



## RCP UPDATE: JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2015

### New livestock guarding dog puppies settling in well

All our Anatolian Shepherd puppies, which were imported from the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) in Namibia are doing well and have settled in into their new Maasai and Barabaig homes in the bush. They are all bonding very well with their livestock, and we hope that they will grow into effective guardians. One challenge we are facing though is the rather poor appetite many of the dogs have – they seem rather picky, which is challenging as we have to make sure they get sufficient calories, protein and nutrients for their growth. We are currently trying different combinations of local food and high-protein puppy pellets to find the most nutritious, palatable and locally affordable diet.



*One of the newest puppies, Duma (which means 'cheetah' in Swahili) spending time bonding with her herd of goats*

Every week the dogs are weighed as part of our health monitoring – this is very important as it allows us to be able to detect any problems as soon as they occur. In general, most of the puppies have a weight gain of approximately 1kg per week – so they are certainly eating relatively well despite their pickiness! However, the puppies are not yet entirely used to the weighing procedure, compared to our first set of livestock guarding dogs who were placed last year, and who now voluntarily enter the weighing box.



Duma jumping out of the box before RCP's Research Assistant, Mgogo, can read the scale (left). By comparison, Shujaa, one of the dogs placed in 2013 who was formerly troublesome with weighing is now very easy to handle (right), which is good as he is now a very large dog!



All our dogs undergo regular health checking, including getting their vaccinations from vet Dr. Harrison. Thanks to their weekly handling training, all the dogs are cooperative when undergoing these procedures.

## New boma material arrived at camp

Human-carnivore conflict is widespread in villages around Ruaha, and the main reason is carnivore attacks on stock, which usually take place in poorly-constructed livestock enclosures (called bomas). People cannot usually afford to construct their bomas from high quality materials, so RCP is working with partners such as National Geographic's Build A Boma campaign (<http://buildaboma.org/>) to predator-proof these enclosures with sturdy wire, virtually eliminating boma attacks.

These have proved extremely popular and there is high local demand – we have a long list of people waiting for a predator-proofed boma. It can be hard to get the materials needed from Dar to our remote field camp, so this month we were thrilled to get over 100 rolls of wire to camp, which should enable us to predator-proof around 50 new bomas, which will protect around 4000 livestock worth over half a million US dollars. This means a lot of work for our RCP boma team (led by Justin, below), but it will be worth it as is one of the most successful ways of reducing attacks, conflict and retaliatory killing of carnivores.



*RCP's Senior Research Assistant, Justin, with some of the new rolls of wire and the metal poles needed to predator-proof local livestock enclosures*

## Capacity building

Local capacity building is a top priority for the project, and over the past year we have been able to offer 6 internship positions for undergraduate and graduate Tanzanian students who were seeking to gain experience in conservation based fieldwork and research. All of them worked with us with great enthusiasm and motivation and we appreciate their time with us and are grateful for their help. These internships enable students to gain invaluable real-world experience in conservation, while the project benefits through the skills, hard work and knowledge the interns bring to the team. Two recently interns particularly stood out for us - Hendry and Geofrey. Both bring valuable experience from previous field positions and practicals, are happy with bush camp life, are very responsible and motivated, and have easy-going characters that fit in well with the RCP team. Therefore, as the project is expanding we were happy to welcome them into our team as permanent staff members.



*Hendry and Geofrey – two of RCP's newest research assistants*

Hendry is a graduate from the University of Dar es Salaam and a former Selous Game Reserve ranger. He used to patrol for days in the bush tracking down poachers, and is now happy to use his experience and passion in RCP's community based conservation work. Geofrey has a Bachelor degree in Wildlife Management and also received practical training in Selous. He is very knowledgeable about wildlife conservation and has great 4 wheel driving skills. He is extremely happy with his first job here with us, and we are thrilled to welcome both Hendry and Geofrey to the team.

#### **Students lose everything in fire**

A terrible incident occurred in February at Idodi Secondary school, which is where our Simba Scholars are studying. Fire broke out in one of the girls hostels, in a terrifying echo of the tragedy which occurred at the school in August 2009, when 12 girls died when their dormitory caught fire. Luckily, this time all children were already in class so no one was injured, but half the hostel block burnt down and many students lost all their possessions. This is a major issue in such a poor community, where 90% of people in the local area live on less than US\$2 a day. Buying the books, clothes and mattresses needed for their children to attend secondary school is a huge cost for local families, so losing them in this way is devastating. RCP was informed immediately by the school authorities and we rushed with all the buckets we could grab at camp to help extinguish the fire. The fire brigade arrived two hours later from Iringa town, and everyone worked together as quickly as possible to douse the flames and prevent even more students losing their books and clothes.



The cause of the fire was thought to be an electricity failure, as power lines reached Idodi just a couple of months ago and electrical installations were still ongoing in the buildings. Given the tragic history of fire at the school, many parents (including those of one of our Simba Scholars) were uncertain about having their children return to the school, but the school was closed for a while and the students are gradually returning. Msago, our community liaison officer, has worked closely with affected students and families, and we will continue working with the school and supporting everyone involved as much as we can.

### **Lion Guardian community work**

This has been a good couple of months for the Lion Guardians in Ruaha. They have been very busy as pastoralists have started to move back into Lion Guardian zones after a six month absence where livestock were moved to higher altitudes in search of good grazing.

Lion Guardians successfully fixed 20 bomas that were in poor condition but whose owners could not currently contribute the 25% needed for a wire boma, so the Lion Guardians reinforced them for free using traditional thornbush. Recently, some of the Lion Guardians heard that cattle belonging to a local widow were sleeping in the bush without any protection from a boma, putting them at high risk of attack. The widow concerned has with several small children, the oldest of which is about 12 years old, and is unable to cut the large trees required for a secure enclosure, although she did construct a basic goat boma without any outside assistance. The five Lion Guardians in her local area decided to build her a cattle bomas from scratch and also to improve her goat boma with strong wood and thornbushes. This intervention was highly appreciated by the widow and her family, as it will

reduce the chances of them losing their livestock, which are vital household assets, and it will also reduce the chances of lions and other predators being killed in retaliation.



*The Lion Guardians putting in some serious effort to construct sturdy livestock enclosures for the widow, and then feeling happy after a job well done!*

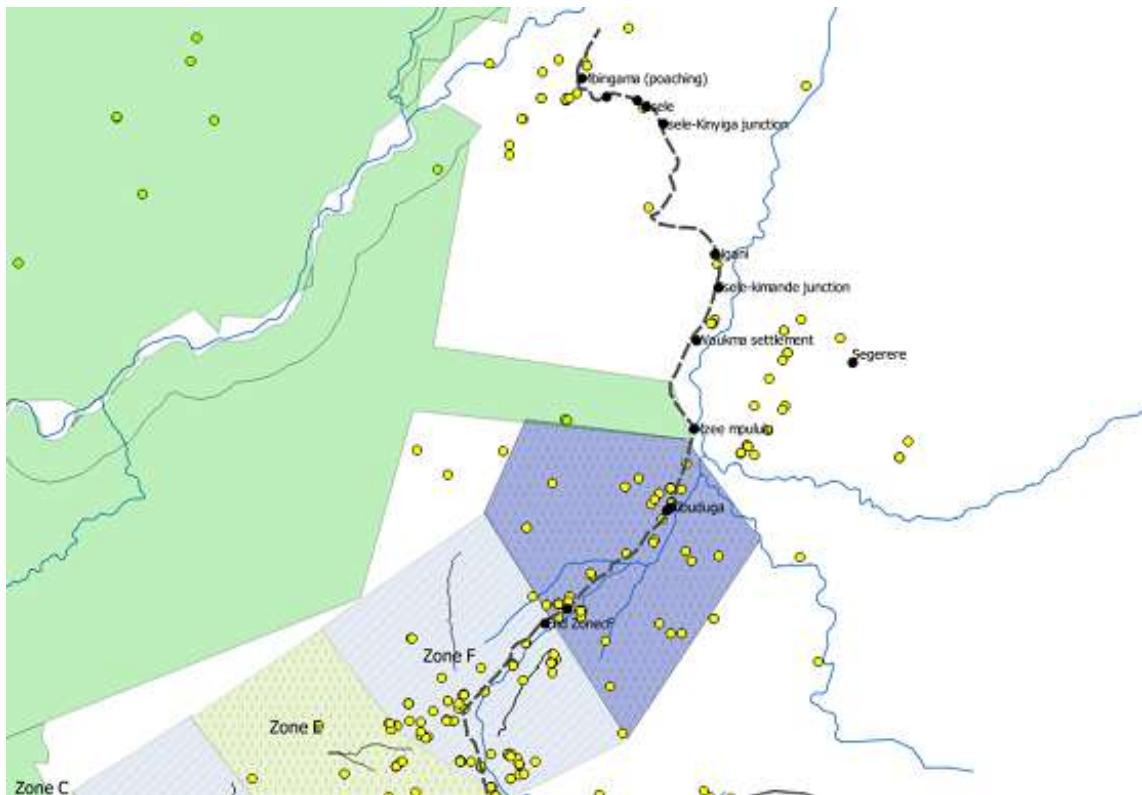
In another incident, the Lion Guardian Community Liaison, Stephano, and one of the Guardians, Pascal, heard that a local man was moving his cattle through the area and was not going to be able to reach his homestead. The man's cattle would have been forced to sleep in the bush without protection from carnivores, raising the risk of carnivore attack and retaliatory carnivore killings. Therefore, Stephano and Pascal went out, found the man and helped to construct a temporary boma for his cattle even though it was late. They worked late into the evening to finish the boma and once finished the cattle were all safely secured for the night. After the work, Pascal went home, got food, and then returned and made everyone dinner. This kind of community work shows that the team is truly concerned about local villagers and helping to protect them against carnivore attack, so it is a vital way of building trust and support within the community.

The Lion Guardians also had two great Park trips, where they were lucky enough to see lions up close on both occasions. Seeing lions regularly, as well as seeing the international visitors who come to see these animals, reminds the Lion Guardians of the importance of their work and why lions must not be allowed to disappear from Tanzania.



*Sean McEnery and the Lion Guardian team heading off for a trip into Ruaha National Park*

The end of February will mark the completion of the first phase of our planned expansion. We will be adding a new 120km squared zone to our northern limit (shown below in blue). We then plan to employ two new Lion Guardians to patrol this area and deal with the large amounts of human carnivore conflict in this area.



*Map showing the current Lion Guardian zones on village land around Ruaha, and the planned expansion area in dark blue*

## Camera-trapping and carnivore sightings

Collecting reliable scientific data about Ruaha's carnivores is a key aim of the project, and we use two main approaches at present – camera-trapping and direct sightings. With our camera-trapping, we collaborate with Jemery Cusack, a PhD student, and Trevor Jones from the Southern Tanzania Elephant Project (STEP) so that we can all collect vitally-needed data about mammal distribution and ecology across this crucial but understudied landscape. For the direct sightings, we collaborate with Park lodges and drivers, and equip them with cameras and data collection devices so that we can record all carnivore sightings. Both these methods provide data for conservation planning, as well as amazing images of the wildlife we are all working hard to conserve. A selection of the most recent images is shown below – we hope you enjoy them, and we will share more in the next update!



A leopard walking directly towards the camera © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



A typically inquisitive-looking spotted hyaena captured at dawn © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



*This beautiful young leopard walked by a camera-trap in the early morning, revealing a small wound on his left side* © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



*A lioness and her two cubs take a night-time stroll past a camera-trap, which was knocked and skewed by an elephant* © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



*A leopard bites at an itchy leg – numerous stinging and blood sucking insects come to life with the rain © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*A lioness and buffalo keep a wary eye on each other – buffaloes are a favoured prey animal for lions in Ruaha, but they are not an easy one; buffaloes are very defensive and support each other against lion attacks. Taken by Maulid Rasi, Mdonya Old River Camp*



*The risks of buffalo hunts are outweighed by the potential reward, which is plenty of meat for the entire pride. Taken by Majuto Magellah, Ruaha River Lodge*



*Just after the first rains of the season come, Ruaha becomes carpeted with lush new grass, providing a lovely backdrop to this sighting of two cheetahs, taken by Ayubu Nyang'ango of Mdonya Old River Camp*



*This is the start of the season of plenty, with lots of young prey animals around, but there is still tension about who gets the lion's share of any kill! Taken by Vincent Kavaya, Mwagusi Safari Camp*



*A leopard making the most of a crevice that elephants dug out of this huge baobab tree.  
Taken by Ayubu Nyang'ango of Mdonya Old River Camp*



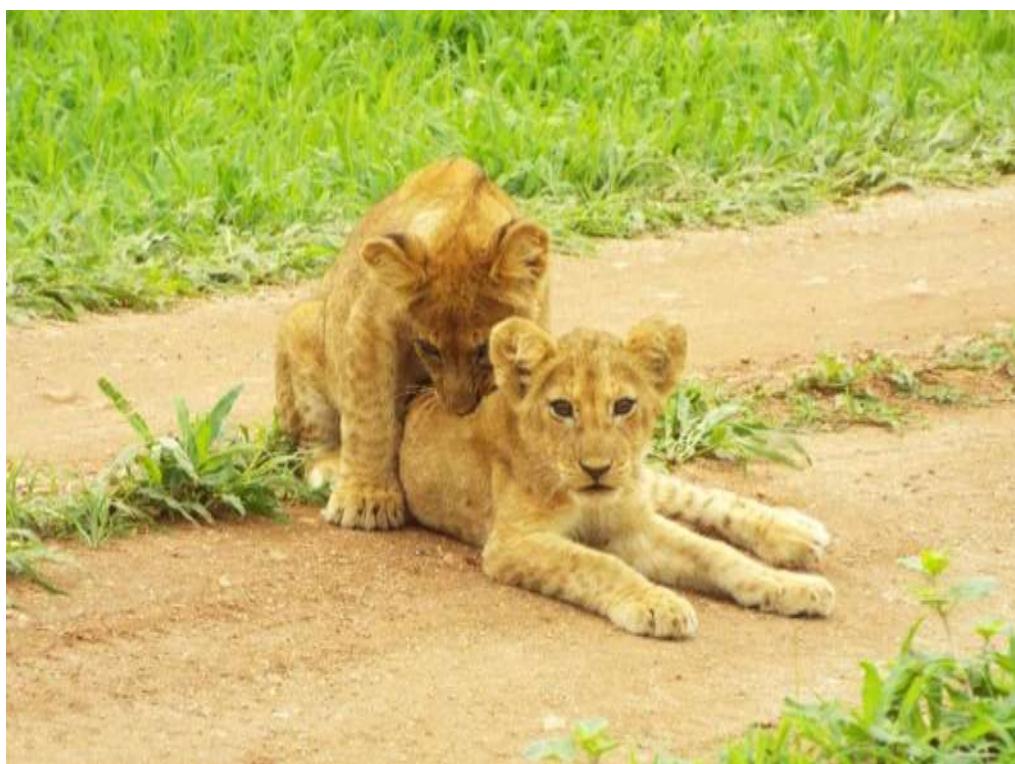
*A lioness rests on a rock, undisturbed by Majuto Magellah from Ruaha River Lodge and his group of tourists*



*Not all the cats spotted are so restful, though – this leopard is demonstrating the amazing strength and agility typical of the species, by scaling a vast baobab tree. Taken by Ezekiel Mbaraga of Mwagusi Safari Camp*



*A lion couple 'honeymooning' in an idyllic meadow of fresh grass and wild flowers.....  
(taken by Whiteman John of Ruaha River Lodge)*



*.....which will hopefully lead to more very cute cubs, like these seen playing in one of the Park roads! Taken by Maulid Rasi of Mdonya Old Riveer Camp*



*We are also interested in sightings of smaller carnivores, such as servals – taken by Ayubu Nyang'ango of Mdonya Old River Camp*



*This cheetah successfully hunted an impala, and now needs to keep a close eye out for other predators such as lions or hyaenas which could steal the kill. Taken by Vincent Kavaya, Mwagusi Safari Camp*