

STEPPING UP SECURITY



As I sit at my computer for several hours a day (because that's what my conservation job is) analysing data and churning out reports with statistics, trends, numbers, anomalies and significances, I still find it hard to believe that –within my lifetime– Zambia has lost 90% of one of Africa's largest elephant herds (estimated in 1973 in excess of 100,000 in the Luangwa Valley alone) and all of the continent's third-largest black rhino population (around 12,000).

Claire Lewis | Technical Advisor, North Luangwa Conservation Programme

Quite simply a wholesale slaughter of these two species. Yet we are facing the same threats again. So what are we doing to stop it? In 1974, two years after being established as a national park, North Luangwa National Park (NLNP) was declared a 'wilderness area' to be left untouched by man. This was a planned strategy in contrast to the management policies of its southern sister – South Luangwa National Park – where elephant numbers were controlled due to their detrimental effect on vegetation.

The North Luangwa elephants were to be left alone, and monitored to establish if they would decrease naturally. But the experiment failed as NLNP became lawless and poaching overran the wildlife. Elephant numbers

decreased, that bit was right, but populations of all large herbivores plummeted and, during the poaching epidemic of the 1970s and 80s black rhino were extirpated.

There are very few national parks in Africa, or even the world, as undeveloped as North Luangwa, but the long-term (now in its 28th year) North Luangwa Conservation Project partnership between Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) has led to NLNP being, arguably, the best managed and most secure national park in Zambia. NLNP is a spectacular wilderness and anyone who has visited cannot fail to be impressed by its vastness, its wildlife, its landscapes and its vibrancy. Today it remains, in essence, true to its wilderness roots but is now afforded the protection it deserves, driven largely by the presence of those curious pachyderms. Elephant numbers have increased and are stable and 25 black rhinos have been reintroduced since 2003 – the biggest translocation of its kind ever undertaken on the continent.

NLNP covers an area more than 4,500 km², but NLCP facilitates protected area management operations over an area nearly five times that size (greater than 21,000 km²), including the surrounding 'buffer zones' or Game Management Areas. At the heart of efforts to protect the elephants and rhinos in the North Luangwa ecosystem are the ZAWA Wildlife Police Officers and village scouts from communities adjacent to the Park, who carry out the law enforcement patrols and apprehend poachers. Together they form an integral

part of the anti-poaching effort in the ecosystem. But it is becoming increasingly necessary to focus efforts not just on the 'boots on the ground' but to pursue intelligence-fed operations that target strategic hotspots, areas, villages and people. It has come down to an individual scale, not an ecosystem scale. Such efforts are intensive. Lots of resources are channelled towards small intelligence and investigations teams to catch the bigger fish who do not set their poaching feet inside a protected area. They are the middle men, the buyers, the facilitators, the bad guys.

NLCP can't abandon its traditional approach to anti-poaching though. It is still necessary to deploy and mobilise the 60-plus four-man 10-day long patrols it supports every month to cover as much of that 21,000km² as possible. But more and more resources are being swallowed up by specialised units to mitigate the influencers and source of the scourge rather than the impoverished local residents they recruit to carry out the dirty work. In 2014, NLCP has directed more effort than ever to intelligence and investigations support. A training programme beginning in September will tackle upgrading a group of 36 men into a specialised Rhino and Elephant Protection Unit as the rapidly increasing demand for ivory and rhino horn is made worse by increasingly sophisticated poaching methods utilising helicopters, night-vision goggles, high-calibre weapons, and every means available to meet the lucrative demand from Asia.

Zambia's reintroduced black rhino population has not, yet, experienced any successful poaching in NLNP.

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MAIN IMAGE AND AUTHOR: NLCP

The NLNP fledgling population is isolated and remote but it is considered only a matter of time before the demand for rhino horn is such that even comparatively small returns will be worth the risk. The escalation in poaching needs to be addressed with an equally rapid escalation in law enforcement before it is too late and Zambia is faced with the possibility of losing all of its black rhino again. North Luangwa National Park plays a vital role for the future of this endangered species in the country, as well as on a regional scale. Focusing law enforcement efforts on this mega-herbivore inherently safeguards all other species and habitats for the benefit of the overall integrity of the larger ecosystem.

So NLCP focuses on anti-poaching patrols, training, technical support, and most importantly facilitating and fundraising for initiatives to stay one step ahead, as much as possible. I am proud and privileged to be part of this rhino reintroduction project, and there are now 34 roaming this wild and remote Park. Here are some more statistics: the Zambia Wildlife Authority officers tasked with the protection of this fledgling population have observed and photographed these rhinos over 3,000 times in the last decade, representing an almost impossibly intense security and monitoring effort. But at the same time they have recorded a 10-fold increase in poached elephant carcasses mirroring the catastrophic rhino figures being released by the South African conservation agencies. Will the younger generation of Zambians living on the edge of NLNP care about the survival of black rhinos if they don't grasp the global significance of the loss of the species, when so many other priorities take over their lives?

I don't know but I do know this: the local school children we brought into the Park today for their first-ever visit to NLNP saw a black rhino, so make that 3,001 sightings. And maybe that is the most important sighting of all because now they know; now they have seen what all the fuss is about; now they can believe.



Zambia's reintroduced black rhino have not yet, experienced any successful poaching in North Luangwa National Park



Rangers use radio tracking equipment to monitor wildlife. Left: a poacher is apprehended with confiscated ivory



Grants

Since 1 April 2014 Save the Rhino has sent £28,108 to the North Luangwa Conservation Programme, made up of a series of grants including: £1,617 for tracking devices and cameras, thanks to Peter Lawrence and other donors; and \$19,515 from US Fish and Wildlife Service, £1,600 from our core funds and £180 in miscellaneous donations for the ongoing costs of Lolesha Luangwa; and finally \$12,000 from the Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and £5,000 from the de Brie Charitabe Trust for the creation of a new education centre in the Park. We are about to transfer \$19,550 from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund for ongoing Lolesha Luangwa costs, and €2,419 from rhino's energy GmbH.

Who's the black rhino?
Each child is given a different animal photo as part of this activity



Educating the next generation of conservation leaders: a ranger demonstrates how radio-tracking equipment is used to monitor the Park's wildlife



These local Zambian schoolchildren are some of the first to take part in the new Lolesha Luangwa Park visits, with the newly refurbished conservation education truck



ALL IMAGES NCP



Each child is presented with a certificate on completion on their visit to the Park and participation on the conservation education programme

Children learn about the conservation, and how humans and biodiversity are connected. In this activity if one pupil breaks the seating chain, then everyone will fall down!

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

In August 2013, Save the Rhino sent a grant of \$25,000 to the **North Luangwa Conservation Programme** in Zambia, for the purchase of a second-hand overland truck.

The truck has now been fully adapted for its purpose as a conservation education truck, and in August 2014 the first of many Park visits have taken place, taking selected school groups and their teachers into North Luangwa National Park.

During the 3-day, 2-night visits, pupils learn about biodiversity, the importance of conservation, and the benefits of protecting their local wildlife. The pupils take part in a range of engaging activities and are presented with a certificate on completion of their visit.

Thanks

The Park visits are a key development of **Lolesha Luangwa** that has had key input into its strategy and delivery from the **Zoological Society of London**, which began mentoring the programme in July 2012. We are incredibly grateful to the **USFWS RTCF** for providing a grant of \$20,000 towards the purchase of the bus; while the ongoing costs of **Lolesha Luangwa** are covered by the **USFWS, Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, Frankfurt Zoological Society** and **Save the Rhino**.

Let's hear it for BIODIVERSITY! Local Zambian school children learn the meaning of keywords and how to spell them



Schoolchildren learn about the different wildlife species found in the North Luangwa National Park during a conservation education activity

SUBJECT: The importance of the healthy Park.
LESSON AIM: To feel positive towards the Park, and feel that a high level of biodiversity is important and to know that the ecosystem in the Park is interdependence.
LEARN OUTCOMES:
- Name some animals and plants that are found in the Park
- Spell 'biodiversity' and state what it means.
- Compare the level of biodiversity in the area you live to the level in the Park.
- Explain that different plants and animals (including humans) are all connected they depend on each other.
- State some reasons why biodiversity is important for people in Zambia.

The key lesson aims are written up for all to see in the classroom



In the Lolesha Luangwa classroom, children are presented with activity books and stationery during their first conservation education lesson