



RCP UPDATE – APRIL 2015

Newly constructed LSDG breeding station at RCP field camp

After a successful initial phase of placing livestock guarding dogs, the next big step in this programme is to breed guard dogs at the Ruaha Carnivore Project field camp in Kitisi is. One major goal is to cross-breed Anatolians with village dogs and test the efficiency of those crosses – research in Botswana suggests that cross-breeds can be at least as effective as specialized breeds. Therefore, much of this month was dedicated to constructing adequate permanent facilities to accommodate the future generations of our conservation dogs. The large enclosure is designed like our predator-proof livestock enclosures to ensure the dogs are safe, and the double diamond-mesh fence is enclosed in concrete to avoid dogs digging under. The shelter is a spacious two room brick building perfect for the dogs to retreat when there is heavy rainfall or during chilly nights. The current resident, our intact female Anatolian Shepherd Busara, especially enjoys resting under the shade of the bushes or in the shade of the hut. If needed, we can place a wire fence down the centre of the enclosure to enable two separate groups of dogs to be contained at once. We are looking forward to the first litter, but this will take some time, because Busara is still a puppy herself. For the upcoming challenges of breeding puppies we are particularly happy about the good collaboration we have with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) in Namibia. CCF has partnered with us on the dog programme since the start – providing all the initial dogs - and are an invaluable source of experience and advice.



Busara enjoying her spacious new enclosure



The team laid a water pipe close to the new enclosure to provide an easy water supply

Amy in the US visiting project partners

Following on from her talk at the New York event for Tusk, Amy continued travelling around the East Coast and mid-West of the USA to meet some of our long-term project supporters. She met with colleagues at National Geographic and was also lucky enough to visit Hyde Addison Elementary School, which is one of our very enthusiastic sister schools through the Big Cats Initiative.

She also met with colleagues from the African Wildlife Foundation, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and the Leiden Foundation, Michigan State University, Columbus Zoo and Cincinnati Zoo's Angel Fund. It was a whistle-stop tour and it would have been good to travel more widely and see other partners, but Amy was accompanied by her seven-month old daughter Millie as well as her mother, so logistical constraints meant that this trip had to be relatively short!



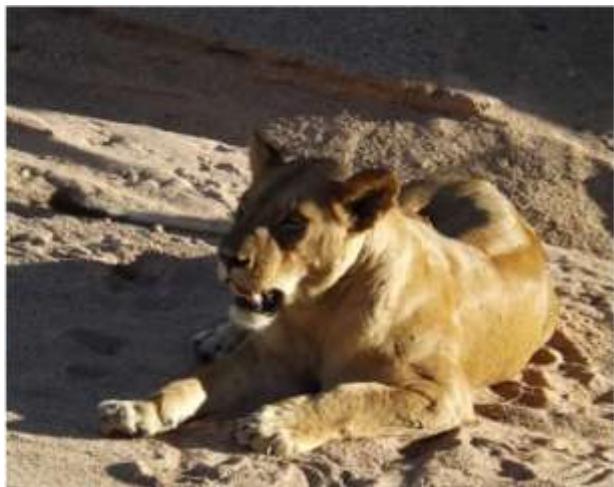
Amy and Millie admiring the lions at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo

Collaborating with TANAPA (Tanzanian National Parks) on educational Park trips

Our educational park trip programme was slowed down for a few months due to new permit arrangements, but it is now up to full speed again. We are particularly happy about the good collaboration between TANAPA and RCP regarding these trips - on each one a Ruaha National Park official gives a talk about the importance of protected areas for wildlife and people, which usually generates interesting discussions and enthusiasm amongst the visitors. This has been a really popular part of the programme so we are keen to continue and expand it to even more villagers and schoolchildren over the coming year.



Students, RCP and Ruaha National Park staff at the Park headquarters



Most Park trips involve sightings of lions, which are always hugely popular – especially when they involve cubs!

There is always great excitement amongst the people we take to the park when they encounter lions and other species like elephants. As the vast majority of these people have never been into the Park before, and usually only see these species when they are causing problems, this is an extremely important way of changing attitudes and improving local views towards conservation and the Park.

Unexpected community benefits - the RCP 'ambulance service'

Alongside the more planned community benefits we provide – such as schoolbooks, access to veterinary medicines and medicines for the clinic – we often end up being called to help transport sick and injured people to the nearby clinics. The vast majority of people don't have any access to vehicles, so although our cars have many problems, having them available can make the difference between life and death for people in our study villages. We have been called out to deal with many different situations (and have even had a baby born in one of our LandRovers!), so the team are used to having to respond quickly and always help as much as we can.

This month we were called to assist in an emergency, when three children were attacked by a swarm of bees. We rushed them to the clinic, but it was just fractionally too late for one of the victims, a two year old child who died in the arms of the doctor just upon arrival to the clinic. The other two children luckily survived, thanks in part to the RCP team who got them to medical care so quickly. RCP is highly committed to working with the villagers, doctors and authorities to improve access to medical care in these remote villages – eventually we hope that the villages will have well-equipped clinics and access to dedicated ambulances.....and in the mean-time, we will continue to respond and help whenever we can.



Our field vehicles are well-used and not in the best condition – but they still offer a lifeline to villagers in need of urgent medical assistance

Carnivore scapegoats – the importance of determining the real reason for stock losses

This month, we were contacted by Wildlife Division with regard to a conflict situation – one of the local pastoralists had angrily informed them that one of his cattle had been badly injured by a lion and that he wanted the lion responsible to be killed. Mgogo, one of our research assistants, investigated the depredation as usual, and discovered that rather than a carnivore being responsible for the cow's injury, it was a human. After slaughtering the cow, a bullet hole was found in the animal, whereupon it emerged that the herder had lost some of the cows and then heard shooting. Apparently the lost cattle had strayed into crop fields, and the farmer had chased them away by shooting a gun. When the herder found the injured cow he was fearful of getting into trouble with the owner for letting the cattle stray, so he reported that it had been attacked by a lion.

Our research has shown that it is very common for people to blame carnivores for any losses, and it is important to investigate those reported losses to understand the real situation. In many cases, losses to carnivores are far outweighed by those to theft and disease, so we report back those findings in our community outreach, to try to slowly change perceptions and help people take the best actions to protect their stock from the real risks they face. Negative attitudes towards carnivores are very deep-seated, and a large part of our community work focuses upon working with villagers to better understand stock losses, help prevent them happening in the future, and combating some of the misconceptions about large carnivore impacts.

Lion Guardian zone expansion

The Lion Guardians are continuing to expand their areas of operations to the north of their current zones. The current expansion adds another 400 square kilometers to the Lion

Guardian programme, and we are working closely with villagers in those new areas to explain the programme and start work. Currently, the team is defining the new zones, drawing out spoor routes, starting to look for young influential men and doing interviews for potential new Guardians in the expanded zone.

One major task of the Lion Guardians is to stop lion hunts, and they have been doing a great job this past month. In one incident, six lions reportedly chased some cows who were returning to a boma in the evening, raising local fears of depredation. Upon hearing this, Guardians Alex and George went and met the young warriors in the area, and stopped 12 hunters by persuading them to help search for the cattle who were still missing instead of hunting the lions. There were two other similar incidents – in one, Guardians Pascal, Darem, Mandela and Stephano managed to stop a potential lion hunt after 3 lions were seen approaching cattle during the day, and later in the month, Darem, Mandela and Daudi stopped warriors from hunting 3 lions after a cow was eaten the night before. These are wonderful examples of conservationists in action, but the Guardians do more than persuade young men not to hunt – they find lost livestock in the bush and help improve bomas, thereby reducing attacks and the likelihood of young men deciding to hunt lions at all.



Zones mapped out for the Lion Guardians Ruaha work

Local carnivore deterrents

Scarecrows are commonly used to scare away birds from crop fields, but we have occasionally seen them placed just outside thornbush bomas to deter large carnivore attacks. These don't seem to be that effective, and in some cases we have heard of lions attacking the scarecrows themselves! This has led to some people building spears into the scarecrows, to try to spear any attacking lions, but this is a very bad idea as it is extremely unlikely to kill a lion, and would just result in a wounded and much more dangerous animal.

We talk with as many villagers as possible about the methods of livestock protection they use, to see if we can learn what is most effective, but there is no evidence we are aware of that scarecrows work well to reduce large carnivore attacks. We are encouraging people to invest in the wire bomas instead, as those have proved almost 99% effective at reducing carnivore attacks.



Msago investigating some of the local scarecrows that people are using to try to prevent attacks – but they are not nearly as effective as a fortified boma

Researching carnivore ecology

Despite the global significance of Ruaha's carnivores (the area is thought to hold around a tenth of all the lions left in the world, plus crucial populations of African wild dogs and cheetahs), they have been very understudied, and little is known about their distribution or ecology. RCP is working with Park lodges and drivers to collect photos and data from any carnivore sightings, and is also collaborating with Jeremy Cusack and Trevor Jones on camera-trapping. Many of the Park lodges are closed this month for maintenance during the low season, so there were fewer images than usual, but the camera-trapping continues apace, and will be expanded next month when a new PhD student, Leandro Abade, joins the project. Some of the most recent images from the camera-trapping and carnivore sightings programmes are shown below.



A vigilant-looking leopard on the prowl at night © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



Ruaha holds one of the most important cheetah populations in East Africa, with an estimated 200 adults. Taken by Dotto Miho, Ruaha River Lodge



Leopards are rarely seen together, but this is likely to be a mother and her cub © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



A male lion marking his territory by spraying a bush with urine. Taken by Teophil Muyinga, Jongomero Camp



Two spotted hyenas enjoying an early morning stroll© Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



Ostriches are relatively rarely seen on our camera-traps, but can be a prey item for large carnivores. This shows two young ostriches (recognizable because of their brown feathers) following an adult along a game trail© Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



Leopards are always incredibly photogenic animals – this relaxed individual was photographed by Josephat Mdegela of Ruaha River Lodge