



## **RCP UPDATE May 2014**

### **Increased demand for LSGDs amongst pastoralists**

In order to reduce human-carnivore conflict around Ruaha, RCP is investigating various ways of reducing carnivore attacks on livestock, and one of those involves a trial placement of Anatolian Shepherd livestock guarding dogs (LSGDs). The guarding dog programme was explained during a well-attended DVD night in Kitisi, one of the local villages. The scene became vivid when the star of the evening was presented to the crowd – Shujaa, the biggest of the RCP Anatolian Shepherd dogs placed so far. At first, the villagers were scared and some people tried to run away, but eventually, curiosity overcame fear and villagers were amazed by the size and the healthy, shiny appearance of the dog. This demonstration generated great local interest in the programme, and more people were asking for LSGDs to help them protect their livestock.

After a successful test phase, with four dogs initially placed in pastoralist households, RCP is currently planning an expansion of the programme. We are hoping to import 4-6 more pedigree Anatolian Shepherd puppies later this year, ideally from the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) in Namibia, and eventually to trial the relative effectiveness of village dogs and possibly cross-breeds as well.

The DVD night showed that there was huge local enthusiasm for more specialised guarding dogs, but people were reminded that it requires significant effort on the part of the potential owner to raise such a dog, as they need the highest standards of daily care, including good food, shelter and hygiene. Shujaa is a perfect example of having a proud and caring owner as he now weighs over 40kg at the age of just 8 months! Not only is Shujaa growing well, but the other guarding dogs are also growing well and seem to be thriving in their pastoralist households. We are very grateful to everyone who has partnered with us on this, especially the Taronga Conservation Society of Australia, CCF Namibia, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and the Wendy P McCaw Foundation. We hope to continue and extend these partnerships as we expand the livestock guarding dog programme in the coming years.



*Jasiri, one of the Anatolian Shepherds, undergoing her weekly weigh-in, watched closely by her Maasai owners*

### **New design for even more effective bomas**

RCP's data show that around 65% of local carnivore attacks occur in livestock enclosures, known as 'bomas', so reinforcing these has been a top priority for the project. To date, wooden poles have been used to construct the predator-proof wire bomas, and while these are effective, the poles need maintaining and replacing over time, due to rot and termites weakening the wood. In order to avoid this, RCP has started using metal poles, which have a much longer lifespan and which also reduce the need for cutting down trees. RCP has also started building square bomas, which pastoralists prefer to the traditional circle, as the four corners make it easier to construct a roof to provide cover for the whole boma.

The boma programme has been very successful, and the wire enclosures are around 99% effective at reducing further attacks. Various funders have helped us with the bomas, but National Geographic Big Cats Initiative has been a key player. Through their BuildABoma campaign, [www.buildaboma.org](http://www.buildaboma.org), they are raising more funds to help us meet the increasing demand for this solution, which is helping local communities by reducing attacks, and carnivores by reducing retaliatory killing. Please look at the site and feel free to make a donation to this important work!



*Attaching the wire to the metal poles*



*Justin Chambulila and his team in front of their newly constructed predator-proof boma*

### **First Lion Guardians Adult Literacy Days**

In addition to reducing carnivore attacks, it is very important that local communities see real benefits from having carnivores around. The Ruaha Lion Guardians – which is a collaboration between RCP, the main Lion Guardians programme in Kenya and Panthera – recently asked local communities which additional benefits they would appreciate from carnivore presence, and improving adult literacy emerged as a high priority. Therefore, the Ruaha Lion Guardians have started adult literacy classes at the RCP base camp, with George (the Ruaha Lion Guardians Coordinator) managing the teaching, assisted by Pascal, one of the local Guardians. The weekly classes started with 8 students in May, but the number of students is increasing, so by the end of June we are likely to run two literacy classes every week. Over time, more Guardians will be trained as teachers, and will help the other villagers learn how to read and to write. Gaining these skills is very valuable as they are relatively rare in the

community, so this is an important benefit for villagers from the presence of the Lion Guardians, RCP and ultimately of large carnivores in the local area.



*The second literacy day: George is teaching*



*Villagers practising reading and writing with Pascal's support*

### **Immediate action taken by Guardians after reports of lion hunt**

On the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, RCP staff got a report that a group of five lions, comprising an adult male and female and three eight month old cubs, had killed two cows close to Kitesi village. We heard that a large group of Barabaig and Maasai warriors had assembled, and were searching the area for the lions, as well as 30 cattle which had become lost in the area overnight. Three Guardians (Pascal, Daudi and Mandela) responded immediately and went to the scene, to try to prevent anyone killing the lions.

The three Guardians slept at a homestead near the attack location to help in case the lions attacked again. Very early the next morning, a team of Guardians and RCP staff set off well before the sun rose and began to follow the lion spoor to the place where the lions had

killed the cows. Upon arrival, they found the remains of the two cows, as well as a small group of hunters who were searching for the lions. The Guardians talked to the hunters, gathered information and persuaded them to leave the lions alone. After our discussion they gave up the hunt and returned home, and the team waited to see if anyone else would try to continue the hunt. They took what was left of the cows and threw the remains into a large hollow baobab where no animals could get to in case the remains had been laced with poison to kill the lions. Thanks to this immediate response, no lions or other carnivores were killed after the depredation incident.



*Guardian Joseph examining lion footprints*

### **Guardians remove a giraffe snare**

This month, some of the Guardians discovered and removed a giraffe snare when they were out patrolling their zones. These snares are put out so that villagers can catch wild animals for meat, either for their own consumption or to sell at local markets. Snaring can have devastating impacts on prey populations, in turn creating a significant threat to large carnivores as their food source declines. Furthermore, if wild prey is depleted, carnivores are increasingly likely to turn to domestic stock for food, creating conflict and imposing more costs on the villagers. Currently, we have very little information on the extent of bushmeat poaching around Ruaha, and how much it is impacting prey and predator populations, and this is something we are very keen to explore more in the future. We hope to eventually have one of our Tanzanian Research Assistants investigate this issue for a Masters degree, which would help build capacity and also provide vital information on this important threat.



*The giraffe snare discovered in the bush, before the team removed it*

### **Introducing the 2014 Simba Scholars – including some national athletes!**

Better education is one of the most important benefits that villagers want to see from the presence of large carnivores. Therefore, in 2013, RCP developed the Simba Scholarship programme, which enables promising pastoralist children to gain a fully-funded scholarship through secondary school. In 2014, 5 new students obtained scholarships, and they are photographed below. All the children are from pastoralist backgrounds, because this is the group that experiences the highest degree of conflict with carnivores, so require the most benefits. We were particularly excited that four of this year's Scholars are Barabaig students, as this tribe is often under-represented at secondary-school level, and also that two of the students are from Kitisi village, where RCP's field camp is based.

All the students had to do well in an exam to obtain a scholarship, but in addition to their academic skills, two of them - brothers Warini and Ismail Baresta – are excellent long-distance runners. They won in the regional competitions and will now compete for the national athletic team. Go, Simbas, go!!!



*Warini Baresta and Ismail Baresta: Barabaig brothers from Idodi village, who won their regional running competitions*



*James Petro: a Barabaig boy from Kitisi village*

*Eva Klerii: a Maasai girl from Makifu village*



*Bariheida Gwaidamy: a Barabaig boy from Kitisi village*

### **New Kids 4 Cats school joins the project**

In addition to the Simba Scholarships, RCP also provides educational benefits to local communities through the 'Kids 4 Cats' school twinning initiative. This is where schools in developed countries pair up with a local village school, and provide a minimum of \$500 or £300 of funding per year, which is used for much-needed equipment such as books, pens, desks etc. Currently, we have seven twinned schools, but the Harrodian School in the UK has just joined in, twinning with Magozi Primary School close to Ruaha. The Harrodian pupils are

extremely enthusiastic and are off to a great start – about 170 students, teachers and parents did a sponsored morning work-out and managed to raise over £2200! This is enough to buy valuable equipment and also to sponsor one of this year's Simba Scholars, so we are very impressed! We are still looking for more developed-world schools to get involved with the Kids 4 Cats initiative, so if you are interested, please email us at [rcpkids4cats@gmail.com](mailto:rcpkids4cats@gmail.com)



*RCP's Community Liaison Officer, Msago, and some of the students from Magozi Primary School*

### **RCP represented at forum about poaching**

Sokoine University of Agriculture and the Nature Conservation Wildlife Students Association (WISA-SUA) prepared a conservation forum on *"The prevailing poaching crisis and the fate of wildlife and tourism in Tanzania"* which took place at Sokoine University - Morogoro on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2014. About 250 participants attended this forum from Sokoine University of Agriculture, University of Dar es Salaam, Wildlife Division (WD), PAMS Foundation and Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB). During the forum, participants gave presentations explaining the wildlife conservation activities they were involved in. WD presented about *"Poaching trends in Tanzania's protected areas"*, TTB presented about *"The impact of poaching on wildlife based tourism"*, while the PAMS Foundation gave a talk on *"Human wildlife conflict trends in the Selous-Niassa ecosystem and the corridor status"*. On behalf of RCP, Monty Kalyahe explained the project activities and gave a talk entitled *"Human carnivore conflict and mitigation measures in the Ruaha ecosystem"*.



*Monty Kalyahe, one of RCP's Senior Research Assistants, representing the project at the forum*



*The forum audience at Sokoine University*

### **Investigating carnivore ecology – camera-trapping**

In addition to resolving conflict, one of RCP's key aims is to learn more about large carnivore ecology and distribution around Ruaha. Currently Jeremy Cusack, an Oxford PhD student, has been working with RCP and Trevor Jones (a local elephant researcher), to set out camera-traps and gather important data on mammal communities and dynamics. This month, the long-term camera-trap grid in the Park was checked and maintained, while additional camera-traps were placed out in the Wildlife Management Area to the south of the Park. These camera-traps are generating great images and very valuable data which we hope the authorities can eventually use for determining long-term conservation plans. RCP camera-traps can be sponsored through the Ruaha Explorers Club by interested people or organisations. This results in a Facebook page being created for the sponsor, where camera-

trap images are posted – these tend to be very popular, and for more information, please email [leosooter@gmail.com](mailto:leosooter@gmail.com)



*A beautiful shot of a leopard. The position and shape of the rosettes (spots) on the coat can be used for individual identification*



*Ruaha is also very important for smaller carnivores, like the serval shown here*

### **First paper published by RCP team on carnivore distribution**

RCP uses both camera-trapping and direct sightings by Park guides in order to assess key habitat areas for large carnivores. The first 3 years of data were collated and examined by an Oxford Masters student, Leandro Abade, and he has just published the first paper on the likely distribution of lions, spotted hyaenas and leopards across Ruaha. The paper can be accessed through the PLOS One journal website, and we hope that it will be the start of many valuable papers resulting from our studies in this important but understudied landscape. Most of the funding for this work came from the Recanati-Kaplan Foundation, SeaWorld Busch Gardens and the St Louis Zoo WildCare Institute, so we are very grateful for their initial and ongoing support of our ecological research.

Leandro is now starting a PhD at Oxford, and hopes to continue his ecological research around Ruaha so that we gain an even better understanding of which factors affect carnivore presence and distribution at a broad scale, which will help guide landscape-level conservation planning.

### **SeaWorld Busch Gardens liaison visits the project**

SeaWorld Busch Gardens (SWBG) has been one of RCP's longest-standing supporters, and has provided extremely valuable funding through their Conservation Fund. This month, we were lucky enough to have Ashleigh Lutz-Nelson from SWBG come and visit the RCP field camp, where she experience all the ups and downs of the project's daily life! We all had a great time and hopefully she can return to SWBG and explain in even more detail to visitors why the Conservation Fund is so important, and what it helps to achieve in the field.



*Ashleigh meeting local schoolchildren during her visit*

### **RCP's killer toilet strikes again!**

Some of you might recall that late last year, RCP's Director, Amy Dickman, had a near miss when her long-drop toilet collapsed and almost buried her! Despite our camp manager, Msago, fixing the toilet with concrete, it has claimed another victim! Last month, a goat that

had been grazing in the camp wandered into Amy's toilet banda and managed to fall down the repaired hole. Sean McEnery, RCP's Lion Guardian manager, was alerted by the cries of a young herder at the other end of the camp. Investigating, he found that a goat had fallen four meters through the toilet hole and was now pacing circles at the bottom of the hole. The goat's landing, however (luckily or unluckily), had been a soft one and the previously white goat had undergone a colour change but was unhurt. A rope was sought and a loop made. After numerous attempts, many subtle changes to the loop and much deliberation our hero carefully got the loop around the goats' neck and gingerly pulled it out of the hole, to the elation of the Barabaig crowd that had formed as a result of the ruckus. The goat was returned to its owner, and the toilet is now being treated with more respect than ever!



*The toilet after the initial collapse – despite being repaired with concrete, it somehow still managed to act as a near-death-trap!*