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JULY 2008 NEWSLETTER

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1. Message from the Chief Operating Officer

Progress continues to be made towards our expansion to Zambia. New enclosures are being built; quarantine requirements are being put in place; and final arrangements to build the three release areas are being confirmed.

We are also near completion to confirm two further release sites within Zimbabwe and have started discussions for stage three and four areas in Mozambique which look extremely promising.

Earlier this month I met with David Barron, President of the ICCF, an organization that educates US policy makers on funding priorities for sound natural resource management. The meeting was highly productive and a road map was agreed for ALERT to develop its US fundraising capabilities.

ALERT, CCWA and ACT is currently in discussions with a number of organizations to extend the scope of our activities; to enhance our role in habitat protection, research and community involvement. We believe that like-minded programs can achieve more if we pool ideas, resources and expertise to achieve our mutual goals. We will of course keep you updated as to how these discussions progress.

For the last in our series of staff profiles we pay homage to the guys who have one of the muckiest jobs in the program; the cage boys. Read about their day in this newsletter.

Thank you to those who have continued to support the program through these challenging times.

Kindest regards

David Youldon

ALERT Chief Operating Officer



2. What is ALERT?



The **African Lion & Environmental Research Trust (ALERT)** is a non-profit organization working with governments, wildlife authorities and private organizations to identify suitable release sites for African lions. ALERT will also provide infrastructure to those sites to facilitate the release and to protect local communities. It was founded in 2005 to support the work of the four-stage African Encounter Lion Rehabilitation and Release into the Wild Program, founded in 1999 at Antelope Park in Gweru, Zimbabwe.

ALERT also carries out research through the **Conservation Centre for Wild Africa (CCWA)**, either in its own right or in conjunction with external organizations and educational institutions. CCWA engages in a diversity of research and programs, not just for lions but on a range of African wildlife to ensure we pass on balanced ecosystems to future generations. CCWA is already undertaking a number of research activities throughout Zimbabwe's National Park system.

In addition, the **ALERT Communities Trust (ACT)** is a means to give back to communities bordering conservation areas such that they receive tangible benefits for supporting those conservation programs. A primary element of this is our community education and awareness program to further understanding of the importance of sound conservation practices. Local communities are involved in eco-tourism ventures related to the conservation programs, and money generated by those programs goes back into development schemes, agreed as priorities with the local community, such as building schools or providing medical supplies.

Stage one update

Last month we told you of **Lozi's** first kill: a sub-adult warthog. His brother **Luangwa** almost went one better. On his morning walk, he and **Msasa** came across a herd of wildebeest.

When the game noticed the lions they quickly scattered, but in their panic the wildebeest didn't notice that one of their young had been left behind; sharp-eyed Luangwa immediately spotted the lone animal and stealthily crept in.

He was less than 10 metres from his intended target when one of the herd males returned to the calf's aid head-butting the young lion away. Luangwa instantly turned his attention on some nearby Zebra.

A few days later Msasa chased mongooses down a hole. A few made a break for it from another entrance but Luangwa was waiting and quickly made his first catch, only to be stripped of his prize by Msasa.

With his Night Encounter career approaching Luangwa is certainly proving that he's ready to take on the game – and Lozi!



Meanwhile, the two sets of cubs at our Victoria Falls stage one site have been just as busy.

Lozi and Luangwa's sister, **Lina**, has been making good progress since jumping on the back of an elephant back in May. Over this past month she's been busy stalking the warthog, impala and buffalo they have met on their walk.

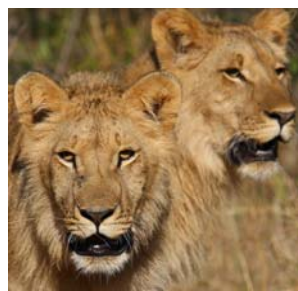
Unfortunately for Lina, her stalk one warthog was ruined by her brother, **Lungile**, who lumbered through the middle of her stalk alerting her prey to their presence. Lungile recovered his reputation however when on a walk at the end of July the pair came across a herd of buffalo. The lions chased; the herd scattered, and in the mayhem Lungile clamped onto the throat of a two year old. With the assistance of Lina they brought the buffalo to the ground but through their inexperience it took half an hour to make the actual kill.



As for the 2Es of **Echo** and **Etosha**, they too are showing signs of becoming increasingly aware of the game around them on walks.

Up to this point the boys had very little hunting form, but a herd of impala changed all that for them recently, with Etosha, as expected, leading the way on the hunt.

The brothers did not get all that close, but their intentions were very clear!



Night Encounter



Landela made all the running with stalks and chases on kudu and zebra, but it was Ltalo who chased and caught a secretary bird on their most recent Night Encounter. It managed to loosen itself from his grip and took off but, already injured, could not fly far and the boys caught it again, but seemed reluctant to make the kill. After tussling with the bird during which time it kicked out and made a lot of noise, the two boys seemed afraid of the bird, which are known for stamping their prey to death in a motion looking like they are typing, hence the name. After a while, the lions backed off completely and we took the decision to euthanize the bird. Even when dead the lions sniffed the carcass but did not want to eat it; seems secretary bird meat is not on the menu for lions.

Introducing....

On 26th July we collected three young lions from another breeder in Zimbabwe. The move was straight forward and all three are now settling in well to Antelope Park.



Soriah is eight and a-half months old and was named after a beautiful woman that her owner met whilst on holiday. Soriah was raised by him and his wife and had been living in their house, playing with the family dogs and watching Animal Planet from her place on the sofa. This is not the first time that we have taken in a lion with such a background. Elsa was similarly treated and went on to become a fine hunter; maybe all that wildlife action on TV gave her the know-how!

Soriah has been joined with Sahara from the 3S group. It has been a tense time as Soriah is not used to being with other lions, but the urge for sociality in lions has won the day and after a couple of days of growling the two are bonding well; you could be forgiven for thinking that they had been together for months.

Soriah is also not used to walking in the Bush and her first steps out of the enclosure were very tentative, but through the confidence she gains from being with Sahara she is already bouncing around the savannah and even chased a herd of Kudu.

At four and a-half months old the scruffy looking Razor & Barb have been nicknamed the gremlins. With less human contact they are a little wary, but are relaxing quickly with patient handling. They are feisty and a little under condition, but nothing serious. They are named as their father was wild caught after being found in a snare, hence Razor (wire) and Barb (wire). Nominations were opened to ALERT's supporters on our Facebook group to give the cubs African names. Please welcome Batoka after the gorge at Victoria Falls & Bhubesi; meaning "lion" in Zulu.





New ALERT Researcher



Over the last few months, we have brought you news of the research studies that are currently being implemented at our stage one locations at Antelope Park and Victoria Falls. In brief, these include character studies on the walking cubs, spoor measurement, mane development, hunting strategies and development, nose characteristics and an activity budget study.

To ensure these studies are implemented and carried out to the highest level, we have retained the services of a full-time researcher.

Sibonokhule Ncube first came to Antelope Park in March of this year to conduct an independent study as part of her Forestry and Wildlife Management program at Zimbabwe's National University of Science and Technology. Her study examined the activity patterns in three groups of captive lion cubs. Two groups [Antelope Park and Lion Encounter at Masuwe Lodge] are raised by humans as cub-only prides, and undergo behavioural enrichment. The third group [Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage] consists of mother-reared cubs, with no behavioural enrichment.

Sibo's study showed that the cubs going through stage one of the Rehabilitation and Release into the Wild Program showed a significantly higher hunting instinct compared to the mother-reared cubs. The study also showed that our cubs were far more alert and active, and that the methods employed by the program aids the cubs' development of characteristic hunting instincts; important behaviour for stages two and three of the program.

We were so impressed with the standard of her report we decided to ask her to join the program.



Hailing from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, 22-year-old Sibonokhule is responsible for ensuring all data collected for the program is completed on the relevant days and analysed. Voluntourists will still play a crucial part in assisting with the collection of data, and Sibonokhule is looking forward to working alongside the vols:

"My first day was a bit overwhelming; there is a lot to take on-board and a lot of work to be done – so it's nice to know I'll have the program's voluntourists to help me. But I'm very excited about being involved with ALERT."



The Role of the Cage Boys

No one can be everywhere at once, not even Antelope Park's super-human Lions' Manager, Cara Watts. So to help her run things smoothly at Antelope Park's Breeding Program, Cara has a dedicated team of 'Cage Boys' who assist her in taking care of the older lions' welfare. Here, we take a look at their role.



The day starts with a check around all the Breeding Program enclosures to assess the general status of the lions. Dominance fights amongst older lions are not uncommon, and while usually nothing more than a bit of snarling, they can turn ugly. Part of the morning check the Cage Boys perform is to look for any injuries and on the general well-being of the lions. Enclosure maintenance is also an important part of this duty.

After confirming with Cara which lions are to be fed that day, meat has to be prepared. This means it's time to haul legs, torsos, heads and whatever else is available out of the cold room. Not a job for the squeamish!

Feeding isn't just a case of lobbing a chunk of meat over the top of an enclosure; lions don't tend to form an orderly queue and wait patiently for their piece. So before every feed, they must first be moved into an adjacent management enclosure. The Cage Boys then place the pieces of meat in one big pile in the main enclosure. After leaving, and making sure the gate is locked again, the lions are then released from their management area and the claws and fur go flying in the race to get the best piece!

If you're not being fed, it's probably your turn to be cleaned out and again, the lions have to be put into management enclosures for this task, while the Cage Boys collect all the bones and waste, and refill the water troughs. It's not the most pleasant job, so it's always a bonus when the vols come up to lend a hand!

Social groupings of the adult lions can change, depending on who is breeding at any given time and who needs to be bonded for future releases. Sometimes moves are easy, just a case of opening and closing gates to management corridors and moving certain lions into neighbouring enclosures. And sometimes they're not so easy...

Last month, the Cage Boys had to move five members of our proposed Zambian release pride to a new enclosure a couple of minutes' walk away from their old home. Walking cubs is one thing, but walking five strong-minded lionesses, aged between three and five years, is quite another and takes a special knowledge of each lions' character to ensure the move is managed safely.

The Cage Boys also play a role on Night Encounters. There are three enclosures where lions in stage one taking part in Night Encounters are housed. Not every member of a group necessarily goes out on each occasion. For instance, if Ltalo and Landela are taken out, then before the Cage Boys go home, they need to make sure Langa and Lokothula have been moved into the holding enclosure.



But the worst part of the Cage Boys' job surely has to be putting up with bossy manager, Cara Watts. These unsung heroes of stage one not only keep our lions in tip top condition, they have to put up with AP's mouthiest member of staff... all day.

Antelope Park Cage Boys:

**Bongani
Busani
Patrick**



Sponsor a Lion

Sponsoring a lion is proving to be a big hit with voluntourists and visitors to our stage one locations. By sponsoring a lion from just £10 a month, your contribution will help fund future release sites, help pay for veterinary bills, micro-chipping, permits and research. You can sponsor individuals, or make savings by sponsoring multiple lions. If you wish to sponsor a lion, below is a 'who's who' of our current walking cubs. But any lion in the program is eligible for sponsorship, including our Dollar Block release pride and the stage one hunting lions.

Sango: Born 8th October 2007



The only male from a litter of three, Sango quite often finds himself on the receiving end of his sisters' tag-team bullying tactics. However his playful and cheeky nature have made him hugely popular with the Antelope Park voluntourists.

Sahara: Born 8th October 2007



The leader of her gang, where Sahara goes her brother and sister follow. Wilful at times, Sahara has shown a particular passion for climbing just about any tree she comes across on walks – often exasperating the Lion Handlers!

Swahili: Born 8th October 2007



The most nervous of the Ss Swahili scares easily, but has shown phenomenal hunting promise. Still too small to threaten any game, at eight months old she made her first contact with a monitor lizard, and gave an ostrich a good run for its money too.

Echo: Born 12th April 2007



One of the most popular cubs with voluntourists, Echo wins over everyone that he comes into contact with. One half of a litter of two, his willingness to view anyone as a potential new friend has made him one of our most sponsored cubs.

Etosha: Born 12th April 2007



Echo's shyer brother: Etosha can be a little wary at times especially around people he does not know. However he compliments boisterous Echo's personality with his reserve, but is not afraid to keep his brother in check when Echo tests his limits.

Luangwa: Born 19th January 2007



Luangwa is the program's most vocal cub, and 'chats' a lot during his walks as a way of greeting his pride. One of three males from a litter of five, Luangwa only has a short time of walking left before his hunting skills are tested on Night Encounters.

Lozi: Born 19th January 2007



Lozi recently made his first kill, a sub-adult warthog, on a morning walk. Often the first of his grouping to spot and approach game it was inevitable he would make a formidable hunter, albeit a selfish one as he refused to share his spoils with Mana!

Lungile: 19th January 2007



Lungile moved to Victoria Falls with his sister, Lina, last July. Not as friendly as his brothers, his steely nature should hold him in good stead when he returns to AP shortly to commence Night Encounters and his eventual progression into stage two.

Lina: Born 19th January 2007



Like her brother, Lungile, Lina can be anti-social, and moved with Lungile to the Falls last year. While not the friendliest cub, she makes up for this in the hunting stakes, recently taking on an adult elephant the pair came across, jumping on its back!

Mana: Born 23rd December 2006



Named after Mana Pools NP, the name has meaning for this cub. On a walk in March, Mana made her first kill, a freshwater crab, at a water pool. Just a week before, one such creature painfully attached itself to her nose! Was this Mana's revenge?

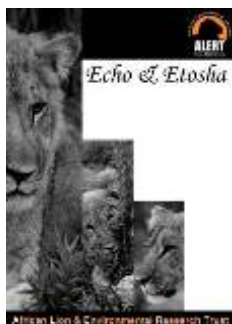
Msasa: Born 19th January 2007



A striking-looking young lioness, Msasa's first kill was in April when she surprised a group of mongooses, managing to catch one before the nimble animals all made it to their burrows. With such quick reactions, a second kill can't be far away.

For your chance to make a difference to these lions simply email alert@africanencounter.org with the following details, stating "Lion Sponsorship" in the subject line:

- Full name
- Confirm the email address you wish us to use to send invoices and updates
- Your mailing address, so that we can send your copy of the ALERT DVD
- Whether you prefer to make monthly or annual payments
- Whether the sponsorship is for yourself or as a gift. If it is a gift we will also need the recipient's mailing and email address
- Terms and conditions apply to this program, we would ask that you read and agree to them before making payment.



In return for your generous contribution you will receive: a copy of the ALERT DVD, a photo and biography of your lion by email, the ALERT newsletter by email, quarterly updates and photos of your lion by email, a 5% discount off any stage one lion walk, a 5% discount off any African Impact program and priority booking to see the release of your lion.

To sponsor **one lion**, such as Acacia, costs **£10** per month. **Two lions**, such as Echo and Etosha, costs **£15** per month. **Three lions**, such as Sango, Sahara and Swahili, costs **£17.50** per month. **Four lions**, such as Landela, Langa, Lokothula and Ltalo, costs **£20** per month. **Five lions**, such as Ashanti, Athena, Nala, Narnia and Phyre, costs **£22.50** per month.

Please note that you can pay in monthly or annual instalments.



6. The Last Roar

Donate with Everyclick

Remember there is a new and easy way for supporters to donate to ALERT. Everyclick is a search engine with a difference. For some time now, every time an ALERT supporter signs up to everyclick their internet searches raise money for the program.

Now you can make donations through their website too. If you wish to use this method to donate to ALERT, go to www.everyclick.com and click on 'make a donation'. Then enter in 'African lion' under your chosen charity and follow the instructions.

Cafepress.com

There is a wide variety of ALERT merchandise available at Cafepress.com, such as T-shirts, caps, calendars and mugs and even baby-grows for your own little cubs.

We can also provide tailor-made items, so if you have a photograph of yourself with your favourite lion during your time at Antelope Park or Victoria Falls then we can stick your mug on a mug!

Please go to www.cafepress.com/lionalert to view the complete range available.



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