Newsletter

September 2020

Gorilla in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda, Credit: Ryoma Ostuka

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The Darwin Initiative supports developing countries to conserve biodiversity and reduce poverty. Funded by the UK Government, the Darwin Initiative provides grants for projects working in developing countries and UK Overseas Territories (OTs).

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- the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS)
- the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
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Monitoring team doing door to door monitoring and training of farmers, Uganda, Credit: Chimpanzee Trust

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Child reading guide on Jatamansi management, Credit: ANSAB

Publicity and information about the Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund

For more information on the Darwin Initiative please visit **gov.uk/government/groups/the-darwin-initiative**
For further details about current and completed Darwin Initiative projects, including their final application forms, please visit **darwininitiative.org.uk**

Fore more information on the IWT Challenge Fund, please visit **gov.uk/government/illegal-wildlife-trade-iwt-challenge-fund**
If you would like any further information about the IWT Challenge Fund, please email the team at **IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk**

If you would like to submit an article about your project for a future edition of the Newsletter, please email an article of no more than one side of A4, alongside any pictures, to either **Darwin-Newsletter@ltsi.co.uk** or **IWT-Newsletter@ltsi.co.uk**

Publicity and referencing Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund

We kindly remind project leaders that if they are publicising their work then it is important that they make every effort to mention IWT Challenge Fund and Darwin Initiative funding. This is important as it helps us to ensure the schemes retains a high profile and secures continued Government funding.

Group photo of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park staff wearing masks, Credit: CTPH

A word from Darwin and IWT

Covid-19 has impacted countries across the globe from those in remote island states to communities in busy towns and cities. In an effort to tackle the spread of the disease and protect their citizens, many country governments have opted to close international borders, enforce strict curfews and social distancing and encourage frequent hand washing. Despite these efforts Covid-19 has impacted the health of many and lives of so many more. Businesses, schools and organisations were forced to rethink how they carried out their day to day operations whilst trying to keep their customers, students, and employees safe.

However, the virus has impacted more than just the health of populations around the world and has significantly affected economies both nationally and internationally forcing many to either seek alternative sources of income or worsening an already difficult situation for those that struggled to provide for themselves and their families.

Despite the border closures and advice on staying at home, **wildlife crime and illegal hunting (driven by a combination of factors) rose** with many vulnerable and endangered species suffering from the lack of active enforcement and patrols. In this joint edition of the newsletter we hear from both Darwin Initiative and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund projects on how they overcame and adapted to the changing circumstances in their project countries as well as how they were able to play an active role in raising awareness on preventing the spread of the disease. There is also evidence that the loss of habitats and biodiversity addressed by these funds contributes to the **emergence of new pathogens - such as the Covid-19 virus**.

Through this newsletter we therefore hope to highlight the intrinsic link between the human health and that of our environment and celebrate those projects that gave a helping hand during such an uncertain time to those that needed it most.

We hope that you enjoy this edition of the newsletter!

Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka with Gorilla Conservation Coffee lead farmers, Credit: Jo Anne McArthur

Conservation & the coronavirus – Conservation through a public health approach

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the intrinsic and inseparable links between people, wildlife and ecosystems. For Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH), whose work is at the intersect of humans and wildlife, Covid-19 has shone a spotlight on the importance of work around the prevention and management of zoonotic disease, central to the organisation's work. Despite restrictions introduced to curb the spread of the disease, CTPH was granted an exemption from the travel restrictions by the Government of Uganda who recognised the centrality of CTPH's work to the mitigation of the spread, particularly in and around Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) where there is major concern for the risk that Covid-19 poses to the endangered Mountain Gorillas.

The Mountain Gorilla population in Bwindi represents 43% of the global total. If the virus were to spread to these gorillas, it could have devastating impacts on the survival of the species which has only recently started to show positive growth. Mountain Gorillas also face threats posed by harmful human activity which has only increased as tourism, on which many people relied for income and employment, has come to a complete standstill. As poverty rises, more people are entering the forest illegally to meet their basic needs. This was highlighted by the devastating death in June 2020 of Rafiki, a lead silverback Gorilla in Bwindi, who was killed by a poacher allegedly hunting for bush meat. Prior to Rafiki's death, BINP had not lost a Gorilla to poaching for nine years.

> "If the virus were to spread to these gorillas, it could have devastating impacts on the survival of the species which has only recently started to show positive growth"

Through community volunteer cadres, Village Health and Conservation Teams, whom CTPH trained on Covid-19 prevention measures, have shared information on how to prevent infection amongst the community and the gorilla population. Community sensitisation has included information on hygiene, mask wearing, proper handwashing, human waste management and the dangers of hunting and eating bush meat.

Village Health and Conservation Teams have also been trained in recognising Covid-19 symptoms, referring patients and contract tracing. CTPH has trained all people who enter the forest, including wildlife rangers, on measures to prevent the spread of infection and has supported procurement of infrared thermometers for use at entry points. In addition, gorilla guardians and wildlife rangers have been trained to monitor gorilla health and identify symptoms which may signal that Covid-19 has affected the gorilla population. Routine faecal sample collection amongst gorillas who come into closest contact with humans, with analysis at CTPH's field laboratory, enables further close monitoring of gorilla health and creates an early warning system.

"CTPH has trained all people who enter the forest, including wildlife rangers, on measures to prevent the spread of infection and has supported procurement of infrared thermometers for use at entry points"

Supporting community members, particularly in this time of greater need, is central to CTPH's approach to conservation. CTPH's social enterprise, Gorilla Conservation Coffee, provides vital income for farmers and reformed poachers around Bwindi who previously relied on tourism, subsistence farming and forest resources to feed their families. Gorilla Conservation Coffee negotiates international coffee prices above the local market price for quality raw coffee which is sold to conscious consumers in Uganda and globally. With a secure income, coffee farmers reduce dependence on natural resources and hunting to meet family needs, contributing to reduced habitat destruction and improved biodiversity conservation.

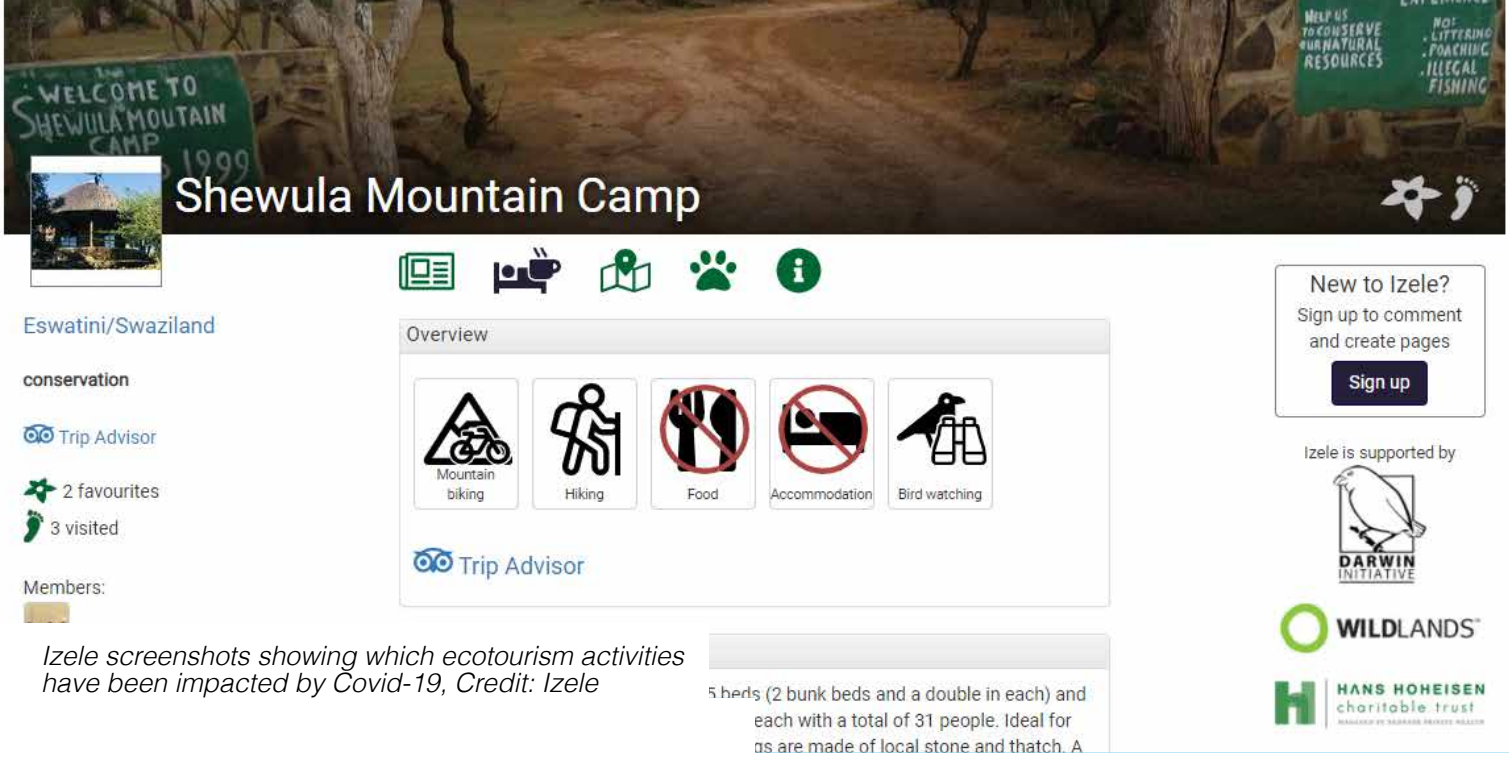
With the loss of tourists in Uganda who constituted a large part of the domestic market, Gorilla Conservation Coffee has recently turned to external markets, including engaging in a partnership with its first UK distributor, Moneyrow Beans.

Ranger guide Emmanuel checking on the Nkuringa Gorilla group, Credit: CTPH

CTPH continues to fundraise to support other key areas including Covid-19 research, park surveillance and supporting at risk community members with food crop gardens to alleviate hunger amongst the poorest community members who are most likely to turn to poaching in the absence of support. With the rapidly-changing landscape being moulded by the pandemic, CTPH remains committed to its mission of biodiversity conservation by enabling people, gorillas and other wildlife to coexist through improving their health and livelihoods, as its central focus on preventing and controlling disease transmission becomes ever more pertinent.

We would like to thank the Darwin Initiative for all the great support to our work, particularly in helping to evaluate the contribution of CTPH's health investments to conservation and sustainable development at Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and to expand our One Health model to Budongo Forest Reserve and Mount Elgon National Park.

For more information on project 23-023, please click **here**.



Izele screenshots showing which ecotourism activities have been impacted by Covid-19, Credit: Izele

Conservation social networking, ecotourism and land-use planning in Maputaland

Community-based ecotourism can reduce poverty and conserve biodiversity, but these businesses are often located in remote areas and lack the capacity to market themselves effectively. Our project has been tackling this problem in a biodiversity hotspot in southern Africa, developing an online system to promote ecotourism by working to expand the Izele social network to include Eswatini and Mozambique. But with the introduction of Covid-19, international ecotourism disappeared almost overnight. This has forced us to adapt and modify our project to cope with the new situation.

Our project focuses on Maputaland, a transfrontier biodiversity hotspot with high levels of poverty that covers Eswatini, Mozambique and South Africa. It is led by DICE at the University of Kent and the ecotourism component is a partnership with All Out Africa, KUWUKA JDA and Izele. The region has huge ecotourism potential with its beaches, impressive wildlife, beautiful scenery and cultural richness, but at present most tourists only visit the South Africa section. To tackle this, we adapted the **Izele online social network**, expanding it from South Africa to include Eswatini and Mozambique, and adding functionality so that ecotourism businesses can add their details. This lets community-based organisations like Shewula Mountain Camp create a page on Izele free of charge to show their location, their amenities and activities, and contact details.

Any tourist planning a visit to Maputaland can now see what is available in the region, rather than having to piece together the information from a range of different websites. In particular, tourists can see where different ecotourism activities are available, whether it's birdwatching or mountain biking.

Our project has produced a really important resource for supporting future community-based ecotourism in Maputaland. But how can Izele help now, during the pandemic? One important role is to provide a platform to share information about which activities and amenities are still available. While international tourism may have collapsed, many Mozambicans and Swatis still want to spend time in nature. In response, we have added new functionality to allow ecotourism businesses to provide details on their safety procedures and which of their activities and amenities are on hold because of the coronavirus.

Until the successful roll out of a Covid-19 vaccine, Izele will continue to let ecotourism businesses share up-to-date information about the services they provide. This is important because government guidelines are likely to change over time, and future restrictions might be location-specific. Izele can help reassure national and international tourists that they can safely return when the time is right, ensuring that ecotourism can continue to play its important development and conservation role.

For more information on project 25-003, please click **here**.

Alabien Mgombe at her local newly repaired borehole, Credit: Ripple Africa

Ripple Africa – helping more Malawians to wash their hands!

Having devastated many countries around the world, cases of Covid-19 are starting to rise quickly now in Malawi and there is concern that despite having a youthful population, those with underlying conditions could be extremely vulnerable. Currently, there is no lockdown in place as there is little assistance for those who would lose their income and face starvation if forced to stay at home. Prevention measures such as handwashing and social distancing are vital as medical facilities in rural areas are over-subscribed, under-staffed and lacking in basic equipment and medicine.

Ripple Africa runs large scale environmental projects in northern Malawi, including fuel efficient cookstoves, tree planting, forest conservation and 'Fish for Tomorrow', a project which is part funded by the Darwin Initiative and is empowering fishing communities to conserve fish along more than 300km of Lake Malawi's shoreline. Two District Councils approached Ripple to help ensure that communities and their families have the necessary information on how to protect themselves from Covid-19.

In a previous **Darwin newsletter** we shared information on how volunteer Fish Conservation Committees are helping to spread important messages on coronavirus

> "Prevention measures such as handwashing and social distancing are vital as medical facilities in rural areas are over-subscribed, under-staffed and lacking in basic equipment and medicine"

symptoms and the importance of social distancing and frequent handwashing. But in rural Malawi, the latter is not always easy as few households have running water and water has to be collected in buckets from boreholes which are located around the rural villages. During the planning stage of our communication campaign, we learned that a large number of boreholes in rural areas were broken, meaning that many people had to walk long distances to collect water to carry back to their homes.

Alabien Mgombe is a 24 year old business woman, married with four children. Three years ago, her community borehole broke, resulting in her having to walk for 40 minutes to collect water from the nearest borehole which was shared by many others.

Unfortunately, with so many other families also depending on the same borehole Alabien had to wake early to go and fetch water, and her business suffered as she couldn't start work until there was water at home.

Most boreholes in Nkhata Bay and Nkhotakota Districts were built by NGOs however funding for regular repairs and maintenance was overlooked, meaning that once the boreholes were built it was expected that District Councils would ensure that they were maintained. Sadly, there has seldom been enough money in their budgets for this. There are 2,271 boreholes across Nhkata Bay District with a similar number in Nkhotakota District and around 20% of these are broken. Repairing these boreholes would reduce over-crowding at the ones that are working and provide more Malawians with easier access to water for drinking and crucially for washing their hands during the Covid-19 pandemic.

> "Repairing these boreholes would reduce over-crowding at the ones that are working and provide more Malawians with easier access to water for drinking and crucially for washing their hands during the Covid-19 pandemic"

In addition to producing information leaflets, organising community awareness campaigns and providing soap and buckets for handwashing in busy areas such as health centres, beach landing sites and markets Ripple Africa has also repaired 240 boreholes. An estimated 150 people use each of these boreholes, so in total this will have directly benefited around 36,000 people, some visiting them several times each day. Many of these people are also beneficiaries of the Fish for Tomorrow project, all of whom are extremely grateful!

Alabien's business has now improved as she no longer has a long journey and a queue to collect her water. She told us, "The coming of coronavirus has affected us and measures have been put in place to avoid catching it. We are very happy that our borehole is now working and we do not allow people to pump water until they have washed their hands with soap". In Singo Village, 21 families depend on one borehole but when it broke seven years ago, they had to walk long distances to neighbouring villages to fetch water. Villagers are really happy to have had their borehole fixed and are grateful to Ripple Africa.

Rabecca Kamanga is delighted to now collect water close to her home, Credit: Ripple Africa

Rabecca Kamanga told us, "We have also learnt about coronavirus because of Ripple Africa. We are now taking part in social distancing, staying home and washing our hands with clean water and soap".

This is not Ripple Africa's normal work – we have never been involved in water, sanitation and hygiene projects before. We were fortunate that the experienced borehole maintenance teams employed by the District Councils were already in place and could be deployed quickly to repair the boreholes, once we were able to pay for transport and spare parts. We are happy that we have been able to ensure that many more people now have easier access to water for handwashing. However, there are still many boreholes that are broken – so if anyone would like to help us repair more, please contact **info@rippleafrica.org**.

Let's hope that we can help keep Malawi safe!

For more information on project 25-009, please click **here**.

Young farmer with his potato harvest, Credit: Chimpanzee Trust

Conservation and the coronavirus in Uganda

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the entire world, greatly affected everyday life, businesses and even conservation! Travel restrictions and social distancing has forced a lot of organisations, governments, and industries to adapt and rethink how they conduct their business.

The Chimpanzee Trust is currently implementing a project funded by the Darwin Initiative, "Community adaptability to loss occasioned by wildlife in Uganda". The project is addressing Human-Wildlife Conflicts in the Albertine Landscape in Uganda, where 98% of households rely on agriculture as their primary livelihood occupation, of which 79% is in subsistence agriculture. However, wildlife and especially chimpanzees are increasingly being forced into proximity with local subsistence farmers due to increasing encroachment and fragmentation of forests resulting in human-wildlife conflict.

Due to the risks related to Covid-19 many field activities and operations were restricted. Whilst farming communities were able to continue with their daily activities, monitoring of the project activities was impaired by the lockdown restrictions, coupled with the rising costs of in-kind and technical inputs. In an effort to fight the spread of the coronavirus the President of Uganda placed restrictions on gatherings, closed schools and enforced strict curfews.

The team was able to adapt to these new restrictions by carrying out door to door visits for training and used local FM radio whilst encouraging call-in sessions to spread awareness to farmers, local businesses, students and the general public on human-wildlife conflict. Messages on the risk of disease through wildlife interaction and infection prevention were share daily in local languages on the local FM radio stations.

The project team received recognition for their good work through the issuing of a special permit that allowed the team to continue to use their vehicles to make necessary visits to farmers and continue to progress towards project activities, even with a significantly smaller team.

Many local farmers felt the negative impacts of the pandemic through the deprecation of fresh produce and the increase in crimes such as illegal logging and the encroachment of protected areas. However, despite the widespread hardship those farmers involved in our project thrived thanks to the diverse range of high value and resilient crops they were able to cultivate like potatoes, soybeans and onions.

Although lockdown is slowing easing and things are returning to normal, it is clear that Covid-19 has had an impact on the project progress to date.

For more information on project 25-028, please click **here**.

Sundew Drosera uniflora *growing on* Astelia pumila*, Credit: SAERI*

Soil mapping and social distancing

In 2018 our project based in the Falkland Islands began and just over two years later is soon coming to an end. It was led by the Falklands-based South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) in collaboration with the Falkland Islands Government's Department of Agriculture, James Hutton Institute, UK Falkland Islands Trust, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, the Natural History Museum and the University of Magallanes. The aim of the project was to deliver a national soil map and tools for sustainable land management as well as provide baseline data to be used to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

> "Climate change is bringing about changes in soil and peat properties in the Falkland Islands, which may have detrimental consequences for carbon storage, biodiversity and land management"

It is thought that climate change is bringing about changes in soil and peat properties in the Falkland Islands, which may have detrimental consequences for carbon storage, biodiversity and land management.

In order to monitor the anticipated impact, the project established a baseline for peat and erosion extent, among many other soil property layers.

Digital soil mapping was carried out with data collected on topography, geology and habitat classification. The fieldwork took the team to about 200 survey point across the entire Falkland Islands, many of them in remote locations, which could only be accessed by a long hike or with off-road vehicles. Fortunately, the fieldwork and lab work for the soil maps were completed before the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic. However the timing of the final soil modelling was not so lucky and was scheduled to start right at the beginning of the pandemic.

Project partner Dr. Matt Aitkenhead at the James Hutton Institute, who ran the soil modelling, reports on how Covid-19 impacted on his workflow: "The soil mapping component of the project was already done with a fair degree of social distancing prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. From my comfortable office in Aberdeen, I would receive a steady stream of data, queries and requests from 13,000 kilometres away in the Falkland Islands. Never having been to the Falklands, this meant a slight sense of separation from the difficulties the field team had to go through.

When I moved my office to my bedroom in March I realised just how much I had relied on access to good internet and relatively high computing performance. Using an elderly laptop and WiFi with 300 kbps bandwidth, the mapping became more of a challenge. The main workaround for this was to connect remotely to a server at work. This meant I could generate models at home and run them from a server with faster access to the vast repository of spatial data generated prior to lockdown – there was no way that data was going to fit on my laptop! A further challenge was the demand on our remote servers, which made them slightly erratic, causing my code to crash every couple of hours. So I had to work out how to avoid creating maps in one big code run, instead making the system pick up from where the last crash had ended and then stitching multiple pieces of map together – about as much fun as it sounds".

Hard work and perseverance paid off and the soil maps are now available on **SAERI's webGIS**. The project also had a strong stakeholder engagement element and raised awareness locally on climate change impacts on soils and land management. Denise Blake, Falkland Islands Government's Environmental Officer and Policy Advisor states: "In a predominantly agricultural landscape, knowledge of our soils underpins sustainable management. From an environmental point of view, mapping our soils ensures that we can work towards maintaining their health, not just for carbon storage, but for the life they support on our islands."

"From an environmental point of view, mapping our soils ensures that we can work towards maintaining their health, not just for carbon storage, but for the life they support on our islands"

- Denise Blake, Environmental Officer & Policy Advisor

Internet connection can be a challenge in the Falkland Islands and online maps may not be accessible to everyone at any time, through stakeholder engagement it was revealed that there was an interest in offline maps in addition to the webGIS. To accommodate the request, local landowners also received layered pdf files with farm-specific soil maps alongside an interpretation guide to aid them with understanding and application of the maps. The soil maps provided will hopefully aid in directing land management towards a sustainable future.

For more information on DPLUS083, please click **here**.

Soil surveyor Roberto Jara Langhaus at Bluff Cove, Credit: SAERI

Hassan Golo and local women planting trees whilst wearing protective equipment, Credit: George Odera

Coping with effects of the coronavirus on conservation in Tana River Delta, Kenya

The first case of Covid-19 was detected in Kenya on 13th March 2020. In an effort to curb the spread of the virus, the Kenya government banned gatherings, implemented a curfew and placed lockdown restrictions on the Nairobi Metropolitan Area, Kilifi, Mombasa, Mandera and Kwale counties. Kenyan locals and residents were required to social distance and where necessary ensure that face coverings were worn. This strict lockdown was enforced for five months and on 7th July the government started to phase out some of these restrictions.

Throughout the country and in Tana River Delta people and biodiversity struggled to cope, particularly in the first weeks of the lockdown when the changes were the most difficult. Despite the challenges, staff, partners and project beneficiaries were trying their best to adapt to the new normal and ensure that progress was still ongoing. However, this was not always possible for all project activities, in particular those requiring face to face meetings or gatherings. As a result project work focused on strengthening community governance of the Tana Delta Indigenous and Community Conservation Area (ICCA) was delayed.

Before the pandemic, 45 villages within the ICCA were supported to form village natural resource and land use committees (VNRLUC). VNRLUC were in the midst of location level elections for delegates to represent them in the ICCA management committee when Covid-19 struck.

George Odera, the Nature Kenya Site Project Manager says, “Unfortunately, low literacy levels, coupled with poor internet and high poverty levels means that it is impossible to hold virtual community consultative meetings. While it is possible to hold many other meetings via platforms such as Zoom and Skype, at the community level face to face meetings is what works”. In an effort to overcome this challenge, Nature Kenya and the Tana Delta Conservation Network (TDCN) held small community meetings restricting the number of attendees to no more than 15 people and ensured that people washed their hands, wore face masks and observed social distancing rules.

> “Throughout the country and in Tana River Delta people and biodiversity struggled to cope, particularly in the first weeks of the lockdown when the changes were the most difficult”

Omar Bocha, TDCN chairman says, “Coronavirus has dealt a blow on our efforts to consolidate community action towards conservation. The Tana Delta communities are accustomed to making collective decisions in large community meetings bringing together opinion leaders, faith based leaders, political and administrative officials and other community members. In the absence of

Small family biodiversity monitoring team, Credit: Kelly Mutuku

such meetings it takes more time, effort and financial resources to achieve joint community decisions on the conservation agenda".

The challenges faced by these communities was echoed by Dolphin Komora, the TDCN secretary who noted that "Covid-19 has hampered the conservation of critical species and sites in Tana Delta because community income streams have been decimated. Surplus farm produce was not sold and generally people lost alternative livelihood sources. Worst still, we suffered one of the heaviest floods around the period of the lockdown, making life even more unbearable for farmers, pastoralists and fishermen in the Delta".

Furthermore, Dolphin points out that the pandemic has significantly impacted the roll out of TDCN's poultry enterprise as the communities were unable to obtain quality eggs coupled with the fact that that many companies and individuals were forced to scale down their operations, ultimately making inputs difficult. TDCN has a strategy to hatch chicks, vaccinate them and distribute them to communities as a way of stimulating commercial scale community driven indigenous chicken production enterprise. This slows down degradation of fragile ecosystems because households that are food secure and financially stable are unlikely to engage in activities that destroy nature.

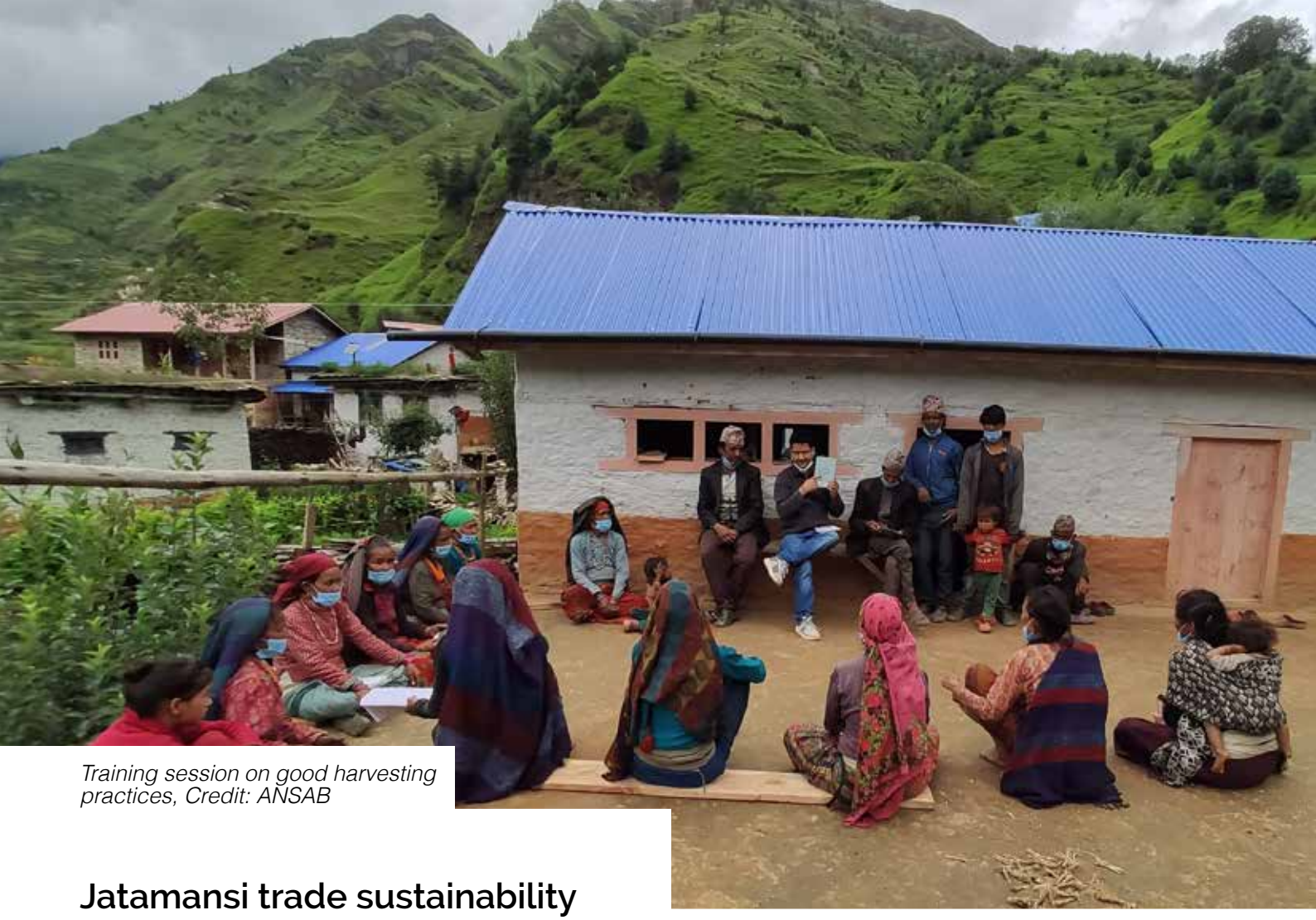
Despite best efforts, Covid-19 has impacted nature as well as people. Community scouts are reporting instances of increased poaching of small game due to community attempts to survive the economic impacts of the pandemic, which is compounded by the reduced surveillance and enforcement by government agencies during the period.

The pandemic is causing serious challenges that will become clearer with time. Some community members who initially worked in urban centres lost their jobs. As a result, many of them returned to the villages and embarked in farming activities once the lockdown was lifted, often in areas that are considered as environmentally fragile. Those individuals with the financial means were able to purchase heavy machinery to enable them to utilise larger areas of land for agriculture, posing a serious threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

This reality is captured by Mariam Basaa, the TDCN Treasurer who observes, "Requests for community support for certified seeds and other farm inputs have increased tremendously this season. Further interrogation by TDCN points to a worrying trend, with some of the traditionally conserved areas being put to farming". She adds, "TDCN has increased surveillance of beneficiaries to ensure that people do not get support to destroy nature. Whereas food security is important for our communities, I think we shall be risking our lives more if we begin destroying critical areas to create farm lands".

Joint efforts of TDCN and Nature Kenya on biodiversity monitoring were slowed due to gathering restrictions. However, biodiversity monitoring, training and family level monitoring have been restructured to ensure lower numbers of individuals per group, with any visits to households adhering to social distancing rules. Serah Munguti, the Nature Kenya Policy and Advocacy Manager says, "The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered unprecedented challenges to biodiversity in the Tana River Delta. We are learning, but the situation at national and local levels is rapidly changing. The situation is fluid as infections in Kenya are still on an upward trend. As we come up with new strategies to adapt to the new normal, fragile ecosystems and community livelihoods are in jeopardy".

For more information on project 24-013, please click **here**.



Training session on good harvesting practices, Credit: ANSAB

Jatamansi trade sustainability and Covid-19

As our project "Succeeding with CITES: Sustainable and equitable Jatamansi trade from Nepal" entered its final year, the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, with wide-ranging impacts on project implementation. National lockdown (March-June/July) saw many socially vulnerable people left with no access to basic necessities. Although short-term relief was offered this had little effect with no stable safety nets in place. There are still concerns about a possible surge in Covid-19 cases and proliferation of further negative impacts. The project implementation districts of Jumla and Mugu have not been exempt from the effects of the virus, with reported cases and the influx of about 50,000 returnee migrant workers to the region adding to the pressure.

> "There has also been evidence of illegal logging and forest loss due to fire, as forest officials were under lockdown, meaning local patrols and monitoring could not take place as usual"

In the project's target communities, collection and trade of Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) halted, due to limitations that were placed on incoming generating opportunities, such as the harvesting of key Yarsagumba (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*), Banlasun (*Fritillaria cirrhosa*) and Morel mushroom (*Morchella sp.*) coinciding with the lockdown period. Unfortunately, Yarsagumba and Banlasun are usually harvested by groups of collectors, but due to the restrictions on gatherings the activity was banned.

For Morel mushrooms there was a significant reduction in harvesting, despite travel permits being issued by the Divisional Forest Offices. No harvesting of Yarsagumba or Banlasun happened this year (compared to the average annual harvest of 100 kg of Yarsagumba and 6,000-7,000 kg of Banlasun) and only 200-250 kg of morel mushrooms were collected in Jumla, compared to the 4,000-5,000 kg usually collected annually in the project areas.

There has also been evidence of illegal logging and forest loss due to fire, as forest officials were under lockdown, meaning local patrols and monitoring could not take place as usual.

Checking participants temperatures before the training, Credit: ANSAB

Communities put more emphasis on subsistence agriculture in anticipation of food shortages in the medium-term, efforts that were helped by timely rainfall and an increased labour force (from returned migrant workers).

Trade in CITES Appendix-II listed species from Nepal, such as Jatamansi, was effectively halted, with government officials working from home and unable to issue export permits. Exports re-started in August 2020, with the first permits issued for trade in Jatamansi oil and marc (the residue left after the extraction of essential oil). Globally, TRAFFIC is monitoring the potential medium- to long-term impacts of the increasing demand for herbal products as a potential Covid-19 treatment. This demand for herbal products is growing around the world. At the project sites, local communities also relied on herbal products to support their immune systems and increased the use of *Paris polyphylla* in tea.

Project activities were affected by the country-wide lockdown and travel restrictions, with the project team consequently adapting the workplan. During the lockdown the project team worked virtually with local municipalities and mobilised local staff in target districts to share information on Covid-19 prevention and control approaches, based on the WHO and government regulations, and to deliver critical supplies. Virtual training and planning continued with local staff once the initial restrictions had been lifted in an effort to restart capacity building activities for the Community Forest User Groups.

Preparatory activities to meet the requirements at the community level of the planned FairWild certification audit were ongoing and discussions on the feasibility and safety of Nepal Jatamansi were discussed. In an effort to continue to collect necessary information on household socio-economic data, local staff adhere to social distancing protocols.

Team members from project partner ANSAB moved to the field from Kathmandu in August after partial lifting of the lockdown, following all necessary and recommended precautions to ensure the safety of communities. All interactions ensure rigorous health and safety measures are in place, and control/prevention training takes place before the commencement of any project technical session. The project has been providing personal protective equipment to community members and trainers, the body temperature of participants is checked, and trainings are arranged to ensure social distancing, with the number of participants limited to 25.

While Covid-19 has created many challenges for project implementation and local people in Nepal, with appropriate precautions and safety measures now in place, the team are optimistic that the successes of the project so far will be built upon and the overall Outcome of the project achieved.

For more information on project 25-018, please click **here**.

Hussan Farmers composting,
Credit: Palestine Museum of Natural History team

Can conservation efforts progress, when faced by political oppression & Covid-19 pandemic?

In the Palestinian villages of the western area of Bethlehem governorate stands the last significantly biodiversity rich area. Unfortunately, this area faces a multitude of threats from Israeli occupation and other human activities that have resulted in economic and social marginalisation. Funded by Darwin Initiative and implemented by the Palestinian Institute for Biodiversity & Sustainability (PIBS) of Bethlehem University, this project was started in 2018 with the aim of strengthening sustainability in this area. Through one of the main project Outputs, over 80 farmers from the communities of Battir, Hussan, AlWalaja, and Beit Jala will benefit from increased capacity.

Through the implementation of awareness raising activities such as conducting biodiversity inventories and designing comprehensive conservation plans, the project aims to enlighten the local populations about the importance of biodiversity conservation and restore key habitats in the area.

This project is a British and Palestinian collaboration to conserve biodiversity in Al-Makhrour Valley of Bethlehem (Palestine) benefitting the local communities through sustainable use of ecosystem services, including promoting agriculture/green practices, developing ecotourism, and reducing human impact via environmental awareness and education programmes whilst promoting sustainable lifestyles.

Through these activities the project hopes to revive traditional farming methods, promote ecotourism and build the capacity of the local population.

The strategy and tactics employed in this project to empower the local people takes into account the rich natural and cultural heritage and also the threats and challenges they face. The valley chosen for the work is designated as a threatened UNESCO World Heritage Site and this adds a new and important layer to the efforts to protect this area. Throughout its lifetime thus far, the project has achieved significant progress. It has successfully conducted a survey outlining the flora and fauna found in the valley, identified threats and developed a management plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, restored three key areas, worked with 80 farmers to implement eco-farming, developed a nature path for ecotourism and engaged the community in environmental awareness raising activities.

Covid-19 was first identified in the Bethlehem area in early March and resulted in lockdown restrictions which are currently still in place. However, our team and project beneficiaries were able to overcome these difficulties and continued to develop programmes and activities in line with our plans. This was achieved through flexible planning and also by getting special provisions for farmers and team members working in the valley, as food production is considered to be an essential service. If anything, the pandemic highlighted the importance of these project activities for welfare of both the local human communities and nature in marginalised areas.

For more information on project 25-030, please click **here**.

STEP staff, Innocent Mwasubila washing his hands, Credit: STEP

Coexisting with new preventative measures

By coexisting with new safety protocols for Covid-19, we have been able to continue our efforts in elephant conservation and human-elephant coexistence in the Kilombero Valley, Tanzania. The Kilombero Valley is an area of high value to both people and elephants, consisting of fertile farmland and wildlife corridors located between protected areas. The work of the Southern Tanzania Elephant Program (STEP) has so far focused on mediating a peaceful coexistence between the people and animals here, but this spring we have added the important job of doing our part to prevent the spread of Covid-19 to our list of tasks.

As the novel coronavirus moved its way through many countries in the world, we had a little extra time to consider which precautions to take at our project sites before the virus was officially detected in Tanzania in March. Although much of our HQ-based staff began working from home, we were able to continue the majority of our field operations, including implementing beehive fences with farmers' groups to protect farms from elephant crop damage, by establishing careful protocols and consulting with our community partners on how they wished to operate during the pandemic.

Some of the most important preventative measures that we enacted were hand washing stations at our Kilombero office together with a mobile unit for teams to bring along to meetings at project sites.

This has meant that both our team and members of our farmers' groups have been able to wash their hands before and after meetings. We made an effort to conduct all meetings outside and to keep a 2m distance between each participant. STEP staff and members of the farmers' groups received over 120 reusable cloth masks as well as training on how to produce more. We have also ensured a continuous supply of soap and sanitizers to our local teams through regular check-ins and southern Tanzania's excellent bus system which enables rapid sending of supplies!

For these measures to be effective, it was important to distribute information about Covid-19 and to follow up and monitor implementation. During our weekly meetings with farmers' groups, we reviewed large format posters printed with best practices on how to wash hands, wear masks and stay safe. We reviewed symptoms and talked about how to find help.

We are fortunate that despite Covid-19, we have been able to continue with our planned activities and made our conservation efforts coexist with the new preventative measures. As Tanzania shows signs of recovery from Covid-19, we continue to keep hand washing at the forefront of our work!

For more information on project 26-007, please click **here**.

Tour guide teaching local fishers how to become community guides, Credit: Raiz Azul Cabo Verde

Physically farther away but socially closer than ever: challenges and solutions in Santiago island fragmented by Covid-19

In the middle of March, just couple of weeks after the start of national quarantine in Cabo Verde, it became evident who was being affected the most - people in rural communities, particularly those who were either single parents or those that did not benefit from social security. As a response, project partner the Association for the Development of São Francisco (ADSF) organised an initiative to prepare basic food baskets for these families. This initiative was partly funded through the Darwin Initiative grant which had been redistributed to buy necessities such as flour, oil and soap. The Municipality of Praia also stepped in and, through this collaborative effort, over 600 basic need baskets were delivered to families struggling with daily needs in São Francisco.

During the quarantine, project partner Cabo Verdean Ecotourism Association (ECOCV), refocused their efforts on producing educational and participatory monitoring materials such as the 'sharks - kings of the sea' and expositions for the eco-centres currently in development. The Italian project partner ViaggieMiraggi unfortunately had to cancel their trip to the project site due to travel restrictions. Despite this set back, they managed to collaborate with the other project partners and lead organisation through social media channels. In May both partners came together to host an online session as an opportunity to share more information on local stories, traditions and the natural treasures of Cabo Verde, this session was attended by a total of 60 people. However, some project partners were more significantly impacted by Covid-19 than others. While reflecting on the impacts of Covid-19, Nelito Tavares, a marine tour operator (for Nauticas Tavares), pointed out that because of the national and international travel cancellations tourism dropped up to 100% on Santiago Island.

> "While reflecting on the impacts of Covid-19, Nelito Tavares, a marine tour guide operator pointed out that because of national and international travel cancellations tourism dropped up to 100% on Santiago Island"

Due to the loss of revenue from the lack of tourism he could no longer offer boat tours and had to go back to fishing in an effort to provide for his family. At the same time fish prices dropped by 30-50% due to the lesser demand by local people.

Loggerhead turtle carapaces found during a monitoring survey, Credit: Raiz Azul Cabo Verde

Terrestrial tour guide, Fredy Cardoso (Cardoso Tours), member of the tour guide association of Santiago island, added that he worked mainly with international tour companies for over 10 years. Since the end of March, he and all of his colleagues from the association are unemployed. High uncertainty and pressure lie on their shoulders since majority of them were the main providers for their families.

> “Some [poachers] used this opportunity to earn extra income by taking advantage of reduced patrol effort on beaches, others due to the economic downturn saw it as a way to provide meat for their families”

As for the local marine biodiversity, illegal sea turtle catches increased in Santiago and other islands of the archipelago where these marine reptiles nest. Despite the new stricter national regulations, poachers continued to kill and sell turtles and their products. Some used this opportunity to earn extra income by taking advantage of reduced patrol effort on beaches, others due to the economic downturn saw it as a way to provide meat for their families.

The main species that was targeted by the increase in poaching was the loggerhead *Caretta caretta*, with Cabo Verde being the third largest nesting ground in the world for this species.

As the uncertainty continues the Eco-Village project seems to be addressing local needs more than was initially planned or expected.

The glass recycling machine in Rincão village is already running and community members are being trained to manage and operate it independently. Local professional tour guides such as Nelito and Fredy, who lost their jobs, joined the project as trainers of community guides and teach fishermen, fish sellers and unemployed youth to gain new skills. The new national tourism strategy is being adjusted to boost internal tourism. Thus, our aim to develop a new rural eco-network on Santiago island and offer novel explorations, balanced with respect to the land and sea, is growing in demand.

Through these small steps, we see that our work is providing hope to the local people, and more than ever it is evident that strong resilient coastal communities are only possible when surrounded by healthy natural ecosystems.

For more information on project 26-025, please click **here**.

Training for chicken farmers in Rawalo Village, Credit: Moses Nyawasa

Supporting vital conservation efforts in Yala Swamp amidst the Covid-19 pandemic

In Kenya, like many other countries in the world, Covid-19 remains a major threat with negative socio-economic impacts and government directives restricting movements, banning gatherings and encouraging people to stay home. Life as we knew it has dramatically changed – despite this, Nature Kenya and the Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group (YESSG) have strengthened their resolve to ensure that critical conservation actions continue for the Yala Swamp amidst the global pandemic.

In collaboration with YESSG and the Yala Planning Advisory Committee, Nature Kenya has intensified awareness creation to rally community support for the adoption of the Yala swamp Land Use Plan as a policy. This is done through a local vernacular radio broadcast on Bulala FM, in Budalang'i, Busia County.

The Land Use Plan provides guidelines on how land within the swamp and the surrounding areas will be used while ensuring development is sustainable and compatible with biodiversity protection.

The broadcasts have been running since 29th May 2020 with a two-hour session taking place weekly on Sunday nights. These broadcasts have been well received with many community members calling in to ask for advice and clarification. In addition to offering advice on the radio channel, Nature Kenya and YESSG have also used it as an opportunity to broadcast key messages to mark global events such as the World Environment Day, World Migratory Bird Day, and World Nature Day among others.

> "Life as we knew it has dramatically changed - despite this, Nature Kenya and the Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group have strengthened their resolve to ensure that critical conservation actions continue for the Yala Swamp amidst the global pandemic"

Between March and July 2020, farmers established their own farm woodlots with 30,430 exotic tree seedlings and planted over 34,972 indigenous tree seedlings within the River Yala riparian zone. They also rehabilitated an additional 41ha of degraded areas within Yala Swamp through papyrus planting, constituting 82% of papyrus planting targets for the year, highlighting that despite the global pandemic, regular biodiversity monitoring has continued.

"With reduced human activities, papyrus is thriving as compared to 2016 when Lake Kanyaboli was in a sorry state. It is motivating to see Kombo beach teeming with birds, this is evidence that our conservation efforts are not in vain and habitats can recover if well managed," remarks Ibrahim Onyango, one of the lead monitors and an avid birder. "With Covid-19, I have been birding alone. Last month in a span of three hours I was able to record over 192 bird species!" he exclaims with excitement.

Boniface Kesa, another lead monitor states, "During this pandemic, we have witnessed interesting wildlife trends especially within the lower parts of the swamp. For instance, it was easy to spot the shy Sitatunga antelope. There was an upsurge in the numbers of wild pigs and hippos. With the excessive flooding experienced this year, there was even a boom of the rare and coveted mud fish such that it didn't require taking out a boat to catch one!" A record number of sightings of the elusive Sitatunga antelope which is nationally endangered has occurred more frequently between April and July than in the last four years.

> "During this pandemic, we have witnessed interesting wildlife trends especially within the lower parts of the swamp"

Despite this, threats to biodiversity have increased. "Cases of illegal fishing within Lake Kanyaboli have tripled in the last four months with records of an average of up to 15 cases reported per day per beach. We found out that a few of the perpetrators were driven by desperation for survival after losing their main sources of income while other fishermen were taking advantage of weakened enforcement efforts occasioned by government advisories encouraging people to stay and/or work from home," asserts Peter Ayasi, Chairperson, Alego-Usonga Beach Management Unit Network. This is a significant threat considering that the lake is home to populations of cichlids that are considered to be extinct elsewhere. In an effort to combat these threats Nature Kenya is collaborating with the County Fisheries Departments to develop a fisheries management plan to enhance management of fisheries resources and safeguard such species that are of high biodiversity value yet highly threatened.

> "Cases of illegal fishing within Lake Kanyaboli have tripled in the last four months with records of an average of up to 15 cases reported per day per beach"

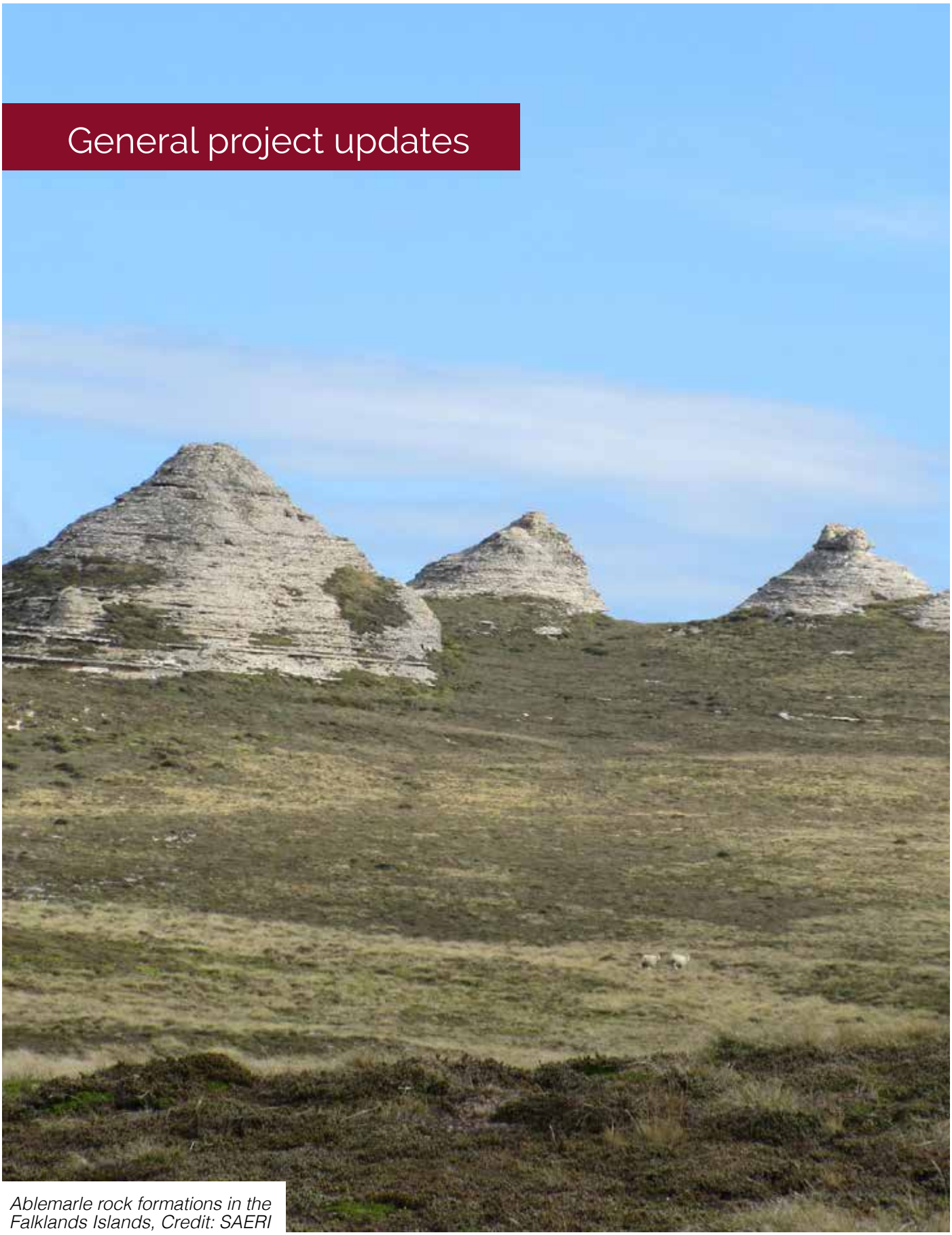
Despite the milestones, activities that would benefit from face to face meetings have been a challenge. To overcome this, Nature Kenya has developed a protocol to protect staff, beneficiaries and partners from infection. This includes use of meeting venues with hand washing facilities, sanitising and fumigation of all contact surfaces, provision of hand sanitisers, limiting meetings to 15 people and limiting meeting time. Additionally, masks must be worn during meetings whilst adhering to social distancing.

Luckily, there are a lot of project activities that do not require meetings. Through the use of conservation agriculture and climate smart agriculture techniques farmers have produced 3,008kgs of high value vegetables worth Ksh.120,320 (£849) and 1,450 kg of cereals worth Ksh. 182,000 (£1,284) and Fish farmers were able to produce 200kg of feeds worth Ksh. 50,000 (£353). Chicken farmers completed the construction of a poultry rearing unit in Rawalo village and stocked it with 150 indigenous chickens. Project partner YESSG completed the construction of a papyrus products bulking and marketing outlet in Siaya Town with the aim of promoting community-driven green value chains in the Yala Swamp through access to large external markets. Proceeds go to enhance community livelihoods with a small percentage going to provide innovative financing for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Yala Swamp Indigenous and Community Conservation Area.

We are exploring how we might deliver activities such as meetings by members of county assembly to adopt the Land Use Plan, and formation of village natural resource and land use committees.

For more information on project 26-003, please click **here**.

General project updates



Ablemarle rock formations in the Falklands Islands, Credit: SAERI

Spectators reading STEP booklets, Credit: STEP

Football for people and elephants: Engaging future protectors

Elephant protection is vital for the species' immediate survival, but how do we make sure that they stay safe in the future? One way is to engage communities living next door to wildlife conservation areas and increase the positive association towards elephants in areas with many human-elephant interactions. This was exactly what we hoped to achieve with the awareness raising Tembo Cup Week 2019 (tembo is Swahili for elephant). With more than 10,000 individuals reached through matches, movie nights and other outreach and ten schools participating in teaching events, the week laid the foundation for a new generation of elephant protectors and has been a milestone on the road to coexistence. The Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund has helped fund these and several more activities to increase positive associations between humans and elephants.

At the Southern Tanzania Elephant Program (STEP), the vision is to create a long and peaceful future for the elephants of Southern Tanzania and for the ecosystems and communities on which they inter-depend. This is the main reason why we introduced Tembo Cup Week, to promote conservation awareness and discuss the, experiences, and ways to stay safe around elephants through providing an array of events for all ages.

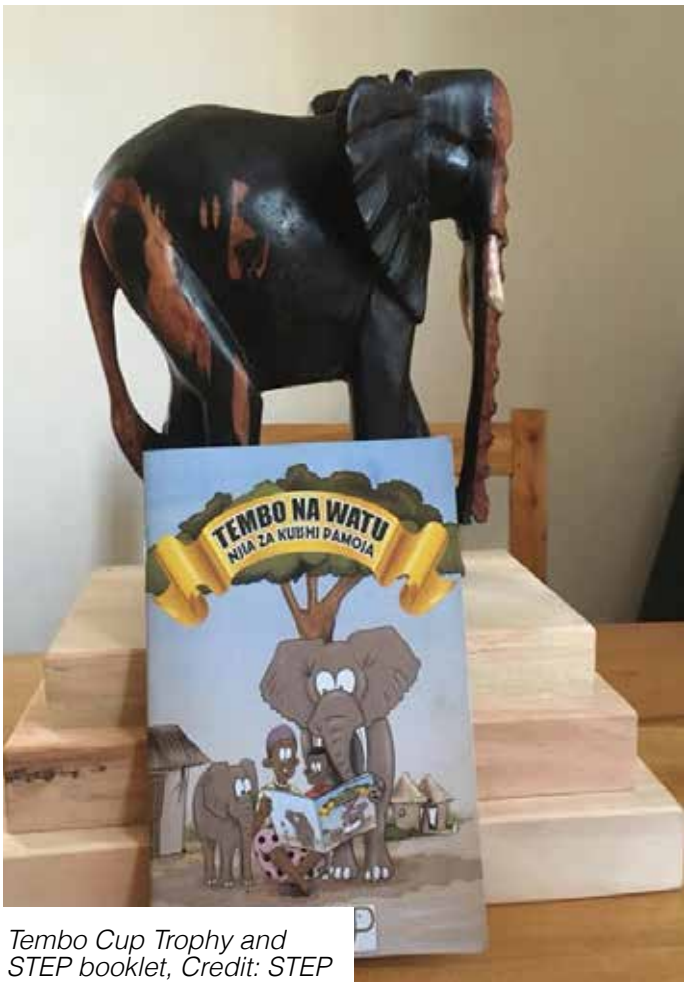
Twelve teams from five villages bordering the Rungwa Game Reserve joined for a total of 13 football matches in the cornerstone of the week, The Tembo Cup. One thing that all teams had in common was that they lived right next door to elephants. As part of the matches, participants and spectators were given the opportunity to share experience and knowledge of human-elephant interactions. Before, during and after matches, STEP used a megaphone to share key facts about human-elephant interaction to the spectators.

> "Spectators loved hearing about how much water elephants can drink each day or how much food they need to survive"

As part of the knowledge dissemination, other STEP staff moved around setting up small group discussions and distributing coexistence booklets and leaflets to match spectators. The main topics discussed were the causes and impacts of interaction, the ecological needs of elephants (specifically water, food and home range requirements) and basics of elephant behaviour. Spectators loved hearing about how much water elephants can drink each day and how much food they need to survive.

Staff also discussed ways to mitigate crop damage and simple ways to increase human safety around elephants. Football matches were supplemented by other events during the week. These events included: five formal and eight informal village trainings reaching ~7,000 people; training at eight primary schools and one secondary school reaching over 3,100 students; and film nights held in nine locations reaching over 2,000 members of the community. The trainings were facilitated using educational materials created by STEP, most notably "People and Elephants," a short booklet focused on human elephant conflict, its causes, mitigation strategies and techniques for staying safe. STEP created a booklet specifically for the communities around Rungwa Game Reserve in early 2019.

"The trainings were facilitated using educational materials created by STEP, most notably "People and Elephants", a short booklet focused on human elephant conflict, its causes, mitigation strategies and techniques for staying safe"



Tembo Cup Trophy and STEP booklet, Credit: STEP

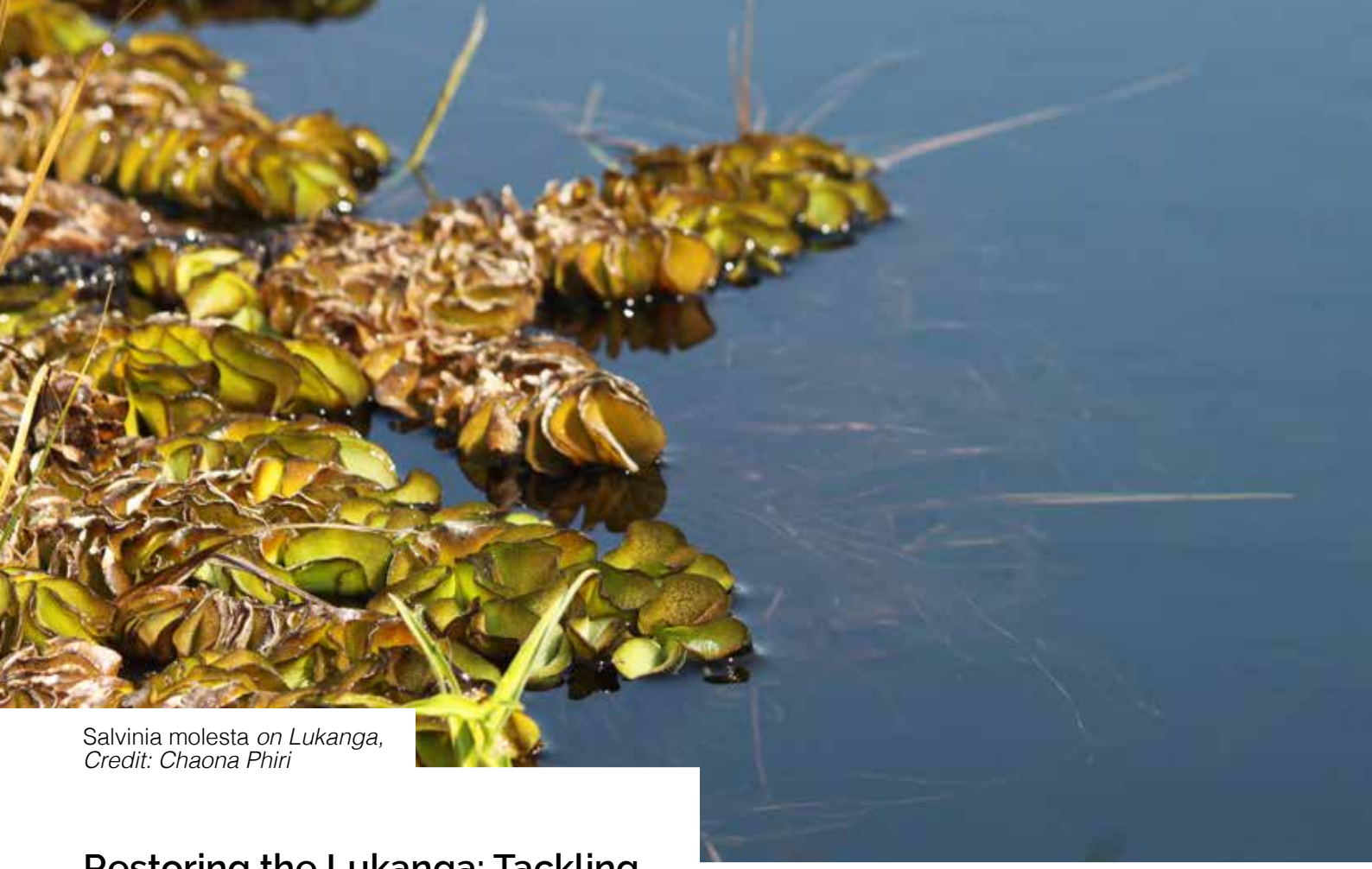
We also used a series of wildlife documentaries in Swahili showing scenes of human-elephant interactions from East Africa. The events were designed to build love and respect towards elephants among children, explore current challenges, experiences and practices among adults as well as to prepare youth as future decision makers in agriculture and settlement expansions.

The event was carefully planned in cooperation between STEP, participating villages, leaders of the football teams, the Itigi District Council, the Itigi District Football Federation as well as staff at the Rungwa Game Reserve. All stakeholders had the opportunity to give feedback on initial plans. Before the event, football teams signed an agreement, committing to comply with agreed tournament regulations and guidelines, specifically regarding the finality of referee decisions, the procedure for contesting a call and overall guidelines for fair play.

One of our experiences was the importance of investing in official tournament infrastructure and requiring submission of official team photos from participants. This helped to underline the importance of the event and increased participation and adherence.

The District Community Development Officer and the Rungwa Game Reserve Manager provided the closing remarks and awarded the winners with prizes. A call for more tournaments to reach, educate and entertain more communities has been part of the feedback. Tembo Cup 2020 is scheduled for early November, pending the developments of Covid-19 and a successful national election. We hope the rains are not early this year or it will make for some wet games!

This article features project IWT052 "Increasing Capacity for Anti-Poaching and Enhancing Human-Elephant Coexistence", led by Southern Tanzania Elephant Program (STEP), working in Tanzania.



Salvinia molesta *on Lukanga, Credit: Chaona Phiri*

Restoring the Lukanga: Tackling invasive weed species in Zambia

In two decades of fishing, Boyd Kayombo has witnessed a steady decline in his catch. Kayombo sighs as he tugs at his nets. "The fish catch is poorer and the water has turned pale and green", he remarks wiping sweat from his brow on a hot fishing day.

Kayombo is part of the fishing community living around the Lukanga Swamp, one of Zambia's eight major wetlands and a Ramsar site. Lukanga Swamp is located in Central Zambia about 55 km west from the town of Kabwe. The site is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) covering approximately 3,300 km^2, and hosts over 350 residents and migratory bird species including some globally threatened species such the Wattled Crane (*Bugeranus carunculatus*), African Skimmer (*Rynchops flavirostris*), and African Finfoot (*Podica senegalensis*).

Lukanga Swamp is also home to a variety of other species including semi-aquatic antelopes such as Sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekei*) and reptiles such as the Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*) and African Rock Python (*Python sebae*). Fishing is a major economic activity in the swamp, supporting a fishing community of approximately 22,500 and contributing at least 10% of Zambia's national fish supply.

> "Over the years, Zambia's wetlands have increasingly come under threat from land use change, poor land management, damming, mining and encroachment"

Over the years, Zambia's wetlands have increasingly come under threat from land use change, poor land management, damming, mining and encroachment. Additionally, invasive species are having a toll on the country's wetlands. Invasive species establish breeding populations, and thrive fast, and in the absence of natural predators, these species thrive and successfully colonize ecosystems. One of these species, the invasive weed Kariba Weed (*Salvinia molesta*) has infested the Lukanga swamp ecosystem since 2009. Over the years, this weed has grown to cover an approximate area of 2000 km^2 - more than 50% of the swamp's surface area. Additionally, the weed has reduced the amount of fish caught in the swamp, and the quality of habitat through limited the amount of sunlight that can penetrate through the surface water – ultimately reducing the levels of oxygen available by restricting photosynthesis. This has led to the use of inappropriate fishing methods like mosquito nets and poison in bid to catch more fish.

Since 2013, BirdWatch Zambia (BirdLife Partner) has been involved in controlling the weed. Initially, this was done manually where community members used sickles, rakes and pitchforks to remove the weed. However, this method proved unsuccessful and in 2017 the BirdWatch Zambia secured funding from the Darwin Initiative to tackle this invasive species through a multi-year project. The project seeks to control the weed by introducing an effective and host specific weevil biological agent, *Cyrtobagous salviniae*, that exclusively feeds on the Kariba weed. The weevils cause damage to the leaves by perforating them and sucking their chlorophyll (the green pigment in plants responsible for photosynthesis) thereby causing the plants to turn brown, decompose and sink. Depending on the climate and extent of the weevil's infestation, weed mats sink within one to three years.

"The project seeks to control the weed by introducing an effective and host specific weevil biological agent, *Cyrtobagous salviniae*, that exclusively feeds on Kariba weed"

Since October 2018, when they were first introduced into the swamp, the weevils have spread to over 650 km^2 resulting in clearing some canals, thereby enabling fishing and swimming activities in the cleared areas.

"I heard there is a weevil that BirdWatch Zambia introduced in the Lukanga to feed on this weed, and have seen it before. It is small but powerful. Some canals are clear and easier to navigate through now", says Patrick Ndemena a local fisherman. "I decided to attend one of the community meetings where they explained how the weevil works, because I was worried that it could harm both the fishermen and the fish. I had a lot of questions! They explained everything. The weevil has not harmed any fish or swamp plants, it is a good weevil, it minds its business. There is hope for restoration of the Lukanga", he notes.

"It is such a delight to see the Lukanga habitat improve from when I first saw it in 2017", notes Clara Nanja, BirdWatch Zambia's wetlands project officer. "The unfolding success story of the Lukanga, serves as an example of a well implemented biological control project. The weevils have proven their resilient, self-sustaining and highly adaptive behaviour in the Lukanga, at present covering an area of about 662 km^2, based on recent weevil monitoring surveys.

"I am leading an enthusiastic and hardworking team that is working to see the project Outcome achieved and ultimately creating a good habitat that benefits both swamp biodiversity and the local community. Once the weed is controlled, it is expected that there will be improved fish catch, restored habitat and an increase in the population of the globally threatened species and other water birds, thus benefitting biodiversity and improving the livelihoods of more than 2,500 fishermen by the end of the project in 2021", concludes Clara.

For more information on project 24-030, please click **here**.

Water transport in recently cleared canals, Credit: Clara Nanja

STEP's Research and Human Elephant Coexistence Officer adjusts a camera trap in Kanyenja Village, Tanzania, Credit: STEP

Newsletter Contacts

The Darwin Initiative and IWT Challenge Fund Secretariat (Defra)

The Secretariat is based in Defra and includes Tim Pryce, Scott Nelson and Chelsea Goodwin.

For any queries on project applications or existing projects please contact our Darwin and IWT Administrators (LTS International)
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IWT: **iwt-fund@ltsi.co.uk**

This newsletter is produced quarterly. To include an article on your project please contact us at **darwin-newsletter@ltsi.co.uk** for Darwin projects or **iwt-newsletter@ltsi.co.uk** for IWT projects.

The UK Government's Darwin Initiative aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources around the world including the UK's Overseas Territories. Since 1992, the Darwin Initiative has committed over £177 million to 1,220 projects in 159 countries.

The UK Government's Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund provides financial support to practical projects around the world which are:

- developing sustainable livelihoods to benefit people directly affected by IWT
- strengthening law enforcement
- ensuring effective legal frameworks
- reducing demand for IWT products

To date through the Challenge Fund, over £20 million has been allocated to 75 projects.