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CAF

April 2009 NEWSLETTER

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!!! Late breaking news....

As predicted last month, one of the wild dogs that have made the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park their home has been killed by local communities after the dog started killing the goats owned by villagers residing around the Park.

Sahara has managed to catch a young wildebeest but let it go when its cries surprised her.

A big thank you to Colleen Chisholm who raised CAD \$1400 through various fundraising events in her local area in Canada.

Anyone else think that Luangwa is really starting to look like his dad – Maximus?



ALERT Chief Operating Officer David Youldon...



This past month has been like a whirlwind with so much going on its difficult to keep track of everything. We have had new interest for lions to release into reserves in both Zimbabwe and Botswana; our *Corporate Pride* program to raise sponsorship is gaining significant interest; the lions have been successfully hunting both during the day and at night; magazines and TV crews from all corners of the globe are asking to write articles and make films about the program; Dr. Pieter Kat visited our Victoria Falls and Livingstone programs in March; unique visitors to our web site jumped by 162% in the last month alone with nearly 6000 hits on the site in March; our community programs have been developing strongly in the last month and preparation for the publication of a number of academic papers from the program are underway. We have been asked to assist in writing a regulatory framework for the keeping of wild animals in captivity for the Zimbabwe authority; we have been approached to provide images from the program by a jigsaw puzzle maker; we are setting up a link with a rainforest protection program in the UK to assist promotion of our *Friends of Victoria Falls* program to enhance protection of the mist forest that is sustained by the Falls; we have helped develop community empowerment programs related to our Livingstone project, taken our first volunteers here and facilitated students from the University of Oslo. We are in discussions with the University of Glasgow to conduct research and much, much more...

A few days ago I met with Allan Savory, founder of Holistic Management International, whilst he is visiting his home on the ranch where the Africa Centre for Holistic Management is based in Zimbabwe, and who we have recently reported that we have formed a partnership with. Our discussions were extremely fruitful and we discovered more ways that our two organizations can benefit each other. He said of the partnership "*We really look forward to years of synergy between our organizations.*"

We are currently preparing for the next community meetings where we will present the options available to them and the Parks & Wildlife Management Authority to deal with the human / wildlife conflict that is such a problem in the area around Victoria Falls town. We hope that we can offer both the pros and cons of each method so that the communities will understand that the only reasonable long term solution is to learn how to live with these animals around them rather than killing the wildlife which will not solve the problem. Through the partnership with ACHM we believe we can offer both a best option solution for both people and wildlife whilst delivering economic benefits that will give communities reason to prefer this solution.

Work is underway full steam on the Livingstone side now as well and we hope to start implementing elephant conflict mitigation measures very soon. We really need your support to fully implement these programs and we ask for any donations that you can offer. As is our usual practice we look to ensure that all programs we implement are financially self-sustaining in the long term but we do need funds to set up programs as communities themselves can ill afford such outlays.

Kindest regards and thank you for your continued support,

David Youldon
ALERT Chief Operating Officer





Kela

At 11-months old, Kela and Kwandi are proving to be the stars of the show at our stage one in Zambia's Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park.

A walk on the 17th March led the sisters to a group of giraffe and impala. Kwandi was the first to chase a group of three giraffe and was swiftly followed by Kela who set off after the rest.

The chases lasted for around 70 metres, but in spite of their lofty ambitions, Kela and Kwandi were easily out-run.

Returning from the pursuit Kela then literally stumbled over a duiker and gave chase again. Managing to get a paw to the animal, she ultimately lacked the experience to knock it off balance. But the excitement wasn't over just yet.

Towards the end of the walk, a rabbit hopped out onto the path in front of Kela. Once again, she gave chase but came back unrewarded.

And the Ks aren't the only cubs showing off their hunting skills in Zambia. Sisters **Loma** and **Leya**, were on an afternoon walk on their 10-month anniversary.

Early on in the walk, the cubs spotted a pair of giraffe, but at 500 metres away they were content just to watch for the time being. However, further into the walk a much easier target presented itself, and at less than 100 metres away this giraffe received more than just a curious glance from the cubs.

Both Loma and Leya stalked, with Loma flanking to the right and Leya taking a direct approach. A high-speed chase then ensued and saw Leya get to within a couple of metres of the giraffe, while Loma wasn't too far behind either!

Luangwa has a busy month...

Of the eight lions currently taking part in stage one's *Night Encounter* program at Antelope Park, it is 26-month old **Luangwa** who is giving the prey species in the Park cause for concern – making three kills in the month of March alone.

His first encounter of the month saw him head out with his brothers, **Lozi** and **Lungile**. Catching a rabbit on this occasion he made his first kill of the month – only then to have it stolen by Lungile.

Just over two weeks later the trio were patrolling the Park again – this time Luangwa found an easy target in a plover (a common ground nesting bird).



Luangwa

His final outing of the month came on the 29th March when he and Lozi launched several attacks on an impala herd. Deciding to get down to business, Luangwa made his third kill of the month and his fifth overall on a sub-adult, only to have Lozi take it from him this time!



Shadow the Lions' Manager at Antelope Park...

Not everyone is up to the role of Antelope Park's Lions' & Wildlife Manager. Responsible for all the lions on site – from the walking cubs, to those taking part in *Night Encounters*, the stage two prides awaiting release and the breeding population – plus the stable's horses and mules, four elephants and more than 30 species of mammals in the 3,000 acre game park, it's not a job for the work-shy.

Now, not only can you volunteer to work alongside the program's lions, the unique placement to shadow the Lions' Manager at Antelope Park is also available.

The project is specifically designed for those looking for a possible change of career into veterinary care or animal welfare, or students already studying these at university. For such students, your time on the placement can count towards your 12-weeks husbandry EMS. For anyone considering a career in this field, this placement will offer a taste of the profession while teaching you how to care for and work with a range of animals – it will also be a great addition to your CV.

Whilst working with the Lions' Manager you will get hands-on experience raising, feeding and walking lion cubs – as well as good husbandry and welfare standards of all the Park's lions, elephants and other animals.

Your primary tasks while on the project will include:

- Ensuring the lions are fed with appropriate amounts and types of food
- Sourcing the meat to feed the lions – a never-ending task!
- Ensuring the lion enclosures are properly maintained and cleaned, and overseeing any maintenance work needed
- Conducting regular health checks on all the animals to detect any problems early on
- Administering any necessary medication following consultation with the program's vets
- Assisting our consultant vets on any procedures they may need to undertake
- Training other members of staff in good animal welfare practice
- Maintaining accurate records on all animals' welfare
- Liaising with the Park's management, guides, lion handlers, cage attendants and project managers
- Preparing animals for transports and even travelling with them, when needed
- Conducting game censuses on the free-ranging game species resident to the Park
- Answering questions from the Park's guests about the animals.

If you wish to receive more information, or book a placement on the project please email: Lesley@africanencounter.org with the heading 'Vet project' in the subject line, or alternatively you can go to www.africanmapct.com/volunteers/project-manager/

Left: Antelope Park Lions' Manager, Cara Watts, oversees the operation to relocate the Dollar Block pride for re-release in Gweru



ACT's Urban Agriculture program...

Last year a collaboration between ALERT, ACT and African Impact was founded to empower vulnerable and marginalised members of the community through a number of projects to offer opportunities for them to secure more sustainable livelihoods through environmental responsibility. One element of this is to provide support in the setting up of 'nutritional gardens' to improve health and provide excess crops they can sell.

At the start of March a donation arrived from a past voluntourist, Angela Lancaster in the shape of vegetable seeds; including carrot, bean, cabbage, broccoli and pumpkin seeds.



Every week, a meeting is held at Chinotimba Gardens by the District AIDS Awareness Council (DAAC) made up of some 40 individuals from the Victoria Falls area living with HIV. During these meetings they discuss ways of improving their livelihoods and how to live positively with the virus. And this was to be the destination for the donated batch of seeds. ACT project staff and voluntourists assisted the group with the clearing of two areas and weeding before the seeds were planted in a preparation bed. Once they have germinated and established they will be further transplanted and distributed among the community.

Appeal: The Chinotimba Gardens is without a nearby water source after the water tank broke. The DAAC is requesting donations to source and install a new tank. Any donations to this project can be directed via ALERT using the reference 'Urban Agriculture'.



ALERT Facilitates two students from the University of Oslo...

Andreas Doppelmayr and Oyvind Handberg have joined ALERT's recently launched facilitated research program at our project site near Livingstone.

Andreas is looking at the economic impact of the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, within which our stage one operates, on the local community, and has conducted interviews with organisations such as the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA), as well as interviewing members of the community to gauge their opinions on the benefits of the Park. Around 80% of the local economy in Livingstone is based around tourism, so most people support the Park as it is a huge draw for visitors to the area. But one section of the community's opinion is divided. Farmers obviously face the potential of conflict with transient animals moving to and from the Park, such as elephants, which can cause huge crop and property damage. However, a great deal of the produce the farmers sell is to the tourist lodges based within the National Park.

Oyvind is looking at the degree of local participation in development projects, and will include many projects that ALERT operates in the area as well as other NGOs with project sites in and around Livingstone.

If you would like to conduct research for your studies either on the lion program or to be hosted by ALERT, please go to www.lionalert.org and click on the 'study with us' link for more information.



Lion Fact File: the white lions of Timbavati...

For centuries rumours of mysterious white lions had been circulating in South Africa. Legend said the white pelage represented the good to be found in all creatures.

Strong claims of sightings started to surface in 1928 with scattered reports continuing over the next 47 years. Confirmation of their existence came in 1975 when a litter containing two white cubs was seen at Timbavati Game Reserve, adjacent to Kruger National Park. The discovery was made by the researcher and conservationist Chris McBride.

The two cubs, Temblor (Zulu for 'hope') and Tombi ('girl') had a tawny brother called Vela ('surprise'). The cubs were taken into captivity and placed at the National Zoo in Pretoria. White lions were given the status of technically extinct in the wild.

Due to their rarity the lions became the focus of the canned hunting industry. ALERT supports any moves to close down this barbaric "sport".

White lions are not albinos but are leucistic (the 'c' is pronounced as a 'k'). This condition has been relatively well characterised, and results from a defect in pigment cell differentiation and/or migration from the neural crest (cells present during the embryonic growth stages of the organism). Leucism occurs in a variety of animals such as reptiles, amphibians, birds, fish and other mammals including seals tigers and squirrels. It can either result in completely white animals or animals with white patches depending on the number of early embryonic cells affected.

Leucistic lions have pigment visible in their eyes (which may be the normal hazel or golden colour, blue-gray or green-gray); paw pads and lips.

It is generally considered that white lions have a low survival rate in the wild as their fur is conspicuous during hunting, as well as exposing the cubs to greater predation from competitive species, however there is evidence to refute this.



The leucistic trait is due to the chinchilla mutation among normally pigmented animals that inhibits the deposition of pigment along the hair shaft, restricting it to the tips. The less pigment there is along the hair shaft, the paler the lion. As a result 'white' lions range from blond through to near white. The males have pale manes and tail tips instead of the usual dark tawny or black. Leucism is recessive which means that the gene or genes need to be expressed on both chromosomes (one from the father, one from the mother) at the same time.

With so few white lion individuals in the world and the high costs involved in identifying the genetic marker that differentiates white lions from tawny in order to broaden the breeding base to include tawny lions with the marker, maintenance of the white phenotype will require a certain level of breeding among close relatives which could have genetic consequences. Successive levels of close inbreeding are bound to result in lions with skeletal, reproductive and immunological aberrations.

In 2003, the Global White Lion Protection Trust initiated the first reintroduction of white lions to their natural endemic range – the Greater Timbavati region in South Africa. Preliminary results have shown that the hunting success of the white lion pride was comparable to or higher than the tawny wild prides of Timbavati itself.

As the big day draws closer and the funding rolls in, Jana Bakunina's training for the Flora London Marathon in support of ALERT continues...

For the next step of my training I took part in the Adidas half marathon at Silverstone in Northamptonshire on the 14th March. With 10,000 other runners for company, I set off for three laps of the circuit.

I first competed in a half marathon last October, and found that fairly easy going. However, today I was struggling and by the third mile I was pouring water over my head to cool down. I paced myself for a 1h 45min finish and kept going well until mile eight. But it was at this point that I hit that most dreaded of hurdles known to runners – *the wall*.

In October I managed a comfortable run until mile 10 and of course today I was constantly comparing the two experiences. After resolving to just enjoy the run, I got to mile 12 and pushed for home, and even managed a fast sprint to the end. I was convinced my time would be much worse than during my debut run, but it turned out I was only a minute slower.

Next, it was time for a very different sort of training. Having spent the last two-and-a half months training through the harsh British winter, I took part in a Wild Fitness course on the coast of Kenya.

Wild Fitness is a health and exercise philosophy based on our evolutionary origins combining a 'hunter-gatherer' diet with a natural fitness regime comprising running, swimming, flexibility and strength training to transform "zoo humans" into leaner and fitter "wild humans". Over two weeks, I was coached by top fitness professionals helping me to develop my running techniques and how to prevent injury.

And now I am actually looking forward to the marathon. With just three weeks left until the big day I feel ready to tackle it head on!

Thank you all for helping me to raise £1,210 for ALERT so far, but I still need help to hit my target of £1,600. Please take a look at my donation page if you would like to help me raise even more for ALERT: <http://www.help.co.uk/fundraisers/jana>

Thank you,
Jana

