

AFRICAN LION & ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH TRUST

**ALERT**





**Kwandi (pictured left)** sent a very clear message recently. She's tired; tired of being part of the *future* Dambwa release pride.

Well the wait is almost over and Kwandi's going to have plenty to keep her awake as she leads her pride mates; sister Kela, Loma, Leya, Rusha and Temi, into the 710 acre Dambwa site for the pride's release on the 26<sup>th</sup> August.

For the time being it will just be an all-female release as DNA analysis is completed on the proposed pride male; Zulu (more on that later).

The build up to a stage two release is a frantic affair, and the staff at Lion Encounter Zambia has been firing on all cylinders to ensure the site and the lions are ready for the big day.

First of all there was the small matter of ensuring that once the pride are released they can't cheat and go back to the enclosures. Their current enclosures are inside of the site which has allowed it to be used for encounters since last May. But there'll be no going home at the end of the day, or night, anymore!

So in record breaking time, the Dambwa team constructed a new boundary fence line along one edge of the site, complete with new management enclosure, cutting off the pride's access to their current home.



Then there was the small matter of collecting scat samples from the pride members, most notably Zulu, for analysis. With future off-spring born to the pride in the site being, when old enough, released into the wild a genetic profile needs to be built up. This however, is easier said than done.

Dealing with poo is nothing new to anyone on the lion project; in fact it's more of a daily requirement. But usually it's shovelled and thrown away... not carefully placed in a plastic bag and stored in the freezer.

To ensure that the sample is correctly allocated to a lion only scat that is witnessed being passed can be collected. Two samples are then placed into sealable bags, labelled with the lion's name, the date and time of collection and the time of storage.

Sounds simple, but as usual the lions stick to their own timetable – and making sure someone is there to witness the great event hasn't been quite so straightforward

But you can collect all the poo you want and put up as many fences as you like, sometimes other things seem to be working against you. On the 30<sup>th</sup> July a fire outside the site was able to jump the breaks due to very high winds.



The alarm was first raised around midday and it wasn't until seven hours later that the last flames were finally put out.

Due to the size of the site the game species resident within were able to easily avoid the flames. And although the fire was being aided by strong winds, staff and project volunteer efforts meant that, despite the rather intimidating seven foot flames, less than 40% of the site was burnt. Most importantly, all lions, humans and game emerged from the smoky remains unscathed.





(left) **Kwandi** mugs for the camera mid kill (she's that good)  
(right) The KL partnership at work in Dambwa in May 2011  
(main) 13 month old **Leya** shares a romantic meal with



**The six lions being released** into Dambwa arrived at Lion Encounter Zambia on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008, the first of ten lions to commence stage one of the program in the then newly founded Zambian operation.

**Kela and Kwandi**, (b. 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2008) The 2K sisters were social, eager and highly entertaining from their very first walk in the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park. The eldest of the 10, Kela became a sort of unofficial mother to the group, while Kwandi filled the shoes of alpha. They were teamed with Loma to form the 2KL walking group, and with Kwandi's keen hunting form made four kills as a group, and many more contacts with zebra, giraffe and buffalo on the way.

The second set of sisters, **Leya and Loma**, were born a few weeks after the Ks on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2008. The Ls took a little more coaxing to get going, but with the Ks to bolster Loma and Leya forming the LZTs with the group's two males, Toka and Zulu, the pair soon found their walking feet. It was Leya who really stole the show in stage one though; making her first kill at 13 months old on an impala on the banks of the Zambezi River. Then a few weeks later brought down her first giraffe, a feat she repeated before the end of her walking career. And then there was the unforgettable walk where she jumped on the back of a hippo...

**Rusha**, along with former walking partner Rundi, moved in with the Ks, Ls and the boys when they were six months old. Born on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 2008, as the group's youngest member, Rusha was bullied relentlessly at first, before winning over the Ls; an alliance that still stands to this day. The 2Rs weren't known for their hunting prowess, but did tag team up on a buffalo on one walk and Rusha made two kills on baboon and rounded out her walking career with a monitor lizard kill. On an encounter in Dambwa, she left jaws on the floor as she chased a baboon up a tree, forced it out to the end of the branch so that it leapt – into the waiting clutches of Rundi.

The pride's baby, **Temí**, was three weeks old when she and sister, Tswana, arrived at Lion Encounter. The 2Ts were a cheeky and lively pair to walk; but no one was fooled by this irascible surface. Temi brought down a waterbuck at 11 months old and just before her first birthday brought down an adult impala. Assisting in dozens of successful hunts in Dambwa, she may be small but she's all business.



(above) **Rusha's** taste for baboon knows no bounds  
(main) **Temí's** second kill before her first birthday

**Huge thanks must go to** ALERT's commercial partner, Lion Encounter Zambia, who have not only prepared the lions for release, built an incredible area suitable for them, but also financed the whole thing from top to bottom. Thanks also go to all the agents and lodges that have made this possible by supporting the activities offered by Lion Encounter in Zambia.

Join us and follow the fortunes of this pioneering lion pride on their own official [blog site](#), or on twitter from ALERT @LionsinAfrica and through our partner Lion Encounter Zambia @LionEncounter





## St Mary's Church of England Primary School's Year 1 class have stepped out of Prestwich and explored Africa's wildlife!

Teacher, Helen May, explains: "My year 1 class have been learning about Africa; the places, people and of course the wildlife. Every area in our classroom was linked to Africa. We modelled animals, designed animal prints, constructed "safe and happy" zoos, experienced life in the savannah through some entertaining role play, read about life in Africa and even created our own National Parks!

In literacy classes the pupils wrote factual reports about big cats, and created myths about how the animals got their wonderful patterns and amazing body shapes.

As part of our Africa topic, the class decided they would like to raise money for ALERT. Having previously completed a topic on dinosaurs the class were clear on what the term "extinction" meant. With this in mind, they were determined to help ALERT save the African lion. The children raised over £100 by doing jobs at home. Each child then emailed David Youldon [ALERT Chief Operating Officer] to tell him all about their achievements and were delighted to receive replies which they have printed off and taken home!"

### A CALL FOR ALL TEACHERS...

The African lion has the ability to capture the imagination and can be a means to draw attention to issues facing Africa. ALERT is looking to produce resource packs for teachers both in Africa and around the world to assist in lesson planning. If you are a teacher and can spare some time to help please contact us [here](#)

\*All photos have been approved for publication by the children's parents.



# The Daily Pride

## Mkoba 4 Primary

## Intern 2012 [here](#)



## Antelope Park completes borehole at Mkoba 4 Primary

On 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, Antelope Park handed over a borehole to officials at Mkoba 4 Primary School in Gweru, Zimbabwe.



*AP's Community Project Manager, Simba Giya, and General Manager, Nathan Webb, at the handover ceremony*

The handover ceremony was attended by the former Governor of the Midlands Province, Mr Cephas Msipha, high ranking education officials, politicians and members of the local community. Mkoba 4 Primary School has facilities designed for 500 children, but currently has an enrolment of over 2,000 and has had no running water for well over 10 years.

Antelope Park, in partnership with African Impact, the ALERT Communities Trust (ACT) and the Happy Africa Foundation facilitates volunteers who wish to assist at the school or at selected projects in the local community.

Peter Flawn, a past volunteer at both the school and to AP and Livingstone's lion projects, funded the drilling and equipping of the borehole.

If you are interested in volunteering options please visit [here](#).

## Madoda charms the wings off some angels!

LE Zambia hosted an educational visit for Angel's Wings Orphanage this past month.

The 12 guests got to meet Livingstone's walking cubs including Madoda (pictured below) while learning about the physiology and behaviour of the species, lion conservation and about how ALERT and Lion Encounter are helping from Lion Encounter guide, Mwiya Lusenge.



**Jamie Jolly** volunteered at the Livingstone project back in 2009. He's now coming to the end of a two-month Animal Management Internship at Lion Encounter Livingstone.

*"Since my volunteer placement I've began a degree in Animal Management and Welfare. So when I heard that I could now do an internship with the program I knew it would give me invaluable experience."*

*My placement began at the end of June and I've been working with Lion's Manager Cara Watts. The main responsibilities I've been given include keeping the health records for all 24 lions up to date as well as behavioural records. I complete weekly body condition scores as well. A big part of the role has been to ensure that the weights during meat preparation for the feeds are correct and accurately recorded.*

*I can't believe how quickly two months has gone by, but I've learnt so much in that time. The best memory I can take back with me is the time I've spent with the lions, but will also be getting to watch the release of the Dambwa pride – literally a couple of days before I go home. Those are the lions I walked with as a volunteer and to see them ready to move onto the next phase now is incredible."*

If you're interested in undertaking an internship, click [here](#) for more details.



Series 2 now available for download from iTunes.

## From Oxford University to Zambia

Also onsite at Lion Encounter Zambia is Facilitated Research student, Chris Goodman. Joining us for five weeks, Chris is collecting data for his dissertation in Geography at the UK's renowned Oxford University.

Chris is investigating the domestic-wild binary of the practices and stages of the rehabilitation and release program.

If you're interested in completing your study at one of the project sites, click [here](#) for more details.

## AFRICA NEEDS LIONS

ALERT is proud to announce a new range of merchandise with the tag line "Africa needs lions".

All proceeds from sales goes to funding ALERT's various programs.

A selection of the designs available are shown here. You can visit the online shop by clicking either of these links:

[US Store \(multiple currencies accepted\)](#)

or the

[UK Store \(multiple currencies accepted\)](#)



# Ngamo pride update: Playing with fire – and Nala & Narnia

Nala and Narnia have fast become AT1's favourite playmates. It is not uncommon to find one of the Ns involved in a play session with the seven-month old.

However it seems all that play has formed some very strong bonds between the little cub and the 2Ns. Whilst observing the pride on 10 July, AT1 was seen to approach Kwali to play but was rebuffed aggressively. Almost pushing Athena out the way, Narnia appeared alongside AT1's mum to chase Kwali off and reassure AT1.

A similar incident occurred a few days before when Ashanti got a little over exuberant whilst playing with AT1. This time Nala quickly jumped to the defense of AT1 and chased Ashanti away. Nala then settled down with AT1 and they peacefully rested together.

Although the whole pride do thrive on having AT1 around, it is good to know that she has other lionesses to rely on to defend besides Athena. No matter how strong the bonds are between Nala, Narnia and AT1 though, when things get a little rough it's always Athena that she seeks out in the end.



The bad blood between AT1 and Kwali didn't last long; less than a week later Kwali was noted to be initiating plenty of play with AT1 and seems to be enjoying the attention from the youngest member of the pride.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, a play session between the pair soon escalated to include most of the pride. Kwali, Athena, Kenge, Nala, Narnia and AT1 were all rolling around on their backs and playfully swiping away at each other before a game of chase ensued. Since the loss of her cubs Ashanti was more preoccupied with Milo, and Phyre was catching up on some missed sleep.

As AT1 continues to grow and learn from her more experienced pride elders she will also start to become actively involved in territorial behaviours with the pride. On 20<sup>th</sup> July, Milo initiated a roaring chorus. As his deep booming roar reverberated around the site, the females joined in letting everyone know whose land this was.

AT1 watched with intense curiosity before giving a very high-pitched, short roar (if you can call it that). Clearly wanting to lend weight to her pride's territorial display, she marched up to Milo and gave all she had got for the duration of the pride's roaring bout.

The weekly early morning research session on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July found Milo resting by himself near the Western fence line. Nala, Narnia, Ashanti and Athena joined him not long after with AT1 following behind by a couple of minutes.

The females were alert and started to move off into Kruger, leaving AT1 behind with Milo. Quite often we see AT1 initiate play with her dad, but this time it was Milo who was feeling impish. He stalked his daughter and bowled her over on to her back, gently pawing her face as she tried to bite his paws...



...But almost as soon as it started playtime was over when AT1 became distracted by the sound of zebras' alarm calls in the distance and set off in search of the other females. It wasn't long before she found Athena, Nala and Narnia and together they set off further into the bush. The females stalked to approximately 15m away from a zebra herd and quickly chased; but to no avail.



Twenty five minutes later the regular research session began and in that short time the lions had successfully killed a zebra. Frustrating as it was for the team to have missed the kill, they spent the rest of the day with the pride as they fed and rested intermittently.

By the 25th, all thoughts were still fixed firmly on food and Milo and Phyre were, as usual, battling it out over a fresh impala kill.

The warring duo along with Athena and AT1 were in the Masai Mara area of the site and it appeared that the argument had been going on for some time with Milo and Phyre lying on top of the carcass.

Athena and AT1 were too preoccupied with their own game of chase to take any notice of the scuffle and slowly moved off towards waterhole one.

Who actually made the kill is unknown, although it is somewhat less likely to have been either of the lions fighting over it.

While the pair battled it out, Nala and Narnia were busy in the Tree Tops area feeding on their own steenbok kill. As they devoured the snack Ashanti, Kwali & Kenge rested nearby.

After the latest feeding frenzy it was time to carry out the monthly game count on the 29<sup>th</sup> July.

But things didn't go quite to plan. During the midday session, the lions were all resting in Hwange and after a short search the team soon located a large herd of impala along the road.



The first priority was the lions; they had been feeding on a zebra earlier in the day and having full tummies it was unlikely that they had moved. The team located everybody except for Milo, all resting about 40m from where the fire was currently burning. Most animals have a natural fear of fire and the team was relying for this to kick in as they started to search for Milo.

The thick smoke seemed to be stopping the telemetry from picking up the signals, but after a while the team located him towards water hole three, quite a distance from where the fire was, but in the direction it was heading. He seemed relaxed though and even had time for a short nap whilst the fire was still raging towards him.

The main concern was for AT1 being separated from Athena, but luckily Narnia was keeping an eye on her. The two of them headed towards the northern fence line, whilst Phyre and Kwali moved passed the fire to rest in the area that had just been burnt.

After several hours, the team fighting the fire (well away from where the lions were) managed to get it under control. Some small, manageable fires remained but the bulk had been put out. By this time darkness was falling.

All lions were ok. Athena, AT1, Narnia and Kenge were together. Ashanti and Nala were resting in the newly-burnt Serengeti East area; looking slightly perplexed but perfectly healthy. A few minutes later the team was amused when they found Milo happily munching away on the zebra kill from earlier in the day, apparently not at all bothered by what had been going on. And finally Kwali and Phyre were resting together in between water hole one and two.



**Ngamo cont...** While focused on counting all the antelope, the team were suddenly distracted by three tawny blurs off to the side; Ashanti, Kwali and Milo!

The team slammed on the brakes so as not to disturb the hunt and watched the three give chase. The herd tried to escape but one was not quick enough and Kwali was able to bring it to the ground whilst holding it around the neck. But before long Milo muscled in.

Once again Milo was not happy about sharing his food and started snarling. Kwali is a low ranking female and unlike Phyre was not willing to argue back. However she seemed to have a tactic up her sleeve; as long as she didn't respond to Milo's aggression, she could quietly feed on the neck region of the kill whilst Milo continued to growl to himself! Once Kwali had taken her share, she moved off to drink from the nearby waterhole and Milo quickly grabbed the rest of the carcass and trotted off in to the bush to enjoy the rest of his prize undisturbed and in the shade.

On Tuesday (2<sup>nd</sup> August) the team was busy entering data between the mid-morning and afternoon sessions when a call came through on the radio to say a fire had broken out in the release site. The team grabbed all equipment and jumped in to the vehicle to head to the site along with practically every member of staff and volunteer at Antelope Park.

The sight that greeted them was nothing short of terrifying; 10 foot flames quickly sweeping through the southern part of Ngamo.

Although the fire has affected 50 per cent of the site, it seems that all the game managed to avoid the flames and escape unharmed. As stressful as the situation was for both the lions and the team putting out the fire, there are positives to come from it. The burnt land will soon have new shoots poking through which will provide some very tasty food for the plains game. It also means that the lions will have to start hunting in the burnt area, a much more challenging prospect helping to develop their hunting abilities even further.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> August they were witnessed attempting to hunt in the burnt areas for the first time. A little more practice was needed though, with the females making several attempts to chase both impala and zebra but were not able to get within less than 15m before they were spotted by the prey.

But then Nala took charge of the situation; taking a left flank she left the rest of the girls eagerly watching and spread 10 metres apart. As Nala slipped out of sight several minutes passed before the zebra suddenly burst into life racing towards the other girls lying in wait. It was only then that Nala was spotted driving them towards her pride mates. Ashanti and Kwali soon took up the chase but in the end were only able to get to within two metres.

By the 8<sup>th</sup> the pride were found feasting on a fresh zebra carcass in the Tree Tops area; one area that was left untouched by the fire. As the pride fed it became clear that AT1 is very possessive of her food; snarling and growling away with the best of them as she fed. This aggression will stand her in good stead as she grows older.

By mid-month, the first signs of summer were starting to make themselves felt over Ngamo. And with all the hunting, fires and other dramas the pride have had to contend with what better excuse than some slightly warmer weather to take things a little easier?

For two days over the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> the lions were sprawled around waterhole one; rising occasionally to drink or to move to a better patch of shade when the sun became too strong. Obviously some needed this rest more than others and sisters Ashanti and Athena fell into such deep sleeps that their snoring was audible.

As mum, aunt and the rest of the pride slept on as the sun started to set, AT1 kept herself entertained by leaping up as she tried to grab fruits from a nearby tree before crashing to the ground and repeating the process.



**Elephant monitoring has morphed into baby watch recently. Not only are** we closely watching the progress of the juveniles within the population but a number of females are showing signs of pregnancy.

Within the study's database there are already 52 juveniles aged between three months and eight years of age. It's not always immediately apparent on a sighting exactly who each calf belongs to. Usually the only way to identify the mother is through repeat sightings, detailing who each juvenile is with and most frequently associates and interacts with. Or sometimes you catch a bit of luck, and get a sighting like 242 and 242a here where there's little doubt! Although related cows may suckle one another's cows; so even this isn't a sure thing.

The identification of elephants can be slow; vegetation gets in the way of taking identifying photos of ear notches and other features. But for juveniles it can be an even more frustrating process; with no or few ear notches there's little other than herd association to distinguish them from all others.

Over the months of July and August, the population in the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park are severely restricted to the areas surrounding the Zambezi River.



**Left: 219 on a more sedate sighting**

The last rains were in April and won't return until November. After months of heavy utilisation and no water there is little vegetation of substance left and the elephants begin to lose form rapidly. But there are several females who look suspiciously thick through the middle.

Gestation is close 22 months with births most common during the rains. The herds move out of the area over the rains so we may not see any new-borns, but we know who to keep any eye out for next year

While we're already confident that seven of our known females will be adding to their herds over the coming months, over August we saw two incidences that suggest that a female known to us as 219 will be adding to the population in 2013.

Our first sighting of her in August was as her group was being covered by a large bachelor herd. As she crossed the road in front of our vehicle one of the males checked her reproductive status. With a shake of her ears and a lift of the trunk she rebuffed him and walked off. Then, mid-month she was spotted again and this time we observed her displaying what is termed the "oestrus walk". When approached by a male she moved off from the herd at a running pace and was trailed by the male. As she circled back around to run back towards the herd her admirer emerged clearly annoyed she'd given him the slip. We decided it was best to get out of the way and left them to a game of kiss chase.