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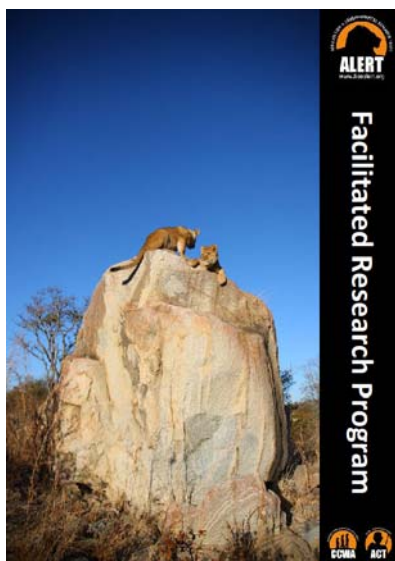
February 2009 NEWSLETTER

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A message from David Youldon, ALERT Chief Operating Officer...



We are very excited to officially launch our Facilitated Research Program this month although it has been operating unofficially for almost a year now. We have already facilitated a number of studies and have many more students from around the world currently preparing their research proposals for implementation in 2009.

This program allows students enrolled on a variety of courses to join us at our project locations with the full logistical and scientific support of ALERT.

The variety of studies that can be implemented is endless from a range of conservation issues including independent reviews of our release protocols, human / wildlife conflict mitigation and land management to species specific studies on any number of factors such as behaviour, ecology, or reproduction for the full variety of Africa's wildlife. The flora of Africa of course cannot be overlooked, and again, a plethora of studies are possible in this area of research and conservation.

It is our hope that through these programs we can greatly enhance the knowledge from which sound conservation and management plans can be created to conserve a wild Africa.

Our newly formed partnership with the Africa Centre for Holistic Management allows us to greatly enhance our habitat protection role. Communal lands are showing ever-increasing levels of desertification due to unsustainable land use activities with the attendant denuding of natural ecosystem processes such as; access to clean water; reduction in soil quality; loss of wood for fuel; and the extinction of flora and fauna species. As land becomes less productive communities are forced to expand their zones of use in order to maintain the same benefits derived from these eco-system processes, which inevitably encroaches on wildlife areas. This encroachment reduces the land area which all wild species need to thrive and increases conflicts between humans and wildlife, particularly through crop raiding by elephants and livestock predation by carnivores such as lions.

You can read in this newsletter about how our partnership will implement methods of land use management that tackle this problem using Holistic Management, a system developed in Zimbabwe.

It is only through your continued support that we can grow and develop innovative conservation solutions to meet the challenges facing Africa's people and its wildlife. We thank those who give of their time and money to help us realize our vision of a wild Africa for the benefit of all Africans, both now and in the future.

Kindest regards and thank you,

David Youldon
ALERT Chief Operating Officer





Above: Swahili made three kills in January

On the 19th January Sango and Swahili,

now 16-months-old, were on a morning walk at Victoria Falls stage one. The pair spotted a troop of baboons and Swahili gave chase. But to everyone's surprise it was Sango who caught a baboon first, followed by his sister.

Swahili clearly thought the baboon she had killed was too small and after several looks at Sango's kill she decided to chase an adult, but missed. Three days later however she fared better by catching a larger baboon swiping it from the air as it jumped from a tree. She quickly got her teeth around its neck for the killing bite.

This is Sango's first kill and Swahili's second and third, having made her first on a monitor lizard at the start of January. Their sister, Sahara, at Antelope Park is progressing well with her hunting.



Above: Sahara corners a warthog in October

A cub's first kill is always a big event within the program so we've taken a look at the statistics of past efforts.

Thirty two cubs (split equally between males and females) making their first kill in the last three-and-a half years did so at an average of 18.0 months. The youngest first kill was **Bhubesi** at nine-months and the latest was **Acacia** at 29-months old – who took a rabbit on a *Night Encounter* on 10th January.

Females tend to make their first kill at 18.75 months (range nine – 29m) whilst males make theirs at 17.25 months (range 11 – 21m). Cubs raised in Victoria Falls have made their first kills earlier than at Antelope Park; 15.62 months versus 19.63 months. This is probably due to the increased ground cover afforded the cubs in the Falls as well as the fact that the game at Antelope Park is used to being hunted and is therefore very wary and alert.

First kills have typically (66%) been smaller prey such as mongoose, birds, duiker and baboon with 18% being medium sized prey such as bushbuck and impala and 16% being large prey including buffalo. There is no pattern when gender was compared to the size of first kill.

Forty seven per cent of first kills have taken place between July to September.

This is probably because young animals are starting to separate from their mothers and have not yet learnt predator avoidance behaviours coupled with an overall drying of the habitat forcing animals to congregate at water holes. It's also cooler at this time of year and the lions are generally more active. The second peak is between November and January when 34% of first kills are made. At this time ground cover is peaking due to the rains and there are many new-born and young prey animals around.

Of the lions that have gone on to be in the top 10 most successful hunters on *Night Encounters* in terms of individual hunting success they made their first kill at an average of 18.6 months - so a later start is not necessarily a sign of poor hunting prowess.

Useful studies that could be undertaken following on from these findings is to compare when lions in the program make their first kills against wild cubs, as well as seeing if individual character traits are significant in determining when a lion is likely to make its first successful hunt.

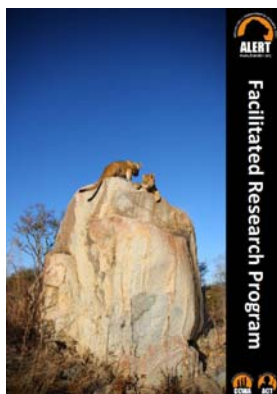
After hosting several independent studies during 2008, ALERT is launching its Facilitated Research Program allowing students from all over the world to complete their dissertation or senior thesis at any of our project sites – providing a unique environment within which to study whilst also producing valuable data sets which will assist ALERT develop sound conservation and management plans.

Students will have the chance to get up close and personal to cubs as they develop their hunting skills, watch a pride of released lions adapt to a wild environment, observe a variety of African species or implement studies with communities assessing conservation awareness or the impact of conservation initiatives on livelihoods.

ALERT is opening up all program locations as potential field sites, which include:

- **Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, Livingstone, Zambia:**
Bordering the banks of the Zambezi, Mosi-oa-Tunya is a 6.600ha National Park within which resides an abundant wildlife population as well as stage one of the Rehabilitation and Release into the Wild Program. North of the Park lies the Dambwa Forest, where we will commence construction of stage two and three release sites in 2009.
- **Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe:**
Set within the spectacular 56,200ha Zambezi National Park our Victoria Falls program includes stage one of the program as well as opportunities to study a wide variety of fauna and flora species. In addition, the town of Victoria Falls and the surrounding rural communities are located within the Victoria Falls National Park. This constant interaction between people and wildlife provides many opportunities for study.
- **Antelope Park, Gweru, Zimbabwe:**
A private 3,000 acre game park located near the city of Gweru, the home of the Rehabilitation and Release Program comprises the program's breeding centre, stage one also operates here as well as being the only location from which the *Night Encounter* program takes place. Many types of game species can be found within the Park, allowing additional research opportunities. As well as stage one, several stage two sites are being constructed in this location which will host release prides by mid- to late 2009.
- **Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe:**
Our project site is located in the community of Dete on the edge of the National Park. The Park contains a range of African species, many of which come into conflict with the communities that work with us. As such, this location is perfect for those looking to study human / wildlife conflict issues.

The Facilitated Research Program offers students a network of support and guidance throughout the research process from experienced program staff, research technicians and our Scientific Officer, as well as logistical assistance. If you are interested in studying with ALERT please email research@lionalert.org





The ALERT Communities Trust is proud to announce a partnership with the Africa Centre for Holistic Management...

A partnership has been formed to undertake joint projects to promote, through Holistic Management, the reversal of land degradation / desertification in communal areas that will bring economic, environmental and social benefits to the communities that we work with whilst bringing greater opportunities for wildlife to thrive through human / wildlife conflict mitigation and education.

Communal lands, like almost all seasonal rainfall environments worldwide, have been deteriorating alarmingly over many years. Using methodology developed originally in Zimbabwe but now being applied on over 30 million acres worldwide, we will, in this partnership be helping people to begin improving their land and their lives permanently. Because the ultimate fate of all wildlife, including herbivores and predators is dependent on habitat, what is good for people is also good for wildlife.

The Africa Centre for Holistic Management has its own land under Holistic Management near to Victoria Falls. Here people can learn about what sort of future they can build for themselves. This ranch, under Holistic Management, has increased livestock numbers 400% higher than when it was formerly deteriorating badly. The river arising on the ranch now has open water 1.5km higher up the vlei than has been known before, even through most dry seasons.

And the wildlife is continually increasing.

All this has been done using livestock to heal land and restore water in a people and predator friendly manner.

What is Holistic Management?

Forty years ago, Allan Savory, then a young wildlife biologist in his native Zimbabwe, wished to solve the riddle of desertification. Savory concluded that the spread of deserts, the loss of wildlife, and the human impoverishment that always resulted were related to the way people made decisions, whether or not those people lived or worked on the land.

The principles of Holistic Management developed to regenerate deteriorating rangelands by increasing cattle, rather than destocking. From these beginnings Holistic Management expanded over the years to enabling people, while healing their land, to live more prosperous and harmonious lives.

Holistic Management replaces fragmentary decision-making and short-term solutions with a decision making process that consistently links people's values and culture to their land that sustains them.

These proven holistic practices yield a "triple bottom line" of sustainable economic, environmental and social benefits by:

- Improving soil health and biodiversity of rangelands and pastures;
- Increasing grazing and wildlife capacity;
- Increasing annual profits and enhancing livelihoods;
- Optimally using rainfall and conserving water;
- Growing healthier crops and achieving higher yields;
- Reversing desertification in brittle environments;
- Breaking the cycle of food and water insecurity;
- Enhancing family relationships;

These benefits are achieved with resources the land manager already has in place. Whether land is used for ranching, organics production, food production in pastoral communities or public lands preservation, or even if it is unused, it can be returned to health and its productivity greatly increased without large infusions of cash, equipment or technology.



Africa Centre for Holistic Management (ACHM)

In 1992, the Africa Centre for Holistic Management in Zimbabwe was launched just outside the town of Victoria Falls on a 6,500-acre property known as Dimbangombe Ranch mentioned earlier. The centre has two main roles: firstly it manages the ranch as a Holistic Management learning site that demonstrates how livestock can be used to restore deteriorating landscapes and lost wildlife habitat. Secondly the Dimbangombe College of Wildlife, Agriculture and Conservation Management provides Holistic Management training to the local community and beyond from the Cape to Ethiopia.

Since its inception, the Africa Centre has worked to the following long-term objectives:

1. Establish an international training facility and learning site--one that serves as a working example of Holistic Management in practice on the land and in local communities--and one that brings governments, scientists and local communities together, working in collaboration at all levels.
2. Empower the people in the neighbouring communal lands (some 145,000 people) to become self-sufficient and to achieve a long-term sustainable future of their own design.
3. Restore desertifying land in Zimbabwe and develop a model program that can be implemented anywhere in Africa.
4. Enhance the survival of threatened wildlife populations by working to restore damaged habitat, and to improve the quality of life for the people living among and around them.
5. Research and document the successful use of livestock and wild ungulates to 'recycle' old vegetation--as an alternative to fire, which is damaging both to land and wildlife, creating serious atmospheric pollution, and contributing to global climate change.

Restoring Land and Livelihoods.

The Hwange District Community, which incorporates communal areas surrounding Victoria Falls, is enormous, covering over a million acres of rapidly deteriorating land on which over 145,000 people attempt to subsist on livestock, marginal cropping areas, and wildlife. These communal lands are within or are contiguous to a number of wildlife areas including the Zambezi National Park, Hwange National Park as well as a number of forestry and hunting zones.

The partnership will extend the work of the Africa Centre for Holistic Management in the following areas:

Land Management

ACHM has, for some years now, piloted a new way of managing land for livestock grazing in a number of villages and has invited ACT to assist them to extend the program further.

Individual families are encouraged to bring their herds together overnight in guarded, moveable, lion-proof kraals. These are easily moved once a week to a new location leaving behind an area that has been hoof-tilled and organically fertilized. This greatly enriched land can be used to grow crops which have shown significantly higher productivity levels therefore bringing greater nutritional and economic value to the farmer.



During the day the community's livestock, in a joint herd, is grazed using a planning process that ensures no overgrazing takes place no matter how many animals are in the herd. The herd is kept tightly packed to achieve the beneficial effects of trampling, dunging and urinating for a short period of time, maybe even as short as 15 minutes, before moving on to the next area. This use of high animal impact with no overgrazing of plants leads to all four of the processes through which our eco-system functions to perform better. These processes govern how water and nutrient minerals cycle in the environment and how biological communities relate to one another and sunlight energy flows through plants to support people, economy and all life. This all leads to greater energy flow, which provides for more forage production, which translates into the land's ability to withstand higher stocking rates and more wildlife. Ultimately Holistic Management makes more profit for the farmer with greater economic resilience.

Elephant-Proof Crop Fields

Elephants can consume a family's entire food supply for the year in a single night. In recent years a number of elephants have been shot in an effort to prevent raids on large, poorly protected fields that in fact yield very little. One village farmer agreed to work with the Africa Centre staff on a promising alternative that has already attracted the attention of other farmers: Elephant Proofing. A trench, one meter deep by one meter wide is dug around the field deterring elephants, which cannot jump. A row of chilli plants, also a deterrent, is planted in the trench. Finally, a fence of woven twigs is constructed between the trench and the field.

The elephant proof fields are managed using livestock as described earlier meaning smaller fields are required to produce more food. The first demonstration field that was impacted by cattle and trenched produced 15 times the yield of adjacent fields.

Village Banking

To reduce hunger while elevating the most vulnerable families out of poverty through the conversion of an on-going micro-lending program to one based on goats as the currency.

The Africa Centre had launched a village banking program that eventually served 500 women who used the profits from their microenterprises to feed their families and send their children to school. By using livestock as the currency ACHM could more than match Zimbabwe's inflation: not only do they maintain their value, they also produce offspring, thus outpacing inflation. Five banks, of 20 families each, have been formed following six weeks of training in the three pilot communities.

Each family has been loaned 10 goats (a minimum of 9 females) for three years. Interest is due annually (3 goats per annum) until the loan is repaid. (Interest payments provide the goats needed to start new banks). Goats were selected as the currency because they often kid more than once a year and can also produce twins. In theory, this reproductive rate should allow families to grow their herds, while consuming some animals, selling others, and repaying their loans.

Gender and HIV Awareness

To effectively address the long-standing prohibition against female ownership of livestock, the issues of safe family sexual practices, and the stigma of those living with HIV, through gender empowerment training to the male and female heads of household participating in the goats-as currency banks.

This objective became necessary because women are often culturally (but not legally) prohibited from owning livestock in Zimbabwe, but equally important, they generally have little say in the matter of when animals are to be sold, and how the income will be used. Women now head a growing number of families in Zimbabwe, a trend that is likely to continue due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

A diagnosis of HIV-positive is essentially a death sentence that leaves behind orphans who must assume the roles of adults, and grandparents who must again become parents. The stigma of the survivors and those who contract the disease further compounds the issue and highlights the social dilemma of multiple families now headed by females—many of whom constitute the membership of the goats-as-currency village banks. All bank members receive gender empowerment training and HIV awareness and stigmatization training in monthly bank meetings.

In September the task of disease testing and re-vaccinating all the program's lions began at Antelope Park.

Our consultant vets returned in early December to continue this process and towards the end of January this process carried on with several more members of the program undergoing the vets' attentions.

Among these were two male lions, called **Simba** and **Silwane**, who the program has recently given sanctuary to after their previous owners were no longer able to take care of them in Zimbabwe's current climate. They were micro chipped, vaccinated against rabies and tri-cat as well as having blood samples taken. They will now undertake a period of quarantine at Antelope Park.

As well as Simba and Silwane, a group of the program's males commonly referred to as 'the seven boys' were also due for testing. The seven comprise **Achillies**, **Apollo**, **Mamba**, **Mambo**, **Phoenix**, **Penduka** and **Kwezi** – all aged around four-years old and will form our all-male coalition stage two release.



Introducing...

On the 11th January Antelope Park welcomed three new cubs to the program. The 3Ts were born early in the morning and are the third litter of cubs for the pairing of **Lulu** and **Maximus**; having previously produced the 4Ls of **Landela**, **Langa**, **Lokothula** and **Ltalo** in May 2006 and the 5Ls of **Lina**, **Lisha**, **Lozi**, **Luangwa** and **Lungile** in January 2007.

The 3T litter comprises two males, Tsavo and Thulani, and one female, Tanaka.

They were removed from Lulu at three-weeks-old on 1st February and placed in the care of Antelope Park's Lions' Manager, Cara Watts.



Support Jana to run the London Marathon



Former Victoria Falls voluntourist Jana Bakunina

will be running the Flora London Marathon on 26th April to raise funds for ALERT. Currently training hard for the big day, Jana has even had a special T-shirt designed to help her stand out from the thousands of other runners.

But not only has Jana set herself the daunting target of completing the 26-mile course, she also aims to raise £1,000 from her efforts and has set up an online donations page with the Help Organisation. In fact anyone can use the Help Organisation to set up a page to raise funds for their favourite charity, whether they're running the Marathon or not by visiting www.help.co.uk

While you can't help her run the marathon, you can help Jana achieve her fundraising target by visiting the donation's page at <https://www.help.co.uk/fundraisers/jana>

SERENGETI PROVERB:

Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed.

Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows that it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death.

It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle, when the sun comes up, you'd better be running.



Lincoln Lions support African lions...

Jana isn't the only former voluntourist continuing to support the program. Barbara Mozanich spent a month at Antelope Park's stage one, and a week at our stage two project at Dollar Block, in July last year before returning to Lincoln Elementary School in Redondo Beach, California where she is a teacher.

The school's student council, the Lincoln Lions, raised \$650 selling candy grams over three days in December 2008 to students. In the spirit of the festive season the council elected to donate the proceeds from the sale to charity and decided that charity was ALERT with the slogan of the campaign becoming **Lincoln Lions love African Lions!**



Lion Fact File: Predatory Behaviour in African Lions...

...predator: an animal that preys on others

Hunting

With relatively small hearts and lungs, lions are not fast runners and only have a maximum speed of 48kph, nor do they have the stamina to keep up this pace for more than 100-200m. As such, lions rely on stalking their prey and seldom charge until they are within 30m, unless their prey is facing away and cannot see the lion's approach.

Lions stalk their prey, although ambush behaviour has been observed. This happens mainly during daylight when stalking prey is more difficult. Of 1,300 hunts observed in the Serengeti, 48% involved only one lion, 20% involved two and the remainder involved a group of three to eight (up to 14).

Females do the majority of the hunting. Males who tag along with the hunt usually stay back until a kill has been made.

Lions hunting in twos and groups have a success rate of c. 30%. Those hunting singly by daylight have a success rate of 17-19%, but are the equal to groups at night, reopening the debate as to why lions became the only sociable cat; maybe it is to control exclusive hunting grounds.

Most successful hunts are on dark nights in dense cover against a single prey animal. One reason for lions' relative low hunting success rate is that lions do not take into account wind direction when hunting; they often approach prey from an upwind direction thereby alerting their prey and ending the hunt. Additionally, the lion's charge is generally launched directly at its quarry and it rarely alters the path of attack, as do other cats. Generally speaking, if a lion misses its target on the first run it usually abandons the chase.



Hunts of impala and medium-sized prey are significantly more likely to be successful when the lions do not stalk their prey but rather chase them immediately upon detection. The opposite is true for small-sized prey species. However, lions are more likely to stalk impala and medium-sized species, whereas they are less likely to stalk small-sized prey. Females are significantly more likely to stalk anything.

Cooperative hunting brings a greater probability of success in lion hunts, but a question exists on whether pre-planned cooperation is taking place or whether lions make use of opportunities brought about by the presence of other lions.

Studies of the tactics of group hunting by lions give a similar basic plan of the hunting process. When the group spots the prey a hunt is often initiated by a single lion looking at it, to which the other lions respond by looking in the same direction – the only clear form of “communication” evidenced in the hunting process. The group fans out, with certain lions stalking at a greater distance to encircle the prey. The encircling lions launch the attack, seemingly to drive the prey towards the others who ambush from their cover position.

It is suggested that lions often, but not exclusively, followed the same hunting patterns and divided lions into stalking roles; left, centre and right wing positions. Lions hunting in their preferred roles increased the success of the group by nine per cent.



Killing

Once within range of smaller prey, lions use their paw to slap the rear of the animal at its legs or haunch to knock it off balance or drag it down. A bite to the neck or throat quickly kills the animal.

With larger prey lions approach the animal at an angle, jumping on top and using their own weight to wrestle the animal to the ground, biting at the vertebrae in an attempt to sever the spinal cord as they do so.

Once downed they bite the throat or over the nose and mouth of the prey to suffocate it, a position that keeps them out of the way of horns that could injure the lion.

Feeding

When plenty of food is available lions gorge themselves into near immobility. At these times, on average, males swallow around 35kg of meat, and females 22kg, which is 15% of their body weight and five times their average daily needs. Averaged out over a period of time daily consumption is 5-7kg.

Man-eating

Man-eating has been recorded wherever lions are found, but humans appear to be regarded as competing predators rather than as prey. In Tanzania it has been noted that more people are killed during the rainy season where the tall grass makes hunting more difficult. Notable cases of man-eating include a pair of males who killed 28 Indians and “dozens” of Africans in Tsavo, Kenya, at the end of the 19th century and a single male who killed 48 humans at Ankole, Uganda, in the 1920s. The greatest toll was from a man-eating pride which killed around 2,000 people in the Njombe district of Tanzania between 1932 and 1947.



The Last Roar...

Want to get your paws on a Valentine's Day gift for a loved one? If you're stuck for ideas or have just forgotten, ALERT might have the answer with a range of unique gifts that really make a difference.

Release areas for lions:

By giving a lion a place to roam free you will be supporting the reintroduction of lions back into areas where they were once common and protecting their natural habitat to ensure that the most iconic of all the continent's animals, remains at the heart of a wild Africa.

Conservation education:

Give a child the opportunity to participate in a fun, practical and hands-on conservation education class. Here, children are inspired to take action to protect their natural heritage; to ensure a wild Africa for future generations.

The gift of Water:

The gift of water to the Zambezi National Park, ensuring that its diversity of wildlife can exist in greater numbers, that smaller animals have a chance of survival, and keeping Africa wild.

The gift of Life:

Help to empower vulnerable and other marginalised members of society to secure a sustainable livelihood through environmental responsibility.

All gifts require a minimum donation of £15*each, and the recipient will receive a personalised certificate by email to remind them of the work being done in Africa on their behalf.



To purchase one of these incredible gifts in time for Valentine's Day all you have to do is:

1. Send an email to gifts@lionalert.org with the following information:
 - a. Your name
 - b. The full name (as you would like it to appear on the certificate) and email address of the person you are purchasing the gift for
 - c. The name of the gift you want to send
2. Make payment by **credit or debit card** by visiting www.cafonline.org and entering "African Lion" under the charity keyword search. Email the payment confirmation your receive by CAF to gifts@lionalert.org
3. All gifts will be email to their recipients on February 14th.

* Special Valentine's Day Offer for all purchases up to February 14th 2009. Normal price £25.