



NVT Event, evening of 27 October 2020

Please put the date in your diary.

In these uncertain times of the Covid-19 virus, none of us is certain when events will be back on the agenda and we will be free to enjoy them. For now, we just ask you to put 27 October in your diary and we will come back to you with more information.

We are delighted that Kondwani Munthali has agreed to be our speaker this year. He is well-qualified to talk about Nyika and Vwaza because he was brought up in an area close to the Nyika plateau and says he remembers singing about the animals and birds as a child. Kondwani is an award-winning Malawian journalist, a diplomat, and founder of one of Malawi's leading youth organisations. He has used his considerable communication skills to write a charming small book, *'Malawi – Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture'*.

Do please note the date. Kondwani will inspire us with his knowledge and experience of Northern Malawi and the context in which the NVT programme operates. It will also be an opportunity to share news with old and new friends who share an interest in Malawi.



Kondwani Munthali
© Kondwani Munthali

Details of the event can be found at www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/UJC-2020.html.

Tickets for the evening (£16, students £8) are available from Peter Lawrance: e-mail: sec.nvt@gmail.com.

Jonathan Timberlake's to visit Malawi

Each year, one of the UK trustees visits Malawi so that we have real conversations about how best we can support the Environmental Education Programme run by the Lilongwe Wildlife Trust and funded by NVT UK as well as our research grant programme. In October 2019, Jonathan Timberlake spent a busy 10 days, split between LWT offices in Lilongwe and Rumphi, DNPW offices in Mzuzu, the Department of Forestry at Mzuzu University, as well as visits to the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve and Nyika National Park. The purpose of his visit was both to cover issues related to the Research Grants scheme and to talk with those closely involved with the Education Programme.

Environmental Education Programme

Jonathan met LWT's Frank Chimpango and Prince Luhanga in Rumphi and was pleased to hear that LWT continues to work closely with DNPW, with local councils, and also through the Malawi-based Nyika Vwaza Association. He was reassured that the children's camps at Chelinda are proving successful in educating the young about wildlife and the

importance of its conservation. Elections had interrupted some parts of the programme and it was agreed that unspent funds from Phase 1 of the programme would be absorbed into the agreed budget for Phase 2. A wildlife club has been formed at Rumphi Prison. Training is planned for those imprisoned for wildlife crimes. This has not yet started but is important as a means of preventing re-offending. The full report on Phase 1 is due shortly and we look forward to information on the impact achieved, as well as actions taken, though we accept impact can be difficult to measure. We will bring you a more detailed update in the autumn newsletter. In the meantime, see in this newsletter, some of the stories of the people involved.



*Inmates listening
attentively
© LWT*

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Research grants

Jonathan was told by many of the organisations involved that the NVT UK Grants programme is useful to them. He met several of the researchers (Andrew Kanzunguze, Sopani Sichinga and Paston Simkoko) who had received grants and completed studies. They said that their involvement had been well worthwhile. Particularly helpful was the support and advice given by NVT UK while developing proposals, as well as guidance over the final report. It is important that these valuable research findings feed into the DNPW decision-making process, as well as informing NGOs and other institutions operating in Malawi.

LWT is reassessing its research strategy which, to date, has been mainly on single species studies. In future, it is likely to be more focused on issues affecting the communities around the protected areas – human-wildlife conflict and the illegal trade in wildlife products such ‘chikanda’, timber and charcoal. There are obvious advantages in the NVT Research Grants and the LWT research programme being closely linked.



Sopani Sichinga at site of harvested plantation near Chelinda
© Jonathan Timberlake

The main biological management issues on the Nyika plateau that research can help to address are:

- Fire regimes and fire impact on vegetation. There is much data on burning but the questions remain – how much of the Nyika plateau is subjected to fire each year (planned or by poachers), are some areas burned more often and what is the effect on vegetation cover and plant species composition?
- Bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*) invasion, which may be linked to fire. What is the underlying cause for bracken spread and what controls are effective?
- Rehabilitation of the Chelinda area after drastic removal of stands of *Pinus patula* (Mexican Weeping Pine). In some places, the harvested areas have been devastated with continuing excessive erosion.
- Further investigation into alien species invasion e.g. *Acacia mearnsii* (Black Wattle) and *Rubus ellipticus* (Himalayan raspberry).

- Elephant damage to woodlands.
- Human-wildlife conflict, a major issue around the Vwaza Reserve.

Following Jonathan’s discussions in Malawi, the NVT Research Notes will be revised to pinpoint the specific focus required.

Jonathan Timberlake commented: “The visit was well worthwhile in helping NVT UK understand the reality of the issues and what support will be most useful to management decision-making.” He added that many thanks are due to LWT in Lilongwe for organizing and hosting the visit, particularly to Stuart Williams and Jonny Vaughan. Andrew Kanzunguze and Sopani Sichinga provided useful insight into issues on the Nyika and at Vwaza, building on their earlier studies. Michael Tsiska enthusiastically guided us round the juniper forest, while staff of the Department of Forestry at Mzuzu University gave freely of their time for discussion. Finally, particular thanks go to Clement Manjaalera, LWT’s Head of Education, who arranged most of the logistics, did the driving, provided much help over the whole trip, as well as being an excellent travelling companion.



Clement and Jonathan © LWT

Butterfly checklist updated

We are grateful to South African lepidopterists, Mark Williams and Jeremy Dobson of the Lepidopterists’ Society of Africa who kindly revised the Nyika butterfly checklist. A number of new species have been added and it was our good fortune that Jonathan Timberlake encountered them while in Malawi. The checklist is now up on:

www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/bfl19.pdf

People make the difference

We report in each newsletter on the plans and the activities that make up the Environmental Education Programme, but it is the people that are the real heroes. Whether educator, influencer or learner, all play an important part.

Shubert Chilongo, NRC Zone chairperson for Mphanda, where collaborative management training took part said: *“The training has helped to enlighten the community which lagged behind in terms of environmental education and conservation awareness. Being one of the poaching hotspot areas for orchids, the sensitization on new act and community’s role in conservation has motivated and triggered conservation awareness in the community.”*



Shubert Chilongo © LWT

Chimwemwe Mnyenyembe, teacher at Mzumero primary school commented: *“The design of the training influences inner motives because the approach taken of community engagement influences community’s active participation in conservation. It is high time stakeholders prioritize these multi-stakeholder systems.”*



Chimwemwe Mnyenyembe
© LWT

GVH Kaperemera from Chitapa commented on the refresher training: *“There is need for continuation of stakeholder engagement in problem solving and situation analysis towards conservation. We are indeed part and essential in making these decisions. We all need to join hands and work together.”*



GVH Kaperemera © LWT

Nyika’s beautiful flora

Wherever in the world you are reading this, you are probably well aware of the effect that Coronavirus is having on us all. It is of course affecting the tourist trade and Chelinda will be very quiet for a while. CAWS are busy dealing with inevitable cancellations and, rather than take up their time asking for updates, we thought we could refresh your memories of the beautiful flora on the Nyika plateau. Keep safe and well wherever you are.



Gladiolus dalenii
© Jennie Kettlewell



Gerardiina angolensis
© Jennie Kettlewell



Erythrocephalum zambesianum
© Jennie Kettlewell

Three new research studies completed

In our last newsletter we reported that Andrew Kanzunguze was about to submit his report on bracken invasion on the Nyika plateau and that Sopani Sichinga had just finished fieldwork for a plant survey of the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve.

This is Andrew's second report, now available on www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/Kaz19.pdf. The purpose of the study was to help understand the distribution and impact of bracken fern invasion. Results revealed that the species covered nearly 14% of the entire grassland plateau by 2017, being most dense within five kilometres of the pine plantation around Chelinda. Areas where the plant grows show a significantly lower diversity of plant species. It is a concern that distribution increased by over 120% between 1986 and 2016. The same rate of increase could result in invasion of the entire grassland plateau within the next 40 years. Recommended action is research to establish what influences distribution, as well as field experiments for control options.



Bracken fern survey © Andrew Kanzunguze

Before Sopani's study, no comprehensive account of the flora of Vwaza Marsh existed. The aim of his work was to create a vascular plant checklist, showing diversity of species and indications of habitat. Fieldwork was carried out in 2018/19 with results showing:

- 461 vascular plant species, belonging to 76 families recorded.
- Four of the families represented 40% of the total flora.
- 19 species were considered to be exotics (alien species), of which four are known to be invasive.

Gmelina arborea was the only exotic and invasive species observed in many places, where it was abundant. Recommended action is to develop strategies for eradication of exotic invasive species in order to prevent negative impact on biodiversity.



A cluster of *Toona ciliata* © Sopani Sichinga

Julia van Velden has completed her study of the bushmeat trade at Nyika, Vwaza and Nkhotakota. Large-scale, community-based surveys among local communities indicated that illegal hunting and consumption of bushmeat exists at significant levels. Consumption is linked strongly to poverty, but hunting is not. A range of interventions was discussed and those with a strong developmental link, such as skills training, were thought to be fair and likely to deter hunting. Recommended action is that conservation plans for the areas take heed of local perceptions and socio-economic realities in relation to bushmeat and recognise that that hunting and consumption have different drivers. Julia's study is on the NVT website.



A coffee production enterprise, located near Nyika national park, as an example of a potential microenterprise initiative.

© Julia van Velden

Finally, the proposal by Paston Simkoko to research *Prunus africana* in the Nyika forests has been agreed. He will undertake the study of this tree species as part of his Masters thesis, with support from NVT for the fieldwork. Also known as African stinkwood, this tree is valued for its timber and medicinal properties.

Rolling Grasslands, Rolling Experiences

By Andrew Kanzunguze

Of the many words that are used to describe the Nyika plateau, the phrase *'rolling grasslands'* takes my fancy. I still remember how awestruck I was the first time I set foot on the Nyika Plateau in December (2013). It was night time, and the starlit sky, like a chandelier, did justice to the beauty of the vast landscape before my eyes. Arriving at Chelinda Camp, the rather quaint housing only deepened my sense of awe. I truly couldn't wait for sunrise to behold more of this unique place and I sure wasn't disappointed. During this trip I spent a week learning how the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) was to go about mechanically controlling bracken fern invasion over 40 hectares of grassland near Chelinda Camp under the Malawi-Zambia Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (TFCA) project. I continued my internship under the TFCA project, which became my laboratory for experimenting with every bit of knowledge I amassed as a student with Mzuzu University, to its close in 2016. All that I saw and learnt during this period sealed the conviction in me to delve into the world of conservation ecology, and explore all I could of the Nyika National Park.



Andrew Kanzunguze © Andrew Kanzunguze

So it was that after completing my internship, I decided to apply for an NVT (UK) research grant to carry out a survey of invasive plants on the Nyika plateau in July (2016). This was really the launch of my experiences as a free-lance researcher in conservation work. Like most beginnings, I had not yet come to the point of independently carrying out conservation research despite having worked under the TFCA project. Coordinating logistics, managing finances and being sure to do one's best in the work committed to was not easy. Travelling to Nyika during the rainy season at the risk of getting blocked-off in a damaged road, encountering a herd of elephants, or getting a car breakdown at the peak of the cool-dry season is an experience that's only humorous once over. More so, getting stuck at Chelinda camp with little food supplies and insufficient funds to re-stock is an even worse experience only to be shared with those who've grown from such. I will say, I was very fortunate to have very supportive colleagues and

assistants during my field trips, more so was I fortunate to have been supervised and mentored by seasoned conservationists, (not forgetting very understanding guarantors). With such support, the challenges only became easier with each successive research work that I carried out under the auspices of the NVT (UK) research grants.

The NVT (UK) initiative of supporting research work on the Nyika is very laudable. It is a big opportunity for supporting the research arm of DNPW and developing budding researchers in conservation work. I am convinced it has to continue. Carrying out research work on the Nyika plateau has been a very fulfilling experience with its constant fair share of ups and downs. It has been a rolling experience indeed.

Raise funds and get fit!

Please help us raise money for the Nyika-Vwaza Trust by taking up one place to run in the London Marathon. It's not this year, but in 2021, so you have plenty of time to get in some practice. In 2016 Juliet Rumsey-Cornelius did us proud by raising £750. Please let Peter Lawrance know if you would like to take on the challenge next year.

“The Role of Environmental Education in Conservation in Malawi” – talk by Jonny Vaughan

Who better to talk at our autumn 2019 event than Jonny Vaughan, CEO of the Lilongwe Wildlife Trust (LWT), who run the environmental education programme for the Nyika Plateau and Vwaza Marsh? He knows, more than anyone, the possibilities and challenges of conservation in the north of Malawi, though he is always quick to credit his very able team.

He started by quoting Senegalise forestry engineer Baba Dioum's words from a major conservation convention in 1968: *"In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."*

There has been huge growth in environmental understanding, but Jonny posed the question of whether it has made any difference? Malawi has seen significant deforestation and a decline in fish stocks since Dioum's inspirational words, so do we need to reach more people or do things differently? Climate change is adding to the woes, with animals bereft of habitat, water and food, forced to eat community crops to satisfy their hunger. No wonder then that human-wildlife conflict exists.

LWT started in 2007 as an animal sanctuary and is now a registered trust in both Malawi and the UK with around 115

staff and a mission to “Safeguard Malawi’s wildlife and empower guardians of the wild”. The environmental education programme, part funded by NVT UK, aims to create the next generation of conservationists. To do that, the subject needs to be included in mainstream formal education. That is starting to happen, but it is slow and remains an aspiration and LWT wants learning to take place outside the classroom, giving people direct experience of wildlife.

You may have read in previous newsletters the impressive statistics of numbers of people sensitised (made aware) to the impact of wild life crime, and Jonny was able to add a whole rich layer of meaning. We are in phase 2 of the programme and the difference in this phase is a significant increase in the number of individuals and adults interacting with nature. This harks back to Dioum’s quote about the importance of understanding. The transition is to a more holistic approach of education and prevention. Shifting from issues-led campaigns to behaviour change has meant working at high level with government officials and magistrates in Malawi. The law has been strengthened, with the National Parks and Wildlife Act resulting in the more serious wildlife crimes carrying prison sentences of up to 30 years. Since the act there have been 383 wildlife crime arrests and 1623 kg of ivory have been seized. This has been achieved by institutional change, not just change at poacher level. It takes serious skills to poach an elephant and these skills are only found by adding the know-how of organised groups to the local knowledge of the hands-on poacher.

It is very gratifying to see that numbers of some key species are actually increasing in the area.



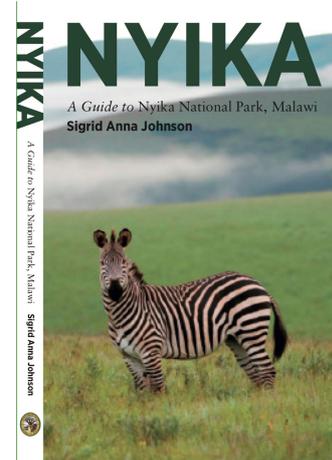
© LWT

Hearing Jonny talk about what has been achieved was very encouraging and to hear about what might still be done was inspirational. His leadership in this field has been recognised when he was awarded an MBE in April 2019. It was pleasing to see many young people in the audience who have either already been to Malawi or now wish to go there and do their bit to become guardians of the wild by helping more people to understand.

Editor: Jennie Kettlewell
 Designer: Mike Budgen

Guide to the Nyika National Park

Now that travel is restricted, it will be a while before any of us can get to see the wonders of the Nyika plateau. It is a good time to read about places you have been to, or would like to go to in future so why not order a copy of the Guide to Nyika National Park. An order form is included at the end of this newsletter.



The Nyika Guide
 © Sigi Johnson

See the order form at the end of this newsletter for prices and ways to buy. For further information visit www.Nyika-Vwaza-trust.org, or contact Peter Lawrence on sec.nvt@gmail.com, or Tel: +44 (0) 1483 714130.

We can't do it without you!

We hope you can see that the Educational Conservation Programme is more active than ever and will make a lasting positive impact on the conservation of the Nyika National Park and Vwaza Marsh. This can only happen with significant regular investment. We are most grateful to all of you who have already donated towards our programmes and hope that this newsletter will encourage others of you to support this important work. You can find a donation form at the end of this newsletter. Or donate online at www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org.

A very big 'thank you' for your support.

Order Form for Guide to Nyika National Park

To order "Nyika – A Guide to the Nyika National Park, Malawi", payment can be made by £sterling cheque (made out to Nyika-Vwaza Trust), via Paypal, or direct to NVT's UK bank – see details below.

Prices:

UK: £20, incl. p&p, or £21 via Paypal

Overseas: (direct to Lloyds Bank plc account or by bankers draft) £28, including p&p, or £30 via Paypal.

We rely on donations to the Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust to fund our programmes, so please consider adding a donation to the amount you are paying for the guide.

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I would like copies of the book, "Nyika – A Guide to the Nyika National Park, Malawi."

I would like to add a donation of £.....

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50 Brewery Road

Woking, Surrey, GU21 4NA, UK



The Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust
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Working for environmental and wildlife conservation in northern Malawi.

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