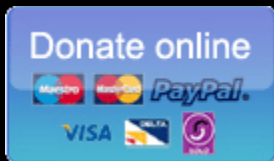




July 2011



The lion: a global cultural icon

Lion on Westminster Bridge, London



find your pride @ www.lionalert.org



Walking on hot coals might not be everyone's cup of tea, but Cassandra Beattie explains why it's just the start of her fundraising for ACT's partnership projects with The Happy Africa Foundation (THAF) and Antelope Park.

"Before I set off for Antelope Park last December I wanted to raise some money for the orphanage. Through a raffle I raised \$2,000. After visiting the orphanage and talking with Simba Giya, AP's Community Project Manager, it was decided that it would be used for toys, clothes and school supplies. After returning from AP I had to return to work the next day and immediately put in a request to take another three months off work to return. Unfortunately I had to settle for two months, but I'll be heading back to the Park this December.

This time, I'm serious and with 10 months between my placements I'm aiming for \$30,000. I got in contact with ALERT's partner, THAF, and arranged to do this through them. Most people thought I was being unrealistic, but so far I've raised almost \$28,000!!

I knew I'd have to come up with some interesting ideas so after much consideration I decided that my main event would be a Fire Walk - a sponsored walk over hot coals.

I've also organised a race night at a greyhound track and several raffles. With the success of the first Fire Walk, which raised \$19,500, I'm now organising a second one. I even resorted to crazy ways of advertising the events by getting designs and information shaved into my hair!

It's been a lot of effort to organise but I know when I see the projects this money has helped to complete and the lives it has impacted, I know it will have been worth it.

All my events take place in Ireland so if you live in Ireland or know anyone who does then come along or even participate. You can also make a donation and see the progress of my project [here](#)"

Some of the project's Cassandra will be helping:

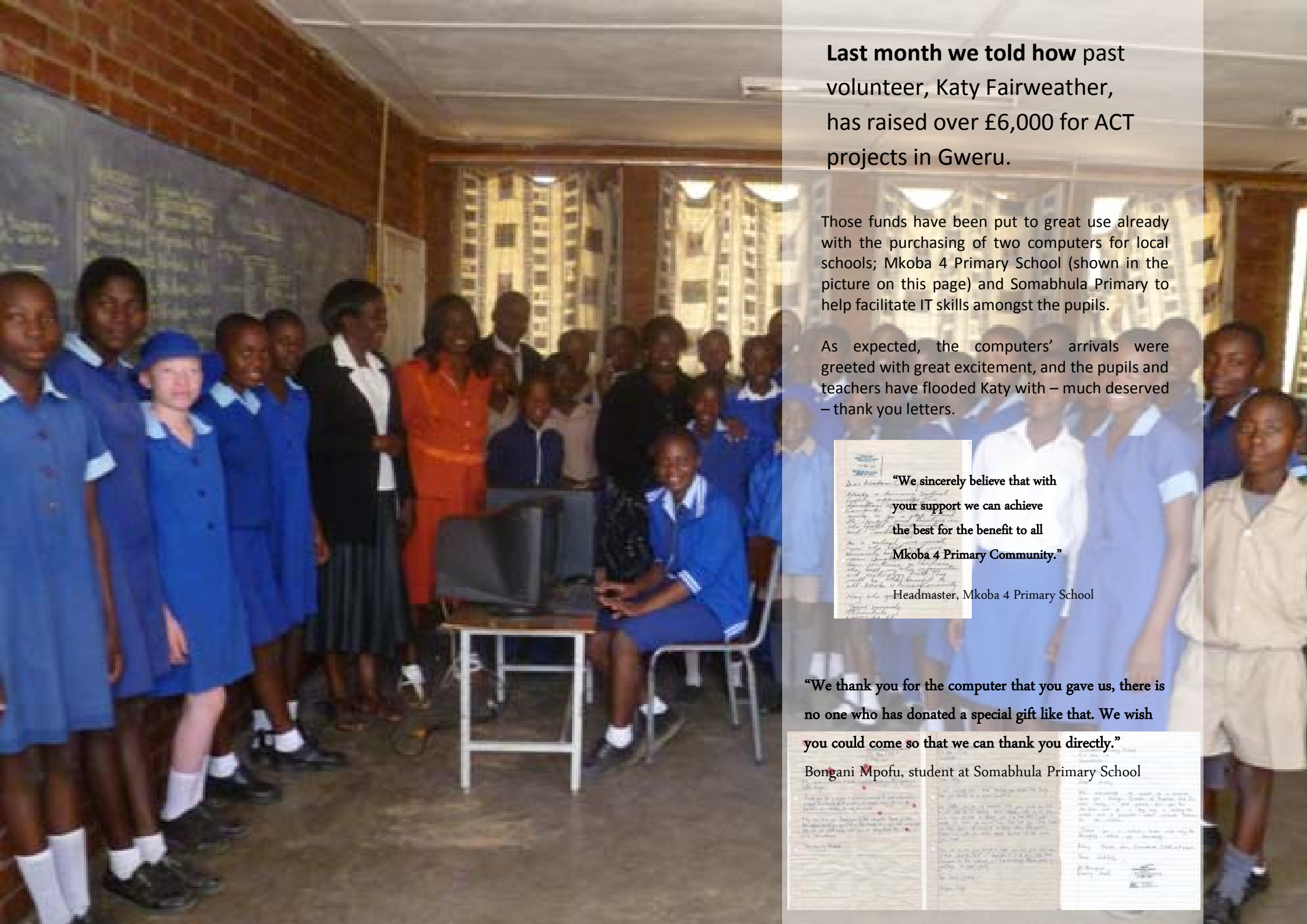
Mkoba 4 Primary School: With over 2,000 students we're hoping to increase the school's current one computer to eight. The creation of a computer lab will allow volunteers to teach IT classes at the school and the school will be able to offer IT lessons to the wider community (*read on for an update on Katy Fairweather's assistance to this project*).

Mickey Mouse pre-school: A small pre-school with limited facilities; 110 children share just one classroom. A four-stage plan has been devised to complete construction of two new classrooms, a health office, store room, kitchen block and toilets and the final stage; a Community Hall, allowing the school to generate its own income.

The Midlands Children's Home: Caring for 60 children aged 2-22 years assisting the children attend school and complete further education. The Home already has extensive vegetable gardens, and poultry and rabbits are also kept to help generate income. But to become truly self-sufficient two 1,500 litre water tanks are being sourced, and, along with the relevant piping, installed.

Happy Readers: Many of the schools in Gweru are poorly funded and lacking in resources. The Gweru Educational Support Programme helps to fairly distribute equipment to the schools most in need. A scheme is underway to purchase Happy Reader books aimed at African children, aged five to eight. The books use familiar animals as characters against urban and rural settings. Many overseas books are simply too unfamiliar in content to follow, and the children can become discouraged from reading.

Medical support: Like many clinics in Zimbabwe, those in Gweru are struggling to provide basic health care to local communities. It isn't uncommon for a clinic to have a patient list of 25,000 people in the surrounding areas. We work with two clinics in Gweru; Mtapu and Mkoba 4 Polyclinic; helping to secure basic medical equipment and items such as mattresses with protective covers.



Last month we told how past volunteer, Katy Fairweather, has raised over £6,000 for ACT projects in Gweru.

Those funds have been put to great use already with the purchasing of two computers for local schools; Mkoba 4 Primary School (shown in the picture on this page) and Somabhula Primary to help facilitate IT skills amongst the pupils.

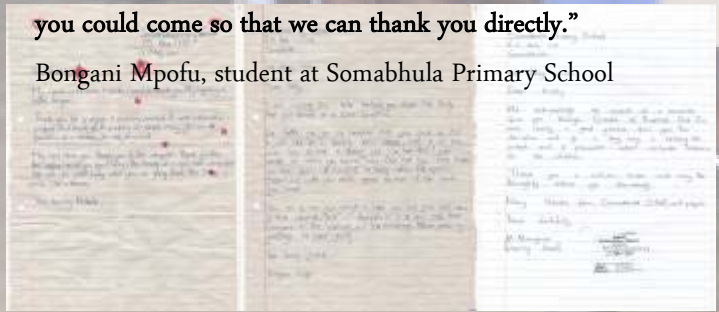
As expected, the computers' arrivals were greeted with great excitement, and the pupils and teachers have flooded Katy with – much deserved – thank you letters.

“We sincerely believe that with your support we can achieve the best for the benefit to all Mkoba 4 Primary Community.”

Headmaster, Mkoba 4 Primary School

“We thank you for the computer that you gave us, there is no one who has donated a special gift like that. We wish you could come so that we can thank you directly.”

Bongani Mpofu, student at Somabhula Primary School



The Daily Pride

Pre-school
assistance



Lion Encounter Zambia begins pre-school assistance

The volunteers at Lion Encounter in Livingstone began assisting teachers at Muuke Pre-school, not far from the program's base in the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park.

Muuke only has two teachers caring for 70 pre-school age children, mostly between 4 and 6 years old; a tall order by anyone's standards!

Currently hosted in a church building, the school's lease on the space ends in December; while they have a new plot of land to move to, at present there are no funds to begin building work for classrooms, ablutions or kitchen facilities.

Over the first weeks of Lion Encounter's involvement volunteers have been assisting with English, Maths and Games lessons.



Lion Encounter's plan is to increase the scope of lessons held at the school to include music and sports. In addition, four 11 year olds also attend and special classes are being devised to help skip them ahead to Grade 2. Of course the biggest challenge for this new venture is to help in the creation of a new school block by the end of the year. Any future volunteers to Lion Encounter Livingstone, be prepared for plenty of brick making and building!

The trials and tribulations of Ashanti and ASM1



June started off well with the pride feeding on a zebra on the 7th June in the Hwange area of the site. While the grown-up component of the pride spent the subsequent hours to-ing and fro-ing between the carcass and the waterhole, AT1 amused herself in the surrounding vegetation.

The following day, the pride continued finishing the remains of the carcass before Athena and Ashanti upped sticks and headed into Serengeti East with AT1 in tow. As the A-team moved into dense cover it took a while to pick them out again, but eventually Athena was spotted eyeballing more zebra.

Heading downwind and back into tall grass, she glided towards the oblivious herd. Within 15m of her quarry Athena bolted and the chase was on. Causing panic, she separated a sub-adult from the group; but ultimately her full belly slowed her pace and the youngster was able to get away.

But Ashanti was nowhere to be seen and it was only later in the day that she was sighted in the Etosha area. Solitary, and appearing restless the behaviour was typical of an expectant mother. Behaviour which had been expected; her matings with Milo put a due date anywhere between 30th May and 22nd June.



Impala release

With the anticipated stage two release before the end of the year, stocks needed replenishing in the Dambwa Forest release area. The site was first populated with game in April 2010, but with 12 months of encounters having taken place numbers have incurred a bit of a dent. In order that suitable numbers have time to settle in and establish themselves ahead of the pride's introduction to the site herds of impala have been released into the site



With the pride preparing to make the site their full-time home, we're also preparing a map of the site with all areas soon to be christened; so that you can follow the Dambwa pride's progress in the same way as the Ngamo pride.



Are you a **travel agent** or **tour operator**? If so, Lion Encounter would greatly appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete a short [survey](#) which could help benefit you as a travel advisor.

Teacher's pet

Lion Encounter has begun hosting school trips for educational visits to the site in the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park.

This month a group from Grace Ministries School were hosted by intern Vicky Lalumiere. The day started off for 12 students and three teachers with a lesson on conservation, the importance of the National Park, and finally some information on Lion Encounter and the lions in the program. Lion handler Steven Mashata, and guides Zick Kolala and Friday Ngambi were on-hand to offer their expertise and knowledge of characteristics, behaviour, eating habits and habitats of both wild and captive lions.



Then it was off to meet some of the lions, including the 3Rs and 2Bs, as well as the walking cubs, aged 6-8 months old. The day rounded off with a Q&A session, with the kids asking some well thought out questions about birthing rates, physical characteristics and food intake. Who knows, there may be a few guides in the making!

Ngamo cont... It isn't uncommon for one or more lionesses to separate themselves from the main pride for short spells, and it was hardly surprising after a recent meal of zebra that she looked uncomfortable – so the question lingered; was Ashanti getting ready to give birth? The 10th June confirmed Ashanti had become a first-time mother when the unmistakable sound of cubs was heard in the Hwange area. While signal confirmed Ashanti was present at the den site no further attempts were made to sight the new family, allowing Ashanti time to adjust and introduce her litter when ready.

But it wasn't just Ashanti who underwent some changes over this time. You usually can't swing the proverbial cat around Phyre without hitting Kwali, but her shadow began distancing herself from Phyre. However, Phyre seemed unfazed by this, and shortly after began mating with Milo. Like Ashanti, she too had last mated with Milo over February, but clearly unsuccessfully.



By the 14th Kwali had hooked up with the N sisters in the Etosha area. But it didn't seem this grouping was much to her liking and soon Kwali moved off, prompting a playful reaction from Narnia. Kwali however was not in the mood and Narnia was given a clear warning. Retreating from the encounter to rest next to her sister Nala, the 2Ns decided to watch Kwali head off into the distance, this time towards Route 66 and the signal of Ashanti; who by now had been joined by Milo and Phyre.

Athena and AT1 were in the Tree Tops area near a carcass they had been feeding from over recent days while Kenge was on her own with her last carcass in The Valley.

By mid-morning the Ns had hooked up with Athena and AT1 to help polish off the last scraps, whilst Kenge, still on her own was having to fend off rising numbers of vultures for what was left of her kill.

The remaining members of the pride were at Ashanti's den site. Lionesses make little attempt to keep newborns isolated from contact with the rest of the pride. Kwali was found to be resting closest to the cubs whilst Ashanti interacted briefly with Phyre who was being given some time off from the marathon that is the lion mating process by a sleeping Milo.

No visual had been made of the cubs at this point, but evidence suggests Ashanti was nursing a litter of three.

By the 15th June, the lions were on the brink of bursting. The pride's recent kill rate had left Ngamo looking like a zebra graveyard; but it wasn't over as that morning Milo, Phyre, Kenge, Athena and AT1 on their 8th zebra kill in 2 weeks (one every 1.75 days, expected kill rate one every 1.8 days). In between feeding bouts Milo managed to burn off some calories by mating with both Phyre AND Kenge. As expected Kenge has once again has come into heat, approx three months since the loss of her litter in April.



Meanwhile Ashanti and Kwali remained tucked away in the shade of the den in Hwange some 40m from the kill site. A visual on the 16th revealed all three observed cubs are mobile with beautiful big blue eyes now wide open. (all cubs are born with blue eyes, changing to their adult colour at around two months old).





We presumed Ashanti to have fed at some point upon the carcass. With suckling a litter of three she would rapidly be losing energy and fat reserves so must make the most of the food she finds when leaving the den.

On the 23rd we found the a zebra kill in the Valley area, the state of carcass suggesting the kill had only been made minutes before. It was a blood-splattered Athena who led the way to the scene of eight frenzied lions feeding. All pride members were accounted for and a visual of Ashanti showed her to be in fantastic condition and obviously suckling.

By mid-morning most pride members had moved from the carcass to drink, but Athena and Ashanti slept off their breakfast in the shade of a thicket. As usual AT1 was full of energy but she finally had a playmate. A piercing squeal was heard from nearby to AT1's position and a tiny cub popped out from the grass. Just under two weeks old, the cub was dwarfed by AT1 who is 5-6kgs heavier than her cousin, who she then proceeded to play with. Even at just five months old, AT1's size and energy could have been too much for the newborn. Occasionally the cub, which we suspect to be male and named ASM1, would cry out if AT1 played too rough and both Ashanti and Athena would bolt to attention.

As the hours passed ASM1 began to suckle from aunt Athena alongside AT1. This behaviour is typical of those cubs and females within a crèche. Females with cubs will pool their litters primarily to increase cub defense, though other benefits include engaging in play with peers and increased suckling opportunities. Athena was observed occasionally grooming her nephew whilst mum slept close-by. We suspect the relation between Ashanti and Athena may be indicative of Athena's immediate acceptance of this cub.



Ngamo cont... Nala & Narnia were in light-hearted mood. With the pride fat and flourishing its members could relax with no worries and waste some energy playing about with one another.

Over the subsequent days, the onslaught continued with two more successful zebra kills. Most of the lions were resting by the first kill in the Etosha area on the 21st June, with Milo throwing his considerable weight around to ensure he got the best pickings.

Telemetry signal indicated Ashanti and Kwali were still located in Hwange, presumably by Ashanti's den and cubs. Later on in the day Kwali was seen feeding upon the day's leftovers after the others had abandoned it. We had no visual of Ashanti but heard her calling softly

As fantastic and stunning as this visual was we are concerned that the cub was very close to a recently made kill and any lions returning to feed may cause injury to the vulnerable newborn. We are also aware that there was no sign of the other two cubs seen in a previous den. It seemed odd for Ashanti to only move one cub.

The whole pride shifted to Amboseli on the 24th June, with most remaining more or less unconscious for the better part of the day until Athena picked up on the movements of a nearby herd of impala. Consisting of open grassed areas and scrub habitat, Amboseli provides ideal hunting grounds for the lionesses.

Athena began to stalk towards the grazing herd before Kwali, Nala, Narnia and Ashanti joined the hunt. A conveniently placed thicket provided an ideal hide for the lionesses to circle around and sneak through. Nala flanked to the left, downwind of the herd whilst Narnia crept into the thicket. Phyre finally awoke and observed the tactical movements of her pride mates. The scene seemed to be set and she too crept into the grass. Suddenly in unison Nala, Narnia and Athena gave chase. The herd dashed around the thicket out of Narnia's reach but directly into Phyre's firing line. Unfortunately Phyre had not fully awoken and failed to react in time. Yet there was still one lioness in play. Although belly-up and asleep for most of the hunt Kenge soon sprung to attention and ran after the fleeing herd but to no avail.

On the 25th June hunting efforts were met with better results for the pride. An early morning research session in freezing temperatures located the pride in the Masai Mara area at 4am. We observed fleeing impala in the distance and the darting of eyes gleaming in the red-filtered spot light. A short time later they were found on an impala kill.

While the pride seemed to be in flourishing form, sadly on the 2nd July ASM1 was found dead; a sad discovery, but not entirely unexpected. No sign of the rest of Ashanti's litter had been seen for several days and the mother herself at times ambivalent towards the sole youngster, often offloading maternal duties onto sister, Athena.

It seems the first time mother may have abandoned her litter from the start, and ASM1 survived his siblings as he was the largest and strongest of the litter and also gained access to Athena's milk.

As stated previously, these females are raising their first litters and mistakes and misjudgements are to be expected.

With Athena still caring for AT1, she is not likely to re-enter oestrus for some 12 months, however Ashanti has already been observed mating with Milo since the loss of ASM1, and Kenge and Phyre have both mated recently too. We expect their second litters to have a higher survival rate, although still likely only as high as 40%, as is normal for lions.

Elephant monitoring has been revelling in a huge influx of familiar faces over the last month. While many of the elephants encountered on monitoring sessions are new to our database, increasing numbers are returnees first identified last year.

An important part of the program is the progress of juveniles and reproductive rates to assess the long term health of the population. Leading the merry procession below is Number 42; being tailed by 42a and 211. Just out of shot is also 40 and 40a. When 40 and 42 were identified last year it was in a large family group meeting on the banks of the Zambezi River, and 42a and 40a are in the background of their ID photos. On that occasion, in excess of 80 elephants were present making the identification of more discreet groups challenging.

This time, they were in a much more manageable group of nine and the relaxed afternoon allowed the necessary data to be recorded on the herd in general and also 40a and 42a's development between the two sightings.

