

The Nyika-Vwaza Trust

Trust News

Volume 1, Issue 1

Summer 2005

Special points of interest:

- Elephant Monitoring Project—page 3
- Exciting times ahead with the involvement of the Peace Parks Foundation - see page 4

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The Nyika-Vwaza Trust makes immediate impact

A year has now passed since the Trust began to operate in the Nyika National Park and the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve. It is an appropriate time to take stock of the progress and achievements so far and to indicate the way forward.

The Trust began operations in the Nyika National Park in the last week of February 2004. In its first year the Trust decided to concentrate on some basic but essential park management tasks. These tasks included implementing the “early controlled burn programme”, control of exotic species and road maintenance. At the same time the Trust has offered assistance to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) in the form of scouts’ cash incentives and food provision. The installation of a VHF network for use by Park’s scouting patrols was also identified as a priority issue

The Peace Parks Foundation of South Africa identifies wildlife areas in bordering countries that have the potential of being linked to create Trans Frontier Conservation Areas.

The PPF team visited the Nyika in April 2004 and immediately realised the potential of linking national parks in Malawi and Zambia.

to increase efficiency and boost morale.

From the outset the Trust made the decision to involve residents of the villages on the periphery of the Nyika NP and Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve. Specifically this has meant employing local people to work for the Trust. The Trust is currently employing 26 people with 16 to 18 working at any one time. There is no doubt that they realise they are doing a worthwhile job. When they go back to their villages they are spreading the word about the work of the Trust through the village chiefs. The Trust believes that over time this will have an effect on the attitude of the locals towards their natural resources.

The Trust now has its own office space adjacent to the Park’s offices at Chelinda. A laptop computer has been installed and is used for gen-



The Nyika-Vwaza Trust Staff

eral management administration. A database has been developed which is used for project history recording, worker administration, elephant monitoring and illegal activity recording. A module has also been included which will maintain a record of the “Friends of the Trust” and be used for mailshots and general administration of donations.

In the first year of operation the Trust has managed to achieve many of its early goals. It can now move forward with confidence.

Peace Parks Foundation and the Nyika TFCA

Events moved rapidly and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in August 2004 as the first step in creating the Nyika TFCA.

PPF immediately identified poaching as the major problem facing Nyika and Vwaza and allocated £180,000 for a three year law enforcement programme that started in January 2005.



The Malawian and Zambian ministers signing the MoU documents.

The Early Controlled Burn Programme



Slashing grass from a road.



Setting a burn line at Juniper Forest.

With the first year's funding secured, the Trust set about employing a group of local workers to carry out the work necessary to run this programme. Throughout March and the beginning of April firebreaks around the sensitive areas of the Nyika were cleared. From mid-April to the last week of May the work gangs concentrated on clearing the roads and tracks of long grass. These road and tracks act as firebreaks between the compartments and have to be cleared to prevent fires jumping from one compartment to the next.

From the end of May the early burns were started. Initially the grasses did not burn readily as the grass was still too green and lush. By the end of the first week of June the frosts and sun had dried out the grass sufficiently for good burns. The burn programme continued throughout June and July. The programme has proved a great success. The park suffered a series of wildfires throughout August and September; however, the ring of firebreaks around the central plateau prevented these fires from sweeping through the area as in previous years.

Regular visitors to the Nyika have commented on how different and better the park looks this year to previous years.

The Trust has learned a great deal and the 2005 implementation of the programme will take on board these lessons. A 1:50,000 burn overlay map has been produced which identifies areas that have been burnt in 2004. A version has been developed to indicate the proposed burn areas for 2005 and the fire break preparation is well under way for this year.

Exotic Species Control Programme

The control of the Chelinda pine plantation can be compared to the painting of the Forth Bridge

Since March the Trust has employed a team of workers to cut down pine saplings around the Chelinda pine plantation. This will be a year-on-year task as the pines are rapid growing and would quickly advance across the plateau if left alone. This work stopped during the burn programme as all workers were required on this work.

Over the winter period work gangs have been clearing areas

of cut pine near the sawmill in preparation for trial burns and rehabilitation trial plots.

Future developments could see the harvesting and removal of the pine plantation—see page 4 for details.

A team of workers has removed areas of wattle in the Chelinda camp where they had been planted in the past. Some self seeded wattle will grow

back next year so the eradication will continue. If attacked like this for several years they will eventually be eradicated completely.

Although indigenous, bracken is an invasive species, it is taking over parts of the high plateau. DNPW has requested that the Trust source the funds for a pilot project to find the best way to control its advance.

Road Maintenance Programme



Repairing the road to Juniper Forest.

A programme of road maintenance was started in mid September initially concentrating on the main game drive route around Chosi Loop. Where necessary, new drains were cut and holes in the road filled in. Once the Chosi Loop repair work is complete sections of the Chelinda Bridge and Zung-

wara Loop road will be repaired. This work continued until the rains began. In future a small team may be employed to cut some new drains during the wet seasons as the ground is easier to work.

The road network throughout the Nyika is extensive and re-

quires a great deal of resource to improve and maintain it. There are ambitious plans for the future.

VHF Radio Network

One of the major problems that DNPW has faced in the Nyika NP and Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve has been lack of communication between base camp and scouting patrols.

The Trust has sourced funding through Luawata Conservation Ltd to install a VHF network consisting of a repeater station at the police mast at Chelinda with a base radio in the Park's office. Six hand-held VHF radios have been given to DNPW. These are used by scouting patrols to report back

to base camp.

The network covers most of the Nyika NP but to date there is no coverage for Vwaza Marsh. DNPW can now also communicate with Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) in the Zambian section of the park.

It is envisaged that the PPF law enforcement project (see page 1) will extend and improve the coverage not only on the Nyika but also in Vwaza Marsh.

There is no doubt that the

installation of the network has improved the efficiency and morale of scouting patrols.

Scouts Cash Incentive Scheme

As part of its efforts to support DNPW the Trust agreed to a cash incentive scheme for the Nyika NP and Vwaza Marsh's scouts to receive cash benefits for successful arrests of poachers and confiscation of firearms, snares and other

tools used by poachers.

This scheme is now being funded and operated by PPF through the law enforcement officer based at Chelinda.

PPF Elephant Monitoring Project

The Peace Parks Foundation is carrying out a two year programme in southern Africa to monitor the movement of elephant in current and future TFCA corridors. Resulting reports will hope to prove that TFCA's will increase the freedom of movement of not only elephants but other species which in turn will lead to better survival rates.

The programme is being funded by the Dutch lottery. Two of the Nyika elephants and four elephants in the Vwaza Marsh population have

been collared with GPS and VHF transmitters. The Trust has agreed, on behalf of PPF, to monitor the movements of these elephants, recording them on a database module.

It is thought that the Nyika elephants have been forced up to the plateau through heavy poaching in the north of the park. In the past elephants were not generally observed on the plateau. They were first seen about five years ago. They appear to be adapting to the environment.

Since observations started in September 2004 at least one calf of six months and a one year old have been seen. Occasionally smaller family groups have been seen breaking off from the main herd indicating that they are beginning to relax.

The Vwaza Marsh herds have been monitored ranging between the southern area around Lake Kazuni and into the western area on the borders with Zambia.



Collaring in Vwaza Marsh



A collared elephant at Lake Kazuni, Vwaza Marsh

Vwaza Marsh and the local community

The Trust has been actively involved in the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve. The long term plan is to reintroduce species such as sable through breeding sanctuaries in the Lake Kazuni area. To this end the Trust is keen to establish a good working relationship with the local community.

During 2004 the Trust ran a scout cash incentive scheme similar to that on the Nyika which helped to increase mo-

rale amongst the scouts and led to an increase in anti-poaching activity. The Trust also provided money to DNPW to assist the road maintenance programme within the reserve.

The 2004 rains were below average which resulted in water levels in Lake Kazuni dropping to a very low level by September. DNPW predicted that animals, especially the hippopotami, would suffer badly.

The Trust provided funds to build a temporary dam across the lake outflow. The resulting reduction in water loss minimized distress and loss of life in the animal population.

Provision of fresh water for the Kazuni community has become an increasing problem. On behalf of the Chigwere Cultural Village the Trust approached the Beit Trust for funds to drill a new borehole and install an Afridev hand



Elephants in Vwaza Marsh

pump. This is now operating successfully.

A glimpse into the future

The promotion of Trans Frontier Conservation Areas by PPF offers new possibilities for the Trust.

The evolution of the Nyika Trans Frontier Conservation Area embracing not only the Malawian and Zambian Nyika parks but also including the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve, the Lundazi Forest Reserve (Zambia) and the Musalangu Game Management Area (Zambia), with the possibility of further expansion to include the Kasungu National

Park (Malawi) with the Lukusuzi National Park (Zambia), might offer opportunities for the Trust to extend its work into these areas with the blessing of the Peace Parks Foundation and the approval of the Malawi and Zambian Governments. However, the first step must be the conclusion of a legal treaty between the two governments to establish the

Nyika Trans Frontier Conservation Area. It is anticipated that this will take place in January 2006.

Whatever the future holds the Trust will continue to ensure the success of its core responsibilities within the Nyika National Park and the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve.

Immediate and future projects

The proposed projects can only be implemented with significant injections of cash from generous donors.

These are exciting times for the Trust. After the first year of operation which saw the successful implementation of the early burn programme and other projects described on previous pages the Trust has now identified a number of projects to be implemented as funds become available.

Re-building of the bridges on the Nyika is a priority issue. Poachers tend to burn down the bridges to hamper scout patrols. General management of the Park is made more difficult due to lack of access to some of the remoter areas of the Park. The Trust proposes to rebuild the bridges using a steel structure to prevent damage by poachers. At the same time the signposting throughout the park will be replaced.

The Chelinda pine plantation poses a significant problem to the park management. Peace Parks Foundation recently commissioned a report to help determine a realistic plan for the eventual removal of the plantation. The Trust has indicated it is willing to be involved in the project

The Beit Trust is being approached to fund housing for Trust staff in the form of a hostel and to replace some of the temporary dwellings in use at Chelinda. There are also plans for a manager's cabin.

In another application the Trust will work with the new Law Enforcement Officer in the TFCA to build new scout housing on the Zambian side outside the park.

In the long term it is planned to provide housing outside the

park boundaries in order to reduce the number of people living at Chelinda.

As the role of the Trust encompasses more and bigger projects so will the transport of men and materials become a major requirement. The Trust will be looking to source funds to buy another pickup truck (Toyota) and a lorry such as an old Bedford to transport materials.

To assist the law enforcement programme the Trust has already started to investigate the possibilities of providing a spotter plane for use by DNPW and the PPF law enforcement officer.

These are costly projects and we will be looking for donors to provide the necessary funds!

A personal note from the outgoing manager

It was a case of being in the right place at the right time. I had the good fortune to be in Malawi in October 2003 and stayed at Chelinda Lodge for a few days.

David Foot was looking for a volunteer to run the new Trust and asked me if I would be interested. I had just finished a long contract in London so had some time available. It was

also an opportunity for me to realise a long held ambition to get involved in wildlife and environmental conservation in Africa.

Four months later I arrived at Chelinda to get the Trust up and running. My background is I.T. so I had real reservations about whether I would be capable of taking on the task. For me personally it has been a

real sense of achievement to see the Trust develop and accomplish so much in such a short time. None of it would have been possible without the encouragement and advice from both Robyn and David Foot, so a big thank you to both of them. My thanks also go to Markus Coerlin for his untiring work during the early burn season.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

I hope the articles in this newsletter go some way to describing what we have achieved so far and the ambitions for the future.

I could write enough to fill many pages of this newsletter to describe my time on the Nyika, the challenges faced, the many highlights and mercifully few lows but one thing stands out. And that is the Malawi people themselves. For a people that have very little they are rarely downcast and are genuinely friendly. The other point to highlight is the sheer distance that has to be travelled to manage both Nyika and Vwaza. This puts great strain on the one Trust vehicle so if you know of any person or company that would like to donate a Toyota pickup please contact the Malawi or UK Trust.

I will be leaving at a time of great excitement as the working relationship between the Trust, Peace Parks Foundation, Department of National Parks and Wildlife and the Zambian Wildlife Authority grows and develops. The management of the Trust will be left in the capable hands of Jeff Hall who will be the volunteer manager until January 2006.

As a trustee of the UK Trust I will still be involved in raising the funds to protect and conserve one of the most unique and beautiful areas of Africa. I am also sure I will be returning to the Nyika in the not too distant future to see how the Trust's work is progressing.

Mike Budgen

The Trustees of The Nyika-Vwaza Trust and of The Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust thank all donors including the following:

From organisations we thank:-

Jeremy Pope and Luawata Conservation Ltd for donating the VHF network.

The Conservation Foundation for part funding the 2004 controlled burn and exotic species control programme.

The Beit Trust for funding the borehole installation at Chigwere Cultural Village.

Stancom Tobacco of Malawi for generously partly funding the purchase of a Landrover Discovery.

The Wildlife and Environment Society of Malawi (Blantyre Branch).

The Nyika Safari Company for the loan and subsequent sale of a Toyota Landcruiser. NSC have also given generously by providing workshop facilities and mechanics free of charge. NSC has also been the host for some of the major TFCA meetings.

From individuals we thank:-

Mr. M.J. Budgen

Mr & Mrs J. Chapman

Mr. F.S. Dorward

Ms. J.E. Gallacher

Major I.A.D.Gordon

Mr. N. Harvey

Mrs. P.J.A Montgomery

Mr. A. Thorp

Mr. S. Turnbull

Prof. W. Van Riet

Mrs. E.G.L Wylde

In addition, Mr.and Mrs.C.G Grimshaw have met the costs of printing the UK leaflet

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The Nyika-Vwaza Trust can only continue with the vital task of helping to conserve the Nyika and Vwaza Marsh with the continuing support of generous donations. We welcome further donations from current Friends of the Trust but we also endeavour to widen our scope for funding so please pass on copies of the donation form to your friends and relations.

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