



UPDATES FROM THE FIELD – FEBRUARY 2016

Predator-proofing livestock enclosures saves stock – and people!

Many of our activities focus on reducing carnivore attacks and therefore retaliatory and preventative killings. One of our most popular initiatives is the ‘boma-building’ programme, where we predator-proof traditional thornbush livestock enclosures (bomas) using diamond mesh fencing. This special wire fencing, which is partly paid for by the owner and partly by RCP, prevents large carnivores from attacking livestock at night, one of the prime times for depredation. The predator-proof bomas have proved extremely effective at preventing attacks, so we have new families joining the waiting list every week. As this is one of our longest-running and most successful initiatives to prevent human-carnivore conflict, we are planning to expand the boma programme in 2016 to provide even greater benefits in terms of reducing carnivore killing and improve the economic security of these very poor households.



The team reinforcing a thornbush boma with heavy-duty metal wire in order to prevent predator attacks

The value of the bomas for protecting stock is well known – but incredibly, one of our bomas recently protected a person against a carnivore attack. One night, a *mzee* (elder man) from Tungamalenga heard a lioness circling his boma so he went outside to scare her away. Instead, the lioness charged at the *mzee* and he just managed to close himself in the wire livestock boma before the lioness reached him. She reared up on her hind legs and attempted to push the boma fence over with her paws but when she found she couldn't, she ran off into the bush. We were very glad to hear that our boma stood up to the test, and that the *mzee* lived to tell the tale! Lion attacks on people are sadly not uncommon in southern Tanzania, and not surprisingly are one of the most significant reasons that people do not want lions around – so we are pleased that we managed to prevent an attack through the boma programme!

Developing a local model of the Lion Guardians work

After Amy returned from acting as an Expert on a National Geographic Expeditions tour in northern Tanzania, the whole team sat down and had discussions about how to implement the best procedures for our growing project, and specifically how to develop our Lion Guardians work to make the Kenyan-born model most appropriate for Ruaha. We have worked closely with the Kenyan Lion Guardians team and Panthera on this for several years, and are moving towards an exciting new stage for the Ruaha programme – more on that in future updates!



One of the most important roles of the Lion Guardians is to explain at community meetings what RCP is currently doing, and liaise with the other warriors to consider how we might reduce conflict even further

New (for us!) vehicles help us continue to expand

This month we were delighted to purchase both a Toyota Landcruiser and a motorbike from our partners at the Ngorongoro Lion Project. Although quite old vehicles, they have been kept in good condition, and are hardy enough to withstand the atrocious road conditions they will face in the Ruaha landscape. The Landcruiser will be used for general operations and the motorbike will replace the old Lion Guardian motorbike, which is now past its prime. The Landcruiser brings our current fleet of vehicles to nine. Vehicles are the single most important piece of equipment we have – without them, we would not be able to run any of our programmes – but they are often the hardest items to raise funds for, especially in terms of maintenance. We are also preparing to purchase a bus for our educational park trips and build a workshop for our mechanics to maintain our growing herd of automobiles.



Baraka, our trainee mechanic, proudly having the first drive on the new motorbike, while the new LandCruiser is parked in the background

Impacts of El Nino

Speaking of rain, this year's historic El Nino weather event had significant impacts on all RCP operations throughout the wet season, but particularly in February. Nearly constant rain caused the Ruaha River and its tributaries to swell to dangerous levels and the subsequent flooding crippled parts of the southern highlands region here in Tanzania. Both of the bridges connecting RCP's camp to the north and south washed away; at one point we were stranded in Kitisi!

On February 4th and 5th our Community Liaison Officer, Msago, and one of our Junior Research Assistants, Fenrick, got stuck in Ruaha National Park while hosting villagers on a



The Ruaha River overflowed its banks and made travel in the region dangerous – in this photo, Msago stands at the far side of an impassable river

park trip. These educational trips are supposed to be fun and entertaining, but our guests were in for a truly wild few days. The Ruaha River overflowed the main bridge at the entrance of the Park so no vehicles could pass and no one could exit.

Msago, Fenrick, and the villagers ended up spending the night at the Park headquarters, along with many other stranded visitors. The next morning, the water had receded enough for people to walk across a small land bridge, so we sent another vehicle from camp to collect the guests and take them home. Unfortunately for Msago, he had to remain in the Park with the vehicle until the water had receded enough to drive back to camp. It has been a very challenging month indeed - one day in the field required us to cross three flooded rivers at 10pm just to make it back to camp!

We aren't the only ones with incredible stories about getting stranded by flash flooding. One pregnant woman in Pawaga woke at night to the sound of the flood water rising around her home. Determined not to get stuck, she grabbed a bucket, a tarpaulin sheet, and her three-year-old son and waded through the water. But as she was searching for help she started to feel labour pains, so she stopped on a small hill, laid the tarpaulin down, and gave birth to her second child in the middle of the flash floods. The next morning, a rescue helicopter spotted her stranded on her tiny island, and she managed to put the new baby into the bucket and carried both the bucket and the three-year-old up into the helicopter. Truly an amazing story of survival – and one that highlights the dangerous, unpredictable flooding we experienced across the study area.

In several other incidents, even our most powerful vehicles got stuck in mud holes left by the rains. Our brown Landrover, in particular, bore the brunt of the floods and mud since it is our heavy duty field vehicle. Below are a selection of photographs of stuck vehicles and the rescues needed to get them unstuck!



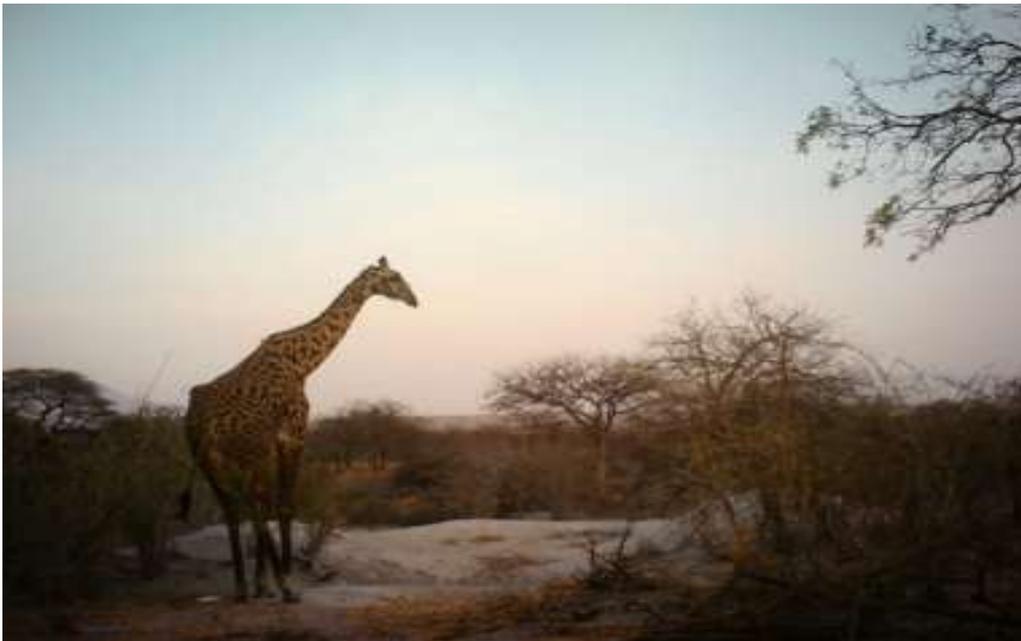
Our brown Landrover – usually our rescue vehicle – got stuck badly a number of times during the El Nino rains. Luckily, Junior Research Assistants Meritho (left) and Zakayo and Alphonce (below) proved up to the task of digging the car out and getting it back on the road.



In one ironic incident, the Lion Guardian car was called to rescue the brown Landrover – and ended up getting stuck in the process! Two cars mired in the mud attracted plenty of attention and thankfully we had lots of help from passers-by.

Our remote camera traps continue to collect data – even when we can't!

One of the benefits of having remotely-triggered cameras photographing our research subjects is that they can continue to take pictures even when we cannot reach them. While some of our cameras unfortunately floated away in the heavy flooding, the majority were still in place when we finally got to them. Here are some of the photos they captured in our absence.



This beautiful shot of a giraffe was taken at dawn; giraffe sleep at night so this individual might have just woken up. Did you know that giraffe usually sleep standing up? © Ruaha Carnivore Project



Zebra are plentiful in the Ruaha landscape, and are an important food source for lions and other predators © Ruaha Carnivore Project



A herd of male kudu grazes on lush green grass. While the rains make hunting hard for carnivores, their prey make the most of the new growth © Ruaha Carnivore Project



Aardwolves are elusive, nocturnal carnivores which feed exclusively on termites and other insects © Ruaha Carnivore Project

Livestock guarding dog programme ready for next stage

Our Anatolian Shepherd dogs have proved good guardians in the field, with no attacks on any herds accompanied by them so far. However, the number of dogs placed is small, and they grow so large that local families often struggle to feel them enough food. Therefore, we are waiting for our female Anatolian Shepherd, Busara, to come into her next season, and then we will hopefully breed her with a large local dog, to see if the crossbreed dogs perform well as guardians, while being slightly easier to keep. Crossbreed and even village dogs have worked well as livestock guardians in other countries, so we are interested to see the relative effectiveness (and cost-effectiveness) of the pure Anatolians, compared to both crossbreeds and local puppies.

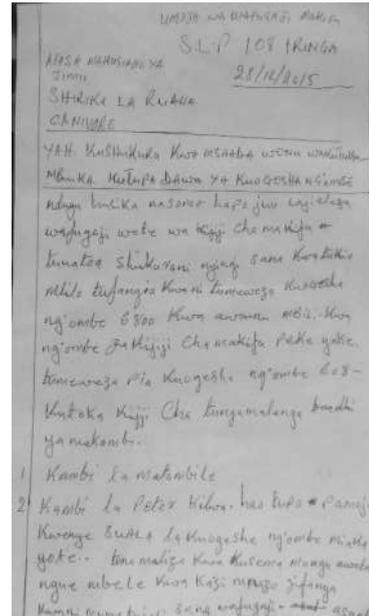


The Anatolian Shepherds grow very large very quickly compared to traditional local dogs – these puppies are the same age but clearly very different sizes!

A hearty thanks from Makifu village

One of the project's most important aims is to give wildlife a tangible value to local communities, as that is the only way that people will want to live alongside these (often dangerous) animals in the long term. One of the most important ways we do this is through our Community Camera Trapping (CCT) programme, which has now been running for over a year. By photographing large carnivores, their prey, and other wildlife on village land, the villagers accumulate points for each species, which they can then exchange for medical, educational, and veterinary benefits. While the CCT programme has met with great success so far, we do not often get to see the benefits in use. So we were delighted to receive a letter from leaders of the pastoralist association of Makifu, thanking us for the veterinary benefits they had received from the CCT. In that round, Makifu took 3rd place and received a medicinal dip for livestock that deters ticks and other insects. The pastoralist association

put out a call to the Barabaig and Maasai families in the village, and in two days managed to treat more than 6,000 cattle! The leaders thanked us for the dip and wrote about how happy they were to work with the Project. The letter (right) was gladly received by everyone at camp – we have now laminated it and are planning to hang it in the office. While our programmes to reduce carnivore attacks are very important, it is these efforts to provide significant household-level benefits to local communities which are likely to have the longest-term benefits in terms of encouraging human-carnivore coexistence in this amazing landscape.



Lion Guardians doing what they do best



Guardian Darem advises a herder about the safest place to take their cattle. Darem’s work has been very impressive lately!

The wet season is always one of the most challenging times in terms of livestock depredation, and our Lion Guardians have been busy preventing four retaliatory hunts. Special mention goes to Darem Philipo, from Kitisi, who stopped two hunts this month – including one single-handedly! The second hunt was particularly challenging to prevent as *vijiana* (warriors) had already attempted to poison the lions. When they realised the poison was unsuccessful, they became even angrier and decided to track the lions - discovering two adults with many cubs. It is very difficult for Guardians to talk down hunters in these circumstances, but luckily one of our former Guardians, who had had to leave for family reasons, had been appointed by the *vijiana* to lead the hunt. He agreed in secret to assist the current Guardians and did an admirable job of misdirecting the *vijiana* until they had calmed down. Also of note, Joseph Dendu and Julius Selendu from Malinzanga were able to stop a retaliatory hunt with the assistance of a local *mzee* (elder) who told the angry *vijiana*, “These Lion Guardians are always helping us – directing us to graze where there are no lions and reinforcing our bomas.” Having the support of the influential community elders (*wazee*) is essential to the programme’s success and a testament to the exceptional work of Joseph and Julius in their zone.

Despite this month’s challenges our spirits remain high and we are looking forward to a drier few months! ☺ Thank you so much for your continued support and interest!