

The Guardians in Zones A and B have seen tracks of two mature lions and three sub-adults on many occasions recently. We are hopeful that we may have resident lions in the wilder areas to the north of the villages. Our hope is that these lions will stay around peacefully and continue to avoid killing livestock.

Three of the Guardians have had big community gatherings at their homes this month, where all the young people in the area and the many of the elders assembled for story-telling and cultural “games” that include the famous jumping dances. The reason behind these is in an effort to build even closer relations among the Guardians and the communities in which they work. The hope is that, as a result of the close bonds that develop at these at these gatherings, the Guardians will start to hear about any lion hunts and lion activity in their areas much earlier and with greater reliability. The idea has seems to have been successful at this early stage, both the community members and Guardians have responded positively, enjoyed themselves and made new allies.

Visitors to RCP

RCP is lucky enough to receive support from various organisations, such as National Geographic and the safari company Asilia Africa. This month, Erik from Asilia’s marketing department visited RCP to learn more about the project, and generously offered to help us develop marketing materials. In addition, Allison Parrish from Global Adrenaline (a company which works with National Geographic) visited RCP and learned all about our work, so they can better explain to visitors the kind of conservation activities being undertaken in the Ruaha landscape.



Erik and Amanda learning about the guarding dog programme and other RCP activities

Architecture with natural materials – our camp

We have recently been making some small renovations to our camp, where everyone is housed in tents sheltered by “bandas”, which are made of grass, wood, bamboo and bricks. The beautiful grass roofs, which effectively protect us from sun and rain, are entirely made from natural materials which grow locally and are bought from local communities. Building with local natural materials is relatively cheap, supports local people and is environmentally friendly, but it has the disadvantage of requiring regular upkeep, particularly once termites discover the new construction! Once the termites

have conquered a banda it would just be a matter of time before the structure collapses, so regular maintenance is required to prevent this. As we have nine bandas at camp, including staff tents, a kitchen area, a dining area and an office – all of which are all built from wood and grass – this is an ongoing process for the team during the dry season.



The newest of our bandas, constructed with bricks made locally from soil, water and the heat of the sun



A typical grass roof construction



New grass bundles for roofing



A part of this roof was destroyed because termites found their way into it

New Nexus devices facilitate data collection on carnivores

In collaboration with drivers and guides in Ruaha National Park we regularly collect as much information as possible on large carnivore sightings. With around 9000 sightings collected so far, data entry is extremely time consuming if we rely on paper forms, especially as we have a very small team of people at camp. Therefore, we are increasingly trying to equip our collaborators in the Park with digital devices which allow rapid data recording, automatic GPS logging and easy data download. Support from North Carolina Zoo, St Louis Zoo and Cleveland Metroparks Zoo has enabled us to acquire new tablet devices and cases, and this month Corinne Kendall from North Carolina Zoo brought 15 new Nexus tablets to Ruaha. In association with this collaboration Michael Kimaro – currently responsible for our sightings programme – joined a training course held by Corinne and her colleagues, which highlighted the need to collect sightings data on other threatened species such as vultures. Michael is now distributing a vulture identification guide and data sheets to RCP staff and collaborators so that we can help collect this information and provide data for future conservation strategies for vultures and other species.



Michael with our 15 new Nexus tablets, and testing the new devices with Msago

The sightings programme – where Park drivers are equipped with cameras and GPS units from RCP and asked to record all large carnivore sightings – produces some amazing images. The absolute highlight of this month's sightings was taken by Ayubu from Mdonya Old River Camp: Ayubu and his guests were lucky enough to observe a leopard hunting an impala, resulting in the incredible close-up photograph shown on the next page.



Meanwhile, Josephat Mdegela from Jongomero Camp took some lovely shots of a lioness spending quality time with her three cubs, as shown below.



The sightings programme also sometimes provides insights into prey species as well – here, a photograph of two impala reveals an unusually pale colour morph, where the impala on the right is lacking the species’ usual black markings, such as stripes down the rump and on the lower legs.



Camera-traps provide another important method of providing data on the distribution and ecology of both large carnivores and their prey. They are particularly useful in areas where there is less tourism activity, and for recording the presence and activity of elusive or nocturnal species. RCP has been conducting extensive camera-trapping in collaboration with Jeremy Cusack, an Oxford PhD student, and Trevor Jones from the Southern Tanzania Elephant Project, and this work always produces wonderful images, some of which are shown below.



A lioness resting close to the camera trap



A leopard roaming in the bush



A serval pausing in front of the camera



A spotted hyaena using a game trail in the early morning



Baboons are commonly recorded on our camera traps and due to their curiosity can usually be seen close up – cheese!



Camera-trapping can produce some lovely, evocative images of the Ruaha landscape, such as this elephant silhouetted against the sunrise