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### ***Goodbye to Busara - our breeding Anatolian female***

In 2013 - in collaboration with the Cheetah Conservation Fund Namibia - RCP started the first trial of specialized livestock guarding dogs in East Africa. Several Anatolian Shepherd dogs were imported and placed in local households with the intention to reduce livestock's vulnerability to predators while grazing.

But life in the African bush is not easy for a dog - not only because of big carnivores but also because of illnesses, snakes and other smaller threats. RCP decided to keep one Anatolian female to breed with a local dog to see whether mixed dogs would be better adapted to the local environment.



*(Left) This is the last picture of Busara, taken in November 2017. She was in great health. (Right) Busara, see here with a snake which she'd previously killed. Photo credits Ruaha Carnivore Project.*

Unfortunately, Busara (the Anatolian female) and Poppy - the local male dog - didn't get to produce offspring. One of Busara's passions, since she was a puppy, had been to kill snakes, and in December 2017 she finally paid for it. One night a spitting cobra came into the dog's enclosure and, although Busara managed to kill it, she was bitten and we found her dead in the morning. The whole RCP team was sad to lose an important part of our bush family.

The livestock guarding dog programme was a pilot one for RCP and it is time for the team to evaluate the results and decide the next steps. Although the programme hasn't been free of challenges, the dog owners are extremely happy with the presence of the dogs and are especially impressed with their shepherding skills, so it is likely that we will continue with some form of a guarding dog programme in the future despite this set-back.

### ***RCP's Camp gets an upgrade***

Since it was first set up in 2009, RCP's camp has changed a lot. Mama Bora, who has been our cook since then, remembers how she used to cook in a makeshift kitchen under the shade of a tree. But the project grew rapidly and we decided to build a semi-permanent structure for the mamas to cook. This was okay for a few years, but as the numbers of staff at camp increased - we are currently around 20 - the amount of food and supplies that we were accumulating increased a lot. That didn't go unnoticed to the rats who had colonised our kitchen and were making an easy living there.

In September 2017 we started building a proper kitchen with walls and doors where our food - which is bought every month in Iringa - can be properly stored. Although some of the finishings are still pending, the mamas have moved in and are really happy with their kitchen. Disappointment reigns in the rat's homes though!



*The new kitchen building was finished in December. Photo credit: Ana Grau, Ruaha Carnivore Project.*



*The old and the new! The old kitchen was charming, but its open-air design encouraged all kinds of wildlife to come in for a quick meal. Photo credit: Andrew Harrington.*



*Mama Dani and Mama Bora - our camp cooks - are happy with their new kitchen. Photo credit: Ana Grau, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).*

### ***Collared lions update - meet Mwasty***

Mwasty was a challenging lion to dart - she was spotted deep in the riverbed, which caused some issues for the field team and the Toyota! However, the team held back and patiently tracked her until they were able to find her relaxed in an area where she could be easily darted.

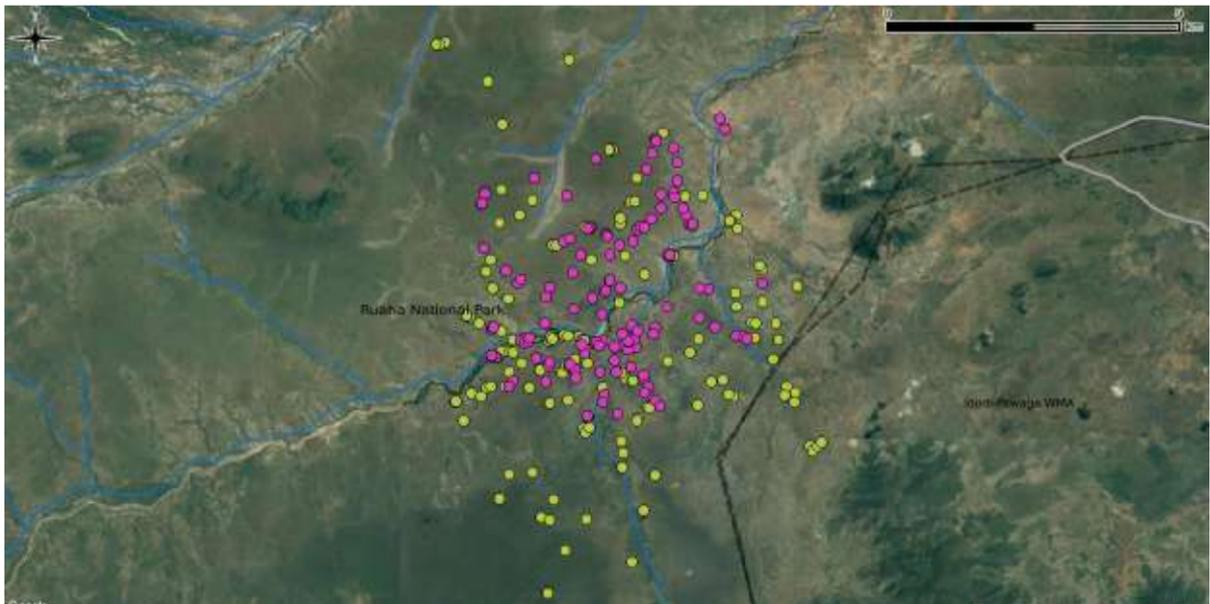
The lioness was eventually darted close to the Park boundary and was successfully collared and monitored until she recovered. Although she was an adult (as were all the lions collared), she was the smallest of the females measured, with a body length of 137cm and a tail length of 87cm, giving her an overall length of 224cm. Despite our best efforts to collar lions in peripheral areas, it turns out that she appears to be one of the key females in Bushbuck pride, so is likely to be spotted by tourists. However, although we are mainly interested in movements around the edge of the Park, data from Mwasty will provide a valuable comparative baseline for lion movements within the heart of the National Park.



*Mwasty waking up after being fitted with a collar. Photo credit: Alphonse Constantine, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).*

Mwasty was named by the staff at Mwangusi Safari Lodge as a recognition for their great contributions to the sightings program over time. The whole Mwangusi staff got together to find this name that is the combination of Mwangusi and Staff.

Mwasty lives around the Great Ruaha River. During the last two months, she has stayed in an area of 140 km<sup>2</sup>. She ventured further from the river in November, sometimes ranging 9km from the river course. She also crossed the boundary of the national park to enter the Wildlife Management Area but luckily returned to the park soon after. It is normal for lions to concentrate their movements around the river during the dry season when their prey is forced to come to the few remaining waterholes to drink. Although the rainy season is delayed this year, we look forward to seeing whether she will change her patterns once the rains finally start.



*Mwasty's movements during November (green dots) and December 2017 (purple dots).*

## Lion speared in village land

Through our work, particularly with the Lion Defenders, we have seen a huge reduction in lions killed this year. However, we still suffer setbacks and challenges and in November we, unfortunately, lost a lion due to a retaliatory hunt. The lion struck two different houses over two consecutive nights which apparently led to a hunting party tracking and spearing the lion after the second attack. Our Lion Defender in that zone, Jack, had also suffered a depredation from a hyaena that night and as a result, he was unavailable to intercept the hunting party.

We quickly heard the news that a suspected hunt was happening, but due to the thick bush and distance from the village, we were not able to reach the area before the hunt had occurred. However, once three of our Lion Defenders (Darem, Mandela and Jack) managed to reach the area, they were able to meet some of the local warriors and talk to them about the situation. The young men pointed out that the lion had been killing livestock, and that people often felt unable to reduce that threat in other ways. The Lion Defenders reminded them of their permanent presence in the area and explained that they are always available to help to reinforce traditional livestock enclosures, help find lost livestock, and even help guard livestock enclosures overnight. They also explained our wire livestock enclosure programme and encouraged them to get community members to purchase one in order to prevent depredations.



Two young Barabaig and Kambona find the lion carcass in the bush. Photo credit: BenJee Cascio, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).

These incidents are discouraging, but it is likely that some level of retaliatory killing will always occur while depredations are common, and while the costs of carnivore presence outweigh the benefits to households.

Through a multi-faceted strategy, including the deployment of Lion Defenders to protect households, construction of predator-proof enclosures, and the development of local benefit initiatives specifically linked to wildlife presence, we can gradually change the situation and improve the conservation outlook. The success of this is clear - in 2017 we only had 3 traditional hunts, compared to 10 in 2016, while in 2011 (before those programmes started) we recorded over 30 lions killed in just a small area of village land. Challenges remain, but we are confident that as we continue and expand these programmes, the numbers of lions killed will decrease further, and people will start to really reap the benefits of their increased tolerance.

## RCP staff present at the TAWIRI conference

Every year the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) organizes a conference for researchers to share their findings regarding wildlife in Tanzania and abroad. One of RCP's main goal is to increase the capacity of local Tanzanian researchers and give them skills that they will need to further their careers. The senior staff worked hard to prepare one of our research assistants, Alphonse Constantine, to give a presentation at this year's conference.

Alphonse's presentation gave a general overview of RCP's programs and the impact the project has had in our work area. The talk was a success and a morale buster for our staff, who returned feeling proud of RCP and the difference we make in people's and carnivore's lives.



(Left) Alphonse and Zakayo at the TAWIRI conference. Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project. (Right) Alphonse Constantine presented RCP's work at TAWIRI's 2017 conference. Photo credit: Zakayo Ngalowska, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).

## The Lion Defenders team celebrates the success in 2017

On the 22nd of December, the Lion Defender team met at RCP camp for an end of year celebration and training. The 13 Lion Defenders, Community Liaison Officer (Stephano), Junior Research Assistant (Kambona), and LD Manager (BenJee) met for the day at RCP camp to discuss challenges, success stories, and plan for the new year.

The team also reviewed the use of GPS, strategies in responding to hunts, as well as reviewed the statistics for 2017. The team made an enormous impact this year and we hope we can continue to be successful and grow in 2018!



*It is a rare occasion for the Lion Defender team to be together in one place. They always love it!  
Photo credit: Ana Grau, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).*

## **Community Camera Trapping - wildlife provides important benefits to villagers**

Every month the dedicated RCP team organizes a *sherehe* (Swahili for celebration) in one of the villages in our area. This celebration is a part of the Community Camera Trapping programme: villagers put out camera-traps, receive points for wildlife they photograph, and then those points are translated into direct community benefits which are given out at the *sherehe*. Although it is logistically challenging and takes a lot of time, it gives community members the opportunity to see the benefits that living with carnivores brings them.

In December the celebration took place in Malinzanga, who finished in third place in the Community Camera Trapping competition. Malinzanga was competing with Idodi, Kitesi and Mafuluto to see which village had had more wildlife on their land over the last three months.

The winner (Idodi) received \$2,000 of community benefits. In second place was Kitesi which received \$1,500. The third position received \$1,000 and Mafuluto - the fourth - received \$500. The benefits are bought and distributed by RCP, and are split equally between three categories requested by the villagers: education, health and veterinary care.

The Malinzanga local government was extremely welcoming and full of gratitude towards RCP. It made our day to hear how - since another of our benefit initiatives, the school feeding programme started in their primary school - all their students have passed their exams for the first time ever. They have also had one student getting the highest ever grades!



*The main goal of the CCT celebration is for the community to see that coexistence with wildlife brings tangible benefits. Representatives of each sector receive their benefits in front of the community.  
Photo Credit: Hillary Mrosso, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).*



*A group of Maasai girls performed a traditional dance during the celebration.  
Photo Credit: Hillary Mrosso, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).*



*The whole community is invited to the celebration, men, women and children. Herders and farmers. It is a day to celebrate! Photo Credit: Hillary Mrosso, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).*

**What have animals been up to on village land**



The rains are late and a small waterhole in Kitisi village attracts plenty of wildlife. But animals need to be alert because predators will likely also be around. These impalas are ready to flee at the slightest movement. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



At the same waterhole in Kitisi this group of greater kudu is also on high alert. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



And as expected, where there is prey there are predators: excitingly for us, we have seen a lioness with two cubs coming every night for a drink. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Bush duikers, like this one pictured in Kisanga, are very common in village land. They can be differentiated from other small antelopes by the black ridge over the nose. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



A group of elephants with their small calves look for green grass in Mafuluto village. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



In Mahuninga village a group of common eland is also looking for newly grown grass. Eland are known for traveling great distances in search of food. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



It is not that common to see elephants dust-bathing like these ones in Tungamalenga. They usually like to bathe in mud but maybe the exceptionally dry conditions haven't left them any other alternative. Photo credit: Ruaha [Carnivore Project](#).



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Although Ruaha is an important landscape for buffalo, they are rarely seen in village land. This one was spotted in Tungamalenga village. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



*In Malinzanga, this black-backed jackal pays a daily visit to our camera trap. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).*

## Sightings programme - news from the Park

The guides who work for different lodges in Ruaha are our eyes and ears in the park. Thanks to their cooperation, every month we can collect detailed data on our five target carnivore species - lion, hyaena, leopard, cheetah and wild dog - inside the park. Thanks to their efforts we can gather detailed information that would be almost impossible for our small team to do alone.

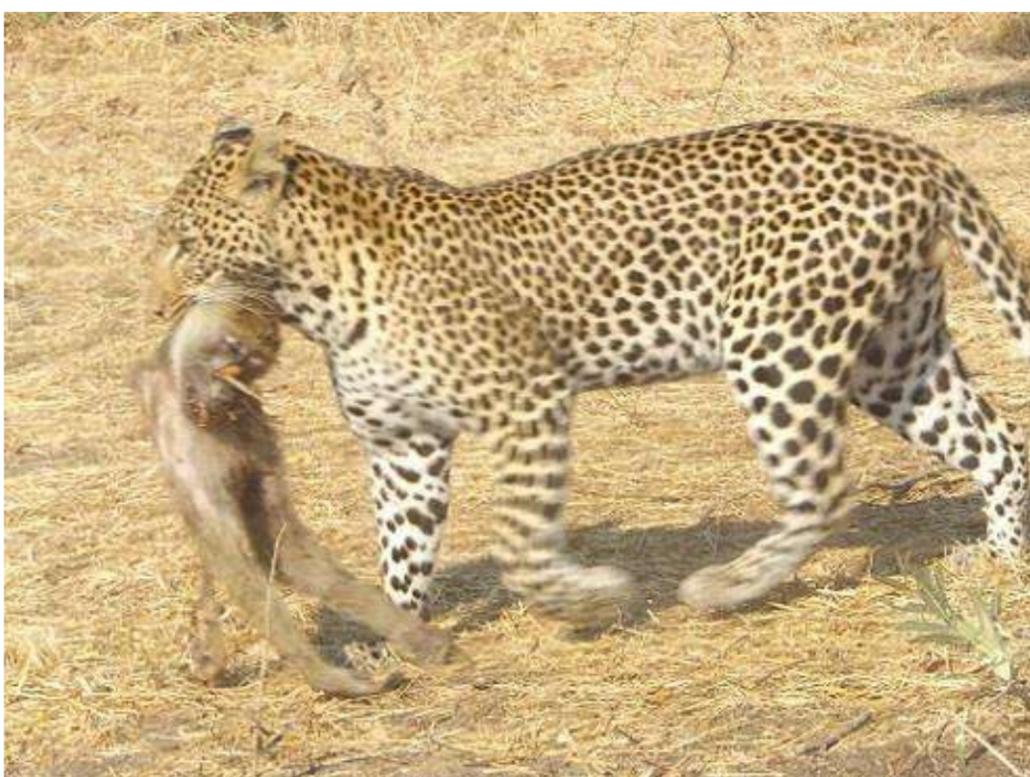
The guides also get us some awesome shots of daily life inside the park.



*Wild dogs move over huge areas and it is difficult, even for experienced guides, to know their whereabouts. However, this month staff at Jongomero managed to spot a pack that comes to breed inside the park. Photo Credit: Leonard Mbelle, [Jongomero Camp](#).*



*Buffalo is one of the lion's favourite meals. These two females can get some rest, knowing that their pride and cubs will be well fed for some days. Photo credit: Husein, [Kigelia Camp](#).*



This leopard must be really crafty to be able to catch a baboon in bright daylight. Photo credit: Kahimba, [Mdonya Old River Camp](#).



We received a most welcome picture of one of our collared lionesses relaxing with her pride. Photo credit: Justin Kalinga, [Mwagusi Safari Camp](#).



Last month we shared the picture of the “black lion” and this month we have a “black spotted hyaena” in the making. Photo credit: Majuto Magellah, [Ruaha River Lodge](#).



Cheetah like to hunt in open spaces where they can take advantage of their great speed to outrun their prey. Photo credit: Christopher, [Albert Tandala Tented Lodge](#).



A lioness engages in the daily cleaning of her cub, who seems to find it very pleasing. Photo credit: Jumanne, [Mdonya Old River Camp](#).

## Meet the team - Hillary Thomas Mrosso, RCP Research Assistant

Hillary, a keen conservationist, was born in the northern part of Tanzania, in Kilimanjaro region, where his family continues to live. He is an avid reader and writer, loves doing data work on the computer and is a qualified driver - all of which make him an asset to the RCP team.

According to Hillary: 'It was after finished my O Level secondary school at DCT Jubilee High school, I met a guy a retired from TANAPA who was giving a talk about wildlife. He didn't talk much to me at the event but handed me a bundle of the well-known magazine, KAKAKUONA (Pangolin magazine), about tourism and conservation. Within days I'd read the magazines and returned them to him, and asked him if he had more magazines that I could read about wildlife and conservation. From then onwards I became very interested and passionate about wildlife, and went on to study at Sokoine University of Agriculture, where I did a Bachelor of Science Degree majoring in Wildlife Management. Armed with that knowledge, I was able to make my dream come true.'

When I finished my degree, I continued to study via the internet, and to read published papers and articles on wildlife conservation; it was at this time that I came across an article about the Ruaha Carnivore Project. I read it very carefully and at the end of the article, I saw an email address. And said to myself, I cannot wait to ask even for a volunteering position on this great project! Fortunately, my request was immediately accepted, and I found myself working with the best and most passionate wildlife people. I really enjoy my work and tackle every task with enthusiasm every day.

Being part of the RCP team has given me the opportunity to live out my life's dream as a wildlife researcher. At RCP I work as a research assistant on the Community Camera Trap (CCT) programme where I get to interact with the communities and talk to them about wildlife and wildlife ecology. My life has been transformed at RCP through working with wildlife professionals and through exposure to the RCP programmes like Park Trips, DVD Nights and Depredation follow-ups. Presentation and teaching secondary students on Carnivores, Collaring, and so on. Thank you to RCP for this opportunity!'



*(Left) Hillary is a keen photographer, when out in the field he captured this moody image of the bush. (Right) Hillary with RCP Director Dr Amy Dickman at a village shehere. Photo credit: Penelope Rogers*

## Species Spotlight - Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis*)

The beautiful leopard tortoise is one of our favourites at RCP and joins the rhino beetle, the red-billed buffalo weaver, the elephant shrew and the antlion as one of the famed 'Little Five' members.



*A leopard tortoise going full throttle, check out the distinct markings on the shell. Photo credit: Peter Jennings*

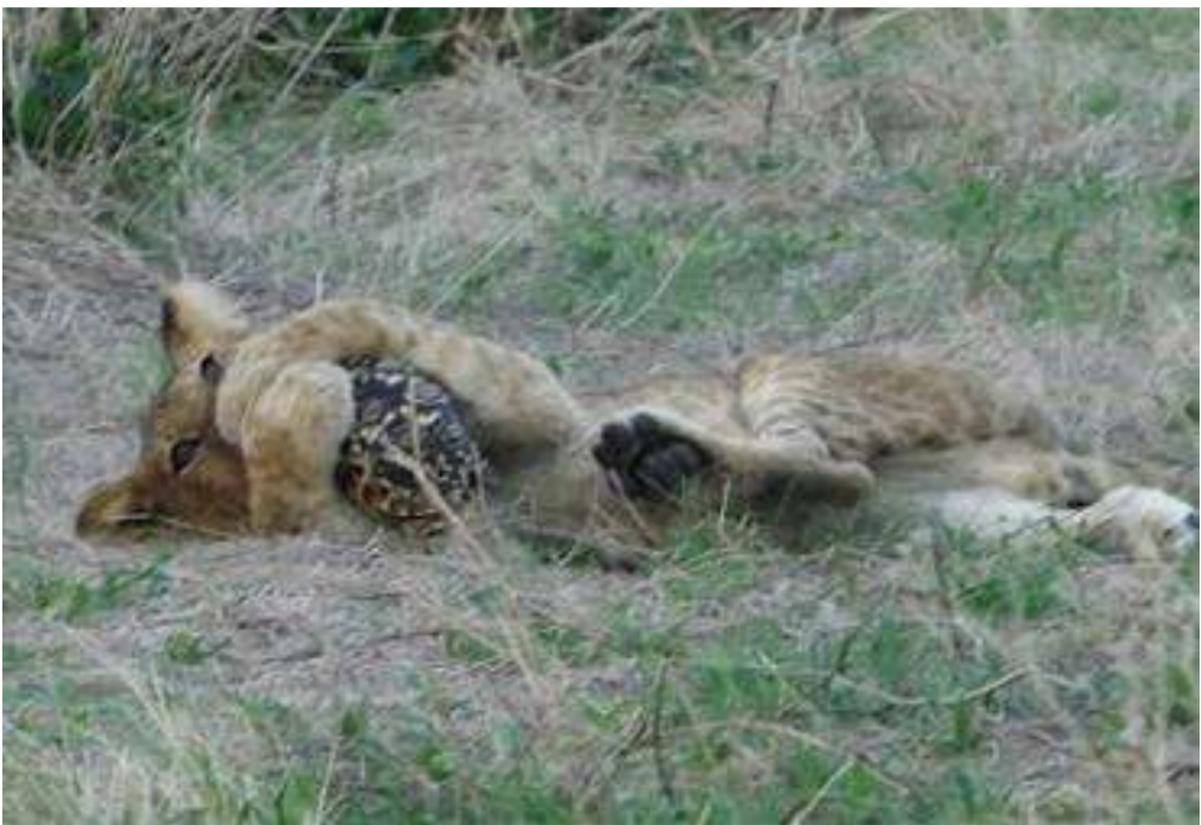
Leopard tortoises are named for the markings on their shell or 'carapace' - black dots and splashes on a bright yellow background which fade with maturity. No two tortoises are marked in the same way - the individual panels of the shell are called 'scutes' and ridges formed with each season's growth can be used to determine an approximate age, in the same way as counting the rings on a tree.

In common with all tortoises, the 'plastron' or base of the shell is convex in males to facilitate mating. The leopard tortoise has a unique 'nuchal shield' which allows it to raise its head and as a result, it is the only tortoise that can swim. Here is one swimming across a puddle in the road!



*Swimming tortoise. Photo credit: Peter Jennings*

Living up to one hundred years of age, the leopard tortoise is the fourth largest tortoise in the world, and the second largest species native to Africa. Typically, they will grow to 16 inches in length and weigh up to 30 pounds, although larger specimens have been known. Common in savanna habitats throughout the continent, mature adults have no natural predators, however, eggs and hatchlings will be taken by lizards, snakes and large birds. Females lay their eggs in holes during the months May to October and several clutches averaging 15-18 eggs may be laid in a single season. The length of incubation can vary by several months - this is determined by the temperature which, extraordinarily, also determines the gender of the hatchlings! Eggs incubating at 26-31°C will hatch male, and 31-34°C will be female.  
*References: Wikipedia, EcoTraining*



*Some readers will remember the fascinating images captured last year by Alphonse Mallya of lion cubs playing with a leopard tortoise (the tortoise appeared unharmed by this encounter).*

### **Letter from a Simba Scholar' - for all of you!**

The Simba Scholarship programme started in 2013 as a way to give pastoralists' households tangible benefits for coexisting with carnivores in their land. A better education for their children is one of the things local herders value the most. Poverty, big families, and an economy based on cows make difficult for some families to cover the costs for their children to go to secondary school. For those children, each year of extra education makes a difference in their future lives.

At RCP we were thrilled when in September six of our Simba scholars graduated from secondary school. And we were moved when Warini, one of RCP's Simba Scholars came to bring a thank you letter to his sponsors. Since your support is what makes this programme possible, this letter is also for you:

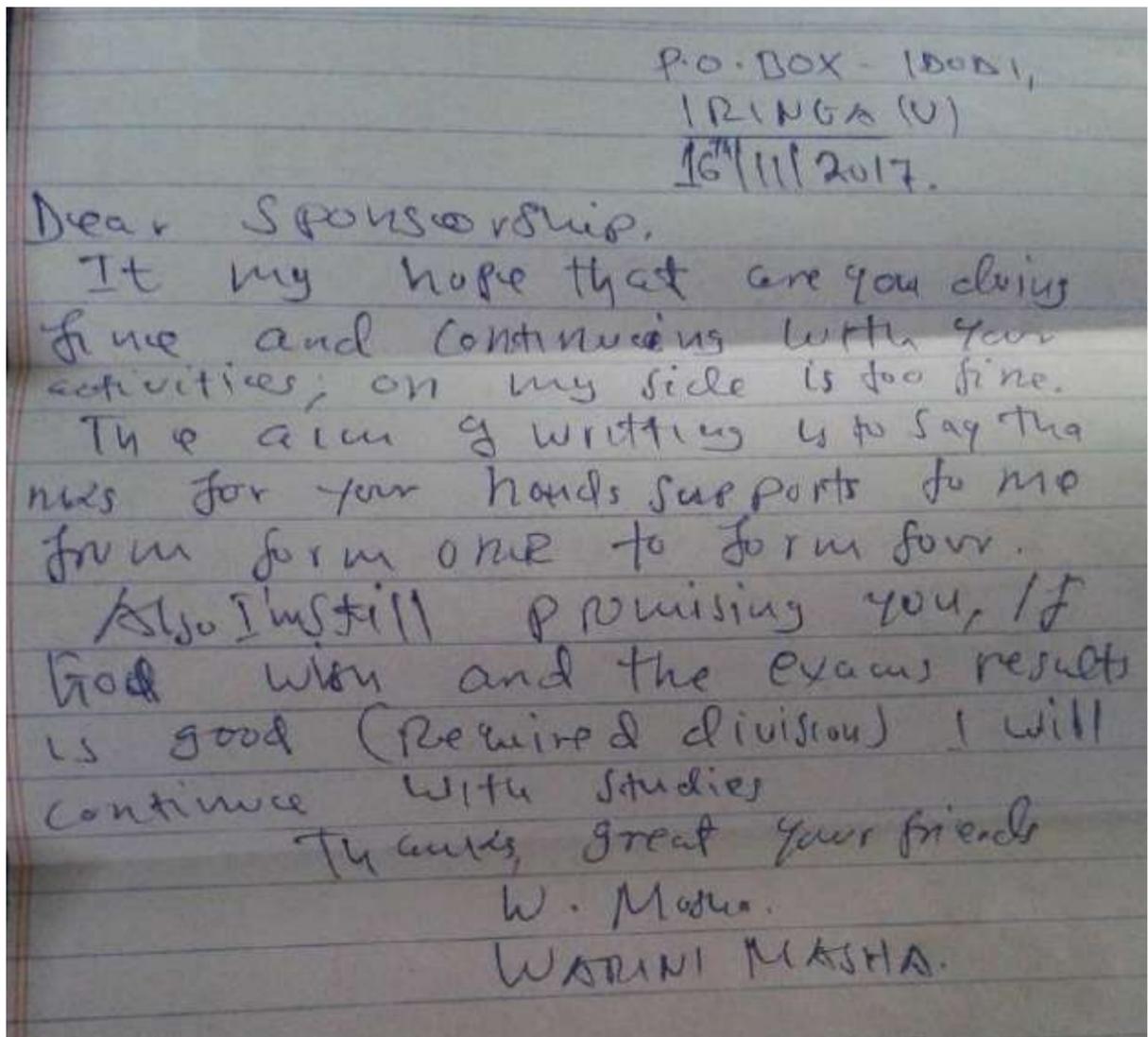
*"Dear sponsor,*

*It is my hope that you are doing fine and continuing with your activities, on my side too everything is fine. The aim of writing is to say thanks for your great support for my secondary education.*

*Also, I am still promising you if God wishes and the exam results are good, I will continue my studies and do my best.*

*Thanks from your best friend,*

*Warini Masha"*



### **THANK YOU ~ ASANTE SANA**

With the end of 2017 fast approaching, we would like to thank each and every one of you for your interest in the Ruaha Carnivore Project, and for your unwavering support for our work. We can't say THANK YOU enough because we simply could not do our work without you. This festive season we trust that you will enjoy spending time with your family and loved ones! As many of you know, our director, Dr. Amy Dickman, is about to give Millie a little brother, and so, I'm sure that you join the RCP team in wishing her and her family congratulations and say a very big WELCOME to their new Christmas baby!

To dedicate your support, please click below to find out more about our programmes:



**Ecological research** - RCP provides vital data on Ruaha's little-known carnivore populations through camera-trapping and recording carnivore sightings. More than 10,000 carnivore sightings have been recorded to date. ([Read more...](#))



**Community camera-trapping** - RCP trains and employs local villagers to set up and manage camera-traps on village land in return for community benefits, directly linking conservation with development. ([Read more...](#))



**Protecting the livelihoods** of villagers living in proximity to carnivores reduces conflict. Fortifying livestock enclosures and placing guarding dogs are proving successful in minimizing conflict. ([Read more...](#))



**The RCP Lion Defenders** actively prevent and stop lion hunts. These Lion Defenders are chosen from amongst the bravest and most influential warriors. ([Read more...](#))



**Kids 4 Cats** is a school-twinning programme where local schools are 'adopted' by international schools who raise at least US\$500 annually for them, to buy essential education material and equipment. ([Read more...](#))



**Simba Scholars** receive full scholarships for all four years of their secondary school. The cost is US\$2,000 per student and RCP is keen to expand the programme to more students. ([Read more...](#))



**Porridge Project** - No one likes to go to school hungry, so RCP and our partners make sure that local scholars have full tummies when they're at school - this increases attendance and attainment, employs local women and is a major benefit in villages where there is very little food security. ([Read more...](#))



**DVD nights and Park trips** provide education about conservation and species in a fun, non-threatening environment. To date more than 30 000 attendees have enjoyed DVD nights and more than 1,000 people have been on Park trips. ([Read more...](#))

Should you wish to know more about individual programmes we will happily send you more information. Please contact our communications manager, Margaret Roestorf at [margaretroestorf.rcp@gmail.com](mailto:margaretroestorf.rcp@gmail.com). Should you wish to speak directly to the Director, Dr. Amy Dickman, please contact her at [amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk](mailto:amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk).

To support our work, you can use one of the following channels:

If you haven't yet browsed through the **RCP wish list on Amazon**, it's a great way to get connected to the project and find needs that suit your pocket and your passion.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/registry/wishlist/?ie=UTF8&cid=AMZKTSB73EMFA>  
<https://www.amazon.com/gp/registry/wishlist/1880XADYUZXWF?>

#### Donating via EFT

Bank: Barclays Bank plc  
Account Name: University of Oxford Development trust  
Account Number: 40155586  
Sort Code: 20-65-20  
Swift Code: BARCGB22  
IBAN Number: GB06BAR20652040155586

#### UK Donors (online)

[www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/report/ruaha-carnivore-project](http://www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/report/ruaha-carnivore-project)

#### US Donors (online)

<http://www.houstonzoo.org/saving-wildlife/ruaha-carnivore-project/>

To pay via **cheque** please contact Amy Dickman at [amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk](mailto:amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk).

*Until next month - so long... tutaonana*



Photo credit: Majuto Magellah, [Ruaha River Lodge](#).

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