



## Annual event held on 27 March, 2024

We skipped our event in autumn 2023 in order to book the speaker we wanted, Dr Claire Spottiswoode. Her excellent talk is described in this newsletter. Before the talk Chairman, Tom Lupton, gave a short update on progress with the Peace Parks Foundation initiative – see below. The event was attended by many regulars and some new faces. We were delighted to welcome two guests from the Malawi High Commission in London; Dyson Banda, tourism attaché, and The Rev MacDonald Sembereka.

## The Nyika-Vwaza Co-Management Agreement Trust: our support of an NVT-funded Research Coordinator

By Tom Lupton, Chairman, NVT UK.

As reported in the Autumn Newsletter, the Malawi Government has entered into a 20-year Co-Management Agreement (CMA) for the Nyika and Vwaza Marsh with the Peace Parks Foundation. This will operate through the Nyika-Vwaza Co-Management Agreement Trust, which will oversee all management activities within the parks and the surrounding communities, funded through a significant endowment fund (sufficient to cover the day-to-day management costs of the parks for the next 20 years), contributions from the Malawi Government and grants from other bodies. Peace Parks will provide management for the Trust and the endowment fund.



*His Excellency Dr. Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, President of the Republic of Malawi, speaking at the signing ceremony.jpg*  
© Malawi government

Following discussions with the CMA Project Management Unit and PPF about how NVT can best provide support to the Trust in the early stages of its operations, we are delighted to announce that NVT will be funding the Trust's Research Co-ordinator for a three-year period, starting on 1 April 2024.

The post will be part of the senior management team and will oversee the management and co-ordination of management-driven research within the Nyika-Vwaza Co-management Trust. The role will be key in helping the Trust develop, implement and evaluate evidence based adaptive management across the parks and in the surrounding communities.

The grant will total £150,000 (distributed six monthly) and is made up of two elements to cover the Research Coordinator's salary and funding for research work. It is planned that, over time, the Research Coordinator will identify projects that attract funding from other organisations to support the research programme. The Co-Management Trust will provide housing and a vehicle.

Over the next few months, the focus of the Research Coordinator will be on the development of a research programme that will support biodiversity conservation and management in all key areas. This will include specific aspects related to human-wildlife coexistence management, wildlife ecology, law enforcement, environmental education, invasive alien species management, fire management, landscape/rangeland/grassland ecology, ecotourism, and any emerging issues. The plan will be based in particular on an inventory of all past and current research projects implemented on the Trust territory, as well as a gap analysis.



*Local community clearing self-sown pines at Chilinda © PPF*

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One of the key sources of information for the Research Coordinator will be the information gathered over the last 20 years through the work of NVT.

As with all NVT grants, we will be receiving regular monitoring reports (activities, outcomes and finance), and working with PPF to ensure our support is put to best use. The grant will be made through PPF, who will be responsible for its implementation and funded from the very generous donation NVT received from Prof David and Dr Meredith Happold.



Undulating hills of the Nyika Plateau © PPF

## Show me the honey!

The speaker at our annual lecture evening was Dr. Claire Spottiswoode, an evolutionary biologist from the FitzPatrick Institute of Ornithology at the University of Cape Town and the Department of Zoology at Cambridge University. Her subject was the evolution of cooperation between human honey-hunters and greater honeyguides (*Indicator indicator*), which are related to woodpeckers. Her talk was a remarkable tour de force with enough research-based facts to satisfy the scientists in the audience, interspersed with fascinating stories.



Honeyguide in tree © Dominic Cram

This cooperation between honey hunters and honeyguides is thought to be a relationship that goes way back in time and is currently practised in West, South and Eastern Africa. The process starts with the hunters making a call or sound to which the birds respond. The birds then lead the hunters to the bees nest, where they wait for the hunters to

harvest the honey. Usually the bees are smoked out, using a smouldering bundle of leaves, and the bees leave calmly with minimal stinging. Occasionally trees are felled but this can result in angry bees. Once the honey has been removed, the wax is left out for the honeyguides which have adapted to be able to digest it. That's a reward for both parties.



Harvesting honey © Dr Claire Spottiswoode

The hunters' specialised calls to the birds vary culturally across Africa, from trills, grunts and words, to different types of whistle. The Yao in Mozambique use a 'brrrrrrr hm' sound, while other cultures use a pierced snail shell as a whistle, or a whistle made from a seed pod with a hole in it. Click here to hear the Yao call on the [theapariarist.org](http://theapariarist.org) website:

[nas-national-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/brrrhm.mp3?\\_e3](http://nas-national-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/brrrhm.mp3?_e3)

Claire told us about some intriguing research which showed that honeyguides learn and prefer the calls they are used to in their local culture. When calls were recorded and played in a region where it is not the call of the local culture, the birds showed less interest and so honey hunting was less successful. This implies that honeyguides can evolve culturally more quickly than their genetic evolution. Honeyguides are parasitic birds, like cuckoos, so they don't learn from their parents, who they never meet. They learn from copying experienced adults of the species.

Another fascinating aspect of this mutualism is that honeyguides sometimes lead honey hunters to wild animals or snakes and it had been thought this might be 'punishment' for cheating i.e. omitting to leave wax as a reward. This cheating is rare and it is more likely to be the bird making a genuine mistake, but those mistakes can happen.

It is hoped that the cooperation continues, and is not endangered by bee keeping. Honey is important in that it can provide 20% of nutrition in some communities and a single nest can produce up to 40kg of honey. The average weight of wax left for honeyguides is 300gm and what the birds don't eat is finished off by other animals.

Claire closed her talk with a short video clip from George M'manga. George's name will be familiar to you from previous newsletters. He is an MSc student in Forestry and

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Environmental Management at Mzuzu University, who has carried out research on honey hunter and honeyguide mutualism with a grant from NVT. He has been part of the team working with Dr. Claire Spottiswoode. On the clip, he talked briefly about his research project, now completed, and thanked those who had helped to make it possible, especially NVT UK. We were very pleased to hear directly from George and look forward to reading his full report.

There were some interesting questions from the audience. Claire's response to a question about tree climbing to get to nests, was that, if not smoked out, the bees would be angry and more likely to sting and also 'it is very hard to swing an axe up a tree!'

If you are interested in learning more, we suggest you visit [www.africanhoneyguides.com](http://www.africanhoneyguides.com) the African Honeyguides Group's website and also an article Claire co-authored [www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(22\)01398-7](http://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(22)01398-7)

## Conservation is on the school curriculum

By Dorothy Tembo-Nhlema

Lilongwe Wildlife Trust (LWT) continued to work with the Ministry of Education, specifically Malawi Institute of Education (MIE) and Directorate of Quality Assurance Services (DQAS), the two key bodies in the Ministry responsible for developing education in Malawi.

The distribution and piloting of the draft sourcebook in 16 schools across the county was followed by refining. Throughout the pretesting exercise, it was clear that learners, teachers and panelists were excited by the new sourcebook, which has now been validated by the Management Committee in the Ministry of Education.



The workbooks © LWT

It is exciting to learn from the Ministry of Education that this sourcebook is considered to be one of the well written sourcebooks. In addition, it includes unique and new topics that will indeed add new knowledge to the education system. These topics include wildlife welfare, wildlife crime and human wildlife conflict among others.

The Chief Assurance Officer in the Ministry, Mr. John Mswayo, appreciated the work, and requested LWT to print more copies so that more schools benefit from the sourcebook.



Teaching staff with the workbooks  
© LWT

The book is welcomed by the leadership in the Ministry of Education, and The MIE ED said: 'I have reviewed the sourcebook, I find that the information is accurate and well-presented in the context of environmental and wildlife education. The book covers important topics, and provides detailed and accurate explanation of issues, causes, effects, and possible solutions, aligning well with factual environmental and wildlife conservation principles.'

The Deputy Director of DQAS, Mrs. Lindiwe Chide, also acknowledged the work, and indicated the completion of the sourcebook is timely, as the Ministry is in the process of planning the review of the curriculum.

The book is expected to be endorsed by the Secretary to Education in April, which will be followed by launching in May 2024.



Approval! © LWT

**We offer our congratulations and thanks to the LWT team and their colleagues in the Ministry of Education for all the hard work they have put into getting the source book complete.**

**Following on from this programme NVT has agreed to fund a three-year programme to support LWT's Environmental Educational programme (total £45,000 over 2024 to 2026). This will fund teacher training, and to develop a programme for school visits to National Parks.**

**We are delighted to continue working with LWT and look forward to getting reports on the new project to share with our supporters.**

## Research grants

For the past ten years, NVT UK has funded research into conservation, environmental, or socio-economic issues that affect the Nyika National Park and the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve. The intention is that the results inform plans for the management of the two areas.

### Beston Kambeta – Assessing the Conservation status of butterflies of Vwaza Game Reserve during the dry season.

We covered Beston's interim report in our September 2023 newsletter. His final report has been submitted, accepted and is now available to view on the NVT website at [www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/VWBT.pdf](http://www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/VWBT.pdf)

Here are some extracts from the report.

'The survey revealed the rich diversity of butterflies inhabiting the area. A total of six butterfly families were recorded during the survey, comprising 80 distinct species. Among the families recorded were *Papilionidae*, *Pieridae*, *Hesperiidae*, *Nymphalidae*, *Satyridae* and *Lycaenidae*.'



Butterfly display box © Beston Kambeta

'It was revealed that 60 taxa of butterflies have not yet been assessed for their IUCN status. This lack of evaluation poses a significant challenge for conservation efforts as it impedes the ability to comprehend the vulnerabilities and threats faced by some species. However, the survey showed that 20 butterfly species recorded are categorized under the IUCN status of Least Concern.'

Beston concluded that the survey did not find any butterfly species in Vwaza Marsh Game Reserve that are Endangered or Vulnerable.

### Occurrences and Impacts of Invasive Alien Plant Species on the Tropical Montane Evergreen Forest Patches of the Nyika Plateau.

By Sopani Sichinga

In the previous newsletter (Issue 37), I highlighted the status quo of my project on Occurrence of the Invasive Alien Species (IAS) on the montane forest patches of the Nyika plateau. But now, having completed the fieldwork, I have decided to

briefly share my field experience while you await to seeing the report.



Sopani Sichinga  
© Sopani Sichinga

Unlike in the past, the journey to Nyika was scary but thrilling at the same time as it was my first trip to travel through the park using a motorbike. A motorbike was hired as an alternative after the vehicle I arranged to pick me up at Rumphi left me as I failed to catch up the agreed departure time on the agreed date (5<sup>th</sup> November, 2023). So I had to let the vehicle go and look for an alternative.

Though it was a risky move, it offered a great unusual experience. I was very panicky on the way as the thoughts of possible encounters with dangerous animals (especially elephants and lions) lingered in my head. Luckily, we travelled without encountering any. As usual, before anyone else at the camp, it was the game (notably Zebras and Roan antelopes) welcoming us first, at the distance of about 4-5 kilometres away.

Fieldwork commenced two days later after the arrival date. With each new project a new experience is added. Traversing numerous montane forest patches while learning how they are arranged at the plateau was an added experience. Also, witnessing research-based action implemented by DNPW to control invasive species is something worth mentioning from the field. Excitingly, the actions applied are not far from the recommendations put forward in some previous NVT funded projects. For instance, invasive pines growing afar are now being consistently uprooted (if juveniles) or cut/ring barked (if mature) to kill the tree to prevent further spread. This simply demonstrates how significant as well as realistic the NVT Research Grant Initiative has been theoretically as well as practically.

Regarding project's findings, I think it would be premature to present them now, as data organization and analyses are still underway. However, from field observations, Pines and *Rubus ellipticus* appear to be the only invasives commonly present in montane forest patches with bracken fern forming a carpet at the periphery.

Like with any project, challenges are inevitable. As fieldwork coincided with the onset of rainy season, intermittent data

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collection due to rains was the only thing considered a challenge in the field. And to deal with this challenge, I had to extend the number of fieldwork days.

Finally, I have to congratulate all those who put an effort to support the NVT. Through their donations NVT is truly making significant strides in as far as conservation of Nyika and Vwaza is concerned.

### **Assessing the value of bracken fern stands as habitats for Reptile and Avian Communities at Nyika National Park.**

By Lumbani Banda

My greatest hope from this research is to provide a comprehensive overview of the birds and reptiles that utilize the bracken fern stands at Nyika National Park. Reptiles are one of the least studied taxa, hence they can be easily overlooked in conservation decision making, I am hoping to provide information about key reptile species that inhabit bracken fern stands. Although we have always looked at bracken fern as a burden, it is possible that some species benefit from it, thus I am of the view that we need to be aware of such species. This is important when we are developing bracken fern eradication programs.



Lumbani Banda on the right  
©Lumbani Banda

The greatest challenge is likely to be navigating through the bracken fern stands as they can be really thick. Nevertheless, I am excited to be visiting Nyika again.

I am looking forward, seeing the beautiful antelopes over the grasslands, and to beautiful landscapes. Nyika is also a good birding place so am also looking forward to having great birding sessions.

### **Malawi represented at the Destinations travel show in London**

Malawi always has a presence at 'Destinations', the big annual travel show in London. Kelly White, from Malawi Tourism, heads up the team and the Malawi High Commission's tourism attaché, Dyson Banda, was also on the stand.

This year, Kelly gave a talk on what Malawi has to offer: 'Malawi: Africa's Most Complete Destination?'



Kelly White  
©Kelly White

Kelly has been involved in promoting Malawi as a travel destination for over 20 years. He fell in love with the country, as so many of its visitors do, on his first trip there (and first to Africa) in 1995. Co-author of the Spectrum Guide to Malawi, Kelly has managed to explore most of the country on numerous trips since then. Having now also visited all of Malawi's neighbours in southern Africa, the Warm Heart of Africa remains his first choice whenever returning to the continent.

In his talk, he said that Malawi always had stunning landscapes, amazing beaches and the friendliest people. Now, with a world-leading conservation programme, it is undergoing a remarkable wildlife transformation, including re-introductions of lion, cheetah, leopard, rhino, elephant and wild dog, amongst many others. The country is emerging as one of the most complete destinations in Africa - lake, scenery, culture and now safari experiences of the highest quality. Yet it's still unspoilt by mass tourism, small, incredibly varied, and easy to travel around.

Answering a question from the audience he said that the wild flowers in Malawi, and particularly on the Nyika Plateau in the rainy season, are prolific and a sight well worth the journey.

### **Donations appreciated**

As you will have read in this newsletter, we are involved both with the programme of conservation on the primary schools curriculum, and now with the funding of a Research Coordinator who will ensure appropriate information is established to help guide the management of the Nyika National Park and the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve. That means our funds continue to be well used and much appreciated.

We are most grateful to all of you who have already made donations 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 you can make a direct donation to the NyikaVwaza (UK) Trust account at Lloyds Bank, sort code 309089, account number 44504860, IBAN GB94LOYD30908944504860

A very big 'thank you' for your support.

## LWC recognised for global standards of excellence.

We are delighted to see that the Lilongwe Wildlife Centre (LWC) has been selected as the winner of the GFAS 2023 Outstanding International Sanctuary Award. The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) is one of the leading global bodies for accrediting ethical sanctuaries. LWC has been accredited by GFAS since 2015 and was selected from over 200 other GFAS-certified sanctuaries for the award.

The GFAS Outstanding Sanctuary Awards are presented in four categories:

1. Outstanding Equine Sanctuary
2. Outstanding Farmed Animal Sanctuary
3. Outstanding Wildlife Sanctuary
4. Outstanding International Sanctuary

They recognise excellence in humane and responsible animal care, professionalism and ethics, organisational sustainability, public engagement and contributions to, and leadership within, the sanctuary field.

Our congratulations to LWC!



Serval © LWC



Pangolin © LWC

## 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), or direct to NVT's UK bank – see details below.

Prices:

**UK:** £20, incl. p&p, direct to the Trust's account at Lloyds Bank, sort code 30-90-89, account number 44504860

**Overseas:** direct to Lloyds Bank plc account (IBAN GB94LOYD30908944504860), account name The Nyika-Vwaza UK Trust, or by banker's draft) £28, including p&p.

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 £.....

I enclose my cheque for £.....

Or, I confirm that I have paid £.... direct to the Trust account at Lloyds Bank plc, sort code 30-90-89, account number 44504860,

Or that I have paid £....sterling by bankers draft,

Please use your last name as the reference.

Cheques must be in £sterling and drawn on a UK bank.

Title: Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other.....

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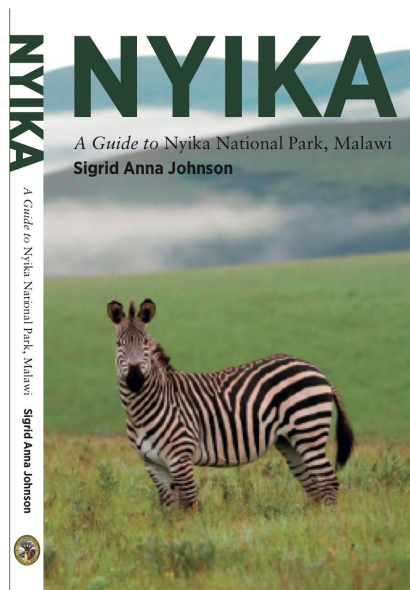
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**Hon. Treasurer, Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust**  
**50 Brewery Road**  
**Woking, Surrey, GU21 4NA, UK**



The Nyika Guide  
© Sigi Johnson



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

Email: info@nyika-vwaza-trust.org  
Website: www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org

<b>BANKER'S ORDER</b> (for UK residents only)	<b>Friends of the Nyika-Vwaza Trust</b> <b>Donation Form</b> PLEASE PRINT YOUR DETAILS IN CAPITALS
<p>To:- ..... Bank plc, ..... ..... ..... <b>(Please insert the name and address of your Bank in the space above)</b></p> <p>Please pay to Lloyds Bank plc, for the credit of The Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust, Sort Code 30-90-89, account No. 44504860, the sum of:</p> <p>£ ..... on <b>(Please insert date above)</b></p> <p>and thereafter every month/quarter/six months/year <i>(delete as appropriate)</i> until cancelled by me in writing.</p> <p>Name of Account to be debited .....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Account Number .....</p> <p>Signature .....</p> <p>Date .....</p> <p><b>Please return this completed form to.-</b> <b>Hon. Treasurer,</b> <b>Nyika-Vwaza (UK) Trust,</b> <b>50 Brewery Road,</b> <b>Woking,</b> <b>Surrey.</b> <b>GU214NA</b> <b>for registration and onward transmission to your Bank.</b></p> <p>Alternatively you may set up a standing order direct with your bank and advise us of your arrangement by email to <a href="mailto:sec.nvt@gmail.com">sec.nvt@gmail.com</a>.</p>	<p>Title: Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other: .....</p> <p>Forenames: .....</p> <p>Surname: .....</p> <p>Address: ..... ..... ..... .....</p> <p>Postcode: .....</p> <p>Telephone No.: .....</p> <p>Email: .....</p> <p>I enclose a donation of: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Or: I have completed the Banker's Order Form. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made.</p> <p>In the past four years <input type="checkbox"/> Today <input type="checkbox"/> In future <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>(Please tick boxes you wish to apply)</i></p> <p>I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.</p> <p>Signature: .....</p> <p>Date: .....</p>