



## **RCP UPDATE – MARCH 2015**

### **New programme directly links wildlife presence with community benefits**

Local people tend to be very appreciative of RCP's benefit programmes, such as the medicines provided to clinics and the Simba Scholarships, but the next challenge is to ensure that people directly link those benefits to wildlife presence. Receiving and recognizing these direct, household-level benefits can increase positive attitudes even towards dangerous animals like large carnivores and hence increase tolerance of their presence. With our new Community Camera Trap Programme, which was set up in partnership with the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), we are directly linking benefits with wildlife presence at a village level. It has been developed in close partnership with the villagers, who are trained in the use of camera-traps (cameras which are remotely triggered to take a photo when an animal passes) and have all the responsibility for placing and managing the camera-traps. Each of our selected villages places eight camera traps within their village boundaries, at what they think are the best spots for wildlife. Each month we then download the camera-trap images during a village meeting, and points are given to each individual animal detected. Large carnivore get higher points (as we are trying to demonstrate benefits from carnivores in particular), with African wild dogs receiving the highest points across all species. However, long-term conservation of predators requires healthy ecosystems with a full spectrum of species, so all mammals over 1kg receive points, in order to encourage the maintenance of wildlife in general.



*A wild dog investigating a camera-trap – this image will get a village 5000 points under the new programme!*

Therefore, the more wildlife a village manages to capture on their camera traps, the more points the village gets. Those points are translated into community benefits such as school books, medicine or veterinary medicine, with the village deciding which benefits they want to receive. Villages also compete against one another, with the top-scoring village at the end of the year receiving an additional benefit, such as an extra Scholarship for a student to attend secondary school. All villages still receive the normal benefits they would get from RCP, such as Kids 4 Cats books and scholarships but this is a way of getting additional benefits and demonstrating direct links between wildlife presence and those benefits.



*Schoolbooks are some of the most valued community benefits that RCP provides*

The villagers are all very excited about this – it has taken several months to discuss and set up, but everyone is keen to move it forwards, so we are excited that it is all underway!



*Amy showing examples of camera trap pictures during a meeting to discuss the community camera-trapping with the Kitisi village committee*

## **RCP Director speaks at prestigious New York event for Tusk's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

Amy left the field at the end of March and went straight to New York, where she was honoured to speak at the Tusk gala event in New York, celebrating Tusk's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This was an amazing event and raised vital funds for conservation, including some which were allocated specifically to the Ruaha Carnivore Project. It was wonderful to be part of this event, and RCP is very keen to continue and develop its relationship with Tusk, which is a partner with the project. Charlie Mayhew and Sarah Watson from Tusk had visited the project not long before the gala, so it was wonderful to show them all our work in the field, and then share that enthusiasm and generate funds for RCP in New York.



*RCP Director Amy Dickman with Tusk CEO Charlie Mayhew and Tusk Chairman Hon Stephen Watson at the Tusk 25<sup>th</sup> New York event (left), and guests watching a special address by HRH Prince William, the Royal Patron of Tusk (right)*

## **Second fire outbreak at Idodi Secondary School within two months**

Unbelievably, the girl's dormitory at Idodi Secondary School suffered another huge fire this month - many students lost everything in the fire, but luckily there were no fatalities. It is the third big fire the school has had in the girl's hostel (the first one, in 2009, led to 12 deaths), and the second in only two months. Having three fires led to lots of local fears and suspicions about witchcraft, but the first one was due to a student reading by candlelight and setting the bed alight, so was a tragic accident. The last two seem likely to be caused by shorts in the new electrical wiring – possibly because students are hacking into the cables to try to charge their mobile phones. Regardless of the cause, these fires are having devastating consequences – many students lose all their possessions, their families can't afford to replace them, and they are understandably scared about returning to the hostel in case there is another fire. RCP has been working closely with the school for years, as our Simba Scholars are based here, and it is also a Kids 4 Cats school, partnered with Exmouth Community College in the UK. We are doing all we can to help the school, and donated 42 new mattresses to help replace the ones destroyed in the recent fires. This assistance was highly welcomed by the school director and other officials, and we will continue to support all the students, families and the school as they work to repair the current damage and try to prevent any future incidents.



*Inside the burned dormitory – it was a very intense fire and it was extremely lucky that no-one was killed*



*The Idodi Secondary School headmaster, teachers, students and district officials receiving the donation of new mattresses from RCP*

## **RCP football shirts donated to villages**

One of the main things that brings people together in the local villages is football, with each village having its own team. However, the teams are very poorly equipped and have no proper clothing or footballs. RCP is very grateful to John Wilkes from BearCreek Trading, who was kind enough to donate enough shirts and footballs for 10 local teams. The shirts have been extremely popular, and will help raise local awareness of RCP, especially amongst the young men who are often the ones who are most involved in carnivore conflict and killings.

John Wilkes has been a long-standing supporter of RCP, and previously helped supply the project with noisemakers, which have proved very popular with herders for scaring predators away from grazing stock. We are thrilled that John has partnered with RCP again, and his efforts have certainly paid off, with many very happy young footballers in the villages!



*Msago and Amy handing over football shirts and balls to the village committee (left) and one of the noisemakers supplied by John Wilkes (right)*

## **Ruaha Carnivore Project team meeting at Kitisi**

RCP has grown substantially since its inception in 2009, when it comprised of Amy and two staff members – now the project employs over 40 people and supports hundreds of other people through those salaries. These people are the absolute core of all we do – for example, we have conflict monitors who visit over 500 pastoralist households every month to assess stock losses and investigate depredation incidents in order to help us learn how to best prevent future attacks. Our Lion Guardians patrol their zones daily to record large carnivore presence, stop lion hunts and work daily within the community to help find livestock and lost children, protect enclosures and deal with other community issues. Currently, 12 permanent members of staff live at RCP's base camp, which is the headquarters for a wide variety of activities such as guard dog monitoring, carnivore sightings data collection, boma building, educational park trips, DVD nights, camera trap

checking, investigating depredation and carnivore mortality incidents, community meetings and many other things. It is vital that everyone in the RCP team feels a very valued part of the project, and understands how their role fits in with everyone else's. Therefore, this month we all came together to a meeting at the Kitisi HQ to share ideas, get updates and strengthen team spirit. It was a great day, and everyone left even more enthused to continue and expand their carnivore conservation efforts.



*Some of the ever-expanding RCP team!*

### **Lion Guardians working tirelessly to protect lions and the community**

March has been a challenging month for the Ruaha Lion Guardians. At this time of year, the rains mean that the wildlife is not centred around the Ruaha River (and therefore often in the Park), but instead disperses, with animals tending to come onto the village land. We experience a marked increase in carnivore activity on the village land during this time of year and there is always a spike of conflict in the early rainy season. This led to several attempted lion hunts in the past few weeks, but the Lion Guardians have been very successful at working with their fellow community members, so none of the hunts proceeded and no lions were killed.

In addition to stopping hunts, the Lion Guardians have found five lost children in the bush and returned them home safely. Two of these children were very far from home, so the Guardian concerned (Samora) brought them to his house and gave them lunch, and then persuaded the local bus to take them home for free. The Guardians are extremely committed to their community work – this month Joseph helped carry a very sick four year old boy to hospital, and also carried a small cow with a broken leg back to its owners!

The Lion Guardians take a break from community work when they go on Park trips, which are extremely popular with the whole team. During this month's park trip, the Guardians had a great encounter with a small group of lions who decided to rest in the shade of the car, giving everyone the opportunity to really watch them and have a very memorable experience. Prior to these visits, the only time the Guardians would have seen lions is either when they were killing stock or being hunted, so it is wonderful for everyone to see a different, non-aggressive side to these amazing cats.



*A lion and lioness approach the car and inspect the Lion Guardian team before deciding it is a great place to take a break from the sun!*

### **Challenges of bush life – a very close encounter!**

Living in a remote bush camp means that encounters with wildlife are common. Our staff are very experienced and are usually relaxed around wildlife, but this month's experience was enough to shake anyone. Msago, our community liaison officer and the longest-standing staff member, was driving to Iringa when suddenly a snake appeared from the engine and wound itself around his feet! Msago was towing one of our other cars that needed to be fixed in town, so was unable to stop quickly without causing an accident. Msago is an extremely calm person, and luckily stayed in control and managed to manoeuvre the car to the side of the road before jumping out of the car. Both Msago and Justin (who was steering the car behind) searched the car, but couldn't find the snake. Nevertheless, Msago was brave enough to drive the car up to town, but the garage mechanics were extremely unwilling to work on the car after hearing the story!

From Msago's description we think it was a Speckled Green Snake, which is non venomous, but he wasn't sure – either way, it demonstrated Msago's strength of character to stay that calm with a snake tangled up in his feet while he was driving! Msago does have proven history in this area – two years ago he stayed calm enough to successfully defend a man who was being attacked by a lion, so we are all thankful that he was driving – or neither the car nor the snake might have survived the incident!



*A Speckled Green Snake. The picture was taken some months ago at Msago's tent, and could be the very individual that decided to take a road trip with him!*



*Snakes are common around camp – here is the newest resident in the roof of our dining area, which is as yet unidentified*

## Collecting data on carnivore ecology

Every month, we work closely with partners across the landscape to collect data on large carnivore presence and ecology. We use both camera-trapping and direct sightings to provide these data, and both techniques also generate a wealth of amazing images highlighting the value of the Ruaha landscape and its wildlife. A selection of the most recent images are shown below.



*A young male lion close-up – the faint leopard-like rosettes are likely to disappear with age © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*A lioness with her two cubs. She has a broken upper left canine - an easy mark for future identification. Taken by Gadmél Kimaro, Jongomero Camp*



*Some lean looking lionesses roaming walking along a path during the night © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*A leopard picking its way through the high grass that is typical of the rainy season © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*Banded mongoose are highly social small carnivores, with group size reaching up to 40 members © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*Spotted hyenas are one of the most social carnivores, living in clans which can number 90 individuals © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*A great photo of a leopard caching its heavy prey – a male impala – high up in a baobab tree. By Leverd Enock, Kwihala Camp*



*Camera-traps also provide invaluable data on prey species, such as warthog, which are preferred prey species for many of the carnivores we study – although they have sharp tusks and sometimes manage to defend themselves against attack © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*The camera-trapping also allows us to collect data on small and medium-sized carnivores, such as this honey badger © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*A great shot of a very well-rounded cheetah, taken by Maulid Rasi, Mdonga Old River Camp*



*African wild dogs are the most endangered of the carnivores we study, and seeing them is always an incredible thrill. Taken by Leverd Enock, Kwihala Camp*



*African wild dogs have great markings, which we will use for individual identification, to learn more about individual movements and ecology. Taken by Ayoub Nyang'ango, Mdonya Old River Camp*