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October 2008 NEWSLETTER

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1. Message from the Chief Operating Officer

Despite continuing uncertainty within Zimbabwe we are determined not to let that slow us down. This last month has seen us make big advances in a number of priority areas; new release sites have been confirmed, new partnerships are being formed and of course the lions themselves are doing what they do best.

We have been able to do a lot of groundwork on new projects for CCWA including forming partnerships with other organizations for mutual benefit that will be announced once all the legal necessities are out of the way. We believe that by drawing together programs with complimentary goals we can share expertise and funding to make each program more effective than if carried out in isolation.

This month we bring you the first of our Lion Fact File series looking at everything you ever wanted to know about lions, as well as things you didn't even know you didn't know. We start by looking at the disease FIV due to our recent testing of 33 lions within the program. Read more about our lion health check in this issue.

For those that are already starting to think about Christmas (is it really that time of year already?) please consider giving the gift of a lion. Your gift will greatly assist in helping us save this most iconic of species through funding for release areas, wild lion population counts, habitat protection and developing community involvement in conservation. Read about our lion sponsorship program on the last page of this newsletter.

Kindest regards and thank you for your support,

David Youldon

ALERT Chief Operating Officer



2. What is ALERT?



We are the **African Lion & Environmental Research Trust**, a non-profit organization dedicated to the facilitation and promotion of sound conservation and management plans for the African lion (*Panthera leo*) in partnership with governments and wildlife authorities.

Based at Antelope Park, near the city of Gweru in the heart of the Zimbabwe Midlands, ALERT was founded in 2005 to support the four-stage Lion Rehabilitation and Release into the Wild Program developed by Andrew & Wendy Conolly.

The aim of this program is to provide a solution to augmenting the sharply decreasing numbers of African lions, but also to provide long term solutions to protect habitat such that wild and reintroduced prides can survive in viable numbers.

ALERT believes that assisting one species in isolation is unlikely to provide a sustainable future for that species; only by looking at the whole ecosystem within which that species lives, and through understanding that species' interactions with that environment, can a lasting solution be found to the crisis facing Africa's wildlife.

The aim of CCWA, the **Conservation Centre for Wild Africa**, is therefore to be involved in; in-situ and ex-situ conservation and reintroductions of other threatened species; to engage in habitat protection activities; and implement or facilitate research that will assist in the creation of improved management plans to ensure a wild Africa for future generations.

Through the **ALERT Communities Trust (ACT)** program, we support the notion that only through local community involvement can the lion, and other species in Africa, survive. If the livelihood of communities bordering conservation areas is intrinsically linked to the health of that environment then the community will have reason to protect it, motivated by Africans to the benefit of Africans.

"To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate hope of survival." Wendell Berry

Stage one update



Seventeen-month old brothers, **Echo** and **Etosha**, have been walking at our Victoria stage one site since April.

Plans were being made to bring them back to Antelope Park next month to start Night Encounters - when the boys proved they're more than ready to start their hunting careers.

On a morning walk, the brothers came across some baboons on the path they were walking along. Startled by the cubs, the baboons raced up the nearby trees.

Unfortunately for one of the animals Echo was in hot pursuit and scrambled 15 metres up the same tree after it.

Making a desperate bid to escape, the baboon fled back down the trunk – straight into the jaws of Etosha, who made short work of dispatching his prize.

Clearly put out that he had put in all the work only for Etosha to claim the meal, Echo climbed back down the tree and promptly stole the kill from his brother!

Later that same day, the 2Ss of **Sango** and **Swahili** caught a water monitor lizard, but this customer was a bit too slippery and managed to escape the cubs' clutches.

A tall order for the Ls

Since their retirement from walking last month the brothers; **Lozi**, **Luangwa** and **Lungile** have spent the past few weeks re-bonding in the hunting enclosures and taking part in early morning Day Encounters.

Bush enclosure is normally reserved for older walking cubs, but as it was empty and is located in an area where plenty of game resides, it was decided to move the brothers here, along with their companion, **Masai**, as it is a perfect place from which to start Night Encounters.

So the four cubs were walked from Breeding Program to Bush enclosure. All four were very playful, but didn't initially show much inclination towards hunting when they came across a small herd of impala and kudu shortly into the walk.

However, as they neared their new enclosure they came across a large number of impala, wildebeest, hartebeest and giraffe.

The boys all immediately went into stalk mode, but it was Lozi who was first to break into a high-speed chase on one giraffe. Bearing down on the animal he was soon backed up by his brothers and the three boys were hot on the giraffe's heels for over 200 metres before finally running out of steam.

Unfortunately, Masai was too involved in his own stalk on a hartebeest to notice the commotion until the giraffe and the Ls were too far away, but seemed quite thrilled by the whole chase as he watched his three companions disappearing into the distance after their target.



Above: Lozi hones in on the giraffe; Luangwa and Lungile join the chase to back Lozi up; all three brothers keep the giraffe firmly in their sights but just out of striking distance



Five-and-a half month old **Bhubesi** proved just how far she has come in the short time she has been with the Rehabilitation and Release program this month.

On one of her afternoon walks with her brother, **Batoka**, our youngest set of walking cubs came across a one-metre long female monitor lizard. Immediately leaping into action, Bhubesi grabbed the lizard and tried biting into it to make her first kill.

At this young age, her teeth and jaws just weren't strong enough to break through the tough lizard skin, and after repeated attempts she eventually let go and left her catch. The lizard decided to play dead for a while, making sure the coast was clear before making a dash for freedom.

The data that was collected on this walk is very useful for our study into hunting development in young cubs: at what age do they make their first stalk, start to chase prey, and what are the differences in development between their response to one prey species against another?

Bhubesi and Batoka are the first set of cubs to take part in the hunting development study, and judging by this walk they are going to keep us very busy indeed!

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Alternatively, simply click on the CAF image below.



Health checks



Regular disease checks and vaccinations of the lions in the release program are crucial to ensure the lions we release into stage two and three are as healthy as possible and that there is limited chance of them passing any disease into existing wild prides through their released cubs.

A massive operation was undertaken at Antelope Park over five days at the end of September, lead by our consultant vets; Keith Dutlow and Lisa Marabini, to take blood samples for FIV testing and update vaccinations to 33 of the lions at the breeding program, including those awaiting release. A random sample of lions was also tested for bovine tuberculosis with all tests proving negative. In addition the three newest members of the program, Soriah, Batoka and Bhubesi, were given their first round of vaccines for rabies and tri-cat (covering feline rhinotracheitis, feline calici and feline panleukopenia) as well as being micro-chipped.



Social groupings were split into smaller groups of two to three members and management and holding enclosures were utilised to keep these groupings separate. The Antelope Park voluntourists assisted the vets in noting down times sedatives and reversals were given, monitoring breathing while the lions were unconscious, and sitting outside enclosures until they had started to come round and were alert again.

Over the coming months every lion within the program will be similarly tested and vaccinated.



Lion Fact File: FIV

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) is a lentivirus that infects both wild and domestic feline species and is closely related to human HIV. The virus is present in blood and saliva, and biting is believed to be the most common method of transmission. Some infected domestic cats develop clinical problems resulting in increased mortality, while others show no signs of illness and have a normal life expectancy.

FIV infection in wild African lions has not been associated with overt clinical signs and there is no evidence that FIV infection results in increased mortality. Some FIV-infected captive lions have displayed the same changes in T lymphocyte counts as exhibited by infected domestic cats but there is little evidence that infection results in clinical signs or increased mortality.

African lions in eastern and southern Africa have the highest prevalence of FIV infection of any wild feline with nearly 100% of adults infected. Although recognized only in the last few decades, FIV has been present in wild lion populations for prolonged periods, possibly many thousands of years. Long-term studies in the 1980s and 90s showed no difference in survival between lions that were infected at an early age vs. those infected later. During a severe outbreak of canine distemper virus (CDV) in the Serengeti in 1994, FIV-infected animals were no more likely to die from CDV than animals that were not infected. Also, the Serengeti lion population has doubled over the last 10 years, so these lions are clearly vigorous despite the ubiquity of the virus.

The lions of Kruger National Park, South Africa, are infected with FIV at a similar rate (and for at least as long) as the Serengeti lions. Accordingly, it is unlikely that FIV alone represents a health threat to Kruger lions. The prime health threat to the Kruger lions is considered to be the recent spread into the population of bovine tuberculosis (bTB).

Although bTB and CDV can cause serious health problems in lions, it is unlikely that FIV poses a serious threat to lions where FIV has been present for extended periods of time. Of the lion populations tested to date, only those in Etosha National Park, Namibia, and Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Reserve, South Africa, (and satellite populations of these established by translocations) have tested negative. However, recent testing suggests that these populations may be infected with a different strain not detected using earlier methodologies. If any of these populations are truly FIV-negative, these lions may not be resistant to FIV-induced disease as they have not had a chance to adapt to the virus during evolution. Therefore, when translocating lions between populations, prudence suggests not introducing FIV-infected lions into FIV-negative lion populations.

Source: *FIV in Lions*, Wildlife Conservation Society, August 2004





Conservation Centre for Wild Africa

This past month CCWA, along with other organizations and individuals provided financial assistance towards vital conservation work on Zimbabwe's hard-hit rhino population. As the economic challenges facing local communities have deepened, there has been a steady increase in poaching. The country's black rhino population is under particular threat. With the future of conservation in mind CCWA provided funds for Dr Keith Dutlow and Dr Lisa Marabaini from the AWARE Trust to accompany Dr Chris Foggin of the Wildlife Veterinary Unit on operations to dehorn and/or implant horn transmitters in black rhino. A small number of white rhino were also translocated to an area considered to be safer for them. This provided an excellent training exercise for the vets concerned and CCWA hopes to extend its potential for capacity building in this area.

CCWA also hopes to extend our conservation work through a series of partnerships. The next big project on the horizon for which we are hoping to provide both financial and material assistance is a disease surveillance study testing 300 cattle for bovine tuberculosis, theileriosis and brucellosis in the communal lands within the proposed area of the Limpopo Shashe Trans Frontier Conservation Area (LSTFCA). A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between representatives of the governments of Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe in June 2006 to allow for the establishment of the LSTFCA, which will link the Northern Tuli Game Reserve in Botswana with Mapungubwe National Park in South Africa and the Tuli Circle Safari Area and adjoining areas in Zimbabwe. This trans-boundary conservation initiative has been designed to allow the free flow of wildlife between the three countries so as to enhance ecosystem integrity and management, and remove artificial impediments to the movement of wildlife. The different regions of the three countries all have different disease statuses at present, with up-to-date data being least available from Zimbabwe. The study aims to assess the extent and strains of diseases within the Zimbabwean areas which will assist in future vaccination strategies, the siting of fences and control of animal movement within the LSTFCA, land use policies in the area, and will establish the risk of spread of diseases into the neighbouring countries.

If you would like to provide financial assistance to aid the implementation of this vital study you can do so by **direct bank transfer** to AWARE using the following banking details:

Name of account holder: AWARE
Bank Name: HSBC
Branch: Pall Mall Branch, London

Branch code: 40-05-20
Account number: 01632523
SWIFT No: MIDLGB22
IBAN: GB62MIDL40052001632523

Alternatively, you can make your payment via ALERT with a **credit or debit card** using our on-line donation system by visiting www.cafonline.org and entering "African Lion" under the charity keyword search, or clicking on the CAF image below. Please state "AWARE" in the donation reference field so that we can ensure that your donation goes to this project as intended. The full amount of all donations processed on behalf of AWARE will be forwarded for use on the project less a 7% administration cost to cover the charges imposed on us for accepting credit or debit card donations and banking charges to transfer the funds to AWARE.





Zambezi National Park

Six kilometres from the Victoria Falls lies the Zambezi National Park; wild with bush and big game it stretches along the river for 40 kilometres. Game includes mega fauna such as elephant, buffalo and lion; large antelope like greater kudu and waterbuck, along with a large number of smaller mammal species such as common duiker, small-spotted genet and honey badger.

The Park is divided into two distinct areas; north and south of the Kazungula Road. The area to the north has sufficient natural water supply in the form of the Zambezi River and a spring line. However the southern section is dry with no natural water points. The consequent concentration of animal species in the Northern section during the dry season exerts ecological pressure on this area as well as focussing tourist vehicles, putting additional wear on the Parks limited road system through soil erosion.

The Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority has already drilled five boreholes in two locations in the Southern section of the Park; three are located in the Chamabondo vlei and two in the Kalisosa vlei. It is ideal that at least two of these boreholes supply water at any given time during the dry season.

Due to limited funding available to the Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority to action the proposed installation of a suitable water pump at the Chamabondo vlei the Area Manager for Zambezi National Park has approached CCWA and African Impact for financial assistance to supply, install and maintain the pump, to conduct a study to ascertain the impact of the proposed water hole as well as provide anti-poaching services to the area.



Justification for the Project

1. If water is supplied in the Southern section more tourists will do their game drives here, relieving the Northern section of pressure.
2. The water point will attract bigger mammals thus shifting use from areas along the Zambezi River and spreading it more evenly across the Park. This is a World Heritage Convention requirement where mega herbivore populations should be spread evenly across the Park in order to spread their impact of use. Mammals with small home ranges will also be able to form territories in the area due to the presence of water.
4. The Northern section of the Park is situated close to human settlements and as such poaching pressure is severe, particularly during the dry season when game is concentrated in this area due to the lack of water in the Southern ranges. A more even spread of game within the Park could alleviate poaching levels.

We are currently seeking financial assistance to implement this project which will include the purchase, installation and maintenance of a suitable water pump, renovation of the tourist viewing platform, implementation of a long term study to review the effects on game and tourist movements within the National Park, alien plant removal programs from the area, bush fire management plans as well as the introduction of anti-poaching activities around the new water hole.

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Release Update

Ashanti, Athena, Phyre, Kenge, Nala & Narnia have proven that they are a socially stable and self-sustaining pride. So the next step in their rehabilitation is to be introduced to a male. In this case **Milo**.

New release sites confirmed

Land has been agreed neighbouring Antelope Park which is large enough for two release areas. At present it is our intention to use one for stage two and one for our soft-release program. Given a number of huge challenges in this current economic climate operating the stage two release area at Dollar Block, not least; getting access to fuel or spare parts to maintain the research vehicles; providing water to the waterholes and communication problems, we have decided to move the release site onto one of these new tracts of land. There are many advantages for us in doing this; we will be able to service the release area and research program better, enlarge the area of the release site incorporating improvements from lessons learnt at Dollar Block as well as increasing revenues to the site which will not only ensure its long term future, but also raise funds towards fencing the soft release area. As such the pride has been moved into the holding enclosure and already the majority of the fence and poles have been returned to Antelope Park. In the next month new management enclosures will be erected and the pride moved. Milo will be put in a neighbouring enclosure to begin the bonding process. Once complete we will start erecting the new release area which we hope to complete by the end of 2008 or early in 2009 depending on the extent of the upcoming rainy season.

Soft release pride

The second release site will be for a pride of lions from those that are retiring from breeding in the near future. They will be given the opportunity to live out their days in a free-ranging natural environment, with prey species to hunt. Given their time in captivity it is likely that we will need to supplement feed them, at least at the beginning. The females will be spayed to ensure no uncontrolled breeding. The pride is expected to consist of **Big Boy, Anna, Mafuta, Alice, Nadia, Ezulu** and **Zuva**.

Partnership to extend Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park

The political uncertainty in Zimbabwe has delayed the signing of the export permit to Zambia for our release pride of **Amy, Melanie, Elsa, Cleo, Ariel, Paka, Kwali** and **Puma**. The land is secure, loan finance has been confirmed to build the two stage two and stage three release areas and agreement for the import permit has been confirmed, however despite obtaining the fifteen necessary signatures from the Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority for the export permit we also need either the Minister of Environment and Tourism, or his deputy to add his final signature. We await confirmation of who will fulfill this role and will then proceed as planned.

In the meantime we are entering a partnership with the Zambian Wildlife Authority to extend the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park to incorporate much, if not all of the Dambwa Forest. As such our release areas will now be within the National Park boundaries. This partnership will bring greater protection to the habitat in the Forest and will include a joint education program with local communities as well as the introduction of ACT development programs to improve the livelihoods of communities bordering the Park. CCWA will also be heavily involved within the extended Park that will bring regeneration to the Dambwa Forest in all aspects of the eco-system.

The next pride

The next release group is bonding well. **Acacia, Amghela, Nandi, Mana, Msasa** and **Lina** have been together a few weeks now and are settling down together nicely. They will remain in stage one taking part in the Night Encounter program for the next year before they are released together into stage two. Eventually they will be introduced to a male, but not for a couple more years; the male is likely to be **Maxwell**.

To date ALERT has been able to fund the vast majority of its programs through its corporate partnership with African Encounter. The speed at which we can achieve all of our project plans is now only subject to how quickly we can raise additional donor funding to set up each project. Ongoing costs will be met by the commercial enterprises established during the set up process, but the initial outlay for the projects is significant, especially in this economic climate.

Any help that you can offer is greatly appreciated and to advise you of how best to do this we have produced a supporter's pack which can be downloaded from our web page at www.lionalert.org



The Last Roar



Bhubesi



Batoka



Soriah



Sahara

You can sponsor any of the Rehabilitation & Release into the Wild's lions from as little as £10 a month.

Your generous contribution will help pay for its food, housing, veterinary bills, micro-chipping, radio-collaring, permits, research and its release. You can sponsor an individual lion, or make a big saving for sponsoring multiple lions in a group or litter, and you can pay in either monthly or annual installments.

In return, you will receive:

- A copy of the ALERT DVD
- A photo & biography of your lion by email
- The monthly ALERT newsletter
- Quarterly updates & photos by email of your lion
- A 5% discount off of any stage one Lion Walk
- A 5% discount off of any African Impact program
- Priority booking to see the release of your lion

To sponsor any lion, simply email alert@africanencounter.org with the following details, stating "Lion Sponsorship" in the subject line"

- Full name
- Confirm the email address you would prefer us to send your invoice and updates to
- Your mailing address so that we can send you a copy of the ALERT DVD
- Whether you would prefer to make monthly or annual payments
- Whether the sponsorship is for yourself or is a gift. If it is a gift we will also require the recipients email and postal addresses.

Terms and conditions:

- There may be more than one person sponsoring each lion
- If you sponsor a litter or group, please note that lion groupings change and the litter or grouping may be split up and placed with other lions.
- Sponsorship does not entitle the donor to any rights of ownership or decision making over the future of the sponsored lion
- ALERT reserves the right to use sponsorship money to go to the general use of ALERT to further the program, and not necessarily towards the specific lion being sponsored
- The sponsored lion may not be released if we select that lion to be kept back for breeding
- If your sponsored lion dies or has to be put down for some reason, then you will be offered the option to cancel your sponsorship or to select another lion. No refunds on sponsorship paid.



Sango



Swahili



Echo



Etosha