



RCP UPDATE – JULY 2015

Injured African wild dog cared for at camp

African wild dogs are one of the most endangered carnivores in Africa, and the Ruaha landscape is one of the most important places left in the world for them. A few days ago, we received a phone call from the National Park saying that an injured wild dog had been found near the park boundary. The park authorities were uncertain what had caused the injuries (which seemed mainly to the jaw) but suspected that it might have been hit by a car. Due to the lack of appropriate enclosure facilities within the Park we were happy to volunteer to take the wild dog to our camp.



After being found, the wild dog was brought to the Park gate where we picked him up to take him to our camp for recovery

The dog was very weak, and initially refused any water or meat, but he keeps recovering slowly and has now started to eat and drink. The Park vet come for daily checks, but due to the condition of the dog it was recommended that he should be transported to Dar es Salaam or Mbeya where he could receive surgery if needed. We are unsure of his future, but the Park authorities are making a plan and we all have fingers crossed for his recovery!



Community Liaison Officer Msago and Senior Research Assistant Mgogo putting the injured wild dog in the enclosure at camp

Community Camera Traps capture large carnivores on village land

With our new community camera-trapping programme (sponsored by the African Wildlife Foundation) we want to link direct benefits to the community based on presence of wildlife on their village land. Pictures of wildlife translate into points, which in turn translate into educational materials for the schools, medical equipment for the clinics or veterinary medicines, depending on the priorities of the village concerned. This means that the more wildlife a village supports, the more points – and therefore benefits – they receive. This is a novel initiative aimed at showing direct community benefits from tolerating wildlife on village land, and should hopefully incentivize community conservation. Points are determined together with the villagers during DVD nights, where all the camera-trap images of wildlife are displayed. These have been extremely popular, with people very excited to see photos such as those of leopards, or of baboons carrying offspring.

Villagers compete against one another to see who can gain most points, and at the moment Kitisi village is in the lead. Kitisi seems to have a particular abundance of large carnivores, including the leopard and spotted hyaena captured below – which is fitting as this village is the home of the RCP field camp!



Some of the large carnivores camera-trapped by Kitisi – both the leopard (left) and the spotted hyaena (right) generated 3000 points for the village

Idodi village is currently ranked second to Kitisi, and the camera-traps have been very well-placed by their Community Camera Trap Officers. Their camera-traps captured images of a lioness, a caracal (an elusive smaller cat) and an aardwolf. This area seems to have a relatively high number of medium and small carnivores – this will be of interest to Oxford University PhD student Leandro Abade, who is currently working with RCP to examine whether smaller carnivores occur more frequently in areas with decreased presence of large carnivores.



A lioness camera-trapped in Idodi village – we hope that this programme will mean people start to associate benefits with the presence of carnivores and other wildlife, rather than just costs



Smaller carnivores such as the caracal and aardwolf generate 2000 points for the village. People sometimes mistake the aardwolf for a hyaena, and few are aware of the caracal, so the DVD nights where the photos are shown are very good for education about wildlife

The points system also rewards villagers for the presence of prey species – this lovely sable male was captured in Makifu village, while villagers in Mapogoro got a great shot of a large male eland.



The sable (left) is a beautiful antelope which is rarely seen in the study area, while the eland (right) is the largest antelope in the area (second only in Africa to the giant eland)

Makifu village is known for leopards inhabiting the hilly terrain and sure enough, as soon as the camera-traps were placed, a leopard was caught on camera. Villagers receive 3000 points for each of these wonderful cats caught on camera.



The leopard camera-trapped in Makifu village

Retaliatory killing: Lion poisoning incidents

One of our main objectives in mitigating human-carnivore conflict is the reduction of retaliatory killing due to livestock depredation incidents. One of the most problematic areas in the Ruaha landscape is the Muwira area, which is a natural wildlife corridor being used by increasing numbers of pastoralists. This is a dangerous area for grazing due to the thick bush and relatively high wildlife density, and has long been the scene of intense human-carnivore conflict – this year alone, we heard of five lions poisoned around Muwira. It has traditionally been very hard for us to work in Muwira as people there are particularly secretive and unwilling to engage with outsiders, but recently, we have been expanding our programmes there to try to help reduce conflict. The most recent poisoning occurred after a cow and her calf was lost in the bush and killed by lions. Pastoralists have low tolerance when it comes to livestock loss, particularly of cattle, as they represent both economic and cultural wealth. Therefore the livestock owner decided to poison the cow and calf carcasses, which killed one of the lions feeding from it. Another lion fed from the poisoned carcasses, was weakened and was then speared by villagers.



Msago inspecting the calf carcass, which was poisoned

Lost livestock is a particularly easy target for lions, and most depredations in the bush are not due to lion attacks on the main herd, but on individuals which have become lost and separated from other livestock. Therefore, locating lost livestock is a priority for the team, and is one of the main roles of our Lion Guardians, as returning stock to their owners before nightfall significantly reduces the chances of them being attacked, and of people then killing carnivores in retaliation.

In response to this latest lion killing, we went to investigate and had a long meeting with the Muwira community, who initially refused to show us the lion carcasses. Eventually, our RCP and Lion Guardian community liaison officers managed to convince the crowd to lead us to the carcasses and tell us what had happened. We are now continuing and expanding our work with the Muwira community, trying to understand the circumstances around the frequent carnivore killings in that area, and how we can work with them both to reduce attacks and provide tangible benefits from carnivore presence. We hope that over time, this will help ease the conflict and reduce the poisoning and snaring of carnivores and other wildlife in this important area.



Lion Guardian Community Liaison Officer Stephano convincing the community to show us the lion carcasses and discuss their problems with wildlife

Snaring of cow leads to lion hunt

Snaring is a huge issue for wildlife around Ruaha – snares are put out both to catch herbivores for bushmeat, and also to kill carnivores to reduce the chances of attacks on livestock. However, snares can also injure and kill livestock, dogs and even people, so they have widespread negative effects. This month, a pregnant cow ended up in a wire snare, and although she

managed to break the snare, she had the wire around her leg and became separated from the herd. This made her an easy target for lions, and she was killed by a lion on village land.



The pregnant cow which was snared and then killed by a lion

There was a lot of antagonism towards lions at the time of the incident, as a young male lion had been trying to attack bomas (livestock enclosures) in the area and had been seen very close to human settlements, making people fearful that it would attack people. After the pregnant cow was killed, villagers decided to take action, and went on a hunt to spear the lion, which was widely viewed as a problem animal. We received information that the hunt had gone out, but when we reached the area it was already too late - the lion was dead and three people had been injured during the hunt. We helped to transport the injured people to the nearest clinic, and talked to people about the problems they were having with lions. Stopping this kind of conflict is not simple or quick – we need to help people protect their livestock, work to reduce snaring, and encourage people to try other means of conflict reduction before resorting to lion hunts.



The young male lion that was killed during the hunt as a suspected problem animal

Helping communities in Makifu and Muwira to deter lions from bomas

Makifu village rarely experiences problems with lions, but this month two lions came to the area, caused two depredations and did not seem to want to leave. The Maasai in the area have very little experience with lions and turned to us for help. We responded immediately and went to the area with our Lion Guardians to assess the situation and see what we could do.



Talking with local communities about what they can do to help reduce attacks – if lions cannot get an easy meal then they are less likely to repeatedly return to the households

The villagers were quite scared and were very keen that we should help to keep them safe. Fears about lions are not unfounded – many people get killed by lions in southern Tanzania each year, and we have several attacks a year in our study area. Therefore, our team decided to stay with the villager overnight, with the main protectors being our Lion Guardians who are very experienced with lions. The Lion Guardians were hosted by three households in the area, and were equipped with noise makers so that they could alert one another if the lions returned to one of the bomas. The Lion Guardians guarded the bomas throughout the night, making the villagers feel safer and enabling long discussions about lions and how people can keep themselves and their livestock safe even when lions are around. This was a great example of community engagement, and the villagers were very grateful to have the rapid response.



Msago and the Lion Guardians, who responded to help protect vulnerable households overnight

The next day the team went out to track the lions to try to chase them away. Only one brave Maasai elder went to accompany the Lion Guardians. Truly impressed by the Guardians' tracking skills, braveness and hardworking spirit, Mzee Katei offered one his daughters to be married to our Guardian Darem. This showed how respected our Guardians are within the communities.



The Lion Guardians recording tracks found close to the depredation incidents, and tracking lions through the bush to help scare them away from human settlements

Not long after this happened, we had another report of a lion coming close to bomas in the Muwira area. Keen to avoid further lion poisoning (which is very common in that area, as mentioned above), our team went to try to track the lion and to chase it away from the bomas. The bush in this area is very thick, and the team had a very tough time getting through it.

However, they followed lion tracks as far as they could, and it seems to have worked as reportedly the lion did not return to the area. This kind of rapid response is something we hope to continue and expand across more villages, as it is highly appreciated by the villagers, demonstrates that we listen to their concerns, and hopefully helps reduce attacks and retaliatory killings.



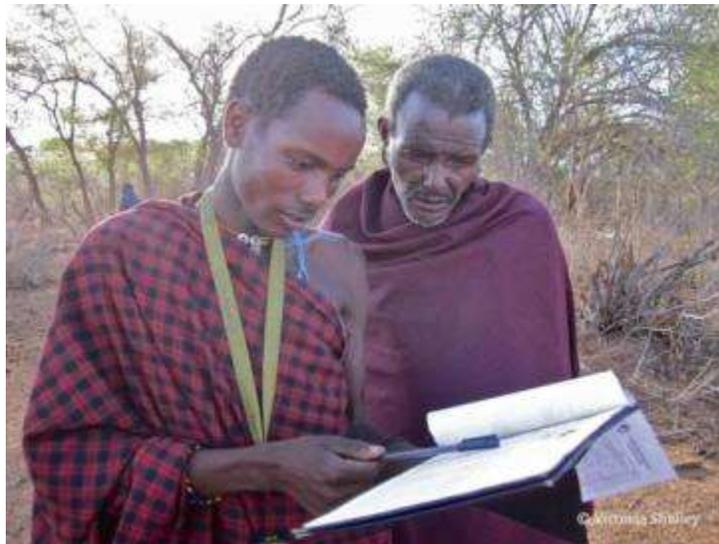
Msago (our Community Liaison Officer), Alex (one of our Guardians) and Stephano (our Lion Guardian Community Liaison Officer) looking out for lions in Muwira

Ruaha Lion Guardians certified

The Ruaha Lion Guardians initiative (which is a partnership between RCP, Lion Guardians and Panthera) has now been running for 3 years. It was extremely challenging to set up, and was the first time the Lion Guardians model had been tested either outside Kenya, or with a tribe other than the Maasai. The agreement was that after 3 years, the Lion Guardians team from Kenya would come down and assess how well it was running in Ruaha, to see whether it met the Lion Guardians operating standards. Leela and Stephanie came down from Kenya to conduct the assessment - Leela conducted interviews to assess the Guardians' knowledge of their tasks and responsibilities, while Stephanie tested them using various scenarios to evaluate their field skills. The Ruaha Lion Guardians were strong in many aspects of their work, particularly in literacy and accurately filling their forms. They also have a solid knowledge of their zones and surrounding environment, so everyone was thrilled when the certification was passed, demonstrating that the model can work well even in a different country and cultural setting. We all look forward to watching the Ruaha Lion Guardians continue to grow and become even more impactful.

First lions named by the Ruaha Lion Guardians!

As mentioned above, the Lion Guardians certification process involved taking Guardians through scenarios and gauging their knowledge of their tasks and responsibilities. Through the process, three of the Ruaha Guardians – Pascal, Daudi and Julius - really shone in both their abilities and knowledge but it was Daudi who stole the show with his tracking skills. One morning, as the assessment team arrived in Daudi's zone, he greeted them animatedly; pointing to the wet sand along the river's edge. He had found lion tracks showing that one male had come to drink water. They followed the tracks up the road and found tracks of two females and three cubs joining the male. Daudi noted confidently that the male lion had a limp based on his tracks. The group started following the tracks with Daudi guiding all along the way, until the tracks entered thick bush where it was not safe to advance any further. Everyone retreated slowly, but Daudi slipped quietly through the thick bush. As he approached the river, his field of view was limited but he saw the water gently rippling and heard clearly the slow heavy lapping of a lion drinking water. He knew his male lion was there, taking water before a long day sleeping in the dense shade.



Daudi is only a young warrior but has proved himself to be an excellent Guardian

Later that day, as dusk settled in, we decided to return to the area to see if we could get a visual of the lions. It seemed unlikely, as lions are very elusive on village land, and after several hours we were about to give up. However, to everyone's delight, a male lion suddenly came into view. He limped slowly towards us and even in the dark night, it was clear to all that he was nursing his back left leg. Daudi had been spot on! A few minutes later, two females and the three cubs also appeared in the beam of our light. All of us were overjoyed; this was the very first time that the Ruaha Lion Guardians had a clear visual of lions in their zones. As we watched them, the Guardians began to name the lions. This is always a special bonding experience for the Guardians and Daudi led the effort, naming the male lion himself. All of this would not have been possible without Daudi's dedication, effort and ability. In that moment, he shone as brightly as any star in the galaxy.

Simba Scholar Park trips

Park trips are a very popular method for raising awareness about the importance of wildlife and the role of Ruaha National Park. Most local people have never had the chance to go into the Park, and have only ever seen animals such as lions and elephants when they are causing problems on village land. These visits help to positively change villagers' attitudes towards potentially dangerous animals like large carnivores, by enabling them to learn about them in a non-threatening way, and show that there is a different side to their nature.

Recently, we took all of our Simba Scholars to the Park to experience wildlife in its natural habitat. Our Simba Scholarships help promising pastoralist children to complete secondary school, and our hope is that in future maybe some of them will be working with us or in other conservation agencies and therefore act as conservation ambassadors within their communities. Even if they do completely unrelated work, the Simba Scholarships demonstrate that the presence of RCP (and therefore the presence of carnivores) generates important community benefits which can help improve peoples' livelihoods in the long-term.



Simba Scholars filling our pre visit survey forms, which help us assess changes in attitudes, and seeing one of the planes land at the airstrip – this is always a highlight of each trip!

Visitors from Phoenix Zoo and the CCG Trust

Liaising with our supporters is an important aspect of our work and we are always keen to show current or potential partners the work that we do here in the field. This month we were very happy to welcome Struan McDougall from the Cambridge Capital Group - CCG Trust. His UK based charity 'Investors in Wildlife' is supporting different conservation projects in East Africa by linking donors to the projects. It was a pleasure to have Struan here and we hope to establish a collaboration between RCP and the CCG Trust in the near future!

Phoenix Zoo in Arizona is one of our longest-standing supporters, and has long supported our educational DVD nights in particular. We were therefore thrilled to have Shannon and Shelby,

both keepers from Phoenix Zoo, come and spend over a week with us. They were really interested in all our programmes, and spent a lot of time with staff learning about things like the guarding dog programme, boma building and the community camera traps. They had such great interest and motivation that it was a true pleasure to have them around, and we hope not only that they return, but we will be able to host more people from our partner organizations in the future for similar visits.



Shelby and Shannon in the field

Field vehicle donated by the Leiden Conservation Foundation

Our work involves a huge amount of driving across incredibly rough terrain, so good field vehicles are absolutely essential for everything that we do. The tough conditions, together with a severe lack of high-quality spare parts and well-trained mechanics, means that car breakdowns are a constant issue, and we are always struggling to get enough vehicles working at the same time to achieve our goals. Therefore, we were thrilled that the Leiden Conservation Foundation recently funded another field vehicle, a well-maintained Toyota GX from Dar es Salaam. This car is currently helping Mastercard Scholar and Michigan State Masters student Arthur Muneza with his field data collection on Giraffe Skin Disease (GSD), as well as enabling PhD student Leandro Abade to collect vital data on the distribution of endangered African wild dogs and other carnivores.



Arthur with RCP's latest field vehicle, donated by the Leiden Conservation Foundation

Staff profile: Uchungu Mgogo – Senior Research Assistant



Mgogo is a key member of our staff, and comes from the heart of our study area. Mgogo's parents come from a village called Iloilo, located in what is now part of Ruaha National Park. His family had to move when the Park was formed, so they ended up in the remote village of Isele, close to the Park boundary, which is where Mgogo and his five siblings grew up. Sometimes he would see foreigners and Park representatives conducting research in the area. Impressed by their presence, he became motivated to follow a career in conservation, so he worked extremely hard in school. Mgogo is the first person from the whole division of Pawaga (covering multiple villages) to get a university degree in Wildlife Science and Conservation. Therefore he became an admirable example to other local children, many of whom have been motivated to go to school to follow his example. Mgogo joined RCP in 2013 and has proved himself extremely dedicated – he is now responsible for all our community camera trapping, depredation follow ups and helps manage the guarding dog programme. He was the second of our team to be sent to the Cheetah

Conservation Fund in Namibia to learn more about guarding dogs. His aim is to become a conservation leader within Tanzania and he sees himself as an ambassador for wildlife.

Camera-trapping continues across the landscape

We are currently maintaining the grid of camera-traps that Jeremy Cusack placed in Ruaha National Park for his PhD, and are also expanding our camera-trapping across the landscape for Leandro's PhD as well as the community camera-trapping. This is providing invaluable data on the presence of carnivores and their prey across the landscape, which will be vital for future conservation planning.



A male cheetah walking at night – cheetahs are more nocturnal than many people imagine © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



A leopard taking a break in front of the camera-trap © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



A lovely shot of a lioness walking along a wildlife path in the early morning © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



RCP is interested in smaller carnivores as well as larger ones. These African wild cats have common ancestors with domestic cats © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



*A black backed jackal trotting along a game trail in the morning – jackals are often seen in pairs
© Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*Some of the leopards in Ruaha have more jaguar-type spots with small spots within the rosettes
– some can be seen on this male © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project*



Bat eared foxes live in family groups and are some of the most endearing carnivores © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



People tend to find spotted hyaenas far less endearing – which is a shame as they are amazing, fascinating and highly social animals © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project



An impala beautifully captured in the sunset © Jeremy Cusack/Ruaha Carnivore Project

Park drivers continue to provide great sightings

We rely heavily upon Park drivers and tourists to send us photos of carnivores that they see – this information allows us to learn more about carnivore distribution and social groupings. If you do come to Ruaha and see carnivores, then please let us know and send us your photos!



A lioness eyeing up the tourists – taken by Saidi Kotoku, Kwihala Camp



Cheetahs like this one can reach around 110km/h when sprinting. Taken by Maulid Rasi, Mdonya Old River Camp



This lion has a variety of physical characteristics, like a scarred nose and missing teeth, which will help us identify him in the future. Taken by Ayubu Nyang'ango, Mdonya Old River Camp



A leopard resting on a tree, showing its pigmented tongue – even markings like that can be useful for our carnivore identification! Taken by Maulid Rasi, Mdonya Old River Camp



Baobab trees are a preferred place for leopards to rest and to eat their prey without disturbance from lions or hyenas. This stunning shot was taken by Vincent Kavaya, Mwangusi Safari Camp



A baby baboon explores its surroundings as an adult keeps a careful watch out – sensible, as baboons are potential prey for leopards. Taken By Saidi Kotoku, Kwihala Camp

Thanks again to all our partners and supporters – we hope you enjoy our updates, and please let us know if there is anything you would like to follow up on. Hopefully they give you some insights into what we are doing with your help in the field, and how we are trying to improve the situation for both people and predators across the Ruaha landscape.