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RCP REPORT | MARCH - APRIL 2018

Camera trapping benefits used to help pastoralists after conflict

Lion attacks at *bomas* - traditional livestock enclosures - are a major challenge for the local pastoralists. Our team does all we can to reduce them from having our boma team reinforce them with wire, to RCP's Lion Defenders guarding the enclosures overnight, especially if there are fears that a lion may return.

After an unfortunate attack on a donkey recently, a pastoralist requested assistance for veterinary medicine to help the donkey recover. The donkey had several infected injuries. Families, especially women, depend on donkeys to transport water and firewood from distant locations. The loss of one donkey and the resultant increase in workload can even prevent young girls from attending school. As part of RCP's Community Camera Trap programme, pastoralists are allocated a third of the "prize money" for veterinary medicine, so part of this was used to assist the affected pastoralist. Although it is difficult to suffer an attack, we hope the benefits can help pastoralists tolerate such incidents.



Photo: (left to right) Mwinyi, Julius, Darem, and the boma owner help to apply antibiotic spray to a donkey that was injured by a lion. Photo credit: BenJee Cascio, Ruaha Carnivore Project.

RCP conflict team responds to suspected cheetah attacks

Our Lion Defender programme is not yet active in the northern parts of our study area, in Pawaga District, but we still try to respond to conflict in the area however we can. RCP's Conflict Officer, Meshak Sanya, heard reports that a group of cheetahs attacked a group of sheep belonging to local Sukuma agropastoralists. Cheetah attacks are not common in our area so this was unusual news. The attack reportedly occurred in a sparsely populated area near the Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Our team, including Kitulu Lesso, our nearest Lion Defender, went investigate the attack and engage the pastoralists in dialogue.

The local pastoralists showed us the sheep that had been attacked and shared details of the attack. They told us that there was a group of "very small leopards" in the area but that they didn't disturb them much, as they were easily chased away by herders - all of this fits with it being a group of cheetahs. However, they initially found a period when the herder wasn't paying attention and attacked one sheep. The team worked with the livestock keeper to share pointers on how best to prevent further attacks, such as through vigilant herding and the use of dogs, as both have proved effective at reducing cheetah attacks in our study area.



Photo: RCP's Conflict Officer (Meshak Sanya) and Lion Defender (Kitulu Lesso) inspect the attacked sheep together with the owners. Often the marks left by the predator can help confirm the species that attacked the animal. Photo credit: BenJee Cascio, Ruaha Carnivore Project.

A few days later, we were called by the Community Camera Trap Officer in Magombwe village who also spoke about this group of cheetahs. They had apparently attacked several sheep and a calf, not far from where the first reported attack. The team responded again, and worked with the household owner to share best-practice methods of livestock protection. Cheetahs rely more heavily than most large carnivores on human-dominated land, so when they are around, it is important for pastoralists to be alert and ensure that they are using dogs and herders to prevent attacks. We hope this will be the end of the cheetah attacks, but if not, we will aim to respond and help households however we can. Although these incidents are very hard for local people, who rely extremely heavily upon livestock, just responding and listening to people can make a real difference in reducing antagonism towards carnivores, improving livestock husbandry and reducing the chances of retaliatory killings.



Photo: RCP's team inspect a goat that was reportedly injured by the cheetahs in Magombwe village. Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

150 students compete for RCP's Simba Scholarships

The chance to attend secondary school is highly prized in our study area, as many families are unable to pay for their children's education past primary school. However, every extra year of education has a positive impact on the life of the student, their family and even their future children. Therefore, for the past seven years, RCP has offered six annual secondary-school scholarships to pastoralist children. The aim of this programme is to show that conservation projects can assist community development, help offset the burden imposed by carnivores on pastoralist families, and encourage greater tolerance of carnivores in the area.

The programme has been very popular, and there have been repeated calls to provide some opportunities for non-pastoralist students as well. Therefore, this year we agreed to add two extra Simba Scholarships for those students, in addition to the six pastoralist ones.



Photo: A group of girls take the RCP exam in Mlowa secondary school. Photo credit: Fenrick Msigwa, Ruaha Carnivore Project.

On March 17, approximately 150 students from four different secondary schools took RCP's exam to try to obtain one of the scholarships. Among the group of students who passed the exam, we chose the eight scholars based upon their attainment in the test, as well as their family background and their need for support. During April, RCP staff visited all the families to make sure the parents understood all the conditions of the grant. All of them agreed not to engage in any activity that harms carnivores and not to obstruct their children's education. The new eight students were officially selected (three girls and five boys) and they have all been incorporated into boarding school. We will share their individual stories in the coming newsletters.



Photo: RCP staff and the school teacher visit the family of one of the new Simba Scholars to sign the agreement. One of the requirements of the scholarship that the family agrees to avoid activities such as poisoning carnivores. Photo credit: Salum Kenya, Ruaha Carnivore Project.

Lion killed following depredation

The rainy season is always a period of conflict between carnivores and villagers, as carnivores tend to rely more on village land during this time. It means the team works tirelessly - often for days and nights at a time - trying to prevent depredations and carnivore killings, but it is impossible to stop all such incidents.

In March, RCP received a report that a lion had killed a cow in the early evening. Our Lion Defender team arrived on the scene within an hour and tracked the lion to a thick bush where it was eating the carcass. Due to the dense bush and the fact it was nearly dark, the team was unable to safely chase the lion away, but they stayed to guard the nearby bomas overnight and decided to chase the lion away in the morning.

However, in the morning, we heard that a group of young men had already gathered to hunt the lion. Our team split up with half the team engaging the livestock owners and neighbours to discuss how we could help to prevent such conflicts occurring. The other team went to track the lion and to try to intercept and stop the hunting party. The lion moved into a populated area of village land, which obviously caused major concern amongst the villagers. The village leaders called Tanzania Park Authorities (TANAPA) to come and help deal with the lion. TANAPA responded quickly and sent out a vet and rangers, with the aim of darting the lion and releasing it within Ruaha National Park.

Throughout the day, our Lion Defenders worked tirelessly to discourage young men from spearing the lion and encouraging people to alert TANAPA if it was spotted. However, despite the best efforts of the TANAPA and RCP teams, the lion could not be successfully darted, and ended up attacking more livestock and then taking refuge very close to a local primary school. Unfortunately, at that point, it was deemed too much of a danger to human life and had to be shot.



Photo: The TANAPA rangers had to shoot the young male lion after it was located close to a primary school. Photo Credit: BenJee Cascio, Ruaha Carnivore Project.

It is always very sad to lose a lion, but this kind of incident highlights how difficult it is to manage these potentially very dangerous animals on village land. This was a young male who was probably dispersing out of the Park, and he may have resorted to hunting livestock as it would have been easier than finding and killing wild game. Preventing such events needs ongoing efforts on various levels - helping people protect their stock, working with warriors to reduce the chance of hunts starting, and working closely with the authorities on best-practice problem animal management. Despite this setback, the team is as committed as ever to achieving those goals and reducing the chances of similar incidents occurring in the future.

It is true what they say - LandRovers never die!

We depend on our fleet of aged, second-hand vehicles for all our programmes, and they are constantly required to navigate rough roads and deep bush. They undergo constant maintenance and our mechanic team of Rashid and Salum do an excellent job of managing to keep them on the road as much as possible.

We recently welcomed back a member of our car fleet, known - rather unimaginatively! - as the Brown Landrover. After spending a year in Iringa and a year in camp, the team resurrected the vehicle with an engine overhaul, bodywork, and a whole lot of elbow grease! The vehicle will help us to transport wire boma materials for reinforced bomas that reduce depredation by predators. Seeing the Brown Landrover back in action was a great day, and our team is pictured celebrating here in front of the garage to acknowledge the new maiden voyage!



Photo: The RCP team are happy to have this sturdy car back in action. This LandRover will be especially helpful with the wire boma program. Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project.

Collared female F1 named Clea by Cleveland Metroparks Zoo

F1 was one of the female lions darted by our team late last year. She was spotted between R26 and Lunda, and was in a deep 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.



Photo: F1 has been named Clea by Cleveland Zoo since they are one of RCP's key supporters, here she rests calmly with the rest of her pride in Ruaha National Park. Photo credit: Whiteman John from [Ruaha River Lodge](#).

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 are 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, she has remained within the boundaries of Ruaha since she was collared. However, although we are mainly interested in movements around the edge of the Park, data from F1 will provide a valuable comparative baseline for lion movements within the heart of the National Park. We are particularly excited to share her data with our partners at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and Cleveland Zoo Society, and further, raise awareness of Ruaha's lions and the need for ongoing work to protect them.

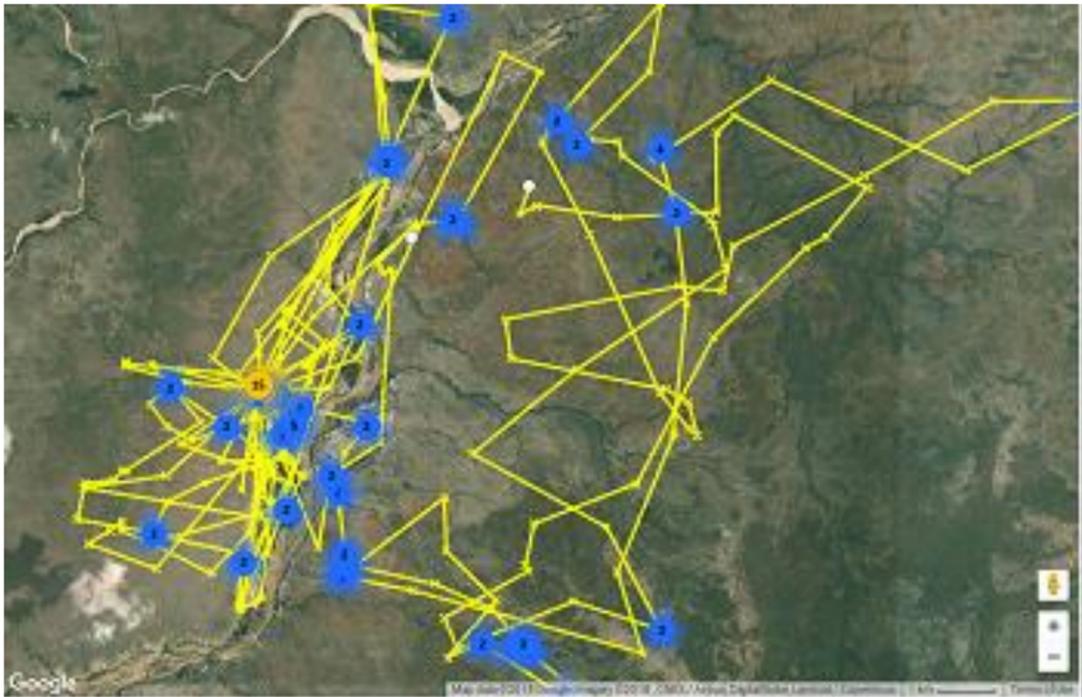


Photo: The last two month's movements of F1. During the rainy season, this lioness ventured farther from the river but always returned to the river margins after the hunting expeditions. Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project.

Camera trapping offers rewards for coexisting with wildlife

Our community camera-trapping (CCT) programme provides tangible benefits to local people thanks to the presence of wildlife on village land. Villagers place camera-traps on their land, and receive points for each wild animal photographed, which translate into valuable community benefits. The programme currently extends over 12 villages and is possible due to RCP's dedicated team of CCT Officers. The officers are hired in the local villages and are responsible for choosing the location of the cameras and ensuring their wellbeing. All of the officers are chosen by the village because they have great wildlife knowledge and can place the cameras in the best place every month to maximise sightings. Some of the officers were previously poachers but are now the most convinced conservationists because they know that their wildlife brings benefits to the villages.

The CCT officers hardly ever see each other and seldom have the opportunity to share experiences. In March, we brought them to camp to have a lengthy discussion about the programme, the major achievements and the main challenges each village is facing. It was an extremely productive meeting that will help us improve in making sure that everyone in the area feels the benefits of coexisting with wildlife.



Photo: A rare picture of the whole CCT team including 24 officers and RCP's research assistants and Field Operations Manager. Photo credit: Hillary Mrosso, [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).

What have the animals been up to in the villages?



Photo: An armadillo sits quietly in front of our camera in Idodi village. These beautiful insect eaters are common but harmless when it comes to livestock or crops. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: Two duikers in Isele village caught in what they probably assumed was a private moment! Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: Herds of eland have been spotted again in Tungamalenga where the vast green grasslands seem to be attracting these big wandering antelopes. Eland are good prey for lion prides because they are big enough to feed several adults. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: It seems to be breeding time for the giraffes in Makifu, and we have seen them fighting and bonding on our cameras. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: Not a mammal but worth sharing this picture of a helmeted guinea fowl in Mafuluto village. These birds are extremely common across the Ruaha Landscape. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: Honey badgers love honey but they wouldn't hesitate to fight off a lion to steal some meat. This pair is looking for buried insects in Kinyika Village. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: And as always, spotted hyenas can't be missed by our cameras. This solitary hyaena was spotted in Mapogoro village. Although known as scavengers, they are powerful hunters and will often attack weak livestock enclosures to kill goats and sheep. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: A beautiful image of what looks to be a fairly young lioness, watching carefully in Kitisi village, where the project is headquartered. She was part of a group captured on the cameras that night, generating many points for the village. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: The lions must have perceived the human smell on the camera because they soon came back and knocked it down. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).



Photo: And another curious bird - an open billed stork - is spotted in Kisanga village. These birds have a preference for wetlands and this one seems quite out of place in this spot. Photo credit: [Ruaha Carnivore Project](#).

Sightings update

Most lodges in Ruaha are closed for the low season with only a few remaining open in the coming months until tourists start arriving again in May. The few guides that are still working continue to collect much-needed and valuable data on carnivores. We thank all the guides who have collected so many important sightings for us.



Photo: Seeing eland is always a treat in Ruaha but a big group like this is a stroke of luck. Photo credit: Ayubu Nyang'ango, [Mdonya Old River Camp](#).



Photo: Spotted hyenas are mostly nocturnal but sometimes wander around during the day. Photo credit: Hussein Ngaloka, [Nomad Tanzania Kigelia Camp](#).



Photo: Ruaha is a very important landscape for cheetahs, and some tourists were lucky enough to see this beautiful pair looking for prey from a broken tree. Photo credit: Joel Mfinanga, [Nomad Tanzania Kigelia Camp](#).



Photo: This is a gorgeous photo of a leopard gracefully slinking through the grass. Photo credit: Jumanne Myovellah, [Mdonya Old River Camp](#).



Photo: The aardwolf is a termite-eater that moves mostly at night. We rarely see pictures of this species during the day. Great spotting! Photo credit: Leonard Mbelle, [Jongomero Camp](#).



Photo: A beautiful picture of a leopard resting on a rock. Photo credit: Moinga Timani, [Asilia Africa Jabali Ridge Camp](#).



Photo: It is the rainy season and the lions are roaming around the village land but there are still enough of them inside the park to make a great view to enjoy. Photo credit: Moinga Timani, [Asilia Africa Jabali Ridge Camp](#).

Species Spotlight: Hippopotamus amphibious

Named by the Greeks “river horse”, derived from '(h)ippo' meaning horse and 'pot-amus' meaning flowing river, it is thought that hippos were once found in the River Thames that flows through London. They are now only found in the lakes and rivers of eastern, central and southern sub-Saharan Africa, where populations are decreasing.



Photo: A group of hippos group - referred to alternatively as a herd, bloat, crash. pod, raft, dale or thunder of hippos - enjoying the cool waters of the Ruaha river. This photo was taken near the entrance to the Ruaha National Park, at the bridge which offers an excellent vantage point for viewing hippos. Photo credit: Theophil Myinga, [Jongomero Camp](#).

The magnificent hippo weighs up to 4 tons and is able to gallop at 30kmph, which should not be underestimated as it means it can outrun a man! However, hippos are at their most dangerous in the water, where one snap of their jaws can break a crocodile, or a canoe, in two. Unable to jump or even step over obstacles, they are most at home in the water. They are graceful swimmers, mating and even nursing their tiny new born calves underwater.



Photo: Often using a neighbour as a pillow, hippos spend most of the day submerged to keep their thin skin from dehydrating and burning. Eyes and nostrils are located high on the head so that they can see and breathe whilst resting. Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project.

Hippos don't have sweat glands but secrete an oily red fluid from their mucus glands, giving rise to the myth that they sweat blood. Interestingly, this protective fluid acts mainly as a moisturiser and sun lotion, and possibly also helps to fight infection.



Photo: At dusk, hippos leave the water and travel up to 6 miles to graze on up to 80lb of grass each night. Mums leave their calves in a guarded crèche whilst taking it in turns to graze in order to give protection against crocodiles, lions, and hyenas. Photo credit: Theophil Myinga, [Jongomero Camp](#).

Calves are born every other year and as daughters stay with mothers until they are adults, up to four siblings, led by the youngest, can be seen following one mother! Hippos are one of the noisiest African animals and schools of hippos can number up to 200 animals. This makes for quite a honking and wheezing spectacle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmH7HUUikyl> but, not surprisingly, over-crowding can lead to bad tempers! More commonly, they associate in sociable groups of around twenty, in territories that are sometimes defended for their entire lifespan of 30 years. A relative of the hippo is the solitary forest-dwelling pygmy hippo of West Africa that is rarely seen.

References: Richard Estes, National Geographic, Trevor Carnaby

Meet the Team - BenJee Cascio, Lion Defenders Manager

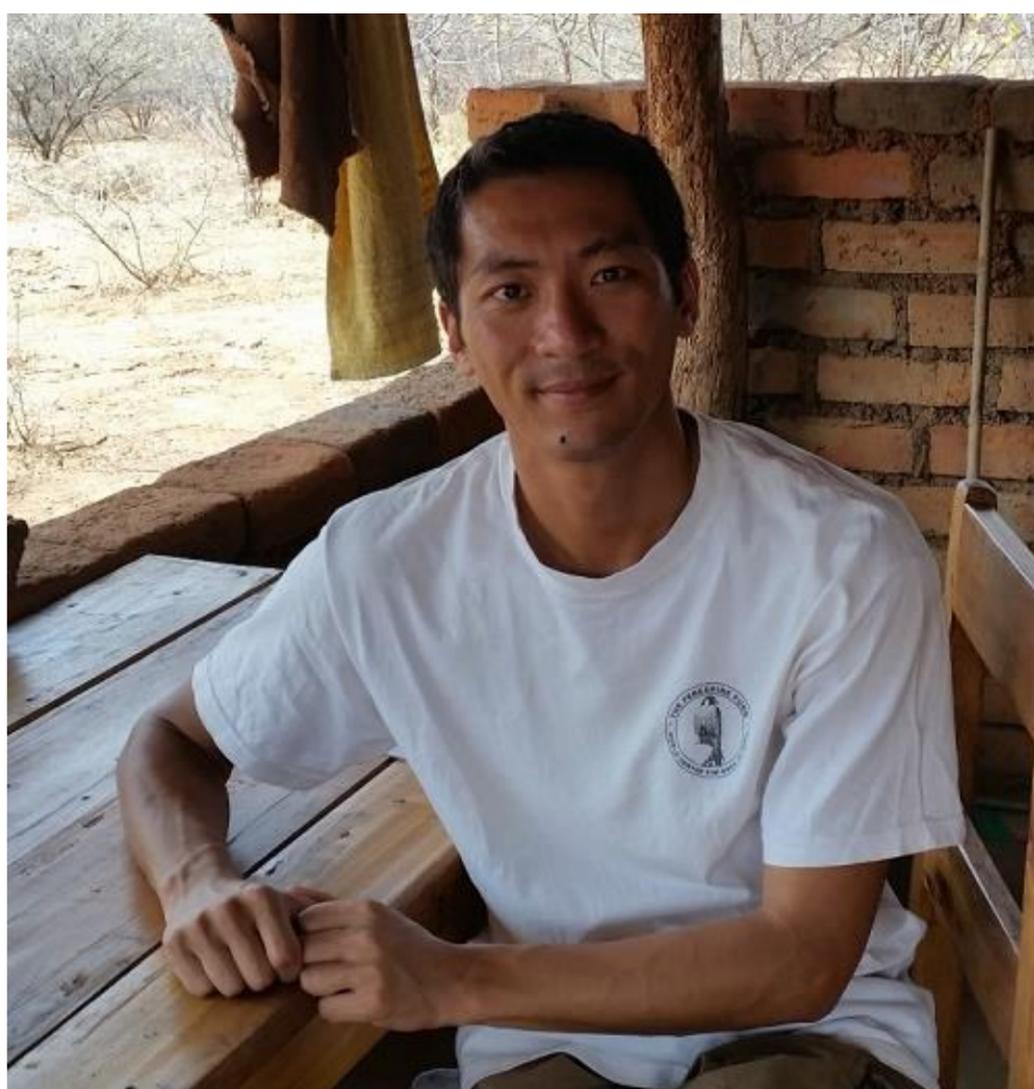


Photo: BenJee Cascio has a busy time coordinating Lion Defenders across all the zones where they operate. He takes a rare breather for Ana Grau to snap his portrait. Photo credit: Ana Grau, Ruaha Carnivore Project.

Hi, my name is BenJee and I'm originally from Wisconsin in the USA. My background is in community development and capacity building and I hold a Masters of Science in Economics, Policy, Management, and Society from the University of Minnesota. I joined RCP in June 2017 as the Lion Defenders manager and enjoy working with the local communities to reduce human/wildlife conflict. The job provides many challenges and opportunities for innovative solutions and I love to work with the Lion Defenders to continue to engage the communities. When not defending lions my hobbies include playing music, bird-watching, hiking, chess and geography.

THANK YOU ~ ASANTE SANA

As always, we thank all our donors for their generous and committed support.



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. Should you wish to speak directly to the Director, Dr. Amy Dickman, please contact her at 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.

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To pay via **cheque** please contact Amy Dickman at amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk.

Until next time...



This charming photo of our species in the spotlight for this issue was captured by one the lodge drivers who collect visual data as part of the RCP Sightings Programme. They often get rare shots, such as this one, as they spend many hours in the park, and their contribution to RCP's dataset is invaluable. Photo credit: Moinga Timanyi, [Asilia Africa Kwiwaha Camp](#) and Joel, [Nomad Tanzania Kigelia Camp](#).

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