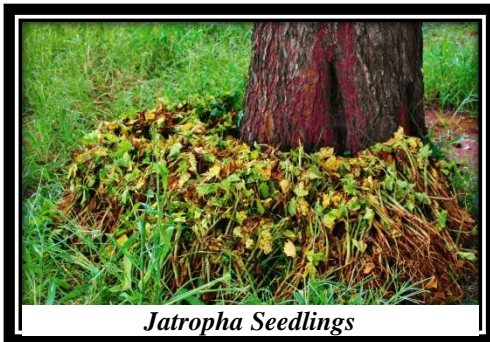
Some time ago I was surfing the net looking at how other places dealt with human elephant conflicts, fence types etc. when I came across an article about an elephant reserve in Kenya who planted a live fence with a tree called jatropha. I thought it was interesting and printed it. I still have the pages!

Then some months later I spoke with someone who mentioned the plant jatropha and how it was being used in Malawi to produce bio-fuel. We made some enquiries and found that this was true and so we researched it some more and found that this might be an answer to some issues in and around our reserves. This shrub is thought to have been brought to Africa and India back in the 16th century by the Portuguese and is believed to be originally from Mexico or Central America.

It currently is being plugged as an alternative fuel which is called bio-fuel and the seeds from the jatropha tree once pressed produce the highly valued bio fuel which once transformed



Jatropha seeds after two weeks



Jatropha Seedlings

becomes bio-diesel.

The seed once crushed provides vegetable oil which can be used - unrefined in the engines of cars, or blended with normal diesel and used in cars and can be refined and sold as pure diesel.

Bio-diesel is an environmentally friendly and a form of renewable energy. Bio-diesel produces 80% less carbon dioxide and 100% less sulfur dioxide emissions. It provides 90% reduction in cancer risks.

Sounds great! At this stage you are probably thinking what has this got to do with WAG? Conservation? Elephants? and maybe Lynn has gone mad! Please read on! :)

Besides the above, this plant has many other properties.

Medically it is used for diseases like cancer, piles, snake bites, paralysis etc.

The oil extracted from the seeds can also be used to make soap and lantern oil.

The seedcake (which is what is left after crushing the seeds) produces a high grade organic fertilizer.

The plant itself is said to repel grazing livestock and in Kenya they are using it to help keep elephants inside a reserve. It is supposed to have a repulsive smell and if planted around gardens as a boundary plant can be a very effective live fence.

Jatropha is a fast growing tree,



Planting boundary fence against ellies

drought resistant, grows easily in marginal soils, reduces soil erosion and lives producing seeds for up to 50 years.

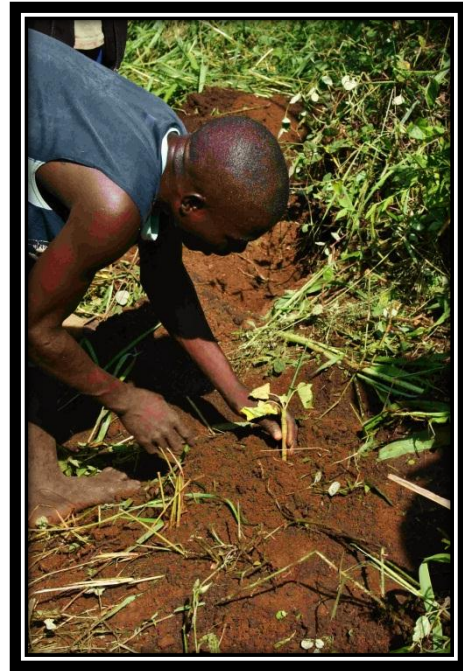
So with all of this in mind we spoke to our local community and asked if they would be interested in trying to grow this tree. They said they were so WAG made contact with Byrl the bio-fuel manufacturer here in Malawi to ensure that a market place would be available to sell the seeds to. Once this was secured we received a donation from our friends in Belgium and sourced and facilitated training on how to propagate seeds and seedlings for our local population.

Three villages surrounding Thuma planted Jatropha mainly planting around their gardens and in areas which elephants cross into the fields. The additional plan is that they can sell the seeds as an income generating activity. Once the trees start producing seeds, Byrl will buy the seeds then produce bio-fuel and supply fertilizer back to the farmers.

So our hope is that it will benefit for our local population in one all some of the following ways

1. as a source of income for the villagers
2. A free cheaper alternative fertilizer which is a huge yearly costs to everyone in Malawi
3. as deterrent to raiding elephants and other livestock

To tell you the truth it all seems a bit too good to be true! but we are working very hard with the villagers to assist them and Byrl also who has a vested interest is helping with pesticide and advice so we hope this will be a success story for all involved. We will keep you updated.



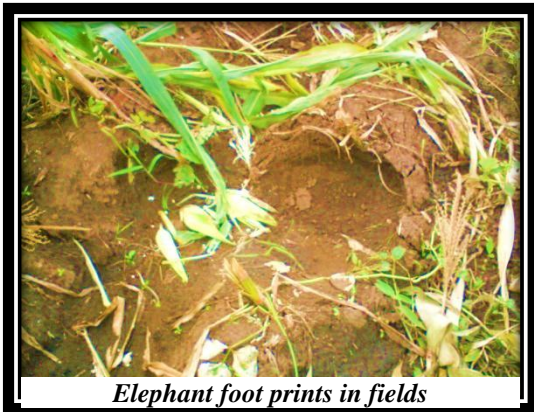
FENCE EXTENTION WILL SAVE LIVES



Maize field destroyed by elephants

As I am sure you all know Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries. Malawians staple diet is maize which most people eat daily and they grow it in their gardens. Farming is mostly subsistence farming meaning they grow food to feed their family. The Rains normally arrive around November and end around April. Last December the rains started, and everyone was busy in the field planting seeds and

applying fertilizer. This time of year is very expensive for most and they borrow money, beg, and sell things just to buy the fertilizer to ensure they will have a good crop. Some 3 weeks later the rain suddenly stopped. By February it still had not rained in our region and the



Elephant foot prints in fields

maize started to die. There was and still is much talk of a famine later this year, people were sitting in the villages when they would normally be in the fields tending the crops. Things looked very dismal. Then mid-February the rain started again. Not a lot, but just enough to make the difference between the crops failing completely and maybe people having something. The rain is still here thank god and the fields look somewhat healthier. However, now the maize is almost ripe! This is the most dangerous time as the elephants love unripe maize! Last week a large group of

elephants left the reserve and completely destroyed several fields of maize, flattening much of the field and eating the maize from the plant. You would cry if you saw what they did and know the current economic climate!

These villages are situated south of the Linthiphe River near the boundary of the Dedza-Salima Reserve.

WAG built a 12km fence back in 2009 along the eastern boundary of Thuma Forest Reserve and it has greatly improved the number of times the elephants go into the villages closest to the camp. However elephants are not stupid and they found that if they walk along to the end of the fence they could still go into the fields of other villages. Since then we have been trying to secure more funding to extend the fence. And we are delighted



Destroyed maize

to tell you that with the help of the Norwegian Embassy we will be extending the fence later this year.

This fence will secure not only the personal security of people's lives but also assist to secure the security of the food they desperately need.

This will bring relief for a certain amount of villages but once this section is complete we need to look to the north and prepare to extend there, so this is only part of a long term plan to extend.

Unfortunately it is a little too late for some people but its better late than never. !

CHANCE FOR CHANGE (MWAI WOSINTHIKA) - VENTURE TRUST MALAWI



Venture trust Malawi supported by the Scottish Government, DFID and UNICEF is a pilot project aiming to offer a direct alternative to custody for young offenders who have exhausted existing options and require an intensive level of support and supervision within the community via probation services. VT is working in Lilongwe prison with young offenders and young offenders who have been released from prison.

They work with the most vulnerable young people, challenging offending behavior and supporting change through providing intensive support and supervision. The chance for change gives these young people the opportunity to change their circumstances but perhaps more importantly and more empowering by giving them the responsibility and choice about wanting to make a change in their behavior and how they deal with life's problems.

After a chance meeting with Mr. Greg Watson (Venture Trust outreach and community officer) we discussed the opportunity of a wilderness-based personal development weekend visit to Thuma with some young offenders. This weekend would include activities such as camping, hiking, some volunteer conservation work, conservation education and discussions along with a range of other experiences including FUN with the emphasis on transferring the skills and learning back with the young person to their community. Another key element will be to give the young people a new experience away from their normal environment and encourage them to develop other interest that long term will help them lead settled and productive lives.



The original number of young people expected was about 8 or 9 so on the Friday morning when 18 young people arrived from Lilongwe along with 5 supervisors we got a pleasant shock!:)



Watching elephants

Besides the two Venture Trust officers (Greg & Tom Saunders) other supervisors were from Ministry of Gender children & community development, Social welfare, Social welfare and child protection officer, and the most impressive of all the Juvenile police officer who sentenced all of them to prison!

Once they got settled in, erected tents, these amazing expd scout hammocks with built in net and tent covering!, collected firewood for cooking, water to cook and wash, got the fires started and lunch prepared you could feel the excitement at being out in the bush for the first time. Most were really interested at the different sounds coming from the forest.

You could also see that they were all impressed with the scouts who assisted them in all activities. The scouts were asked many questions about the wild animals and how to become a scout ☺

That evening we chatted and got to know each other a bit, most were very tired and some a bit scared sleeping out in tents. The hyena crying at night really scared some who then found it hard to go to sleep.

Despite that the next morning, all were very energetic and looking forward to the day's actives. We had discussions about the forest, our work, why it was important to conserve

nature, the various wildlife laws and climate change. What was most interesting is that they all said they never heard of a poacher being put or kept in prison due to the fact that they probably have money and could pay their way out of trouble!

We then split into three groups each doing a different activity. The group I went with were lucky enough to sight elephants! They were so happy, standing on the rocks or up in trees to get a better view and all whispering so not to be heard! Big smiles on all their faces!

Stanley a hopeful up and coming rap artist sang his songs while slashing the road, Bashir and Kells created and prepared a new garden for me as a gift which was so unexpected and appreciated, little Geoffrey wants to be a scout when he grows up! Each and every one of these young men were so well behaved, a pleasure to be around it was just a shame that we did not have more time together! Since they have left some have stayed in touch via Facebook and phone.

What Venture Trust do is quiet amazing.

WAG feel privileged to have been able to spend time with these young people, share this wonderful place with them and hope that their time here has helped them in some small way, shown them they are and will be accepted into society and shown them a new experience. Thank you to all the boys from Lilongwe for visiting us.



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR TEAM!

WAG currently employs ten scouts just now, two fence attendants and 3 general workers. We are recruiting for 3 scouts at the moment. Our ideal number of scouts is 16 but we only have sponsorship for 13. We need to find 3 new sponsors a.s.a.p. Please we would kindly ask you all to spread the word, maybe you know a group of friends, an office or business who could hold a race night or quiz night in a local bar, run the marathon.... ☺ to raise this money. By increasing our number of scouts it will enable us to patrol more areas more frequently, allows us to be more flexible, *intensify* the anti-poaching in particular and also assist us to be able to address forest management issues such as the regulation of the bamboo areas this year.

By sponsoring a scout you not only make a huge difference to the conservation effort but you are helping to support that scout and his family. This puts food on the table for his wife and children, and his extended family such as parents, it allows him to send his children to school, and go to hospital if they are sick!

This year in particular a salary will be very important to someone, we all know the crops have not given the yield hoped for, and it is predicted that there will be food shortages here later in the year; most consumer products have increased in price, so this salary will make a difference between someone eating and someone possibly starving!

So let's meet the team! I will start with myself!

Name: Lynn Clifford

Nationality: Irish

Country of Origin: Dublin, Republic of Ireland

Background: I joined WAG in November 2010. My background is varied - from veterinary nursing to office administration/ admin/ production planning management roles in two large multi international companies in the UK and Ireland.

I have done extensive travelling around Africa visiting as many National parks as I could.

I worked in Cameroon on and off for over 5 years working with orphaned chimpanzee. I then came to Malawi as a volunteer and have never left! I love what WAG are doing here. We are trying to protect the forest and it wildlife before it is too late, this is a true wilderness with our wildlife living as they have for hundreds of years with little contact with man. Thuma and Dedza-Salima are the only forest reserves in Malawi (and there are over 100 forest reserve in Malawi) that still have the large mammals

which shows that we are making a difference.



Name: Kennedy Assan

Nationality: Malawian

Words from Kennedy: I am aged 31 years old and I have a wife and a new baby girl called Bridget aged 9 months.

I joined WAG in 2008 and since that time I have 4 year experience and I been learning a lot of different ways in the bush.

Through the salary I get, it has changed my life and the life of my family for the better.

I love my job and enjoy it because I know and I feel that it is my responsibility to protect both forest and

its wildlife.

Environment is very important to our everyday life in different ways. Even our children's future will depend on it. That is why we need to keep the environment safe.

Name: Samuel Thom

Nationality: Malawian

Words from Sam: I am Samuel Thom, lead scout coming from Thukwi Village, Traditional Authority Khombedza, and District of Salima.

I was born in 1979 and this year on the 23rd September I will be 33 years old.

I am married, and I have four children, three girls and one boy, named Lonely, Liness, Clara and Chifuniro.

I am now five years working for WAG, I joined in October 2007 and I like my job very much.

My main job as a scout here is to conduct daily patrols around the forest to see if there is any illegal activity occurring. I also do extension work in the villages, talking about the importance of the forest and assisting with human elephant conflicts.

There are many challenges during our working days like being chased by elephants, buffaloes, meeting aggressive people such as gun poachers, dog hunters who come into the reserve to kill the animals.

My worst experience to date was the day I was chased by an elephant. It was very aggressive towards us. It was on 6th June 2008. I was on patrol with my fellow scouts there was four of us. We saw one elephant in front of us and I told my friends to change the route. While we were discussing this the wind changed direction and the elephant smelled us and charged at us. I fell down three times and I thought that this is the end of my life! But my friends saw me on the ground and shouted encouragement for me to get up again, which I did and started running again. We escaped and I am here to tell the story. That is an unforgettable day in my life. I just praise God for keeping me alive.



Thank you

Samuel Thom.



Piglet (our local friendly Vervet looking over his kingdom (photo by Jana Baecker)

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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.

Please help us save

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