



Dear all,

**Newsletter April / May 2009:** After a good rainy season ending mid April we have had a number of changes and developments in Thuma. Albert Schenk has left the project after several years of excellent work to take up a new challenge in the Sudan. We would like to thank him again for all his work in the last years and wish him all the best for his future.

Eventually permission has been granted by the Department of Forestry for the construction of the new volunteer and scout accommodation, offices and storerooms as well as the Heritage Centre.

Founder and former Chairman of the Wildlife Action Group Malawi, Georg Kloeble, who started the Thuma project initially in 1996 and managed it for over 8 years has returned to Thuma and started with the building of the new volunteer accommodation and scout camp until a new field manager for the Thuma – Ecosystem Rehabilitation Project arrives.



Most work has been contracted to building teams, workers and carpenters from surrounding villages, which brings substantial income into their communities.



The buildings are constructed using the local "mdindo" method which is simply pounding clay soil into a movable mould whereby under ideal weather conditions the building grows by about 30 cm per day. Those buildings can last for decades unless one removes the roofs or they are abundant for any reason. Then only a pile of soil will remain and no traces of human settlement can be seen anymore after a short time, unlike if they would have been built with brick or concrete.

The area for digging out the clay soil has been selected in front of the new volunteer accommodation and will create a substantial mud pool, hopefully attracting elephant, buffalo and other wildlife. The mud hole will be supplied with water from the overflow of the water tank which is supplying the water for the camps and offices.

The Volunteer accommodation will consist of 6 spacious rooms with a separate kitchen and adjoining dining-veranda which hopefully will also attract visitors from Lilongwe.

At the same time the site for the heritage centre has now been identified to fit well into the new camp settings and construction will start soon. We are all looking forward to this, since it will be a valuable contribution to show and explain the projects work and will also display found artifacts of former villages and settlements that existed in the area about 80 to 100 years ago before Thuma was turned into a protected area in 1926.



Beginning of May, Georg Kloeble was joined by volunteer Christine from the U.K. who stayed in Thuma for 3 ½ weeks. She accompanied the scout team on snare patrols and was a very helpful hand on the administration side and with implementing a GPS and cell phone based rescue system which enables the scouts to find any person which might get lost in the rugged terrain of the Thuma Forest Reserve.

The end of the rainy season, when the vegetation is lush and the grass very high, is the peak season for wire snare poaching. For more effective anti poaching patrols, GPS is used on every patrol for recording of poaching hotspots and future planning of effective patrol-management. GPS will also be used in the Dedza–Salima Forest Reserve in future.

The scout team was once again able, together with a rancher from the DNPW, to successfully arrest charcoal burners on the western boundary. On other patrols a total of 44 poaching snares were found and 3 “pangas” (machetes) confiscated.

Effort is also put into the reopening of old roads, which have been overgrown and had to be neglected due to shortage of funds in the past. A total of about 12 km of roads could be cleared and made again accessible for cars.



*Senior scout Polah handing over the recovered ivory*

Not only for the planned ecotourism developments at Thuma, but also for emergency cases, like recovering injured scouts, volunteers or tourists and of course for faster and more effective patrolling of remote areas, the extension of the road network is very important and again providing many jobs and income to the local people.

In May Thuma was visited by representatives of the Malawi Department of Parks and Wildlife, to whom a pair of confiscated elephant tusks were handed over.

WAG now has been kindly offered office rooms by the Department of Forestry and is busy setting up a WAG office in Lilongwe.

Thank you for your interest!

Georg Kloeble

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