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RCP REPORT | MAY - JUNE 2018

Vital benefits distributed to RCP's twinned schools

Local communities around Ruaha face many challenges: they are extremely poor, have little access to healthcare, education, clean water or secure sources of food - and on top of those issues, they also suffer costs from living alongside potentially dangerous animals. Because of conflicts, such as elephants raiding crops or lions killing cattle, it is sometimes difficult for villagers to see that wildlife in their area actually brings any benefits to them. When RCP first started, we asked villagers which benefits they would most like to see from wildlife presence, and education was one of their top priorities. Therefore, we started the 'Kids for Cats' school twinning programme, where international schools (often in the US and Europe) are twinned with local village schools, for which they raise funds every year.

Each international school is asked to raise a minimum of US\$500 per year - although more is obviously very welcome! For the village schools, this is vital income that allows them to buy things that we would take for granted, such as books, pens and desks. To date, we have twinned 15 schools, and in May we visited them all, distributing the materials they had requested and learned of the great things this programme makes possible.



The children at Mahuninga primary school were very happy to receive notebooks, pens and other stationery that will make a difference in their day-to-day schooling. Photo credit: Ana Grau, Ruaha Carnivore Project

Some schools ask for books, so each student can use their own during lessons; some are doing school improvements or building a most needed extra classroom; others are getting electricity so the children can study even when it is dark, and some are investing in computers and other equipment.

To all the generous children and teachers in our international twinned schools who make this possible with their efforts: a HUGE THANK YOU from everyone at RCP and the children around Ruaha!

If you know a school that would be interested in joining the programme you can learn more here: <http://www.ruahacarnivoreproject.com/benefits/kids-4-cats/> or please contact info@ruahacarnivoreproject.com.



The children at Makifu school excited as they receive all the materials the school need to install electricity! Having electricity opens many new options for the children and everyone is very excited about it.

Photo Credit: Ana Grau, Ruaha Carnivore Project

Lion Defender dancing events grow more and more popular!

In the Barabaig culture, men are typically awarded “dancing rights” after spearing a lion, which enables them to have fun and mingle with young women! Ruaha Carnivore Project has worked with the Lion Defenders and community members to support this activity with a twist; instead of hosting an event for those who speared lions, we host an event for everyone in a community that has not killed a lion in the past month.

These events are wildly popular with around 50 youth attending each month. Because the Barabaig live in scattered households and spend much of their time grazing, the opportunity for a social event brings large crowds. While it is intended to be an informal and fun event, RCP also uses the opportunity to explain our programmes and objectives. This is especially important as the Barabaig are highly mobile and often new Barabaig pastoralists arrive in the area without knowledge of what we do. We have a broader Lion Defender programme which specifically engages young warriors in lion conservation, but this is a fun way of engaging and informing the wider community about our work.



The dancing is a great occasion to talk to all the young boys together and build a rapport with them, so we can encourage them to think about lion conservation and the damaging impacts of lion hunts.

Photo credit: Ana Grau, Ruaha Carnivore Project



Barabaig girls wear a traditional dress when they dance. The colourful beads on the goatskin skirts look nice while they jump.

Photo Credit: BenJee Cascio, Ruaha Carnivore Project

At one of our recent dancing events, we were especially pleased to see a young boy who was rumoured to be related to an influential lion hunter. The boy often grazes his cattle through RCP's field camp and as a result, several of our staff have got to know him. He was happy to join in the dancing although he was still learning the proper technique! He listened intently to our talk at the event, and we hope that he will not only better understand the importance of carnivores and the benefits they bring to the community but will also share that with his wider family and encourage them to engage in conservation rather than lion killing.



*Barabaig men dance in front of the girls. The higher they jump the better potential partners they are considered.
Photo credit: BenJee Cascio, Ruaha Carnivore Project*

Meet one of our exceptional Simba Scholars: Dorice

Dorice performed so well in the Simba Scholar exam in 2018 that she was selected among around 40 students in her school. She comes from a Maasai family from Makifu village, where she still lives with her family and their livestock. Dorice is an ambitious girl and wants to be a civil engineer. She has a very specific reason for choosing this career - in the future, she hopes she will be able to design roads that will help pastoralists women get to clinics more easily for childbirth. Having grown up in a remote location she knows how important it is to live somewhere you can access help in the most difficult situations. This is a daily issue for thousands of people in this area, and we are currently looking at trying to purchase at least one motorcycle ambulance so we can help get people from the most remote locations to the clinic in urgent scenarios. <http://www.eranger.com/>

After finishing primary school with great grades, Dorice was worried that she would not be able to complete her secondary school education. This was because it was difficult for her parents to cover all her costs, particularly her hostel fees, but she needed to live at school because her home was too far to walk to and from each day. However, gaining a Simba Scholarship means she will have a fully-paid scholarship - including hostel fees - for all four years of secondary schools. This will enable her to study without worry, and she continues to shine! In the midterm exams she was the 7th of more than 100 students in her grade and got straight A's in mathematics, physics and biology. Dorice also loves to play netball and to study insects when she is home.



*Dorice in her school uniform during a visit to her school by members of the RCP staff.
Photo credit: Ana Grau, Ruaha Carnivore Project*

This kind of initiative, where students are able to complete their education, and hopefully gain jobs and improve the situation for their families and the wider community, is one of the ways that RCP demonstrates that the presence of carnivores can affect local people in a very positive way. The Simba Scholars are wonderful ambassadors for the project and for conservation, and we look forward to many more generations to come!

Collaring update: Is Mwasty having cubs?

We were excited when Majuto Majellah, from Ruaha River Lodge, sent us recent pictures of Mwasty, one of our collared lionesses and shared with us the news that there are small cubs in her pride. Could they be Mwasty's? We followed up with several people who had seen her, and learned that the cubs were mostly playing with another lioness who could be the mother. The grass has been too high to see which lionesses were lactating so there is still a chance that they are hers, since lionesses in a pride will help each other raise their cubs. Hopefully, we will get new reports soon, and we will keep you posted!

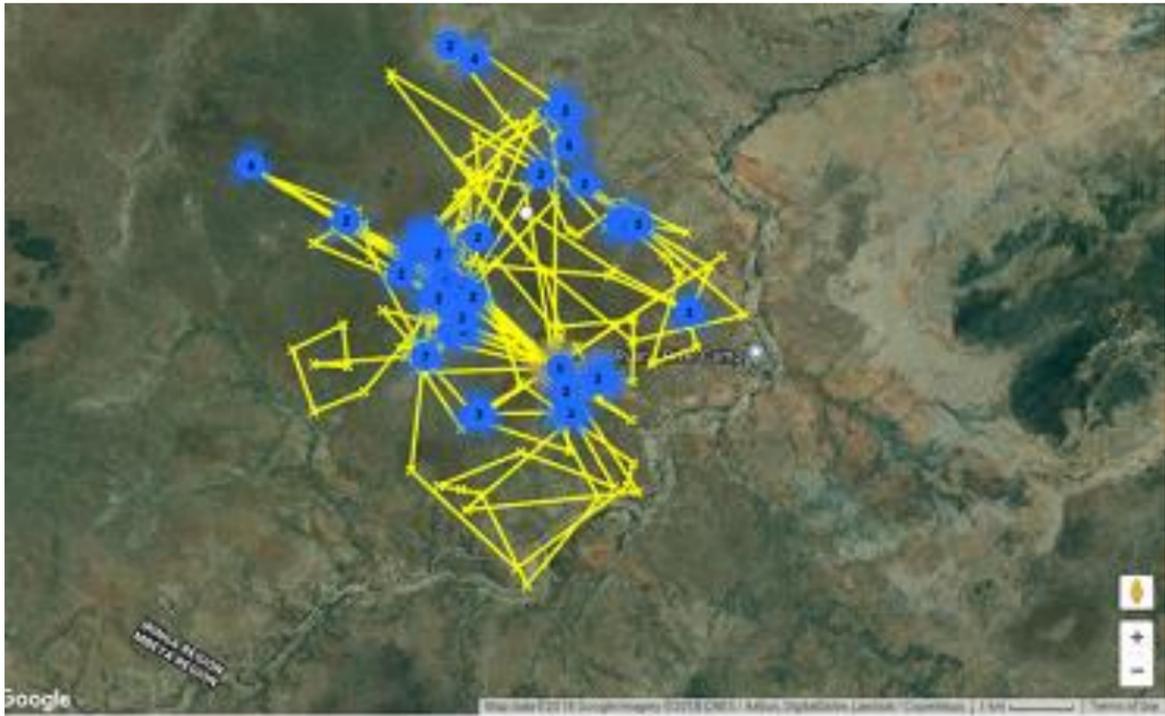


*There are young cubs in the pride but we suspect this female might be the mother since she has been interacting with the cubs most frequently.
Photo credit: Majuto Majellah, [Ruaha River Lodge](http://www.ruahariverlodge.com)*

During the month of May Mwasty has been pretty busy around her territory. Despite the fact that the water level is already reducing in the Ruaha River, Mwasty has never crossed to the village land side of the river. She is probably safe and comfortable within the boundaries of the park.



*Mwasty is spotted with her pride in the National Park.
Photo credit Majuto Majellah, [Ruaha River Lodge](#)*



Mwasty's movements in May and June. She has been actively exploring the territory. The females must be busy hunting to supply enough food for the new cubs, but they never venture to the east side of the river.

RCP's free Park Trips give local people the opportunity to enjoy their wildlife

For many people, living close to Ruaha National Park is more of a curse than a blessing. The wildlife we admire so much know no boundaries and regularly come into onto village land where they can pose very significant dangers. People usually only see elephants when they raid their crops, and carnivores are seen as a threat to their livestock.

To change the attitude of people towards wildlife it is important for them to also enjoy the wildlife in a non-threatening way. And there is no better place for that than the national park! But despite living few kilometres from the border, not having a car and a credit card (necessary to pay the Park entry fees) makes it impossible for many people to visit.



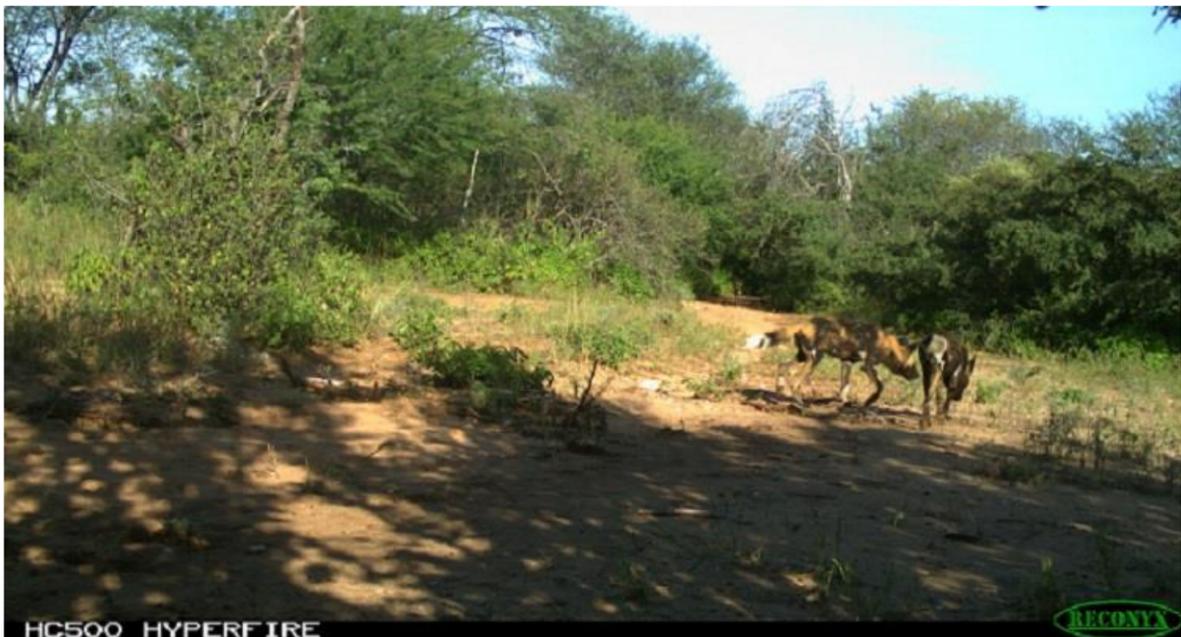
Young Maasai women usually have small children to care for. But we are not deterred by that and want to give them the opportunity to visit the park - with or without their babies!

Photo Credit: Fenrick Msigwa, Ruaha Carnivore Project

But RCP has cars, a credit card and dedicated staff ready to make local people proud of their natural heritage. So far this year RCP has brought 243 villagers to the park and we continue to do between six and eight trips every month. Despite having been born in the area, 80% of the people we take into the park have never been there before and love to have the experience for the first time!

For Carnivores and People, Community Camera Trapping brings benefits for coexisting with wildlife

One of RCP's key goals is to ensure that local people recognise tangible benefits as a direct result of wildlife presence on village land. To enable this, we use 'community camera-trapping', where villagers place camera-traps on their land, and receive points for each wild animal photographed. More points are given for more threatened species, and those which cause more conflict - so for example, a dik-dik generates 1000 points, while an endangered African wild dog generates 20,000 points.



The African wild dog is the top spot, so Mafuluto received 40,000 points for camera-trapping this pair.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project



The Makifu camera-trapping captured this lovely image of sable antelopes. Larger herbivores such as these.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project.



In Mafuluto village the camera-traps photographed a caracal. Although these cats are relatively common and widespread, they are very elusive so it is always exciting to see them and share the images with the communities.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

The villages compete in groups of four to see how many points they can amass over a three-month period. At the end of this period, RCP works with local authorities to distribute community benefits (specifically healthcare, education and veterinary benefits, as requested), with villages with the most points getting the most benefits.

The benefits are distributed at a large celebration (known locally as a *sherehe*) which takes place in the winning village in each group. During this last two months, we have held celebrations in several villages, including Idodi - which often wins thanks to its seemingly high populations of leopards and other large carnivores - and Isele, which has good elephant populations.



This is not the prettiest image, but this sighting of a leopard generated 10,000 points for Idodi village, helping it win its round.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project



*The same camera-trap in Idodi captured a young male lion, generating another 15,000 points for the village.
Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project*



*A serval was also photographed along the same road in Idodi village - the camera-trap officers here are doing a great job of putting the cameras where they think wildlife will pass by!
Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project*

In addition to being fun, the community camera-trapping celebrations are important so that everyone knows what is being given and that the benefits are due directly to the presence of wildlife on their land. The Idodi party was particularly enjoyable due to a performance given by the children from the local school, thanking the project for the initiative and the benefits it has brought.



*The children from Idodi school perform a thank you song for RCP. The school is one of the main beneficiaries of this programme.
Photo credit: Elisante Kimambo, Ruaha Carnivore Project*

When we went to Magombwe village to talk about the community camera-trapping, we were happy to hear the division government representative explain the real benefits they had seen from this programme. Before community camera-trapping reached the area, none of the schools had electricity. This month the last one of them got the supplies needed to install electricity. This really shows the important benefits that wildlife can bring to local people, and improves local tolerance for their presence as well as improving human lives.



*One of the village development officers publicly thanks the wildlife for their 'presents' through the programme. It is very important for RCP's mission that people make a direct link between wildlife and benefits.
Photo credit: Hillary Mrosso, Ruaha Carnivore Project*



All the benefits are distributed publicly while one of RCP staff reads a list of everything that has been bought.

Photo credit: Elisante Kimambo, Ruaha Carnivore Project

As well as generating community benefits, the data from the camera-trap helps improve our knowledge of the wildlife populations in this area, providing valuable information for conservation plans. We share the images with the villagers through DVD nights, and everyone is always very keen to learn more about the wildlife that has been photographed on their land.



Our camera-trapping resulted in the first confirmations of striped hyenas in the Ruaha landscape - this member of the hyena family is distinguished from the aardwolf by being larger and having a noticeable black patch on its throat.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project



Giraffes are usually gentle and slow-moving animals. Something must have really scared them in Tungamalenga village to make them run like this.

Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project



It's the end of the rainy season in Ruaha and most ungulates are having young calves. This group of eland was spotted in Tungamalenga village.

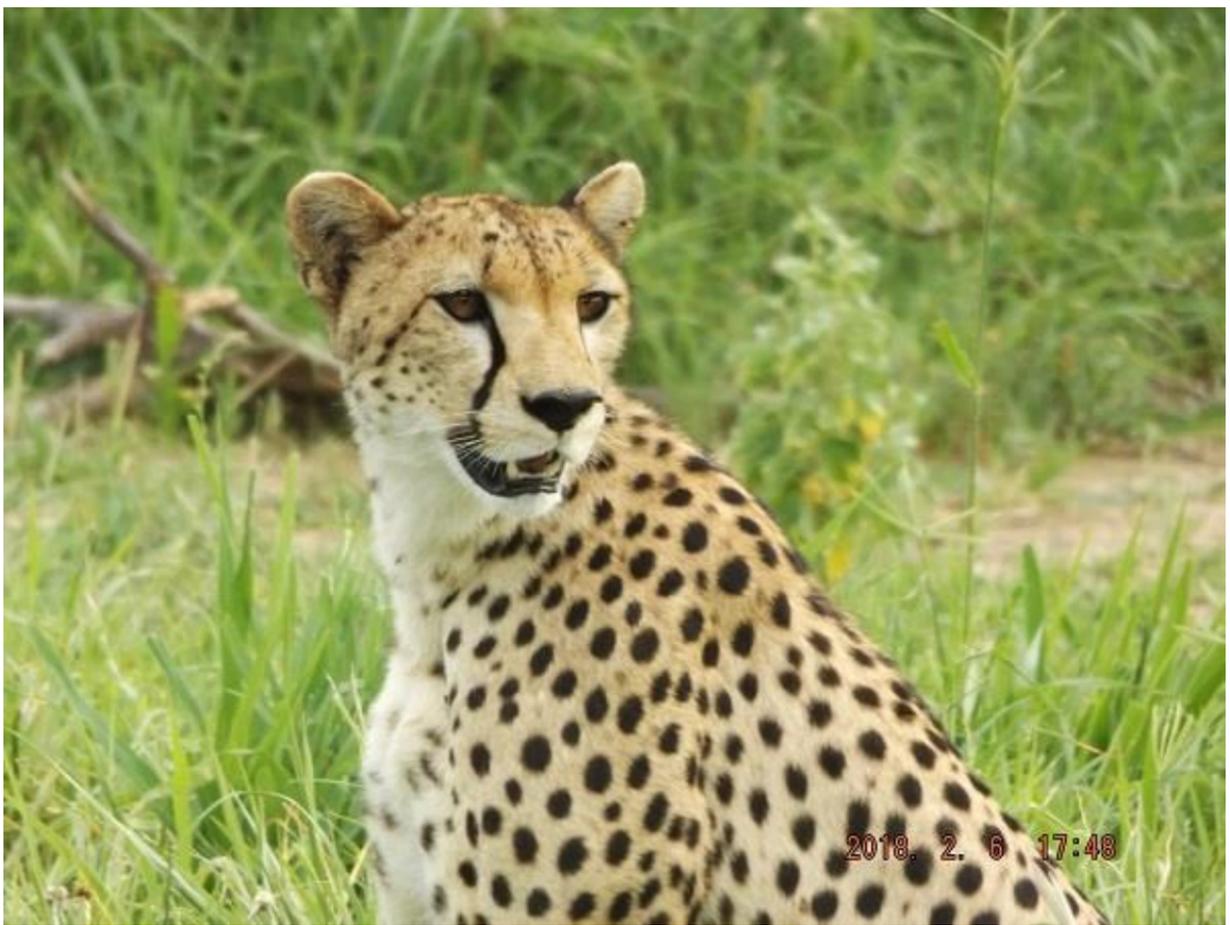
Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project



*In Isele, a Bat-eared fox clearly shows where its name comes from!
Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project*

Sightings start picking up again after the rainy season

Ruaha has been relatively quiet during the past few months, as there are fewer tourists in the rainy season, and many lodges close through May. Most guides are just now coming back so we will soon start receiving fresh news from the park. In the meantime, here are some nice shots from the last few months. Although the rains can make it challenging to move around the Park, it does lead to beautiful lush grass, and even nicer backdrops for lovely images of carnivores! We are looking forward to a new season of sightings from the awesome Ruaha guides, and will keep you updated as we get them!



*It is hard to see cheetahs in Ruaha when the grass is high, but we look forward to knowing if the four sub-adults that were together with their mother are still around.
Photo credit: Hussein Ngaloka from [Nomad Tanzania Kigeria Camp](#)*



*One of our collared lionesses is spotted with her pride. We have very few pictures of this lioness and every sighting is welcome.
Photo credit: Whiteman John from [Ruaha River Lodge](#)*



*The Ruaha landscape is one of the most important places left for the endangered African wild dog, but it's always a rare treat to get a good shot of one.
Photo credit: Joel Mfinanga from [Nomad Tanzania Kigelia Camp](#)*



*In our study area RCP collects data on five large carnivores: lion, cheetah, hyaena, wild dog and leopard. It is surprising how little data on hyaena we get, especially given their relatively high numbers, so we welcome all sightings of them!
Photo credit: Justin Kalinga from [Mwaqusi Safari Camp](#)*

Species spotlight: The Red-billed firefinch

One for the twitchers today! Our featured species is the Red-billed firefinch (*Lagonosticta senegala*), a tiny bird, made significant by its magnificent colouring. It is found across large swathes of Eastern- and Southern Africa, including here in Ruaha. The Red-billed firefinch is a very beautiful bird indeed, with a deep, vibrant red plumage and of its name suggests, a red bill. The males are usually a lot more colourful than the females, however they both have the characteristic red bill.

The Red-billed firefinch generally prefers grass and thickets of vegetation with patches of bare soil, especially in moist woodland and Acacia savanna, although it will occupy cultivated fields. Firefinches mainly eat grass seeds taken from the ground, supplemented with insects, often joining other seedeaters in mixed-species foraging flocks. Their diet will include termites, flies, ants, aphids and spiders.



*Firefinches feeding.
Photo credit: John Whiteman, [Ruaha River Lodge](#)*

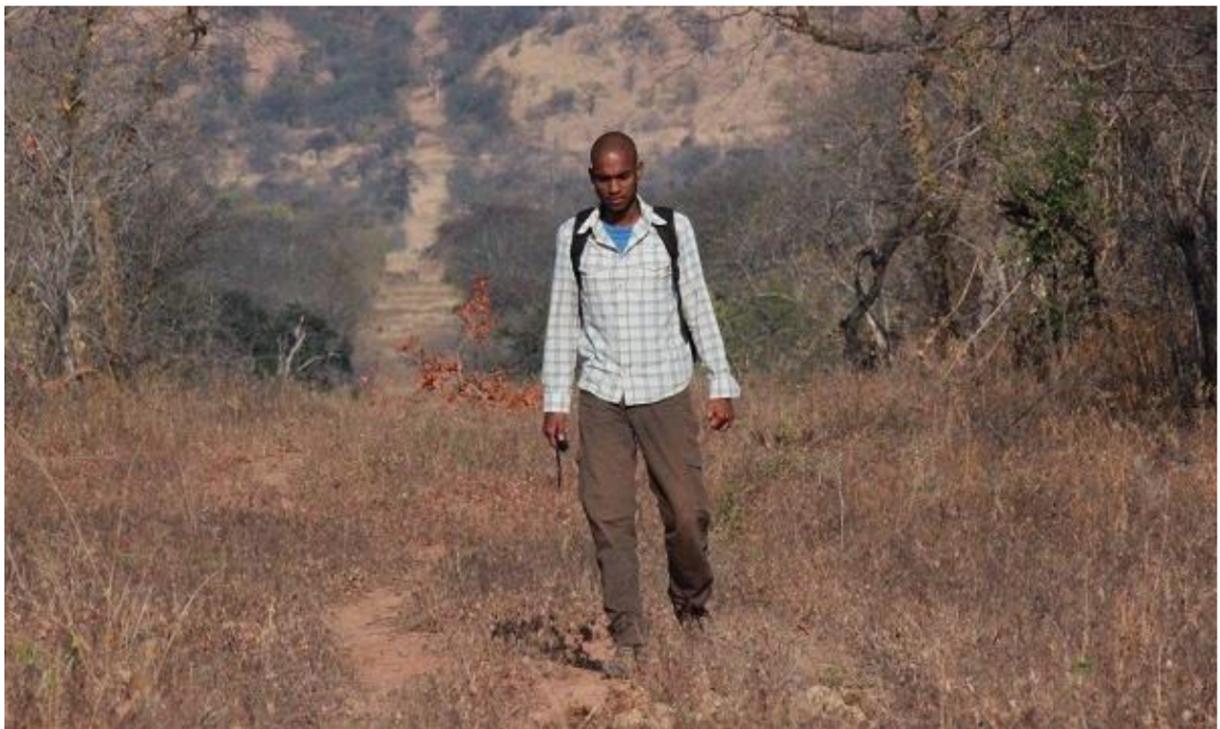
The nest is built solely by the male, consisting of a ball-shaped structure with a side entrance, made of dry grass blades with an inner shell of grass inflorescences, lined with feathers. It is typically placed in plant debris beneath a tree or bush, although they can be found in a thatched roof, hedge or hole in a wall. Egg-laying season is almost year-round, peaking from December-June. It lays 2-6 eggs, which are incubated by both sexes for about 11-12 days. The chicks are fed by both parents, leaving the nest after about 17-20 days and becoming fully independent approximately 2-4 weeks later. The red billed firefinch is classified as Least Concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Listen to the firefinch's fluty whistle, 'pea'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjM2dR5lr-k>
With thanks to Charlie Endson for putting this feature together.

Meet the Team - Dr Leandro Abade

Leandro Abade has had a long history with the Ruaha Carnivore Project and the University of Oxford: he joined the Diploma course at WildCRU, and then went on to do his Masters work in Ruaha, examining the spatial distribution of livestock predation risk by lions, leopards and spotted hyaenas. Success in his Masters led Leandro starting his PhD research, co-supervised by the Project Director Dr Amy Dickman, looking at the determinants of carnivore distribution across the Ruaha landscape through extensive camera-trapping.

Leandro recently completed his PhD and we are very proud of the newly-qualified Dr Abade! Leandro's work has played a key role in improving our understanding of large carnivore conflict and ecology around Ruaha, and will be vital in helping inform future carnivore conservation plans. We hope to continue working with Leandro for many more years to come!



*Although the work is ultimately academic by nature, it is very hands-on and involves many hot and dusty hours in the field. Here Leandro is caught in action by one of his colleagues, as he traipses across the Ruaha landscape in search of critical data to contribute towards saving big cats in the wild.
Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project*

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.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/registry/wishlist/?ie=UTF8&cid=AMZKTSB73EMFA>
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To pay via **cheque** please contact Amy Dickman at amy.dickman@zoo.ox.ac.uk.

Until next time...



The future of wildlife and especially lions lies in the hands of young boys like this one, guarding his family's livestock. Children are introduced to their heritage as young as seven years old. Ruaha Carnivore Project's programmes especially target the youth, as the future custodians of the magnificent Ruaha landscape and the wildlife that call it home.
Photo credit: Ruaha Carnivore Project

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