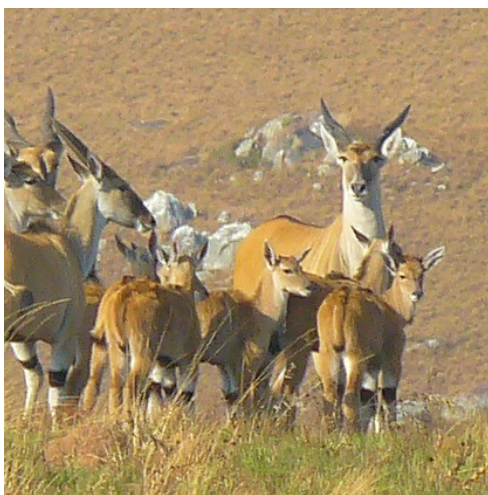


Biosearch Nyika

FOREWORD

This expedition introduced a change from the recent past, in both policy and practise. For the first time since 1997 I personally took on the leadership of the expedition and Marianne Overton took direct control of the field science throughout the month. We also retained our safari bus and driver for the whole period and set up bases in four different areas rather than have one fixed base camp. The change proved to be almost entirely beneficial. It helped to create a good structure to the team and the programme. It also enabled a better focus on the job and good momentum to be maintained throughout our stay. The team of eight from the UK and two Malawians supported by up to four scouts, worked well together and everyone pulled their weight, with no extra baggage being taken into the field, in any sense of the word. Our bases were near Fingira, at Juniper Forest, Zungwara (as in 2005) and the Upper Wovwe River on the eastern escarpment.

We were very fortunate, in the first few days of our visit, to have some cloud cover to make the acclimatisation process easier. Even in the cool conditions at 7000 ft in July, with the maximum temperature usually around 18-20 degrees, it does get very hot in the midday sun. Careful attention was given this year to avoid heat stress and to build up fitness gradually. Being able to work in the forests and woodlands helped to reduce unnecessary exposure. In this we were largely successful and the good health of the team in the bush undoubtedly contributed to the success of the whole expedition.



Fland crêche at Zungwara

After ten years of exploration in the remoter parts of the Nyika National Park, 2006 was most encouraging on two fronts. Firstly, in the areas we covered, we found few signs of recent poaching. The result of this was seen in the Zungwara area, where an abundance of game, including young animals, was exceptional compared with previous years. We are now in a good position to encourage future assistance with some recent photographs of the larger mammals. Although the Biosearch Nyika work is not a safari operation, it does make a big difference to occasionally actually see the game we are tracking! We can but hope that this rather optimistic scenario on the plateau will spread to the heavily poached areas in the northern hill zone, where we have spent so much time in the past. The area north of Jalawi and Nganda creates a greater challenge for patrolling, but since it represents a warmer and drier part of the Park, it plays an important part to maximise the variety and interest of the landscape and wildlife of the whole National Park.

Cooperation with the Millenium Seed Bank Project in Mulanje enabled us to support two botanists in the field. We were happy to be joined again by Hassam Patel, a stalwart of our expeditions over the years. We were also joined by Humphrey Chapama, who became a popular team member and was well able to tackle the difficult terrain, with the assistance of a stout stick which came to the assistance of the team on more than one occasion. We were in

fact very fortunate, in the first few days of our visit, to have some cloud cover to make the acclimatisation process easier.



Elephant at Vwase Marsh

morning dews. Calling in at Mzuzu also enabled a restocking from the market with fresh provisions for the scouts in Njalayankhunda, who appreciated the support, especially the fish. We asked Lewis and Humphrey, as Malawians, to do the selection, which I am sure was a good move!

In the final phase of the expedition we walked up the eastern Nyika escarpment, along the route of the Wovwe River. This gives some excellent views of Lake Malawi at times but the terrain is steep, perhaps too steep for much of the game, since Baboons and Bushpigs seem to be main fauna. We did not have time to go all the way up to the plateau, although given an extra day our team would have happily gone all the way to Nganda Peak and back again. We did, however, travel far enough to decide that the Upper Wovwe is best approached from Chelinda and the North Rumphu river crossing and from there downward to the east. If the North Rumphu Bridge were repaired it would certainly make patrolling in this area much easier and make better penetration by our teams possible from a well-supplied base camp.

The 2006 team is very grateful for the support given to them by Leonard Sefu, Director of the



Presentation of report to Director of National Parks

involve them in the scientific studies, which I believe they have found very valuable. Finally and not least, I thank the team who has put in many hours planning for, funding and conducting the expedition. It was a pleasure to lead such a good-natured group who made the job so easy. It is not always like this and they should be congratulated on their professionalism in sometimes difficult field conditions.

Peter Overton

It was necessary to get one of the team members back to Mzuzu for an early flight back to the U.K. for her degree award ceremony. This gave us an opportunity to call in at Vwase for a night. This hot low-lying area has great potential for game and wildlife studies and we hope to include it in future. It forms an interesting contrast to the cool

conditions of the high Nyika, with its heavy early

Department of National Parks and Wildlife and in particular the provision by Tommy Muhanga and Timothy Maseko of excellent staff to make the project possible. We met them in the Mzuzu office of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife and had a useful closing session prior to our departure for Lake Malawi and Lilongwe. In particular we appreciated the continuity and expertise provided by Lewis Tumbuka throughout our stay in the bush. It was particularly interesting to see the location of his school prior to 1976, now marked by a group of trees in the landscape. Everyone made a

great contribution and we have appreciated the opportunity to learn from them and