

Thuma Telegraph

May 2014

Wildlife Action Group



Dear Donors, Friends and Supporters

We are a quarter of the way through 2014 already and time is flying.

Last year was a very testing year with so many challenges but we dealt with each one and thanks to all our Supporters, we managed to take giant steps forward.

A brief over view of last year's achievements

- Extended the fence line a further 20 kms along the Dedza Salima boundary which has completely eliminated the human elephant conflict in this area. Every village from the Lilongwe river in Thuma to the end of the new fence line has harvested their maize without any loss of crops. An amazing difference from last year!
- Carried out the first ever animal count in both reserves, providing us with vital information that will help us to manage the reserves and the wildlife going forward
- Carried out camera trap research that has lead to the discovering of two new mammal species not previously known in Thuma
- Increased the number of scout
- Built a new camp that allows full time permanent presence in an area which was vulnerable to illegal activity
- Took part in the first ever International Elephant Day and the first ever Wildlife march in Malawi highlighting the plight of elephants worldwide and bring to the attention of Malawi Government the importance of wildlife
- Started to place tsetse fly targets inside Thuma forest where tsetse fly are prolific
- Arrested 4 elephant hunters and confiscating their guns, ammunition and ivory
- Carried out over 600 patrols in Thuma and 360 patrols in Dedza Salima
- Dealt with over 100 Human elephant conflicts
- Removed over 154 snares

Our anti poaching unit is stronger than ever and last year sets precedence for our work this year. We will work harder and achieve more.

Our moto is "MORE SWEAT LESS POACHING"

With your continued support we can and will restore and protect these two unique reserves for future generations.

Yours sincerely
Lynn



Tsetse Fly Control comes to Thuma



sewing the targets to be hung on poles

Tsetse of the subspecies *Glossina morsitans morsitans* is widely distributed in Thuma Forest Reserve. However, the population is mainly concentrated along streams with riverine type of vegetation. There are no documented cases of sleeping sickness in the area. However, a survey shows that 81% of the villagers in the area consider the tsetse problem to be

very serious. The previously mentioned research suggests that control measures must be initiated to protect susceptible animal and human hosts in Thuma Forest Reserve.

The aim of tsetse control in Thuma Forest Reserve is therefore to reduce the tsetse fly population to a low level and maintain that level so that a possible disease challenge is reduced.

The tsetse fly (*Family Glossinidae*) is a vector for single-celled parasites which cause trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) in humans and 'nagana' in domestic animals (Picker *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, attempts to control tsetse flies in Africa have been continuing since the early 1900s. The techniques used were, for instance, bush clearing, animal host destruction and large use of persistent insecticides (FAO, 1992). Today, the control techniques are fueled by the need for environmental conservation. The contemporary techniques include using targets, consisting of



Preparing bottles for the acetone

insecticide-treated screens, and odour attractants to increase the number of flies alighting on the targets.

Targets with a combination of the colors blue and black have proven to be effective tsetse attractants, especially for the riverine species (FAO, 1993). Ketones (acetone and 1-octen-3-ol) and phenols (4-methylphenol and 3-n-propylphenol) are also shown to be potential attractants (FAO, 1992). A possible explanation is that phenols are also found in bovid urine (Chorley, 1948) and bovinds are a natural target for tsetse flies.



A total eradication of tsetse flies is not desirable, nor possible due to ecological factors (Rogers and Randolph, 1985). The objective in tsetse control is usually a 90% reduction in numbers of the population (FAO, 1992). The tsetse flies are highly mobile and seasonal dispersal of flies is an important factor to consider. In the dry season, flies are usually concentrated in dense vegetation, but during and after the rain season they may spread many kilometers into open woodland and bush (FAO, 1992). We are currently looking for funding to allow us to continue this project.

1st ANIMAL SURVEY IN THUMA AND DEDZA SALIMA FOREST RESERVE

In November 2013 WAG along with Department of National Parks and Wildlife met in Thuma to conduct the first ever animal count conducted in both reserves.

This survey was carried out with the funding from Abraham Foundation USA by Ronald Ulrich.

Thuma and the adjacent forest reserve (DSFR) is one of the few remaining forest reserves that still keep some large mammals like elephants and buffaloes. Others were Namizimu forest reserve in the south-eastern of Malawi known for elephants. However this population was translocated to Majete Wildlife Reserve for security reasons.

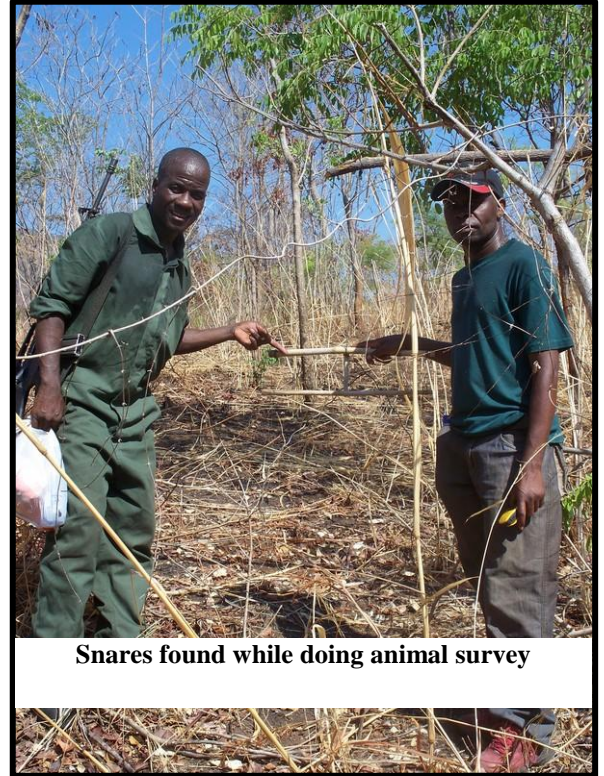
The aim of this survey was to establish the total populations of large mammals in Thuma and adjacent reserves.

The strip transect method also known as the King's method, was used to estimate animal populations in Thuma and adjacent

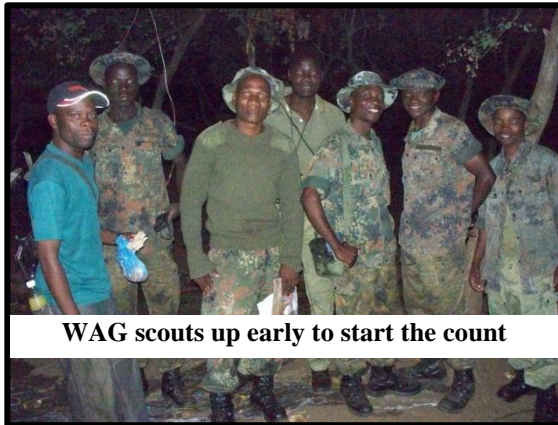
reserves.

This method

is probably the most used transect technique in animal counts. The strip transects are long and narrow plots. Twenty-one transects (1km) apart were established in Thuma running for a central line 11 transect walked from the centre to the north the other 10 were walked southwards from centre.



Snares found while doing animal survey



WAG scouts up early to start the count

DSFR had 11 transects set at an interval of 2km apart and were walked from the north to south the south to north at 360° grid north and 11 (2km) interval were established at 270° west. Observers used the compass & a GPS. Each time an animal is encountered the observers stopped and recorded the species name. The distance and direction to the centre of the herd was determined using a GPS. The location of the herd was also marked using a GPS. Other relevant information like vegetation type, animal & poachers spoor and any other illegal activities were recorded but did not form part of this analysis. Each transect was walked once.



Whilst the primary purpose was to count the number of animals in the reserve, we also used this opportunity to overview of the level of illegal activities. Some dog poachers were also caught in the act and arrested, some snares were found, items confiscated and some charcoal burners arrested also.

It is very important to know our wildlife populations to ensure the implementation of good conservation practices and also to enable us to monitor population trends going forward.

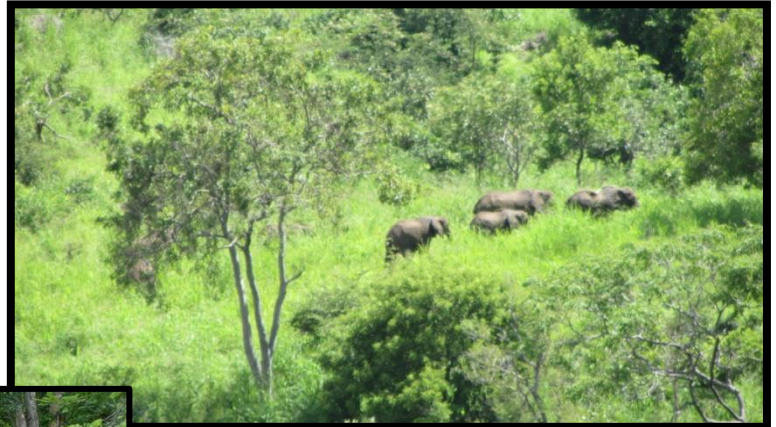
The final data has been very positive showing good healthy populations of most large mammals and good distribution esp in Thuma.

WAG wishes to thank Abraham Foundation and Ronald Ulrich for funding this survey and Department of National Parks and Wildlife for assistance and expertise while conducting this exercise.

We look forward to conducting further surveys over the coming years.

Trees of Thuma Forest Reserve Fodder for the Elephants

January 2014 brought us a extraordinary



volunteer from Germany. "Outdoor Elke" is a retired lady who has worked overseas for many years and who has a special affinity for Malawi and its wildlife (having lived here for 2 years in Mazuzu). It was obvious from the start that Elke was wild about nature and every morning after her coffee she was up and ready to go out.

After some discussion we decided Elke would begin a project to identify the different trees in Thuma

that elephants are eating.

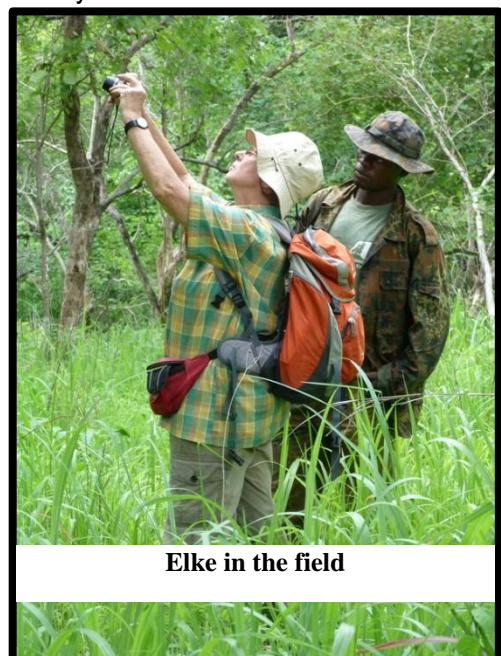
The timeframe of the project was from 29th January to the 20th of February 2014.

It will provide valuable information about the Elephants dietary needs whilst highlighting the specific trees and shrubs at risk in the FR.

(The daily need of elephants, for an adult bull is between 180 Kg and 270 Kg of fodder, per day. They are mainly grass eaters (up to 80% of their diet) and 20% to trees, shrubs and other vegetation.

Elke along with a ranger would go out daily to walk and observe any trees known to us or ones that show recent signs of elephants eating them. Photographs were taken from the complete site of the tree, then from the bark, followed by the leaves, flowers and seed pods, if available.

The indicated trees showed clear signs of the use by elephants, either they were turned over to reach the roots,



Elke in the field

branches broken or the bark stripped off and with unmistakable footprints in case there was any doubt.

31 trees (one was a creeper) have been identified so far with their scientific and English names.

This is the beginning of a ongoing project that will help us to know more about the forest and its attractiveness to the elephants.

This project is not finished and will also lead on to other research such as the number of different species of trees and their distribution.

Elke you are amazing and we are waiting for your return later this year.



Elke on Pride Rock

SOME GREAT PHOTOS OF SOME AMAZING CREATURES





Photos courtesy of: Ekle, Norbert, Lynn, Anna



Spot the frog



PROFESSIONAL HUNGARIAN CHEF TURNS BUSH GRUB GOURMET!

Norbert and his wife Gabby volunteered with us earlier this year while on a gap year from work. Norbert is a professional chef and has been working in top hotels and kitchens in the UK for many years. Norbert is passionate about wildlife and went on patrol with the scouts





Norbert with scouts cooking classes

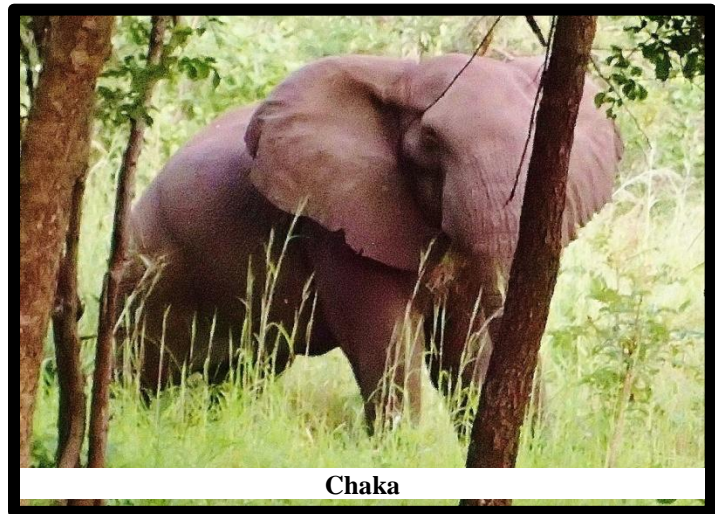
every day. In the afternoon he held cookery classes for anyone who was interested. Surprisingly six scouts volunteered to learn to cook European food. Several dishes were taught to the scouts including Hungarian goulash, spaghetti bolognese, salads with dressings, veggie curry, and chicken satay.....hmmmm also cutting techniques were shown.... Although I was scared someone was going to loose a finger!!! Thank god it

did not happen!

Norbert is a true professional and nothing phased him... including cooking on a open fire with only a few pots!!! It is a far cry from what he knows in top class kitchens back home, The scouts loved the lessons and I loved the food and I had my meals cooked and served each day☺ I could get used to that!!!! But alas Norbert has continued his travels and I am back in the kitchen!:)

RETURN OF CHAKA

Chaka paid us a visit after almost over one year to show us how big and healthy he has become. Chaka is a well know large bull to us. He is easily recognizable as he has no tusks but also he seems to really like hanging around camp for up to a week at a time... shows himself in day light and keeps us awake at night with his snoring and pushing over trees.



Chaka

I was woken early one morning to the sound of elephant near my hut and looked outside to see him very close by. I grabbed my camera and as I stepped outside to take a shot he turned towards me, shook his head to warn me. So I took a quick photo and he turned and walked into the bush. He looks magnificent.

FENCING CONTINUES 2014

Human Elephant Conflict (HEC) reached an all time high last year which brought the very real threat of the elephants being moved from Thuma and Dedza-Salima forest reserve. Local populations reacted to the elephants leaving the reserve on a regular basis by herding three elephants to town, the serious injury of a young man who tried to chase the elephants and ran directly at them, the death of another man inside the



Damaged crops

reserve while he illegally cut tree.. While we dealt with the elephants who were outside the reserve the poachers took advantage of the situation and four elephant were killed.

Things turned around pretty quickly as we lobbied government and gained political will to keep the elephants in situ. A SOS appeal was sent out looking for funding to extend the fence line in the most affected area of Dedza-Salima Forest and mass ranger deployment to the area to try control the movements of the elephants.

Funding was realized from several sources and by mid November only 3

months later we started to build phase 3 of the fence. A total of over 180 local people all living near the boundary were employed to assist with clearing and building.

The building ended at 3pm on the 23rd of December. A total of 20kms solar powered fence was constructed bringing the fence line up to 48kms of fence reaching from the Lilongwe River on the northern boundary of Thuma along the eastern boundary south into Dedza-Salima Forest reserve (see map).

This new part of fence has really changed the movements of the elephants.

But there is a start and end of the fence and elephants are not stupid. It has taken them only 3 months to find where they can exit.

In March we placed full time rangers at both ends of the fence and if elephants tried to leave the reserve we chased them back inside the reserve.

The northern section of Thuma, where there is no fence, saw the most pressure with nightly occurrences.

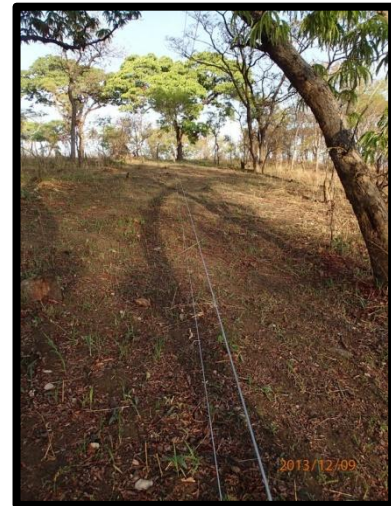
But despite this little crop was lost, trampled or eaten.

All maize has been harvested and people are extremely happy.

As planned we will implicitment phase 4, which is a further 8kms of the fence extension which will be along the Lilongwe River, Northern boundary of Thuma.

Most protected area in Malawi have become isolated islands surrounded by people. These places which are home to wildlife are coming increasingly under pressure from the growing human population. For many conservationists, fencing is not considered always to be the best option.

However, in our case it is the only viable option. To date the proven track record shows with the fence there is a vast reduction in HEC, a fence line that is managed and maintained - works, and it creates acceptance for the reserve and wildlife from local people. Good conservation practices must adhered to and wildlife populations managed along with careful monitoring of the eco system and its animals. We need to raise more funds over the coming months to continue to secure Malawi's elephants and these protected places.



NEW EQUIPMENT WITH FUNDING FROM USFWS

Late last year we were delighted to receive funding from USFWS.

For some time now we have been really struggling with necessary equipment for patrolling.

Our back packs are falling apart, we were short of trousers, hats, sleeping bags and water bottles to name but a few items.



We have just had our first batch arrive and it will really make life a lot more comfortable for the scouts while out on patrol. A big thank you to USFWS for these items☺

Water bottles, hats, back packs, rain jackets and a few uniforms!

This year we are looking to fund more new camps, increase the number of tsetse fly targets around the forest, extend the fence again, continue different types of research on trees, animals, reduce the illegal activity and protect our wonderful animals.

We will update you accordingly throughout the year.

Thank you all
The WAG family



Wildlife Action Group

P.O. Box 84

Salima, Malawi

info@wag-malawi.org

www.wag-malawi.org, lynardc1@gmail.com

Phone (Lynn Clifford): +265 991 224599,

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.