



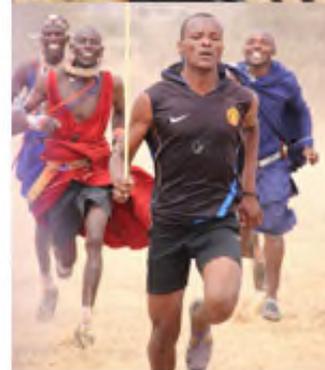
Monthly Report :: April to August 2016

RCP Lion Defenders have success at the LION GUARDIANS GAMES

The RCP's Lion Defenders team were very excited recently as they undertook the long journey to our partners at the Lion Guardian headquarters in Amboseli, Kenya, for the annual Lion Guardian Games. This event affords the team a fantastic opportunity to meet old friends, discuss challenges they face, exchange ideas and compete vigorously in various athletic endeavours. The long journey to Kenya is also an excellent opportunity for the Ruaha team to catch up - some of our Defenders only see one another a handful of times a year and 20 hours on a bus provides plenty of talking time!

Our journey had a dramatic beginning - by stopping a lion hunt! The evening before we left, Joseph Dendu worked 9 hours through the night, to stop a traditional lion hunt. He was successful, and met the team with his usual joviality and smile - although he did take exception to the outrageous price of bus snacks! Travelling with the Lion Defenders was a pleasure - they were in high spirits, professional and courteous.

Our team performed well at the Games this year! The very quiet Samora Tomas demonstrated excellent aim with his spear throwing, making it to the second round heats. Darem Philipo competed for his reign as 100m sprint champion - coming an equal first with his long term rival from the Amboseli Lion Guardians team. The most surprising event however, was the whistling competition - a skill honed by pastoralists in their grazing of livestock and a truly musical experience. Our Lion Defenders, Joseph Dendu, Lanjo Anno, Mandela Dudiyeke, and Darem Philipo provided beautiful performances, with Darem just missing out on the final! Julius Selendu was awarded the "Community Impact" prize for his incredible community work (finding



701 lost livestock and reinforcing 31 bomas) over the past year. He is a truly dedicated Lion Defender was very deserving of the award. At the end of the competition there is much dancing and singing - and whilst our Barabaig team are small, they certainly put on a show, even granting song requests!

On our return journey, the Lion Defenders talked until 10pm - discussing their challenges and what they needed to do as a team to overcome them. The Lion Guardian Games renew the spirits, energy and motivation of our Lion Defenders. It reminds them what they are part of a bigger family, that they do not struggle against the challenges of stopping lion hunts alone, and that their efforts are truly valued.

RCP's Lion Defenders team at the annual Lion Guardian Games were Kambona Kanaya, Samwel Asecheka, Lanjo Anno, Julius Selendu, Mandela Dudiyeke, Darem Philipo, Penelope Rogers, Samora Tomas, Mathew Bajuta, Joseph Dendu, Daudi Kinyoka.



Brainstorming sessions at RCP headquarters

The entire RCP team took some time to discuss programmes, brainstorm new ideas and solutions, and generally think about how to ensure RCP is always meeting the current challenges of local conservation. This kind of team-wide review is vital for developing the next year of activities (and therefore funding proposals!), as it ensures we are not just doing the same things over and over again, but are adapting our programmes to meet the most urgent needs, such as the need for providing school lunches, which may not seem a conservation activity but is actually very important (see below). At the end of this brainstorming, the whole team got new project T-shirts, which were very popular!



Devastating local impacts of poisoning

As in many areas across Africa, poisoning poses a huge threat to wildlife around Ruaha. Poison is easily accessible (many people use legally available pesticides as poison) and it is commonly used to retaliate against predators: after a cow or goat is killed, the herder will often lace the carcass with poison, knowing that the predators are likely to return and continue eating the remains. Unfortunately, large carnivores aren't the only animals who will scavenge: jackals, vultures, and local dogs do as well.

Tragically, in mid-May, our staff were alerted to a potential lion poisoning incident. Initial

reports indicated that three lions (one adult and two sub-adults) had died from eating a cattle carcass laced with poison, but when our staff arrived they only found one dead adult male. The poisoning had far-reaching consequences: more than 50 critically endangered vultures and other birds of prey died after eating the cattle and lion carcasses, as well a black-backed jackal and a spotted hyena. The poisoning was taken very seriously by the local authorities, who collected samples of the poison and conducted investigations in the local community. RCP cooperated with our colleagues at Tanzania National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Society to collect samples of the poison, and the local authorities are continuing to conduct investigations in the community.

These poisoning events do not only affect wildlife, but can also affect domestic animals, and we personally suffered from this recently, when we very sadly lost John, one of our Anatolian shepherds from our Livestock Guarding Dog programme, due to a poisoning event on village land. John must have accidentally eaten some poison-laced meat because he became sick suddenly and his condition rapidly declined. Alphonse, one of our Junior Research Assistants who helps maintain the dog programme, made every effort to save John, rushing him to town, but it was too late and a necropsy by our veterinarian, Dr. Tomeck Mwamhehe, confirmed the cause of death as poisoning. John's family, the Shangalimas, were devastated by his death but are interested in trying again with another dog. We are currently waiting for our Anatolian Shepherd female, Busara, to come into season, and will be breeding her with a large local dog, to see how well cross-breed Anatolian/local dogs work as guardians, as they have proved very successful in places like Botswana.

PHOTO: John with the Shangalima family.

Community camera-trapping expanded to 12 villages

The poisoning events, as well as the traditional lion hunts (which often occur after an attack) underscore how vital it is to reduce carnivore attacks, and also to ensure that local people feel that wildlife offers more to them alive than dead. One of the most successful ways of doing that has been our community camera-trapping programme, where each village selects its own camera-trapping 'officers', who are trained and employed by RCP. The officers are given a GPS, a bike and some camera-traps, and they decide where on village land they should be placed. They check and monitor the cameras, and then once a month, the images are downloaded by RCP. We examine the photos with the officers, and allocate points for every wild animal which has been camera-trapped (ranging from 1000 points for something like a dikdik, to 5000 points for an African wild dog). The villages are arranged in groups of 4, and they compete against one another to receive the most points. At the end of the quarter, the top-scoring village in each group receives US\$2000 worth of community benefits, while the 2nd place one receives US\$1500 worth, the 3rd US\$1000 worth and the 4th US\$500 worth. The benefits are split equally between healthcare, education and veterinary medicines, as those were the top priorities selected by the villagers. The scores are then reset to zero and the competition starts again! In the past two quarters, Tungamalenga and Idodi have been winning villages, and for the Tungamalenga win, we held the awards ceremony at a boma rather than in the village centre in order to attract more pastoralists, which was a great success.

For the first time, we are seeing people directly associate benefits with the presence of wildlife on village land (rather than the project), so this is something we are very keen to continue and

expand, and we are also sharing this model with other projects elsewhere in Africa and beyond. We are thrilled that thanks to support from long-term partners such as the African Wildlife Foundation and National Geographic's Big Cats Initiative, we have been able to scale this initiative up so that it now reaches 12 villages - over half of all villages around Ruaha National Park.



Pilot porridge project set for success

We're delighted with another of our local benefit initiatives, the new 'porridge project' and hope this is the start of great things to come. As mentioned above, educational initiatives had been one of the benefits most sought-after by local communities, so RCP had set up the Kids 4 Cats school twinning initiative, as well as the 'Simba Scholarships' for

students to attend secondary school. However, through this work, we realised that the attainment at primary school seemed very low, with relatively few students able to pass the tests for secondary school. After discussions with parents and teachers, one important limiting factor seemed to be a lack of food - often, primary school children leave their homes on an empty stomach and walk to school to start their lessons without breakfast, and there is usually no provision of any food at school. This meant that these tiny scholars are studying all day without food, affecting their concentration and attainment.

Therefore, with help from some of our key supporters, including Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and the Peoples' Trust for Endangered Species, we initiated a 'porridge project' in Kitisi village where we work with local women to buy supplies such as eggs, beans, rice, maize-meal, vegetables, milk and sugar, and the women are employed to cook a nutritious porridge. This is currently provided free to nearly 250 primary school children every day, and will hopefully improve both attendance at school (as parents know their children will receive at least one good meal a day) and the educational attainment once there. This has turned out to be one of the most highly-valued community benefits from the presence of the project (and therefore the presence of carnivores), so we hope that over time it will improve attitudes towards wildlife, improve local livelihoods, and ultimately reduce antagonism towards, and killing of, large carnivores.

PHOTO: Children eating cups of nutritious porridge at school.



Carnivore sightings programme expanded and refined

Each new tourism season in Ruaha brings new changes for the Sightings programme. By enlisting the help of the tourist guides working in Ruaha National Park, RCP is able to collect important data on large carnivore behaviour patterns and populations. The guides use hard-copy data forms as well as tablet-based software called CyberTracker to record where and when they see different large carnivore species, information about the group size and composition, and notes on their behaviour. This has been a wonderful way of getting information, and we are now collaborating with elephant and vulture researchers around Ruaha, so that the guides collect valuable data on all those species without much extra effort or cost. Thanks to long-term support from partners such as the SeaWorld Busch Gardens Conservation Fund, this programme has generated the first good information on carnivore dynamics and demography in the Ruaha landscape, and our data are shared with local authorities to aid in future conservation planning.

Ruaha is becoming a more popular destination for safari-goers in Tanzania and as a result, several new lodges are under construction and due to open this season. We are planning to continue growing the Sightings programme, so Junior Research Assistant Alphonse, who manages the Sightings programme, has worked with our partners at the North Carolina Zoo to update and refine the software to incorporate the new lodges. We recently began rolling out the newly updated software to the lodges and are looking forward to reviewing the data collected in new areas of the Park as the new lodges begin hosting their first guests.



Long-term supporters visit the Ruaha Carnivore Project

RCP is lucky enough to have built up long-term relationships with many organisations and individuals around the world, and we are always thrilled when people are able to come out and see what we are doing in the field thanks to them.

One of our long-term supporters is the Houston Zoo, which last year helped launch the Pride Lion Conservation Alliance at their Gala event. At that event, a group of seven supporters won the opportunity to visit three of the Alliance's lion conservation projects so recently, the group arrived at Kwihala Tented Camp in Ruaha National

Park along with their private guide. Kelly and Penny made the trip to Kwihala to have dinner with the group and regale them with stories from RCP's work in the Ruaha landscape. The visitors were keen to learn about RCP's programs and they asked a lot of questions - this was a well-educated group of conservationists!

Just afterwards, a group of ten key project supporters from Texas and Wyoming came out for a two-day visit to the project's camp and study area. The guests met a local Maasai family to see a wire boma and Anatolian guarding dog in action, chatted with some of our Lion Defenders and learned about their spoor-tracking and other activities, and heard all about our other programmes such as the community camera-trapping and park sightings. The whole team enjoyed getting to share our work with the visitors, and we were delighted when they took RCP T-shirts home with them to wear proudly in their daily lives.

Another of our most important supporters is Tusk in the UK and the associated Tusk Trust in the USA. We were thrilled when Philip Cayford, a long-time Tusk trustee, and his wife, Tanya, and son, Tom, stopped by for a visit to our camp during their journey through several African countries. Philip and his family were keen to see our camp, meet the staff, and hear how things are going. The Cayfords visited a local Maasai family, saw some of our conflict-prevention techniques in action, and spent a lot of time talking with the staff about our work in the Greater Ruaha landscape. Their visit was capped off with a ceremonial sticker application to one of our vehicles that will help us advertise Tusk's support, which we hope will continue well beyond the lifespan of the vehicle (even though people say that Land-Rovers never die!)

We were also lucky that two of our key individual donors, Laura Brown and Scott Sattersfield, were able to come to Ruaha again this year and catch up with what we were doing. They were only in Ruaha for a few days so Kelly met them in the National Park and gave them updates on how the project was going. Laura and Scott have been some of our most energetic and enthusiastic supporters and it is always a huge pleasure to spend time with them - and the whole team were thrilled as they brought specially-designed RCP caps for the staff, which were very well-received indeed!

As always, we were delighted to host all of our visitors, and hope that their experiences in the field have reinforced their commitment to RCP - we could not do any of what we do without our supporters, so these relationships are fundamentally important to our continued success.

PHOTO: Tusk Trustee Philip Cayford and his son Tom with the RCP team during their visit to the field camp.

THANK YOU!

We could not do any of our work without the support of so many committed people and organisations and individuals around the world, and we thank you whole-heartedly for everything you have done to help the carnivores and communities around Ruaha. This work is incredibly important both for poverty-stricken families and for wildlife, and there is much more to do, so we rely upon all of you for your continued support. Thank you again!

Most of our communications are dealt with through our project communications manager, Margaret Roestorf, so please email her if you have questions or if you need more information, on margaretroestorf.rcp@gmail.com. Should you wish to speak directly to the Director, Dr Amy Dickman, please contact her on email at: amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk

Until our next report... kwenda vizuri and asante sana (go well and thank you very much)!

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