

# Thuma Telegraph

May 2013

Wildlife Action Group



Dear Friends and supporters

*It's been a long time since we have given you some updates on daily goings on in Malawi. It's May; at home its spring, the end of the rain and cold, with longer evenings to look forward to! Here we have two seasons, rainy and dry/ hot!*

*The rain has come and gone, too little by all accounts, but just about enough to enable everyone to harvest at least something! The bush is changing from lush green to yellow and brown. The rivers and streams which is our most successful deterrent to people coming in and poaching are now dropping allowing access to the reserve and its animals.*

*Very worryingly, many streams are already dry. The water table is dropping, possibly a sign of climate change! We are in for a long dry spell.*

*The grasses are high so it is difficult to see any animals, even elephants!*

*The new fence extension has done its job and little or no damage to crops around the Kambwiri area which is great.*

*Despite the lack of communication from us at base camp, we have been extremely busy with various activities.*

*At the end of last year we tragically lost some elephants to poaching. We have made good headway with some arrests. We carried out some surveys, planted bamboo in the villages, opened and maintained the roads after the rain and found again our injured elephant reunited with her family!:.)*

*It seems each and every day brings new challenges and there is never a dull moment.:)*

*Community relations are closer than ever before and we are working closely with chiefs and group village head men.*

*Over the coming months we have a lot of work to do. We have 20 scouts now, the most in WAG history, our possibilities and opportunities are greater than ever before.*

Yours sincerely  
Lynn



At the end of every rainbow there is a pot of gold! In this case it is Thuma!

# INJURED ELEPHANT REUNITED WITH HER FAMILY

I am not sure if you remember but in August 2012 we found a female elephant who was badly injured, we suspect by a bullet. She was all alone, limping and in a lot of distress. We decided to try darting her so that we could help her, but by the time we arranged logistics we lost her tracks and we never saw her again despite searching for her for days!

In January 2013, one Sunday afternoon while sitting on top rock, we noticed a herd of elephants moving towards the camp. We watched 8 elephants with two babies and they came closer and closer. I got the binoculars



**She is alive! Vera our injured ellie**



**Catching the sent of us!**

and was stunned to see one was limping slightly! She had a calf with her. I checked out her ear marking and checked the photos we had of the injured ellie from Aug. And low and behold it was her! Her front left leg was still a little swollen and she has a V shaped nick out of her left ear. She was alive! We danced around and the entire scout came up to watch. They smelt us and grouped together around the two babies and all lifted their trunks in the air. Once they knew where we were they relaxed and came closer and ate and mooched around for over an hour. As the sun went down we watched Vera (her new name) lead this happy family away from camp

and freedom in Thuma.





Vera reunited with her Family close to base camp!

## WAG SCOUTS RESCUE POACHER FROM POSSIBLE DEATH

24<sup>TH</sup> March 2013 – two patrols were deployed to two different areas inside Thuma Forest Reserve. The second team was asked to check out our bamboo area to look for illegal bamboo cutters. There were no signs of any new tracks coming from the main gate entrance suggesting that no one had entered through the gate with tickets. So they carried on towards the fence line



WAG scouts carrying injured poacher

where we know people are coming under the fence to enter illegally to cut bamboo. After about 1 hour they saw 4 men cutting bamboo. As they approached the men dropped their tools and scattered, running away. The scouts followed in hot pursuit and managed to arrest 2 of the four men. Neither had tickets and both were from a village nearby. They called me explaining the situation and we agreed to bring them to the Group Village headman to be fined.

Three scouts decided to follow the tracks of the other two men who escaped to see if they could find them. They followed one track which led directly to the fence line and out of the reserve. He had gone. On the way back to join with the other scouts they heard a strange noise and went to investigate. They found one man on the ground injured. He had run into a tree while running from the scouts and had dislocated his hip and also broken his leg. He was in agony and unable to move. Elephants were around the area and he could have been in serious trouble. We made a stretcher from poles and placed him on it. The scouts carried him over 2kms so they could meet me in the car and we drove him to hospital. He has been given treatment and is recovering now. What a lucky man!

## ILLEGAL PLANKS!



Vehicle used to transport illegal planks

In February, early one Friday morning I received a phone call from an informer telling me that over near our Namwiri camp someone had been cutting trees to make planks. There was over 187 hard wood planks cut and they had hired a vehicle to transport them into town to sell them. However the vehicle had got stuck in the mud and crashed. Tragically a local young man

who was assisting was killed when the planks fell from the

vehicle onto him during the accident. He was 16 years old. The vehicle was dangerously overloaded. The police had been informed and the planks had been hidden until alternative transportation had been arranged. He told us the location of the wood so we set off. We picked up some Salima forestry officers to assist us. On our way to the village we were surprised to meet many bikes cycling towards town with planks on the back of the bikes! Obviously some quick sales had been made to get rid of the illegally cut wood. We stopped each bike and confiscated the wood. When we reached the village we found the wood and saw the vehicle. We confiscated over 97 planks but both the driver and the teacher who were selling the planks were both in hospital recovering after the accident. Department



Planks found near Namwiri Camp

of Forestry and police will press charges. We since found out the planks are not from the Dedza-Salima Reserve but a forest east of there and it is being destroyed to supply the demand for wood.

## BAMBOO ...MAY BE SO MUCH MORE

When people think about bamboo they normally think of China and the endangered Giant Panda! However approx 4 percent of Africa's forest cover is bamboo.

Thuma FR and Dedza-Salima FR are home to a bamboo which grows in large quantities in several areas inside both reserves.



The local population surrounding Thuma are dependent on bamboo poles obtained from the forest for building, to sell for cash and other activities such as furniture making and basketry.

As we are seeing in many places deforestation is a huge problem and it causes a vicious circle of drought and environmental decline.

Deforestation accounts for at least a fifth of all carbon emissions globally. The loss of tree cover dries the land out and the soil erodes and becomes barren.

When a hardwood tree is cut down it is gone! It will take 60 to 70 years for another to grow in its place.

Bamboo is a grass, not a tree, and is renewable. It grows very fast under the correct conditions and is mature enough to harvest after three to five years.

Unlike trees, bamboo regrows

bamboo treated and given to villagers after harvesting, and can be harvested very single year of the life of the plant.

Bamboo has other advantages. Its roots hold soil firmly. If planted on a steep slope or riverbank and it prevent mudslides and erosion. And bamboo is parsimonious with Africa's most precious resource: water.

Bamboo could be the answer to the need for cash, firewood, reducing erosion and creating employment.

In Africa 70 percent of people cook on a wood fire. Bamboo can be also burnt to make charcoal as an alternative to traditional wood charcoal.

With this in mind WAG has started to supply seedling bamboo to some villagers with the aim that each village will have their own bamboo plot which they can utilize and therefore reduce the complete dependence on the forest reserve. We have supplied the large Chinese's yellow bamboo and have undertaken training and planting sessions in several



Chief plants first bamboo

villages.

Meanwhile inside the Reserve we decided to do a survey to assess how much bamboo is in the area. This will allow us to manage it better. Up until now there was little or no information regarding the number of bamboo trees remaining in Thuma forest. In order to better manage, conserve, utilize and monitor bamboo resources, a survey was carried out in January with the main objective of finding out the number of bamboo trees currently available in Thuma. We already have records of the daily outgoing of bamboo.. A further survey will be carried out in the dry season and there after each year to monitor and protect these important plants. (picture above – The team who carried out the survey).



Mr Banda, Yammi, Richard and Felix

## KUDU POACHER ARRESTED AND FINED

On a February afternoon, I got another tip off that someone had killed a kudu and was selling the meat in a local village. We split into two teams and I was the “back up” in the car going around along the road. The scouts entered the village from two different directions going directly to two different houses that we were told was selling the meat.



Geoffery with found bush meat!

At both houses we found evidence of a fresh kill, with blood outside and kudu hair and a strong smell of meat. Both houses were empty but we were told they were in their fields. So we visited them in their fields, arrested them and brought them to the houses so we could conduct a thorough search. In situations like this the chief must always be involved so we had to wait until he arrived. On searching both houses we found fresh meat in a large bucket and a leg. Both men were fined by the Chief two goats each. One goat for the chief and one goat for the Traditional authority. This is a painful fine as each goat is worth over 6000mk each! If we had gone to court maybe they



Poacher with part of meat for sale!

would have been fined 5000mk or worse released for first time offender. This is a very strong message to each villager that we know what is happening in the villages and are willing to come to investigate.

## **VILLAGE CHILDREN GET FOOTBALL FROM OLLIE FROM GERMANY**

On leaving Thuma main gate we have to drive through a village called Ntifu. Here there are many children who get so excited to see the car and especially white people. If we drove up and down ten times a day they still would be as excited as if they had never seen



a car before. They are great kids and always smiling and happy despite having little or nothing. One thing I have noticed is that several school going children is now making great efforts to learn and improve their English. Whenever we have a new volunteer they are now asked “what is your name”? etc. It is good to see. Ollie a volunteer from Germany made a special connection with these children and before leaving bought them a football. They were delighted. And now both girls and boys are playing football in the village. Above Ollie kicks the ball to start the game!

## **JATHROPHA AND BAMBOO**

On visiting the villages where we planted jathropha and bamboo, we were somewhat disappointed to see much of the jathropha had not been cared for and had died or was diseased. Except for one village that have strong healthy plants. See below!



**Jathropha plants**

The bamboo planted in Jan was amazingly over one foot long and about 60% of those planted were doing well. We will keep monitoring both and we have been asked to supply more so will do our best.

See photos below:



**Bamboo shoots!**

## **ELEPHANTS UNDER PRESSURE**

While we were building the new fence extension to assist our local population with human-elephant conflict and food security, a local poacher along with two strangers from Kusungu entered into the reserve and killed one of our elephants. Based on information received we knew we had strangers in the area but we not sure if they had managed to kill anything. We were hot on their tracks and mounted a two day surveillance of the house and their movements and two day search of the forest and that's when we found a freshly



killed elephant. That night in a joint operation with Department of National Parks and Wildlife we raided the house and made two arrests. A homemade firearm was found and confiscated. We are waiting for the court case sentence to take place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May. Two days later we managed to arrest two people trying to buy ivory, both were arrested and brought to the police but both were released without going to court! The lady wanting to buy the ivory had 43,000mk (less than 100 euro) to buy the ivory hidden in her underwear!



**One of our poor elephants, butchered!**

I know this photo will be upsetting for some, however this is the reality and we are here to try stop this pointless slaughter. All over Africa elephants are being mowed down for their tusks! It is tragic!

Please help us protect Malawi's elephants by making a donation or sponsoring a scout. You can do this on our website at [www.wam-malawi.org](http://www.wam-malawi.org) THANK YOU.

## **NEW TRIAL PROJECT – FIRST BEE HIVE FENCE IN MALAWI**

Save the Elephant Kenya have been investigating the use of bees as a natural deterrent to crop raiding elephants. To date the result has been very positive and have shown that elephants will run from the sound of disturbed honey bees. Also when they do run away, the elephants also emit a unique low frequency rumble vocalization which warns neighbouring elephants to retreat as well.

People who have witnessed elephants being stung by swarms of bees, say the elephants can be stung around the eyes, up the trunk and behind the thinner skin of the ears which must be very painful.



Photo above by Dr Lucy King bee hive fence in Kenya

Farmers are now using this knowledge to protect their crops by building beehive fences round their vegetable fields. The “fence” comprises strong posts on which they hang beehives at regular 10 meter spaces. Farmers keep their fences and beehives in good order as they can make a lot of money from selling the honey. The participating farmers are benefiting from this

“Elephant-Friendly Honey” and awareness and tolerance for elephants is slowly increasing.

Wildlife Action Group contacted Dr Lucy King from Save the Elephant to discuss the opportunities for WAG in early 2013.

Now WAG would like to duplicate this idea and adapt as seen fit to suit Malawi.

With funding from the Norwegian Embassy we have selected three known areas in the northern part of Thuma Forest as a first trial.

We are very excited about this and hopeful as not only will it reduce the human elephant conflict here but secure food security and also bring a vital source of income through the availability of honey that can be sold.

We will work hand in hand with Department of National Parks & Wildlife extension workers alongside expert bee keepers to conduct sensitization and training programs with selected families that own the land on which we wish to start the trials, then erect the fence around the gardens.

Will keep you updated on the project.

**Right: local carpenter making bee hives for New trial.**



Best regards  
Lynn and Scouts

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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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EXTEND OUR ELECTRIC FENCE**

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