



WILDLIFE ACTION GROUP THUMA TELEGRAPH MAY 2016

BY LYNN CLIFFORD
DIRECTOR WAG



LAW ENFORCEMENT

2015 saw over 100 arrests of which 84% were prosecuted in court.

Arrests this year were more varied with several dog poachers, gun poachers, snare poachers, fake ivory dealers, plank cutters and charcoal burners.

January 2015, we arrested a gun poacher and a snare poacher. We also found and arrested 2 men who were trafficking in elephant bones.

In April/ May 2015 plank cutters were arrested and prosecuted. In April we again arrested people trafficking in elephant bones which is illegal as it is classed as a protected species specimen – an investigation led to 12 men being arrested. Two elephant bones had been carved to look like ivory. The prosecution and sentence was disappointing but one man served time in prison.



In September 2015, we arrested a very active snare poacher who was convicted and sentenced to 18 months hard labour.

Three plank cutters have been sentenced – one for 3 years and two for 18 months.

WAG works collaboratively with the local police and magistrate, which has led to greater understanding of the crimes being committed and the serious detrimental effects on the forests and the wildlife, especially elephants. We are seeing an effect on the ground as the increased arrests and more severe sentencing serve as a deterrent.

In May 2015, funded by Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) (Save the Elephant and Wildlife Conservation Network) we held an intensive training programme led by Rory Young. Rory Young is founder of Chengeta Wildlife a NGO who



trains front line rangers in anti-poaching skills. The training was very varied and included a mixture of classroom and practical work. Rory shared some essential skills with the team particularly regarding tracking and patrol planning. Some of the topics covered were: proactive and reactive investigations, data recording and analysis, tracking teams, tracking formations, determining age of tracks and spoor, movement and behavior of poachers, information preparation of a conservation area (studying our working area, terrain, knowing movements of the wildlife so you can plan good patrols, know observation points, and where ambushes can be set up), areas poachers like, entry / exit points, developing maps.



The training was brilliant and every scout learnt some new skills including one scout who has been working here since 2002. It also really helped me with planning patrols and implementing different techniques.

With this training we have started to enroll good informers who are making our life much easier, leading us to successful arrests. We would like to sincerely thank Rory and ECF for their time and invaluable training and contribution.



DSFR

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2014	0	0	0	0	15	1	5	1	5	5	24	14	70
2015	0	2	104	3	8	0	4	51	75	34	30	13	324

TFR

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2014	0	0	0	21	59	20	2	23	7	25	2	0	159
2015	11	0	0	3	0	28	0	64	33	15	1	12	167

Snare removal in Dedza Salima Forest Reserve (DSFR) and Thuma Forest Reserve (TFR) 2014 and 2015 by month and total number of snares removed in 2014 & 2015.

COURT RESULTS 2015

WAG have been working very closely with our local police prosecutor and 1st Grade Magistrate in Salima. We have seen the benefits, and offenders have been seeing some changes in the sentencing. When someone is arrested, WAG scouts prepare statements which are used in court, evidence is brought to the police and in many cases we have to also appear in court. The work is still not over, we follow each case to the end and record the outcome. We also visit some offenders in jail, especially elephant poachers. We do this for two reasons, one to make sure they are still in jail and the second to try build a relationship with them which we hope will ensure they do not continue to hunt and kill Malawi's wildlife once released. We were invited to the USA ambassador's residence in Oct 2015, and the work that is being carried out in the Salima district was mentioned and the names of both the prosecutor and magistrate was acknowledged and appreciated for the efforts they are providing to conserve the forests and protecting the wildlife. This in itself is a great motivation for these people who are playing a major role and deterring wildlife and forest crime.

Below is a chart showing the outcome of each arrest made.

Photo: scouts removing a snare wire found in the forest.



	Released by Police	Unknown	Aquitted	0-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-20,000	20,000-30,000	30,000-40,000	40,000-50,000	50,000-60,000	60,000+	Custodial sentence 3months	Custodial sentence 6 months	Custodial sentence 1 year	Custodial sentence 18 months	Custodial sentence 3 Years
Trafficking in Specimen Protected species	6									5						
Snare poacher		1	1													1
Dog poacher								1	2		2					
Charcoal burner	3	3		11		16		3				2				
Tree cutting			2		1	1						1				
Plank cutter		2				2				6				1	2	1
Marajana						1										
Illegal firearm		1						1	1							
Gun poaching	1								1		2					
Bamboo cutters					1											
Enchroachment			y													
Fishing illegally																
Spoon makers																
Totals	10	7	3	11	2	20	0	5	4	11	4	3	0	1	3	1

Arrest each month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Trafficking in Specimen Protected species	2			10									12
Snare poacher		1				1			1				3
Dog poacher									1	1	6		8
Charcoal burner					13	12				3	4	6	38
Tree cutting				2	1	1							4
Plank cutter					5	1				4	6		16

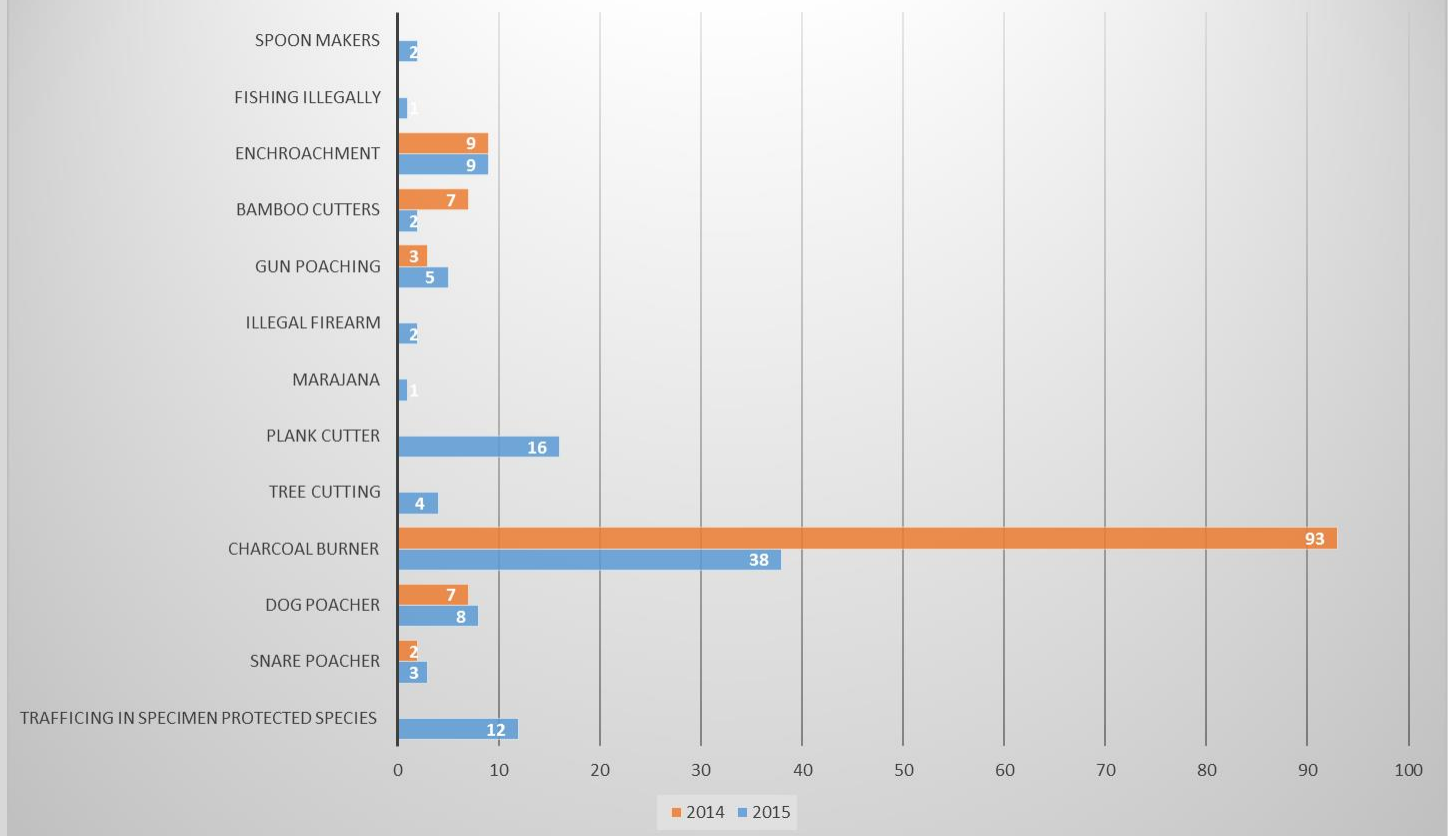
Marijuana				1									1
Illegal firearm				1						1			2
Gun poaching	1										4		5
Bamboo cutters										1	1		2
Encroachment									7			2	9
Fishing illegally											1		1
Spoon makers									2				2
Total	3	1	*0	14	19	15	**0	***0	11	10	22	8	102

*March no arrests made – illegal activity is historically low due to rains, high grasses making it difficult to hunt and people are tending their gardens

** July no arrests however we saw the beginning of the dog poaching season and several dogs were destroyed and we found one dead elephant

*** Aug – although no arrests were made twice we encountered 5 armed poachers hunting elephants. We managed to chase them from the reserve but were unable to catch them. We also had an incident where a local man who has mental health challenges robbed a camera trap. We recovered the camera trap but did not press charges. At the end of August we darted and removed a snare from a young elephant which had left a deep wound.

WAG Arrests by Illegal Activity 2014 and 2015



ELEPHANT POACHING

2015 saw an increase in the detection of ivory trafficking. Malawi's international airport has been making many arrests and seizures of both raw and worked ivory (ivory that has been carved).



Along the boundaries of Thuma Forest Reserve (TFR) precious gem stones have been found. Dealers from the city are coming to buy the stones. These gem stones are very attractive to foreigners in particular. The mining and buying of the stones are illegal in most cases and some of the buyers are looking for new ways to make money. They talk to people and they sometimes see elephants or the signs of elephants. This now brings the possibility of new business, Ivory!

2015 saw the loss of 4 of our elephants. In July a team found a dead elephant in a dam inside the reserve. We have no idea what happened to this animal. It looks like it had fallen into the dam and died, but as elephants are very good swimmers we suspect it was possibly shot and injured and died of its injuries. In November the water dried in the dam and we were able to remove the ivory which was handed over to Department of National Parks and Wildlife.



In August we sighted a baby elephant limping and quickly called for assistance. With the help from Derek Macpherson the baby was darted and the snare removed. The wound was cleaned and the baby reunited with his family. We have named him Little Thomas. He has been seen since and the wound has healed and he is walking perfectly. He was one of the lucky ones!

In September, we had a tragic loss of a baby elephant due to a snare wound. We believe it died from an infection as a result of the open wound inflicted by the snare.

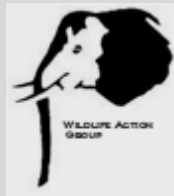
With the use of camera traps we are horrified to see many elephants wounded by snares. Some of the injuries we see are trunks amputated at different lengths sometimes completely cut off. Some have leg injuries.

Then in December an adult female elephant was shot by a poacher and her ivory was removed. She was a mother of a very young calf who was later found dead. Despite our best efforts we were unable to get enough evidence to make an arrest so no one was charged. The ivory has not been recovered to date. With our population so small, losses like this have a material detrimental effect on the growth of our elephant numbers. Our boundaries currently span over four districts (500kmSq) all with major roads close to both reserves. We have to work harder and smarter, increase the number of scouts by 17% (7 more) and continue to raise

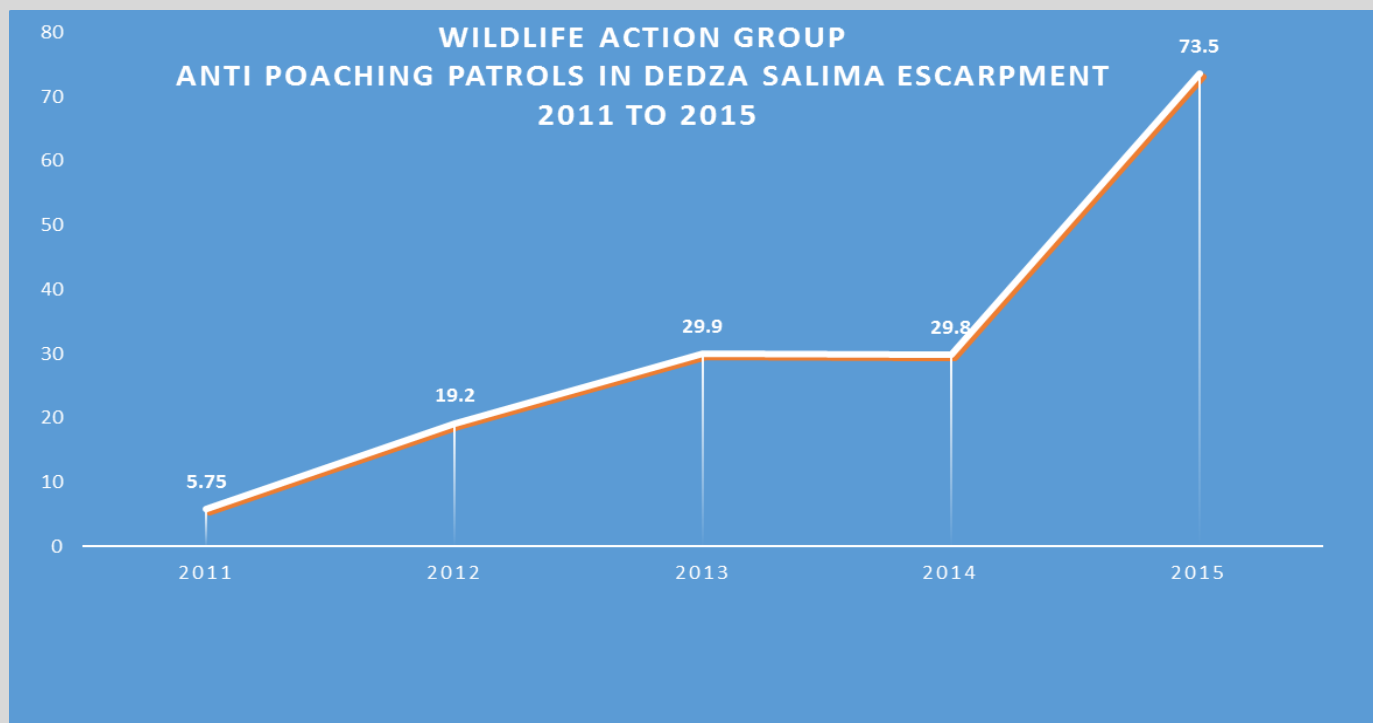
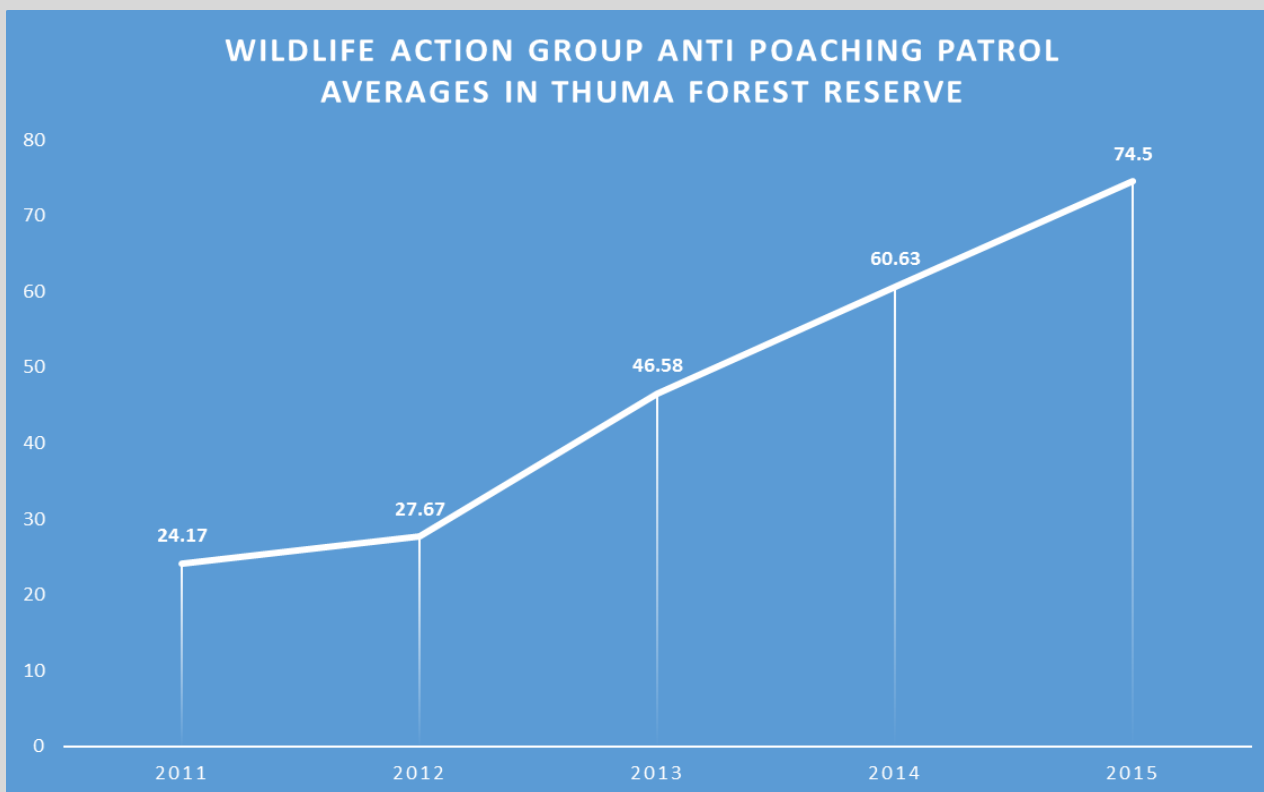


awareness and support from donors in order to protect some of the last remaining escarpment elephants in Africa. Our local stakeholders such as Department of National Parks and Wildlife, police, courts and local populations helps us to protect the forest and the wildlife. The possibility of

being arrested is increasing and more importantly once arrested the more severe sentencing is proving to be a big deterrent.



The graphs show the average number of patrols per month in Thuma Forest Reserve (TFR) and Dedza Salima Forest Reserve (DSFR) since 2011 we have quadrupled the number of patrols due to the increase in scouts and establishment of new camps.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Due to funding from US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) we were able to employ a full time member of staff to start working closely with our local communities. We started to pilot the project in the area closest to our base camp which has 3 schools and 6 GVH (Group Village Headmen) areas.

Schools – we have 2 primary schools and 1 secondary school – Kabvunguti Primary school, Namachete Primary school and Chilumba secondary school. Over 1400 children are being schooled here.

Wildlife clubs have been established, weekly environmental classes with teachers are ongoing and trees and vegetables were planted. Due to lack of rains and the holiday season, the planting has been disappointing. We had a sports day where football, netball and fun games were played. Gifts of exercise books and pens for every child in school were donated by the mother of Nathalie, who was a volunteer here.

In December we partnered up with Lilongwe Wildlife Centre and Stand up for Nature (a UK based project) to bring some environmental messages to the people of Malawi, especially those around TFR and DSFR. A pedal powered projector

(a bike) allowed videos to be shown, including our own video showing elephants mourning the death of one of their family. The films were very moving and many people including Group Village Headmen (GHV) and Traditional Authority (TA) were really surprised that an animal could act like this. This time also allowed for interaction and many questions and complaints were addressed.

This is a really nice way of reaching people and most areas really like looking at the images. We will continue to show films about different environmental issues in 2016.

Also in 2015 we invited several GVH's from areas around TFR and DSFR on a day trip to Kungoni Cultural Ctr. There was a religious mass and drama show with an environmental theme **"KEEP CUTTING THE TREES AND THIS IS THE END OF OUR FORESTS, THE RAINS WILL FAIL AND THERE WILL BE WATER SHORTAGES ON OUR PLANET"** to educate people about the state of deforestation in Malawi. The day was a great success as it



addressed a major challenge in Malawi (deforestation). It embraced religion and traditional culture with use of traditional dancing and the BIG DANCE and was a big encouragement for our local leaders. In Feb 2016 we were invited to several tree planting ceremonies surrounding both reserves and all GVH's said that the play they saw at Kungoni was one of the driving forces for them to encourage their communities to plant trees this year.

Natural Resource Committees have been set up in several areas where the response has been encouraging. The process of their formation started with Consultations with Group Village Headmen and chiefs followed by public meetings, sensitizing the communities. Elections were held to elect the committee members. Since then we have started meeting with each committee. Some interesting issues and subjects have been brought up (to date) as well and disappointments which we can all learn from. As this is a pilot project we hope to learn from this first stage and be able to extend it to other communities.

RESEARCH

Camera traps this year have brought more exciting discoveries.... Two new mammals not previously known to be here. Both are very interesting characters HONEY BADGER and SIDE STRIPED JACKAL. The honey badger has been seen all over TFR including behind the volunteer camp and along the main road a family of three. And in two other places a mating pair. The honey badger is said to be one of the most ferocious animals in the bush....we seem to have lots of them.



In November 2015 we conducted our second animal census. Using the same methods as previously used in 2013 we walked transects and counted every animal seen. This year due to limited water availability in both reserves most animals, especially elephants were



encountered around one place. But we are happy to say we counted an increase in elephant sightings.

We have conducted the third bamboo survey to ensure the harvesting of this natural resource is being done in a sustainable manner.

NEW CAR

In 2015 we received a donation of a brand new Toyota Land Cruiser. The donation came from a gentleman in Germany through our long term donor REA. The car arrived in Lilongwe late one evening when the rain was pouring. I went to see it arrive which was just as well as the driver was very lost so we guided it to the customs clearance holding center when I sat in it for the first time. Air con!!!! Large bull bar on the front..... that new smell. By



November she was given the full off road test as we made the fence and we are delighted to say she is strong and a really needed addition to our growing project. We wish to thank Mr. Felix from the bottom of our hearts for this more than generous gift. Zikomo

IVORY BURN

In March 2015 we became very excited to hear Malawi was going to destroy all its ivory stock piles on 4th April. There was a huge effort to make this day really memorable and much preparation was put in by all stakeholders and partners. Unfortunately it did not happen. Watching the ivory being piled up in preparation was very upsetting as I knew some of that ivory belonged to our Thuma and Dedza Salima elephants who had



been killed for greed and profit.



MALAWI GOVERNMENT TAKES WILDLIFE AND FOREST CRIME SERIOUSLY

2015 saw some giant steps with regard to wildlife and forest crime.

Up until last year both departments were under separate ministries. Both Departments now fall under the Ministry of Environment. With the coming of two new directors we are seeing some positive changes.

Our new Director of Forestry with backing of our Minister has tackled charcoal burning head on. The Malawi Defense Force has been called in and have been active in patrolling many forests including Dedza Salima and Thuma. The Forestry Act is dating back to 1997, so fines are very weak and do not reflect the value of the currency nor inflation rates or the seriousness of the crime. This is also being reviewed.

In Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DNPW) are updating and reviewing the National Parks and Wildlife Act. The review process is still in progress.

DNPW have launched a National Elephant Action Plan which addresses the state of Malawi's elephant population along with actions to ensure stronger protection and management.

An Inter-Agency Committee On Combating Wildlife Crime (IACCWC) has been formed which involves most government agencies. Police, Interpol, immigration, magistrates.

This was funded under a grant from the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund which is supported by the UK government (Defra) and The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). In partnership with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife they are implementing the project aims to 'Developing Law Enforcement Capability in Malawi to Combat Wildlife Crime'

Department of National Parks and Wildlife is also planning to form a wildlife crime investigation unit which is very welcome.



Wildlife crime is on the increase and it seems Malawi is being used as a major hub for trafficking. In our international Airport we are seeing more arrests of people with ivory which is both raw and worked or carved ivory.



Lilongwe Wildlife

Trust (LWT) launched a major advertising campaign nationwide which has been very successful. The airports have "STOP WILDLIFE CRIME" posters everywhere and training of airport officers has taken place so they know what to look for. This campaign has touched lots of people and is having a great impact on the status and future of Malawi's wildlife.

WAG have been an active and supporting partner in some of the campaign and will be working closely with LWT in the future.

20 YEARS OF WAG

2016 sees the 20th anniversary of Wildlife Action Group working in Malawi. The two founders George and Suzi are still active and involved from Germany.

More to come on this special occasion.

FENCE EXTENSION

WAG received funding to continue extending the fence in 2015. This donation was from African Elephant Fund through United National Environmental Program (UNEP).

The first phase of the build commenced in November 2015 and we managed to complete a total of 12kms which has been built along the north of TFR alongside the Lilongwe River.

Over 120 people helped us and three full time jobs have been





created.

The remaining fence will be constructed in 2016. This will be placed along the Dedza Salima Boundary.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

In 2015 we had a lot of volunteers coming from many countries to help us with our work. We also were delighted to see people returning some for the 5th and 6th time to be with us. Some of the activities they assisted with were helping plan and implement our second animal survey in November. They also helped with patrols, education and outreach, building and administration and fence building. Jim and Elke (both volunteers) did incredible work on research and created some books on the different trees in TFR and which trees are being eaten by elephants. Claudia an up and coming photographer from Switzerland blessed us and shared some of her stunning photos of our work.

I cannot mention everyone, but you know who you are we cannot thank you all enough for all

your help, time and efforts.

DONOR SUPPORT

In 2015 WAG was proud to be supported by REA, Abraham Foundation, Save the Elephant, Wildlife Conservation Network, US Fish and Wildlife Services, Ron Ulrich, Kindly French and many more very generous people. We also appreciate visits from Chris Thouless (Save the Elephant), Judith Friedlaender and her daughter Katherine (Abraham Foundation), Thomas Toepfer (REA). WAG not only received financial support which allows us to operate, pay salaries, fuel, rations, replace equipment but we also get fantastic advice and assistance from all of these incredibly kind people. USFWS and REA sponsored a two way radio communication system which allows



us to communicate with each camp, while in the car and while out on patrol. The introduction of this equipment has changed the way we work, reduced air time costs and enables us to plan and react in a much more professional way. I don't know how we managed without it. Our team are motivated and dedicated to continue to work hard due to the relationship and trust that we are shown. They are proud to be guardians of both reserves and the wildlife living here.

FINAL NOTE

The management of areas like this is multi-faceted. We work on so many levels each as important as the other. Remove one and the house of cards will fall around our feet.

Despite the forest being under serious threat due mainly to charcoal burning, the wildlife populations living here are slowly beginning to



increase. Protection of the forest is critical. The work we are doing here is becoming more important and the way we do that is also vital. Having professional dedicated scouts who are well trained and motivated is one of the keys to success. But our local population and government backing is also just as important. Many of our neighbors living close to the forest are reaping the benefits of the fence and are now able to live side by side with iconic species such as elephants and are able to harvest their crops safely. The education and sensitization will prepare younger generations to appreciate these wild spaces. And local T/A's, GVH's, Chiefs and people play a major role in this process. Our relationship with our neighbors is strong, however as drought and hunger affect the economic climate, people are desperate and we fall back into a state of almost total reliance on natural resources! Human population also plays a critical role. As the population increases so does the need for land to grow food and in turn encroachment in the forest escalates.

Thuma Forest Reserve and Dedza Salima Forest reserves are home to some of the last remaining escapement elephants in Africa. This small but important population has at last been recognized by Government as an important population and therefore has been included in the National Elephant Action Plan. In Malawi's protected areas the elephant numbers are reducing except for 3 protected areas where it has been noted that the population are increasing. Thuma and Dedza Salima Forest Reserves have been identified as being one of them which can be put down to the hard work and dedication of our scouts and the support of our donors without whom we could not be here. With this in mind our determination and dedication to work harder is reasserted. I am so proud to work with some of the bravest scouts in the world. Their spirit and fire inside each of them to do this work is incredible. Day in, day out, they sweat, walking in challenging terrain in extreme conditions, putting their lives on the line to protect their heritage. One poacher called them THE LIONS OF THUMA. I agree 100% with this. We hope you will continue your support in 2016. We will work hard to protect these wild spaces and the wildlife.

Warmest regards
Lynn and THE LIONS!



Above – Scouts returning from long patrol from Thuma Mountain

A special thank you to photographers – Reto Guettinger, Claudia Schildknecht, Lynn Clifford





*LOOK OUT FOR OUR 20TH YEAR SPECIAL EDITION
NEWSLETTER SHOWING WAG OVER THE YEARS AND
NEW AND UPCOMING PROJECTS.*

WWW.WG-MALAWI.ORG