



So much has been happening with the Nyika-Vwaza Trusts over the last six months that it's hard to know what to tell you first!

In the UK, we are preparing for our major fundraising event of the year including a lecture by Peace Parks CEO Professor Willem Van Riet and an art exhibition - see below for details of how to apply for tickets. Also, our new website has been launched, an exciting development for us.

In Malawi, this year's controlled burns programme has finished, pine clearance around Chelinda continues and the British High Commission-sponsored bridge-building project is under way. In addition, anti-poaching efforts are producing extraordinary successes. We report on all of these stories, and much more besides, in this issue of Nyika-Vwaza News.

The cynics will tell you that, if you want to do anything in Africa, you have to be prepared to work to Africa time - slowly, slowly. Read this newsletter and you'll know that that's not true. For us, things are happening fast. We are two tiny charities but, with your support, we will continue to punch above our weight and make the conservation of the Nyika National Park and Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve one of Africa's success stories.

Jane Gallacher - Editor

London fundraising party - date not to be missed!

Our 2006 UK fundraising party will take place on **Monday 6 November at Imperial College, London between 6.30 and 9.00 pm.**

We are delighted that our speaker is **Professor Willem van Riet**, CEO of the **Peace Parks Foundation**, South Africa. He will discuss the development of Trans Frontier Conservation Areas, in particular the Nyika TFCA which will embrace Malawi and Zambia. Professor van Riet's talk will be followed by our **Grand Safari Raffle draw**, a **drinks party** and an **exhibition of paintings by Malawian artists** (all on sale at affordable prices, with profits going to the UK Trust).

To cover our costs, the face value of each ticket is £15. We do, though, want to see as many of you as possible - so please contribute for the ticket whatever you like. Further details are contained in the application form enclosed with this newsletter. **Tickets will be issued on a first-come-first-served basis and seating in the lecture theatre is limited, so please apply soon.**

Those of you who came to the Malawi High Commission last year had a great time. Do join us again this year for what promises to be an even better party.

Website goes live

The Nyika-Vwaza Trust website is now live! - take a look at www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org.

Designed by Oli Force, our volunteer trust manager in Malawi, and UK trustee, Mike Budgen, the website updates you on the activities of both the Malawi and UK Trusts. We have included an online donation facility - all major credit and debit cards are accepted - so it's even easier for you to support us.

Please let us know what you think of the new website and give us suggestions for improvements - you can contact us at info@nyika-vwaza-trust.org.

We have also set up an arrangement with www.everyclick.com. Every month, everyclick.com donates 50 per cent of its gross revenues to charities listed on its site.

So, just make www.everyclick.com/uk/thenyikavwazauktrust your browser home page and use it whenever you search the web. You'll find that its speed and search results are as good as other, better known, search engines. It does not cost us, or you, a penny so please use it to support us.



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Fighting fire with fire

Over the last four months, fire management measures have been top of the agenda on the Nyika. Probably since prehistoric times, wildfires have swept across the area, playing a dramatic role in shaping the landscape. The main problem with wildfires today is the damage they do to the remnant patches of montane evergreen forest on the plateau, and to sub-montane areas such as the Juniper Forest (See "Juniper Forest: The Jewel in the Crown" below). These are ecologically diverse but highly vulnerable habitats. Our task is to protect them and allow them to regenerate and expand. The cutting of early burn firebreaks promotes this goal by stopping the advance of uncontrolled wildfires late in the dry season.

Back in April, our volunteer trust manager, Oli Force, and our team of 30 local Malawians embarked on the annual road slashing and firebreak clearing programme. Roads are excellent firebreaks but smaller roads become overgrown during the rains and need to be cut back to prevent wildfires jumping over them. Each road can take three to four days to slash and so "the guys" were sent out in teams with tents and rations for days at a stretch. Not only does this save time but also it economises on fuel - and, since northern Malawi has experienced two fuel crises in as many months, fuel conservation is also an imperative!

The arrival of the first frosts in June marked the beginning of the "controlled early burn" programme. The idea here - as its name suggests - is to set carefully controlled and monitored back burns around ecologically important areas of the park. By back burning away from these areas early in the season after the rains (when the fires burn more slowly, are not as hot as later in the season and so are controllable), the risk of wildfires sweeping through and devastating them later on is much reduced.



Burn line at Chelinda

Fire management will always be an important part of conservation on the Nyika. Thanks to your generous support, the UK trust is funding the Malawi trust so that it can continue to employ our 30 man fire management team. Funding has also now been made available to expand the programme into Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve.

Bridges and signposts

As previously reported in Nyika-Vwaza News, a major signposting and bridge building project - vital to the infrastructure of the Nyika - is now under way, thanks to support from the British High Commission in Malawi.

Mesheck Mtumbuka, our builder, is in the final stages of building signposts in the more remote areas of the Nyika. Painting of the signposts will start soon.



Signpost ready for painting



Bridge over the
Lutete river

The bridge building project is being supervised by Brian Parsons, a retired construction surveyor. A number of lorry chassis - from which the bridges are being constructed - are being brought up to the Nyika from Lilongwe. The logistics of this operation are impressive. Mr Aniz Ghumra of Trucks and Carbreakers in Lilongwe has kindly donated a number of steel pieces from scrapped truck chassis from which to construct the bridges. These have been made to the correct size by Mr Tino Biotero of Luso African Steel Erection Company. They have been transported to Mzuzu by Gaffar Transport. All of this has been done at no cost to us - so many thanks to the individuals and companies mentioned above for their support. For the final stage of their journey, we have hired a 10 tonne truck to bring the chassis up to Chelinda.

Many thanks to the British High Commission for funding these initiatives and to Brian Parsons for giving his time and offering his expertise.

New mechanic for the Malawi trust

Ausward Mhango has joined our team as a vehicle mechanic dedicated to maintaining our four trust vehicles. Ausward works alongside the Nyika Safari Company mechanics from whom he will continue to develop his skills as a top mechanic. The two drivers whom the trust employs, Joseph Mhone and Andrew Mhango, assist Ausward when needed and so are gaining mechanical knowledge which will be useful when there are problems with the vehicles in the field. Thanks to your support Ausward is keeping our vehicles on the road.

The Chipome Challenge on horseback

Molly Jackson, who joined the Board of Trustees of the UK trust at the end of last year, recounts a recent adventure on horseback on the Nyika and how it prompted her to become involved in conserving northern Malawi's natural heritage.

It began with the phone ringing one Sunday afternoon. A distant crackle and Robyn Foot's voice from Mzuzu. Would Harry and I make-up numbers for a pack-horse safari into the Chipome valley, an inaccessible and remote part of the northern Nyika with David? I had ridden on the Nyika three times before (one of our favourite parts of Africa), so I knew that this trip was serious exploring. Surrounded by grey skies and the dismal boggy fields of Leicestershire, the decision was easy.

Now, standing at the top of the escarpment, looking down into the valley below with the peak of Jalawe rock looming over us, I realised that this was indeed a demanding expedition. I had broken my ankle five weeks before, and Harry has two replacement knee joints. But there was no going back. We had finished our farewell lunch, and the pack-horse was loaded. Far away, down in the valley, David saw some elephant; "Just where I plan to camp tonight" but, even with my binoculars, I saw nothing.

We said goodbye to Robyn and the children and went over the top. Our fellow explorers were Nick Leadbetter and Sara Lidsey. We were to climb down some 2,000 ft and then spend three days together following the Chipome River from west to east, emerging back on the high plateau by Nganda Peak at around 8,600 ft. Laurens van der Post had followed a similar route, but in reverse, when he surveyed the Nyika on foot in 1949. This area is a true wilderness with no access except on foot or horseback so we knew we were heading somewhere that few had explored over the years since van der Post.

The first challenge we encountered was the pack-horse, Tiyeni. He had clearly not signed up for the trip, and tried to hand his cards in at the first tiny gully. We coaxed him across, but it did not bode well. Then the challenges multiplied. The going became steeper and rockier. Thick miombo woodland replaced the sparse trees. Poor Tiyeni had not worked out that his burden had inexplicably trebled his width, and so got constantly wedged between two trees. He would stand patiently, ears twitching, until rescued. We had to dismount and lead our horses, which I could not manage with my sore ankle. Nick and Robert Sichinga, the groom, came to my rescue, and shuttled my horse, Blackie, between them, whilst I scrambled and slid down as best I could. Harry's predicament was similar. It took us three arduous and difficult hours to get down the escarpment.

The sense of achievement when at last we were able to remount was palpable. We started to notice the dappled sunlight playing in the new bronze and apple-green leaves of the trees. But we couldn't rest on our laurels as the afternoon was now well advanced and David was concerned that we might not make that night's planned camp-site, the confluence of the Chipome and Jalawe rivers.

We were riding through waist high grass when, without any warning, in a crook of the river, we found ourselves in the midst of 20 elephants. They were as startled as us and our horses and, when the initial shock passed, fled. Despite their huge size, and the panic of their retreat, they were silent except for the rustle of the grass. Like our horses, we were mesmerised as they streamed past. It was wonderful to see a very young one, hardly visible in the long grass, amongst them.

We found a natural enclosure to keep the horses secure for the night, between a steep slope and a high bank on the Chipome River. We pitched our tiny tents on a sandy beach and got a fire going. It was now dark, and it had been a long time and much effort since lunch. We discovered that while he could take elephants rushing by in his stride, David was much less comfortable with the role of chief chef! Robyn had equipped him with a menu for the trip, carefully geared to his culinary skills. This small piece of paper was frequently consulted over the three days, refolded and kept safe in David's top pocket. Luckily, his riders were able to advise him on heating the pasta sauce and opening the wine box. The moon that night, almost a full circle of rich yellow, made our torches unnecessary. I doubt I have ever felt so well with the world or slept so peacefully.

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We spent the next two days following the river out of the valley. We used old elephant paths where we could, as these provided a safe route across treacherous ground. Occasionally, David had to plunge through thick vegetation to test the footing, all of us acutely aware of the steep drop on the other side of the narrow path. There was a frightening moment when Nick and his horse fell into a gully, but luckily both scrambled their way to safety. At other times we meandered through peaceful woodland, lit golden in the sunlight, Tiyeni following behind us, no longer needing the encouragement of Robert's lead rope.

As we began to climb back to the high plateau, the views of the valley began to disappear in the folds of the hills. We ate a last lunch within sight of our adventure and glowed with the sense of achievement and companionship of sharing a special place together.

It is exciting that the Peace Parks Foundation has a plan to restock the Chipome valley with species such as buffalo that were poached out years ago. The very remoteness and inaccessibility of the area mean huge logistical challenges will have to be overcome and it will be difficult to protect the animals. But these difficulties must not deter us from striving to protect such precious areas.

Many of you reading this have the privilege of knowing the Nyika intimately and are aware of the particular magic it weaves. It is a unique environment which needs all the protection it can get. I hope to make my own contribution as a trustee of the UK trust. I sincerely hope that each of you will continue to support our work with enthusiasm and generosity. Our lives and those of our children and their children will be impoverished without wildernesses such as the Nyika.

Juniper Forest - The Jewel in the Crown

The Juniper Forest, which is in the south east corner of the Nyika National Park, has been described as the Jewel in the Crown of the Nyika. It is a sub-montane forest and represents the most viable southerly stand of *Juniperus procera* in Africa. The juniper trees grow to heights in excess of 30 metres and probably once covered a much larger area of the plateau but, in the past few centuries, the Forest has been ravaged by fire. Bushbuck, red forest duiker, bush pig and chequered elephant shrew occur there and leopard claw marks have been observed on some trees. It is also home to avian rarities such as the bartailed trogon, the white-chested alethe and the olive flanked robin.

Reporting on his recent trip to the Juniper Forest with a team of Malawians to clear and burn the firebreak around it, Oli Force, our volunteer trust manager wrote:

"This was my first visit to the Juniper and I was astounded at how unique and beautiful a place it is. Many of the newer staff members had also never visited the Forest and were amazed at the size of the trees, being used to the very small trees that are commonplace in Malawi.



Juniper Forest

The road to Juniper really gives you an idea of the size of the Nyika. The journey to this remote part of the park - accessible only in the dry season - takes you along the top of ridges that look out across the plateau in all directions and it is breathtaking. Also, at a couple of points, you are able to see Lake Malawi and Tanzania. On the return journey, we were travelling back after dark and there was a full moon. At a few of the highest points, you could see most of the plateau illuminated by moonlight".

Fire management is a top ecological priority on the Nyika. Your money is paying for fire breaks to be cut around the Juniper Forest every year. Our aim is not simply to preserve and protect this special area but to allow it regenerate and expand.

Anti-poaching successes on the Nyika

As many readers will know, the Nyika NP has been benefiting from a Law Enforcement Support Project sponsored by the Peace Parks Foundation since March 2005. Early results have been astonishing: law enforcement results on the Nyika NP in 2005 broke every previous record.

The total number of convictions in a court of law against poachers (37) almost doubled the previous record (20) set in the year 2000. Total effective jail sentences passed on convicted poachers amounted to almost 50 years compared to the previous record of 30 years total effective jail sentence obtained in 2004. The total amount of fines handed out to poachers who were not given a jail sentence in 2005 totalled the equivalent of over US\$700 which more than doubled the previous record of US\$300 set in 2003 (US\$700 is roughly the annual average income for two families in northern Malawi).



Mike and his scouts with the evidence

When asked to comment on the results the Law Enforcement Advisor, Mike Labuschagne, who is based on the Nyika, said that it often took donor driven projects time to show results and that it was gratifying to have broken every annual law enforcement record in the first 10 months of operations. He said that an excellent relationship between the project, park management, the police and the courts had made the successful start possible.

Mike went on to say that "We began 2006 by arresting members of the most notorious gang of ivory poachers in the region and recovered heavy calibre hunting rifles and ivory in this operation. If we keep up the pressure then a marked increase in game numbers will become apparent on the Nyika in the foreseeable future".

Samuel Munthali

For many of us, the lives of the people who work in Malawi for the trusts, putting into action the initiatives we fund, can seem distant and remote. We thought you might enjoy finding out more about some of the personalities there. So, to start, we focus on one of the most prominent employees of the Malawi trust - Samuel Munthali. Our volunteer trust manager, Oli Force, has developed a close working relationship with Samuel. This is how Oli describes him:

"Samuel is one of the group capitaos (essentially, a foreman/headman). Samuel hails from near to the village of Hewe to the south of the Park and is in his late 20s. His brother, Martin, is a groom for Heart of Africa Safaris. From what I have worked out from chatting to Sam, his parents have both sadly died and he and Martin are the bread winners for their younger brothers, who are still in school.

Samuel has an incredible knowledge of the Nyika National Park, he has been with the Malawi trust from the start, and he is very familiar with its running. He is fluent in 7 languages and has asked me to teach him what little French I know so that he can expand his knowledge. He has also asked me to teach him how to use a computer. In his own words, he wants to be a 'Jack of all Trades'!



Samuel Munthali

Samuel is also a top striker in the Chelinda Soccer Team - The Zebra Warriors - when he is not working, and is also a very well known and respected individual throughout the Chelinda community." Samuel is also a talented poet. His fabulous poem, "My Nyika", is reproduced on our website - go to www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org.

We are very grateful to Samuel and his fellow trust workers for their hard work on our various projects.

It is also worth noting that the salaries we pay to our trust workers directly benefit the local communities from which they come. We employ 60 men - and 60 salaries go a long way in Africa. There is much more that we want - and, with your support - will do for local people in northern Malawi. But this is a start of which we can be proud.

Lions return to Vwaza Marsh

Back in 2001 three lions appeared around Lake Kazuni in Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve. These were the first to be seen in the area for many years. At the time, wildlife numbers were increasing in the Lake Kazuni area, largely due to a permanent tourism presence, and hopes were raised that the lions would remain in the area with a plentiful food supply around. However, after killing all the huge kudu bulls, they moved on and, apart from the odd sign of a lone lion, nothing was seen of them until ... a few weeks ago!

Six lions have been seen feeding on a hippo calf on the edge of Lake Kazuni. The small pride consisted of a young male, a fully grown female and four sub-adult cubs.

These lions will have come across the border from Zambia, which is a sure sign that the creation of the Nyika Trans-frontier Conservation Area between Malawi and Zambia is of crucial conservation importance. The plan is for the Nyika TFCA to incorporate the Nyika National Park and Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve with the Nyika Plateau National Park and the Lundazi Forest Reserve (which runs down into the Luangwa Valley) in Zambia, together with a wildlife corridor in Zambia which will join all of them together.

Eradicating exotics

Back in the 1950s and 60s, forests of Mexican pines (*Pinus patula*) were planted in areas around Chelinda - the aim was to plant the whole plateau for pulp wood production. Luckily, the inaccessibility of the Nyika soon put paid to that idea and the project was abandoned. But the non-indigenous trees remain and one of our goals, over time, is to see them removed and the Nyika return to its natural state. Restricting the spread of these pines is a slow process, however, since all of the clearing and felling is deliberately done with hand tools.

A team of 30 men work on the pine plantation when not involved in fire management. So far, four acres have been cleared - there are only 1196 acres to go! And the initial clearing is not the only task - pines re-seed at a rapid rate and so yearly removal of seedlings is necessary.

The UK trust has recently made funds available to the Malawi trust so that an additional team of 30 labourers has now been employed who will be dedicated to pine clearance. It is only with your support that this is possible.

Your support matters

We are pleased to report that, in the financial year ended 5 April 2006, almost **90 per cent** of funds generated by the UK trust (through donations, tax reclaimed, fund raising and bank interest) has been utilised or committed to meet the direct needs of conservation work within the Nyika National Park and the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve as follows:-

| Fund Allocation | £ |
|--|--------------|
| Grants for 2 vehicles | 12,100 |
| Staff hostel at Chelinda for 30 Malawian workers | 8,500 |
| 2 x VHF handheld radios | 300 |
| 6 x drip torches | 360 |
| Operational expenses (Nyika and Vwaza) | 840 |
| Support of the volunteer Trust Managers | <u>2,500</u> |
| | 24,600 |
| Fund raising and administration | <u>3,400</u> |
| Total | 28,000 |

(NB. The Malawi Trust also contributes to operational expenses and both trusts are dependent on logistic support given willingly by the Nyika Safari Company.)

Without your generous support, none of the initiatives you have read about in this issue of Nyika-Vwaza News would be possible - so, a big **THANK YOU** to all of our Friends.

Grand Safari Raffle

Thanks to you, our Grand Safari Raffle is well under way. We have just one target, and that is the sale of every ticket. We anticipate much excitement when the draw takes place at **Imperial College on the evening of Monday 6 November 2006** - an event not to be missed!

We thank all of our sponsors for their generosity:-

- British Airways, Ulendo Safaris, the Nyika Safari Company, Heart of Africa Safaris and Manda Wilderness - for the 7-night safari in northern Malawi and the Mozambique lakeshore with internal charter flights and return international flights from London to Lilongwe;
- Tessa Traeger - for a family photographic portrait in her London studio;
- European Tour Productions - for hosting 2 guests in the BMW Hospitality Pavilion overlooking the 18th green during the PGA Championship at Wentworth Golf Club on either Saturday 26th or Sunday 27th May 2007. This prize includes a tour of the television facilities;
- Major Ian Gordon - for the choice of one painting from a selection of paintings by wildlife artist David Kelly;
- Simon Wilson Stephens - for a self-catering 4-night weekend (Thursday to Tuesday) for 2 people in his holiday cottage on the north Norfolk coast;
- Our anonymous donor - for £200 worth of theatre tickets;
- Molly Jackson - for a 12-bottle case of wine delivered to a UK address;
- Fay and Bill Keppel-Compton - for a self-catering week for 2/3 people in their holiday cottage in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, between Easter and October 2007;
- John Douglas and Kelly White - for a signed copy of the Spectrum Guide to Malawi together with a 1:900,000 map of Malawi; and
- Craig Rix - for 10 x 1-year subscriptions to the magazine, "Travel Africa".



Raffle ticket sellers – a reminder!

Please remember that all monies, counterfoils and unsold tickets (if any) must be returned to Harry Foot, Stowford Farm, Harford, Ivybridge, Devon, PL21 0JD by Saturday 21st October 2006. We are truly grateful to all of you who are working so hard to sell every ticket.

How filling in your UK tax return can help us

Are you aware that, if you submit a Self-Assessment Tax Return, you can instruct the Inland Revenue to pay to The Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust, as a donation from yourself, all or part of, any excess tax that is due to be repaid to you?

To do this, you will need to insert our charity's unique code - BAR31JG - in box Q19A.3 of the 2005-06 Tax Return form. Q19A.4 even enables you to have your donation enhanced as a Gift Aid donation.

What a marvellous way of supporting us! Please consider taking advantage of it.

The Nyika-Vwaza Trust

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Working for environmental and wildlife conservation in northern Malawi.

The Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust

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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 newsletter to your friends and relations.

BANKER'S ORDER

(for UK residents only)

To: Bank plc.
.....
.....
.....

(Please insert the name and address of your Bank in the space above)

Please pay to Lloyds TSB Bank plc, 40 High Street, Alton, Hants, GU34 1BQ (Sort Code 30-90-15), for the credit of The Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust's Account No. 1205669, the sum of :-

£ on

(Please insert date above)

and thereafter every month/quarter/six months/year (*delete as appropriate*) until cancelled by me in writing.

Name of Account to be debited

.....

Account Number

Signature

Date

Please return this completed form to:-

Hon. Treasurer,
Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust,
Stowford Farm,
Harford,
Ivybridge, Devon.
PL21 0JD

for registration and onward transmission to your bank.

Friends of the Nyika-Vwaza Trust Donation Form

PLEASE PRINT YOUR DETAILS IN CAPITALS

Title: Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other: _____

Forenames: _____

Surname: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Telephone No.: _____

Email: _____

I enclose a donation of:

Or: I have completed the Banker's Order Form.

I am a UK taxpayer and want the Charity to treat this donation and all subsequent donations I make as Gift Aid donations until I notify the Charity otherwise.

I am aware: -

1. that I must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the amount of Basic Rate tax that the Trust will reclaim on my donations; and
2. that if I pay tax at the Higher Rate I may claim further tax relief through my Self Assessment tax return; and
3. that I can cancel this declaration at any time by notifying the Hon. Treasurer in writing.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

UK taxpayers are asked to send donations to the UK Hon. Treasurer, other donors **either** to the UK Hon. Treasurer or to The Trust Manager, Box 577, Mzuzu, Malawi.