



Monthly Report :: October 2016



RCP Director takes part in National Geographic World Lion Day event

On World Lion Day (August 10th) our Director, Amy Dickman, was invited by National Geographic to take part in a panel discussion event at their headquarters in Washington DC, covering the issue of trophy hunting as well as wider lion conservation. The panel discussion was very engaging, and included world experts Jeff Flocken from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Craig Packer, a top lion biologist from the University of Minnesota, Luke Hunter, the CEO of Panthera, and Dereck and Beverly Joubert who are the film-makers and conservationists who founded National Geographic's Big Cats Initiative (BCI). BCI has been one of the biggest and longest-term supporters of RCP, so it was a great opportunity to share our progress with the BCI team and some of their donors, as well as engage with an audience who were so wonderfully passionate about the conservation of lions.

The link to the discussion can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/causeanuproar/videos/1169307713091937/>



*Photo: Participants in the World Lion Day panel discussion at National Geographic
Photo credit: National Geographic*

Michael accepted for Oxford University's Postgraduate Diploma

Building local capacity is one of RCP's key aims, so we were all thrilled when Michael Kimaro, one of our Senior Research Assistants, was recently offered a place on Oxford University's 2017 Postgraduate Diploma in International Wildlife Conservation Practice, which is held at the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU). This Diploma is an incredibly competitive course meant to help bridge the gap between a bachelor's and international master's degree for developing-country conservationists. Michael was one of only eight students accepted for the 2017 course, so it is a huge accomplishment for him.



Photo: Michael Kimaro out in the field

In January Michael will move to Oxford University to join his classmates, where he will spend eight months studying research and conservation techniques. Michael was fortunate enough to receive a Recanati–Kaplan WildCRU Scholarship to cover all the travel and living costs associated with the course – as RCP’s Director also receives her salary through a Kaplan Fellowship, the whole RCP team are very grateful for the support of the Recanati–Kaplan Foundation! We are so proud of Michael – he is the second one of RCP’s research assistants to get onto the Diploma course, and we hope that others in our team will follow his success in the future. Very many congratulations, Michael!

Lion Defender successes and challenges

RCP’s Lion Defenders, supported by Panthera and Lion Guardians, have been working hard safeguarding villagers’ livestock by reinforcing their enclosures, finding and returning lost livestock in the bush (thereby minimising the chance of carnivore attacks and subsequent retaliation), and working directly with the

warriors to stop any lion hunts progressing to a kill. They also do other valuable community work to prove their use to all local villagers. For example, Julius Selendu is a Maasai warrior who is the Lion Defender for our Malinzanga zone. His community work is outstanding and he has frequently helped blind *wazee* (elders) in the village and helped rescue herders (often children) who got lost the bush. Recently, Julius heroically rescued four baby goats from a rabid dog attack, to everyone's delight!

However, working to stop lion hunts is extremely challenging, as changing attitudes takes a long time, and there are complex seasonal and social dynamics involved. Additionally, RCP is just one organisation in the landscape, and sometimes people go directly to the government authorities to try to reduce lion conflicts. For example, the intense El Nino rains this year led to a large wet-season spike in depredations and attempts to kill carnivores, and a series of depredations occurred in the Tungamalenga area by a small pride of lions with three cubs. This led to intense conflict in the community, and the villagers approached the government authorities and were given permission to hunt the lions concerned. There was nothing the RCP's Lion Defenders could do to prevent the hunts, and could only monitor the situation as two adult females and one cub were killed. It was a disheartening set-back for our Lion Defenders, who have worked so hard throughout the wet season to prevent lion deaths. However (as in many other countries), local people can be legally permitted to kill carnivores who are threatening themselves or their stock, so it is vital that we continue to work extremely hard to protect people's livestock and try to minimise the chances of such issues happening in the future.



Photo: Lion defenders in the field.

Photo credit: Penelope Rogers

The dynamics of the local communities can also play a crucial role in how well programmes such as the Lion Defenders work. Traditionally, young men used to be rewarded with gifts of cattle for hunting lions, as it was seen as a benefit to

the community, and this was a major reason for warriors to kill lions. However, we have seen some very promising changes as communities are increasingly recognising the value of live lions on village land, mainly due to our benefit and employment programmes. Recently, a group of young men from one local village apparently went for a lion hunt, whereupon the community fined them cattle for trying to kill lions. This kind of evidence of how the villagers are starting to value the presence of lions, and act themselves against lion hunts, is extremely exciting for us and shows huge progress. However, during this process, it emerged that there was a lot of antagonism between the young warriors (the *vijana*) and the elders (the *wazee*), and very unusually, the *vijana* refused to accept the authority of the elders. This situation seems to have been brewing for a while, and there is now a tense situation in the village, where the elders have reiterated their lack of support for lion hunting and have banished some young men who want to defy them, so we will have to see how it evolves over the coming months.

Meanwhile, in a different village, some of the eligible young women have been instigating hunts by telling the *vijana* they are not brave enough to marry because the *vijana* have not been hunting. Post-hunt *sherehes* (celebrations) are a key element in traditional Barabaig courtship, and without hunts the *vijana* and girls have no structured way to meet and mingle.



Photo: Dances have traditionally been performed after lion hunts in Maasai and Barabaig

societies, and they provide status to the warriors and a chance to build relationships with women.

Photo credit: Amy Dickman

At RCP we try to address this gap by hosting conservation *sherehes* in communities that have not had a hunt in the past month, enabling young men and women to meet in that way, but it is unclear whether this will be enough to meet that demand. We are looking into other ways of enabling young warriors to prove their bravery and physical prowess (for example by chasing lions away when they are seen close to houses, or by implementing a local competition like the Lion Guardian Games) but it may be that we cannot replace this element entirely.

Changing attitudes and practices in the long-term is extremely challenging, but we are seeing many positive changes, and must ensure that we commit to and expand our community conservation work around Ruaha. Working closely with the communities enables us to establish the dynamics of who influences and participates in wildlife killing, understand the reasons why, and therefore try to adapt our programmes to address those reasons and encourage long-term conservation and coexistence.

Camp improvements and new vehicles

As RCP continues to grow, so does our field camp and facilities. This year we purchased a 1000-litre fuel tank with a hand-held nozzle and volume counter, just like a proper filling station, which should reduce fuel loss and keep the fuel clean, which is important for keeping our engines running. In addition, thanks to the St Louis Zoo WildCare Initiative, we have started constructing an on-site garage, which will allow us to better maintain and repair our vehicles at the field camp, rather than driving or towing them 120km on an extremely rough road to get even minor repairs done.



Photo: Keeping field vehicles running in the bush, in an area with limited access to parts and mechanics, is one of the top challenges for the project.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

Vehicles are always one of the major limiting factors for our work, so we are pleased that thanks to the AZA Conservation Endowment Fund, we were recently able to add to our very well-used fleet. The Park Trip programme, which takes school children and adult pastoralists into Ruaha National Park for an educational opportunity to view wildlife, is one of our most popular programmes and has been shown to markedly improve local attitudes towards wildlife. In order to scale up this fun and important programme, we purchased a gently used higher capacity safari vehicles for our Community Liaison Officer to host larger park trips. The car, which was purchased from a safari company in Iringa, will be used strictly for park trips and will hopefully help us reach an even wider audience. These trips are often the only opportunity that local community members have to view wildlife in a positive, non-threatening way, and are an important tool for helping expose the community to the beauty and wildness of Ruaha. We hope that in time, these positive experiences will help improve the local tolerance of wild animals even on village land, and will improve the human-wildlife coexistence around Ruaha National Park.



Photo: Park trips are an incredibly important way of enabling schoolchildren and other villagers to experience wildlife first-hand and understand the importance of conservation. Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

Six new Simba Scholarships awarded

The local villagers previously selected education, healthcare and veterinary medicine as the top priorities they would like to see from the presence of carnivores, so we have provided educational scholarships as a key part of our educational benefits. The Simba Scholars programme offers four years of tuition for secondary school students from pastoral families, to encourage support for conservation in the pastoralist community. Importantly, we try to ensure that around half the scholarships go to girls, as educating women has been shown to have particularly long-lasting community benefits. However, all Scholars must pass an entrance test, and because many people have traditionally not valued educating girls, they often don't do well enough to pass the test - we hope to improve this by focusing investment in primary schools. The successful Simba

Scholars become ambassadors for the project and conservation within their school and wider community, and their scholarships improve their opportunities to attend university, become employed and help their families out of the severe poverty that is all too common in this area.



*Photo: 2016 Simba Scholars – Christina, Francisco, Himid, Karanai, Michael and William.
Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project*

The Simba Scholarships are highly competitive and the selection exams are only conducted once a year, so it is a rare opportunity for local school children to receive the scholarship. In August we hosted another selection exam for the newest set of Simba Scholars. Six new Simba Scholars were awarded scholarships, taking the total awarded so far to 24. The 2016 Scholars included five boys and one girl this year, although overall, around a third of all selected Scholars have been girls. We wish them the best of luck in their future education!

PhD students come and go!

Over the past couple of months, University of Oxford PhD student Leandro Abade has been in camp for his final field season with RCP, checking his camera traps and spending time speaking having discussions with the research staff about potential future plans for research at RCP. After using camera trap data to produce a density map of each large carnivore species across the Greater Ruaha landscape, Leandro is now focused on comparing relative densities across different land uses, and examining interspecific interactions between large carnivores. He has also been using his carnivore presence maps to estimate the likely occurrence of lions at a larger landscape scale, between Ruaha, Mikumi and Selous, which together hold perhaps a third of all of Africa's lions. We are all excited to see the outcomes of Leandro's work and wish him the best of luck as he enters the final phase of his PhD.

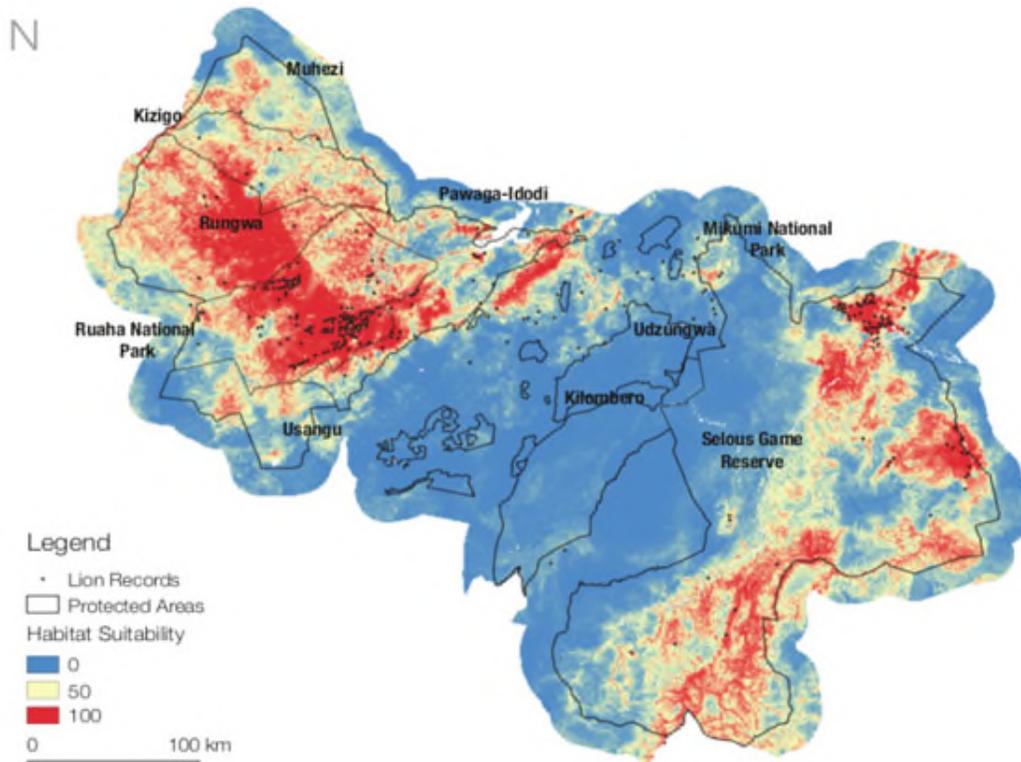


Photo: a map of the areas which are likely to have suitable habitat for lions in the Ruaha, Mikumi and Selous landscapes.

Photo credit: Leandro Abade

Meanwhile, the newest PhD student to join RCP, Leejah Dorward from the University of Oxford, returned to our field camp in April to test his survey and launch his data collection. Leejah, along with George Sedoyeka and Cashew Katei, two Junior Research Assistants, is interviewing local Barabaig and Maasai pastoralists about how often they see or interact with carnivores. Using piki-pikis (motorbikes) to criss-cross the landscape, these three have been quite busy, leaving camp at the crack of dawn in order to meet with the pastoralists before they leave with their herds for day-time grazing. Leejah's surveys will be repeated every other month for the next year in order to estimate the landscape-scale occupancy of large carnivores and the conflict they cause, both in terms of actual attacks and people's attitudes. This is important but by no means glamorous work – this online magazine article provided a great insight into a day in the life of Leejah and his assistants:

<https://www.positive.news/2016/archive/21874/living-with-lions/>

RCP helps to find woman lost in the bush

Recently, a local woman became lost in the Wildlife Management Area – a daunting prospect as this is a large, unfenced and thickly bushed area adjacent to the National Park, with lots of lions, hyaenas, snakes and elephants. She did not come back home that evening so the local village arranged a search party, and the Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA) sent a team of rangers to try to find her. RCP also joined in, helping to provide transport for rangers and helping take food out to the search teams. Finally, after two nights in the bush, the woman was found close to the National Park, which was a huge relief to her family and everyone involved. The family later organised a *sherehe* (celebration) to thank everyone who had helped find her, so RCP was pleased to attend and see her safe and well.



Photo: Happily re-united! Members of the RCP team with the woman who was lost in the bush, and her family.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

Building capacity through local interns

RCP is heavily committed to building local capacity, and recently hosted two local interns, Emmanuel and Wildbad, who both hail from the nearby village of Mapogoro and are interested in learning more about wildlife conservation and field work. Emmanuel's family are long-time partners with RCP, as they were one of the first families to receive a wire boma four years ago, and also have a highly-valued two-year-old Anatolian shepherd called Jasiri. Both Emmanuel and Wildbad have studied for ranger's certificates and are hoping to join TANAPA (the Tanzanian National Parks Authority) as park rangers later this year, so they wanted to get some fieldwork experience before they joined. The interns have been very helpful sorting community camera-trapping photos, checking the guarding dogs, investigating depredations, and learning many other tasks. It was a pleasure working with them and we wish them lots of success doing vital wildlife protection work with TANAPA in the future.



Photo: Building Tanzanian capacity is a top priority for RCP, and the vast majority of our staff are local Tanzanians.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

Amy visits RCP partners in the US

RCP is lucky enough to have a network of supporters across the world, but much of our support comes from the USA. Therefore, our Director, Amy Dickman, makes regular trips to the States to keep people up to date with our work, and to try to generate more support as the project grows. In October, Amy went to several places in the US, including San Francisco for the Wildlife Conservation Network Expo, San Jose Zoo to meet supporters at the Happy Hollow Zoo, and long-term supporters at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, the Cleveland Zoological Society and the Cincinnati Zoo's Angel Fund. Amy also went to New York to meet the rest of the Pride Lion Conservation Alliance for their twice-yearly meeting, which was a great way to reconnect and spend time with some very inspiring conservationists!



Photo: Amy with Cathryn Hilker, Founder of Cincinnati Zoo's Angel Fund and one of our longest-standing and most committed supporters.

Photo credit: Kristin Kalnow – Meet the Team

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, and Happy Thanksgiving to all our American friends!!

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, at: 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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