



Covid-19 in Malawi

Malawi, like many other countries, has had a tough time during the Covid pandemic. There have been too many deaths, including colleagues and relatives of those we work with to carry out our conservation education programmes. It is good to hear that the tide is turning and there is better news. Lilongwe Wildlife Trust staff have been working from home where possible and Covid-safe measures have been put in place in their Wildlife Centre. One benefit is that we have been holding our trustee meetings via Zoom, which means some of the Malawi team can join us from their homes or gardens. We wish all our friends in Malawi good health and safety.

NVT Event, Tues 9 November 2021

Date for your diary!

Please save the evening of Tues 9 November in your diary for our NVT event. We had to cancel last year's event, but are determined to hold it this year. The plan is to return to The Union Jack Club but, if Covid restrictions don't allow it, we will hold a talk on Zoom.

Trustee Jonathan Timberlake will lead a discussion about conservation from a plant perspective. Media stories of animal conservation abound, but there is little coverage from the botanical perspective. Yet, if we don't conserve our plants and their habitats, we won't conserve our animals and, ultimately that means the human animal too.



Jonathan Timberlake in the field
© Jonathan Timberlake

Jonathan has lived and worked as a botanist and ecologist in a number of countries in southern Africa over the last 40 years, including Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as well as being involved in numerous projects in Malawi and Zambia. For many years, he was Editor of *Flora Zambesiaca*, the regional flora for south-central Africa (including Malawi), based in the Herbarium at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

Jonathan says he has some controversial views, so this will be a lively discussion and well worth listening to. Put the date in your diary for now and we will confirm nearer the time whether we can all meet up in person, or via our screens.

Full information about the event will be up on our website when we can confirm details: www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/UJC-2021.html.

Success stories from the Lilongwe Wildlife Trust

Clement Manjaalera, Head of Environmental Education at LWT, has told us that the second wave of the pandemic has slowed down progress on environmental education activities. After a temporary pick-up, schools were barely open for two weeks before they were closed once again. The team has used the time usually spent on education, to focus on conservation activities.

One success story is Mr Vuka Mtete, previously a poacher, now a bee-keeper, who is helping others in the community learn the importance of wildlife conservation. He was a poacher for 28 years, having learned the skill from his parents. Eventually he was caught poaching in the Vwaza Wildlife Reserve and he was sentenced to 42 months in prison. While serving his sentence he joined the prison wildlife club and developed an enthusiasm for wildlife preservation. After his release, Mr Mtete asked for the LWT conservation education teaching modules to help him run community sensitisation meetings focused on wildlife crime and the new Wildlife Act. He said: "Poaching has no profit" in that it provided no worthwhile achievement or development for the household. In another initiative, he used his long-held knowledge of bee keeping, to establish a micro project with twelve locally-made hives, already in position for use. He recognized this occupation as environmentally friendly and an excellent way of generating income. Chief Principal Mwangongonga, also a bee-keeper, was able to offer technical advice. Mr Mtete now feels a happier man and is passionate about helping others to change from poaching to something more worthwhile.



Mr Mtete with beehive © LWT

A second success was when the Chisimuka DNPW Extension Officer and Natural Resources Committee members conducted a patrol in the south west of Nyika National Park. The aim of the patrol was to find and destroy all animal traps set by poachers. While checking for traps, the team caught a poacher visiting his traps with his dog and carrying

an axe. This young suspect is now being held in custody at Rumphu Police Station. A second aim of the patrol was to check the ecosystem status of the area and the official report is awaited.

We hope that improvement in the Covid-19 situation means LWT will soon be able to resume its conservation education programme with schools. We were told that some children missed their learning and took their own initiative to continue looking after the trees they had planted through their wildlife clubs. They will be so pleased to get back to learning about and caring for wildlife.



From Left to Right: Mr. Z sichali, Prince Luhanga (LWT) and Mr. V Mtete © LWT

Research study grants

Research provides the bedrock of information on which to base management plans for conservation in northern Malawi. NVT's programme of grants for research projects are part of its core strategy and supports the development of both local and international expertise to achieve a meaningful impact on long-term goals for the region.

New research grants

The most recent call for applications attracted a variety of project subjects, four of which were accepted for NVT funding.

A project to research elephant pathways and dung to investigate human-wildlife conflict around Vwaza Marsh Game Reserve was submitted by Olivia Sievert, Research Manager at the Lilongwe Wildlife Trust. This has the potential to address a serious issue and you can read more about Olivia's work in her article in this newsletter.

Lumbani Banda, from the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources plans to measure patterns of fire occurrence and the possible associations with the spread of bracken fern on the Nyika. The research is clearly focussed on an NVT priority area with the intention of publishing the data.

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Burning grassland in late dry season © Sigrid Johnson

The impact of invasive plants can be devastating for the ecology of an area. The key is prevention, but this requires sound knowledge of where the plant is found and whether it has the ability to spread. *Lantana camara*, a thicket-forming invasive shrub, has become established where old settlements at Vwaza have resulted in the enriched soil it prefers. Eric Gowero, from the Biological Sciences Department of Mzuzu University, will carry out a study into *Lantana camara* that will also feed into management plans by suggesting possible controls.



Lantana camara © Internet

No research currently exists on the distribution and diversity of aquatic macroinvertebrates in northern Malawi. These macroinvertebrates are organisms such as water fleas, caddis fly larvae and fresh water flatworms. Dr Harold Sungani, of the Fisheries Research Station, Monkey Bay, proposed establishing a baseline for invertebrates in Nyika and Vwaza catchment streams as part of a wider project. This could provide interesting new data and, over time, may help us monitor water quality.

Existing research grants

Paston Simkoko's study on the population structure and seed behaviour of the tree *Prunus africana* on the Nyika Plateau is complete. His interim report shows flowering and seeding were

not found in all the Nyika trees and the final report will provide more detail. See Paston's separate article in this newsletter

Andrew Kanzunguze's research to determine the status of *Juniperus procera* forest, and how well it has been regenerating, has been largely completed. The remaining work will be carried out in April 2021, after the rainy season is over and access to remote parts of the forest becomes possible.

Sopani Sichinga's study on the status of Mopane woodland in the Vwaza Game Reserve has been completed and his final report is awaited. Once it has been received and reviewed, you will be able to view it on www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/research

Protecting elephants and vultures in Malawi: An update on Lilongwe Wildlife Trust's research work

By Olivia Sievert, Research Manager, Lilongwe Wildlife Trust

Lilongwe Wildlife Trust (LWT) runs a research and monitoring programme to inform, guide and evaluate conservation efforts for Malawi's wildlife. We hope you enjoy reading these updates on some of our ongoing elephant and vulture research.

Conserving Malawi's vultures

Vultures are critical to healthy ecosystems and yet around the world vulture populations are in steep decline. Malawi has the potential to make a real difference to vulture conservation in the Southern African region; in 2017, the Convention of Migratory Species identified the country as a "considerable knowledge gap" for Southern and East African vultures in its Vulture Multi-Species Action Plan. Given that multiple Endangered and Critically Endangered species have ranges in Malawi, it is important to address these knowledge gaps so that we can develop strong protection initiatives. The first step is to understand more about how vultures are using the landscape. To do this, we undertook the first ever vulture tagging exercise in Malawi in November 2020.



Tagging a vulture © Olivia Sievert, LWT

Led by vulture expert Andre Botha, of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, our capture team successfully tagged eight Critically Endangered African White-backed Vultures in Nyika National Park. These tags allow rangers, guides and members of the public to report sightings of tagged birds, which give us a better understanding of vulture movements in the region. To help promote reports of sightings, LWT undertook an awareness campaign with guides and rangers in Malawi, as well as researchers within the wider Southern African region. This has already yielded some interesting insights - one of the tagged vultures was reported over 780km away from Nyika in Chisamba, Zambia, revealing a previous unknown connection between Malawi and areas west of the Luangwa! We hope to secure funding in the near future for GPS transmitters which will give us further insights into vulture movements in the region.



Ringing a vulture © Olivia Sievert, LWT



Releasing a tagged vulture © Olivia Sievert, LWT

Investigating human-elephant conflict

In March 2019 LWT fitted two satellite collars to elephants in Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve (VMWR) to help us learn more about patterns of human-elephant conflict. Analysis of collar data exposed a high potential for conflict between May and October, when collared elephants were spending upwards of 15% of their time outside of the reserve. Crop damage can, of course, cause livelihood losses for households, which can increase tensions and ultimately lead to lethal retaliation. We are therefore focusing our research on trying to better understand the drivers of elephant movements into

community land to inform mitigation techniques. Having recently received funding from the Nyika Vwaza Trust, we will undertake research on this issue along the Southern boundary of VMWR where conflict appears to be highest. This work will focus on mapping and surveying elephant pathways into communities and investigating dung samples to understand the elephants' diet and crop choice. This data will show us important access points for elephants undertaking crop raiding and create a useful baseline for park management as fencing commences. We very much look forward to sharing our results in 2022!

Paston Simkoko tells us about his life working in conservation

I was born in Therere village in the traditional authority of Nthalire, Chitipa district in the very north of Malawi.



Paston Simkoko © Paston Simkoko

My adult studies started with a BSc in Forestry at Mzuzu University and I have continued to study for my chosen occupation of conservation. My professional qualifications include:

- 1) Diploma in Natural Resource Management- Southern African Wildlife College, South Africa.
- 2) Certificate in Wildlife Management – From Malawi College of Forestry & Wildlife, Malawi
- 3) Basic Anti-Poaching Certificate- Malawi

I worked in Nyika National Park for thirteen years at different levels. I started as a ranger and was then promoted to Assistant Park Manager. In Nyika, I also worked very closely with NVT on fire management, invasive species control among others. The skills in fire management learnt from NVT assisted me a lot when I started working with African Parks in Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve. I was made, beside law enforcement activities, Fire control Officer which I did successfully.

I am currently working in Kasungu National Park, on a part-time basis, as a Law Enforcement Coordinator under the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). My main task is training rangers in data collection, technology use in law enforcement and illegal wildlife trade and trafficking

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between Malawi and Zambia in the Kasungu-Lukusuzi TFCA. We have seized over 4 tonnes of ivory since 2018 and over 100 arrests of traffickers in the TFCA, which has led to reduction in elephant poaching and increased the number of elephant population from 40 in 2014 to 121 in 2020.

Currently, I am studying towards a Masters of Science (Forestry & Environmental Management) at Mzuzu University. I am working on *Prunus africana* which is a highly threatened species due to overexploitation and illegal trafficking. I am focusing on Population Structure, Phytochemical Analysis and Seed behaviour of *Prunus africana*.



Paston doing lab work
© Paston Simkoko

After finishing my Masters, I want to use the research findings to propagate *Prunus africana* in Nyika National Park where pine was harvested by a concessionaire and resulted in serious environmental problems. The belief is that as an indigenous tree species in Nyika, *Prunus africana* can replace the pine plantation at Chelinda.

Note: See the article on research grants in this newsletter, which refers to Paston's study of *Prunus africana*.



Collecting *Prunus Africana* seed
© Paston Simkoko

Update from Chelinda

Covid-19 has meant few visitors have visited Chelinda over past months. Improvement in the health situation has encouraged people to get out and about again and we hear bookings are good for the Easter holiday. Little information is available on wildlife sightings as there have been no tours, but here are some photos to remind you of the delights of the Nyika plateau.



Streptocarpus © Jennie Kettlewell



View of Dam 2 © Jennie Kettlewell

Sponsor our runner in the London Marathon!

Organisers of the London Marathon are 'very optimistic' this year's event will go ahead on Sunday 3 October 2021. Please help us raise money for the Nyika-Vwaza Trust by sponsoring Juliet Cornelius-Rumsey who has gamely agreed to run for us once again.



Juliet relaxing with her dog
© Juliet Cornelius-Rumsey

Juliet, is a hard-working mother of three and, in her spare time, she competes in triathlons and successfully ran the Marathon for NVT in 2016. We are particularly fortunate that she will represent us once again because she is no stranger to Malawi. She was born in Mzuzu and spent most of her early life on the Viphya Plateau with her family. Her parents lived in the country for over 40 years. We are delighted she has agreed to support the trust because running a Marathon is no easy task, as she well knows. All we hope now is that improvement in the Covid-19 situation will allow the event to take place.

Please support the trust. Donations via Juliet's page which will shortly be up on the Just Giving website www.justgiving.com/julietcornelius-rumsey, or direct to NVT's bank account: Lloyds Bank plc, (Sort Code 30-90-89), for the credit of The Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust's account No. 44504860, quoting 'Marathon'.

Thank you for your support. And good luck Juliet!

Shop at Amazon and they donate to NVT

If you shop at Amazon, sign up for Amazon Smile and they will donate money to NVT, without it costing you anything extra. The shopping experience on AmazonSmile is the same as on a normal Amazon account and there is no marketing or other promotional contact from the retailer. Amazon will donate 0.5% of the net purchase price (excluding VAT, returns and shipping fees).

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AmazonSmile will result in a donation. If you have a normal Amazon account, please ensure your purchases are made through your AmazonSmile account. AmazonSmile may occasionally inform you about donation amounts disbursed to your chosen charity, or about the programme. For shopping by phone, go to the to smile.amazon.co.uk and follow instructions to download the appropriate app.

It costs you nothing to donate, so please do sign up.

Future-proofing areas of nature

While NVT interests lie in northern Malawi, many of the same conservation issues apply closer to home, as we discovered when trustee, Jonny Hanson, ran a series of YouTube talks about the science behind his farm. Jubilee Farm in Larne, Northern Ireland, is a community-owned farm, that practices environmental and agricultural stewardship as well as conservation education and engagement. Jonny also wrote and presented a separate, 24-minute documentary, looking at the case for and against reintroducing large predators to Ireland. As well as historical evidence for their coexistence alongside people, Jonny explored the complex issues surrounding any potential reintroduction project, including the ecological, social, political, financial and ethical dimensions.

Many of Jonny's comments rang true for each of us, wherever we live, as well as for our work in Malawi. He reminded us that *Homo sapiens* is the world's most dangerous creature and that, left alone from human interference, areas of land would simply return to their natural state. We must be careful how we manage land and pay attention to future-proofing it as, "Without nature, there is no human nature".

To listen to the five talks, each about ten minutes long, go to the link below and scroll down to find Jonny's first talk, with information on how to access the others:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_RoWnGHZMw

Jonny's YouTube talk: 'Wolves and lynxes and bears, oh my' can be found on:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpXwmS51FwE>



Jonny filming his YouTube talk
© Jonny Hanson

CITES protects Malawi tree

Pterocarpus tinctorius (the African Mukluk tree) is now included in the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) List of Wild Flora under Protection. In the case of the Mukluk, it is not so much protection of the species from botanical extinction, but the need to take action against exploitation of the tree for timber, which puts trees of harvestable size at risk. The CITES listing will raise awareness of this risk and is likely to require an additional level of government-issued permits.

The tree grows in the North of Malawi as well as in some neighbouring African countries and it is not that common. *P. chrysothrix* was its old name. It is similar to the much more widespread *Pterocarpus angolensis* and both are traded as 'rosewood', one of the ornamental timbers.



African Mukluk © LWT

Editor: Jennie Kettlewell
Designer: Mike Budgen

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.

Please complete the following:

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

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

Email: info@nyika-vwaza-trust.org
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