IMPACT REPORT 2024-2025

LILONGWE WILDLIFE TRUST

OUR VISION

NATURE IN MALAWI IS SECURE AND THRIVING FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

OUR MISSION

TO SAVE WILDLIFE, DETER NATURE CRIME, AND SECURE HEALTHY LANDSCAPES FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE IN MALAWI

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Towards the end of last year, a record-breaking global operation rescued nearly 20,000 animals of threatened and protected species from traffickers, including birds, reptiles, big cats, primates and pangolins. The operation revealed the continued, devastating scale of wildlife crime worldwide.

In Malawi, we have continued to support the Government to stamp out serious nature crimes, including wildlife trafficking. Conviction rates are over 90% for serious wildlife and forestry cases - a positive sign that the judiciary continues to recognise the severity of these offences. Our work on a five-year forestry project has also seen over 2,000 convictions for forestry crime, reflecting growing concern over Malawi's deforestation crisis, which is resulting in the loss of almost 12,000 hectares of forest each year.

The Government's action on nature crime includes addressing corruption that threatens the rule of law. This is reflected by new corruption charges laid against the notorious trafficking kingpin Lin Yunhua by the Anti-Corruption Bureau and a landmark High Court ruling on a Judicial Review of the attempted early release of Lin's wife, who was also convicted for wildlife offences in 2021. The ruling found the pardoning to be erroneous and effectively blocked her early release.

Throughout the year our wildlife rescue team faced increasing calls for support with poaching and snaring incidents in the field, while continuing to provide expert veterinary treatment and rehabilitation for injured and orphaned wildlife needing longer-term care, including pangolins rescued from the illegal wildlife trade. We were delighted that our commitment to excellence in wildlife welfare was reflected by the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance, which re-accredited Lilongwe Wildlife Centre for another five years. We also celebrated the official launch of the new government-ratified Wildlife and Environmental Education Sourcebook for primary schools, which was developed using content from our education modules. This marks a significant step in our efforts to institutionalise environmental conservation in the national curriculum.

Putting the needs of people and wildlife at the heart of our work is becoming increasingly urgent. Poverty and food insecurity continue to take a heavy toll on Malawi's already fragile ecosystems through bushmeat poaching and habitat loss as people are pushed into more desperate measures for survival. That's why this year we developed a new six-year strategy to make sure we can truly make a long-lasting impact for both people and wildlife. In addition to our core programme on 'saving wildlife', we will also broaden our focus to other areas. This will include adapting our approach to wildlife and forest crime to address other forms of nature crime. We're also introducing a new programme to secure healthy landscapes for wildlife and people, working closely with communities to boost livelihoods, promote peaceful human-wildlife coexistence and protect some of Malawi's most vulnerable ecosystems.

We're excited about embracing these new challenges and helping to shift the needle for people and nature in Malawi. To all of our many partners and donors who have been with us this far, a huge thank you. We hope we can count on your support for the years to come.

Jonny Vaughan, MBE
CEO

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

APRIL 2024 – MARCH 2025

SAVING WILDLIFE

94 animals rescued

195 animals cared for at Lilongwe Wildlife Centre

48 animals released back into the wild

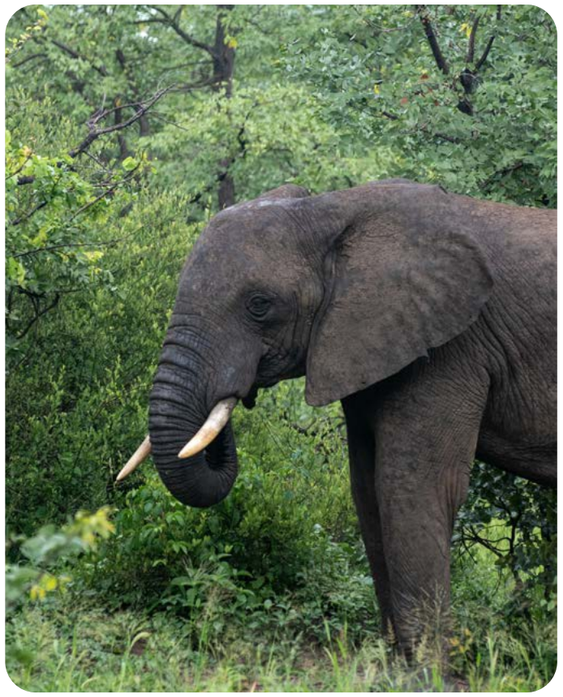
89 animals (all threatened species) monitored per month in protected areas

PROMOTING CONSERVATION JUSTICE

93% conviction rate for offences against Listed Species (elephants, pangolins, rhinos) with 96% of convictions resulting in a custodial sentence

Average custodial sentence of 5.4 years and maximum sentence of 10 years (for offences against Listed Species)

96% conviction rate for forestry cases



EDUCATING AND ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

6,661 children and **229 schools** participated in our education programmes

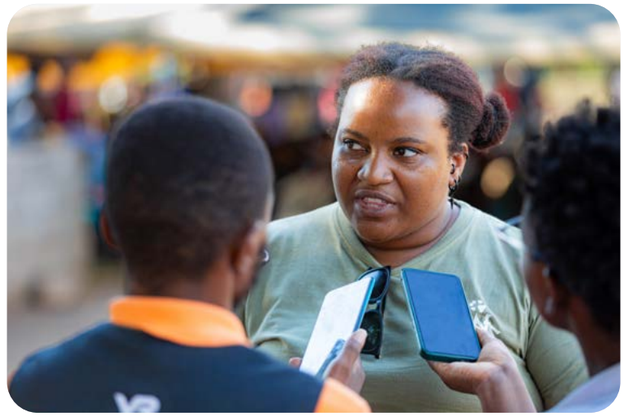
84 teachers trained to deliver environmental education and micro projects

Wildlife and Environmental Education Sourcebook launched for use **in national primary school curriculum**

33 journalists received specialised training on a range of issues related to the environment and wildlife crime to improve reporting

193 press, TV, and radio articles secured on wildlife and forest crime

Two national campaigns delivered on conservation and wildlife and forest crime issues



CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE

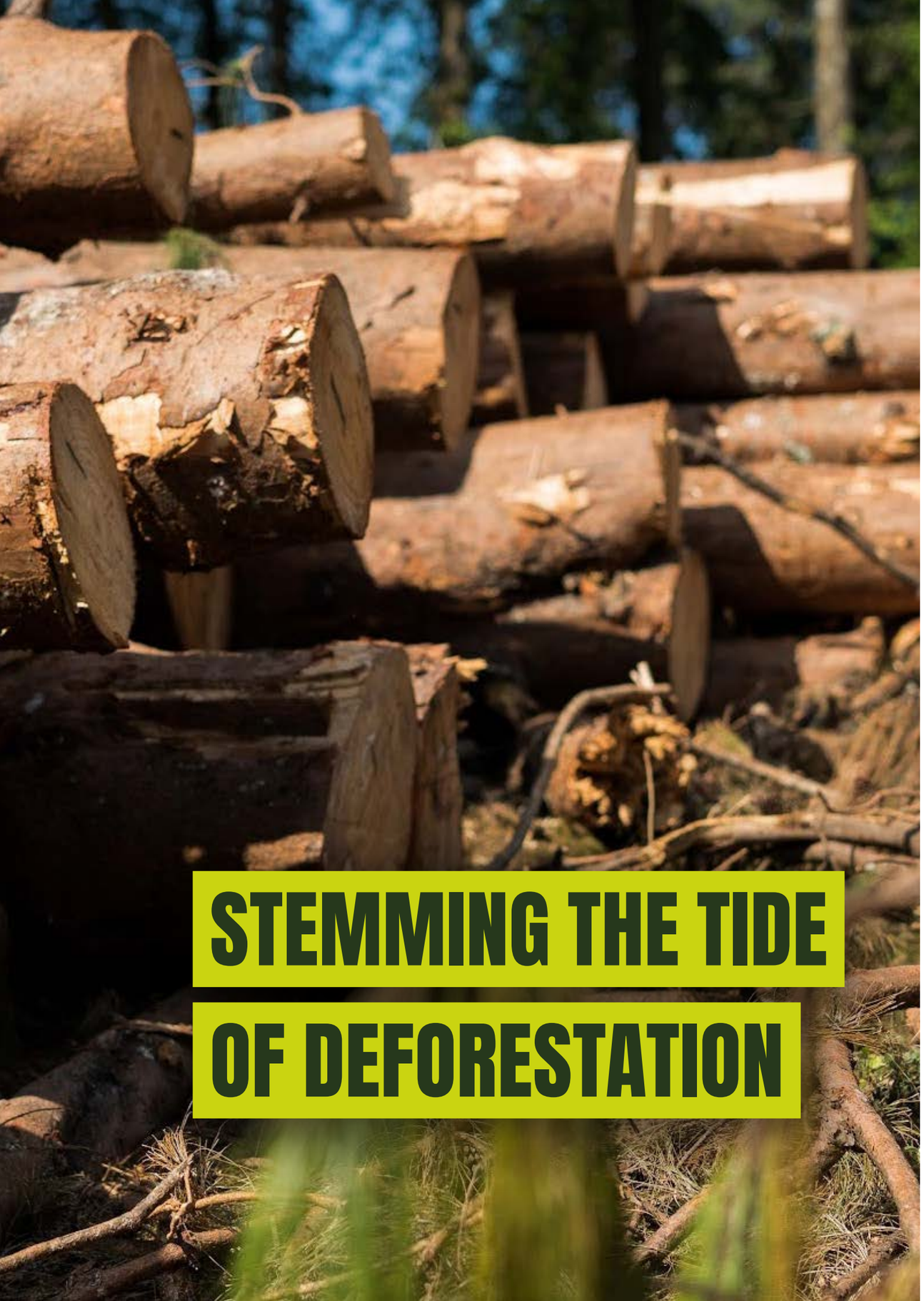
FIGHTING CORRUPTION AND WILDLIFE CRIME

Malawi's commitment to combatting illegal wildlife trade (IWT) has brought justice to some of Southern Africa's most prolific wildlife criminals in recent years. One of those individuals is Lin Yunhua, kingpin of the notorious 'Lin Zhang' network. Lin now faces seven additional charges of corruption after allegedly attempting to bribe a judge and later prison officials while serving a 14-year sentence for rhino horn trafficking and money laundering. If the State is successful with the prosecution this will further extend Lin's time in prison, with the maximum penalty for corruption offences set at 14 years. This case is further evidence of Malawi's impressive resolve to prevent serious wildlife offenders from evading justice.

We have continued to support the Government's progressive approach to IWT over the last year through our court monitoring and capacity building programmes. Court outcomes remain strong; the conviction rate for offences against Listed Species (e.g. elephants, rhinos, pangolins) is now at 93%, with 96% of convictions resulting in a custodial sentence. In efforts to promote deterrent but fair sentencing and to support female lawyers, we launched a new initiative to sensitise members of Malawi's Legal Aid Bureau and Women Lawyers Association on wildlife and forestry crime, associated legislation and legal tools. This initiative, which is the first of its kind in Malawi, promotes the right to a fair trial, recognising that defence lawyers are often not well-briefed on IWT and may lack access to critical legal tools to support their defence of vulnerable, low-income clients.

We have also continued to support the robust prosecution of wildlife offences, including at pre-trial meetings and case review workshops, through which our team of legal advisers support prosecutors on live cases, an annual judiciary workshop for magistrates and a symposium for Supreme Court and High Court judges.

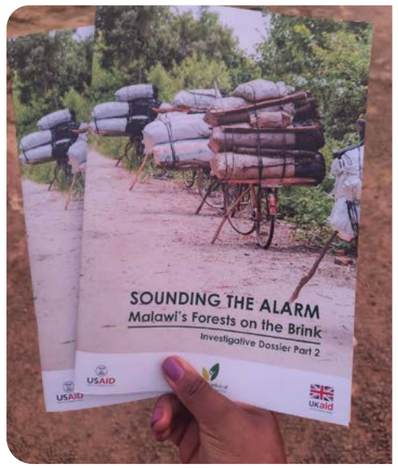
In addition to monitoring cases within Malawi, we are also working closely with regional partners on cross-border collaboration. This included hosting a workshop with Zambian partners on Mutual Legal Assistance, a legal tool that supports transnational cooperation on the collection and exchange of information for court proceedings. We are also conducting a comprehensive analysis of IWT cases across Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, to uncover trends and support regional law enforcement efforts to combat transboundary organised crime. This analysis is possible following the recent launch of the Wildlife Defence Platform (WDP), a database of wildlife crime cases which is managed by our partner C4ADS and now includes over 3,000 cases from across the three countries.



STEMMING THE TIDE OF DEFORESTATION

Rampant deforestation continues to devastate Malawi, driven largely by rising demand for charcoal and a lack of affordable alternative energy sources, particularly for rural communities. Nearly all the charcoal for sale in large cities is illegally produced.

Over the last five years we have supported the Government to introduce a more robust legal response to large-scale illegal charcoal production under the Modern Cooking for Healthy Forests (MCHF) programme. In 2024, 44 forestry crime cases were prosecuted involving 135 suspects. The highest penalties included a four-year sentence for a repeat offender convicted for possession of 214 bags of charcoal. There have been over 2,000 convictions for forestry crime over the five-year project, with sentences increasing over time, indicating a growing awareness of the seriousness of offences. For example, the maximum custodial sentence increased from four years in 2021 to seven years in 2024, while the mode fine doubled from MWK 100,000 in 2021 to MWK 200,000 in 2024. Our work has also helped to identify hotspot areas for charcoal production and key transport routes, including the movement of significant volumes of charcoal illegally trafficked from Mozambique.



We also developed a series of legal tools, including the *Sentencing Guidelines for Forestry Crimes*, *Forfeiture Reference Guide*, and *Technical Orders* to determine the value of charcoal and indigenous wood seized during forestry crime cases. We distributed the Forestry Act and other tools to over 100 investigators and prosecutors and delivered training on how to use them.

Last year we delivered 11 training sessions for 220 members of Community Policing Forums to strengthen grassroots enforcement and reporting mechanisms. We also held awareness meetings with traditional Chiefs to support them to sensitise communities on the importance of forest protection and the penalties for forest crimes. Summary briefs of the new forestry law were translated into Chichewa and Chitumbuka and shared with community members and other stakeholders.

We also collaborated with the Association of Environmental Journalists (AEJ) to support a series of powerful investigative reports for the second edition of the forestry dossier, *Sounding the Alarm: Malawi's Forests on the Brink*. The articles span a wide range of issues, from corruption and carbon credits to charcoal alternatives. In efforts to raise community awareness and encourage reporting of forestry offences we also broadcast radio announcements and disseminated 'Our Forest, Our Future' campaign posters to district assemblies, traditional leaders, and women's groups.

Although the MCHF programme has ended, we will continue to support the enforcement of the Forestry Act through our court monitoring and prosecution activities. Forest protection will also be central to our new organisational strategy.

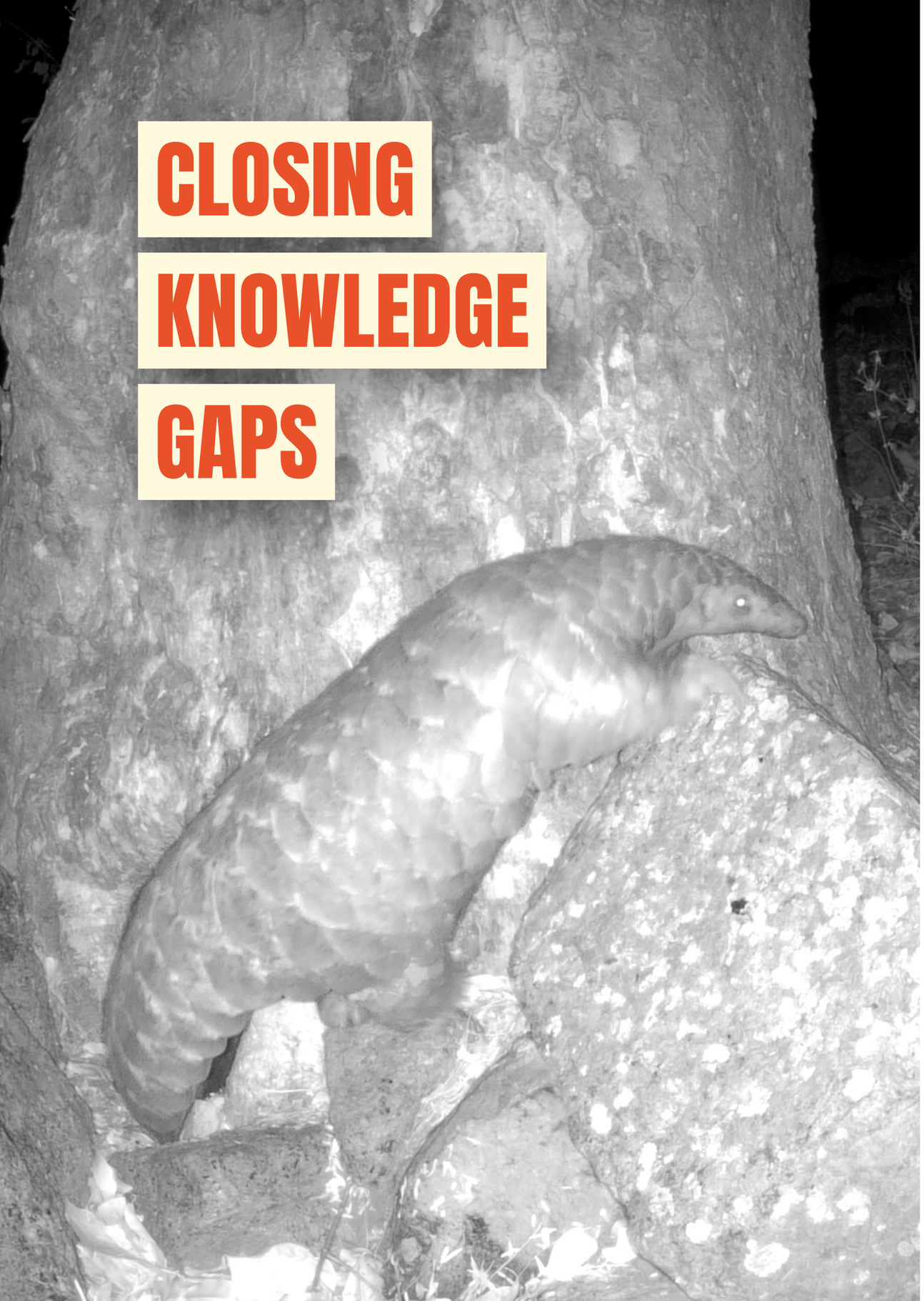
SAVING PANGOLINS

Improved law enforcement and wider public awareness has contributed to a fall in the number of pangolins confiscated from the illegal wildlife trade over the last year. However, the battle to save this threatened species is far from over. Pangolins still make up around 15% of intakes to our sanctuary, often arriving with life-threatening injuries which require specialist veterinary attention followed by long periods of intensive rehabilitation.

In early 2025 we were delighted to finally release two special pangolins that had spent more than 12 months in our care. This included Puck, who arrived in September 2023 as a tiny neonate born just days earlier in illegal captivity. Against all odds, he survived his ordeal and is now living back in the wild, under the careful watch of our research team who will monitor his progress for six months post-release. Shortly afterwards we released another pangolin who had spent just over a year in rehabilitation. Wanjala, which means “hungry” in Chichewa, got her name because when she arrived she ate for six hours straight!

Alongside treating individual pangolins, our veterinary research on pangolin cases has also progressed. In December 2024 we published an article in the Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine analysing bloodwork for pangolin intakes over a year-long period. The analysis helped to identify key indicators of potential risks and survival rates, to inform healthcare plans for future intakes. We also worked closely with the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources to test blood samples for babesia and theileria, both blood-borne parasitic infections that can be fatal to pangolins. In addition, we are exploring avenues to contribute organ tissue samples to a regional database on pangolin genetics, to help identify the geographic origin of individual pangolins and direct future law enforcement efforts.

Given that there are still major knowledge gaps on pangolin ecology, not just in Malawi but across the wider region, we are continuing to collaborate with other stakeholders to share and build learning. In September 2024, we attended the IUCN’s Southern African Regional Pangolin Conservation Action Plan Workshop in South Africa. The aim of the workshop was to bring together key stakeholders working on pangolin protection to develop a regional action plan which will build on all existing national plans including Malawi’s. We also hosted a technical meeting and delivered ‘first response’ training to partners in Malawi who come into contact with trafficked pangolins, including law enforcement, park managers, and officers from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife.



CLOSING KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Conservation action in Malawi is still hampered by significant knowledge gaps on threatened and endangered species. Closing these gaps is one of the underlying drivers of our Biodiversity Research Programme.

This year the programme achieved a significant milestone by conducting Malawi's first pangolin population assessment. As pangolins are notoriously difficult to monitor, very little is known about their distribution both within Malawi and beyond. Pangolins dig burrows or find gaps under trees or rocks to sleep in, and often use burrows made by other animals. As a way to determine pangolin presence in different areas, our team conducted a burrow study in one of the national parks to map both potential and utilised habitat for pangolins and investigate how burrow characteristics influence pangolin presence.

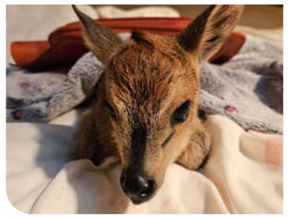
In total they mapped 255 burrows and deployed 44 camera traps. A total of 71 pangolin sightings occurred over the 144-day study, with 62 of these coming from the camera traps. We are using this data to produce a density estimate for the site and will share the findings with park management to promote pangolin-friendly habitat management. Expanding this study to other areas in the coming years will ultimately help to inform the selection of priority release sites for pangolins that have been rescued and rehabilitated from the illegal wildlife trade in Malawi. It also has the potential to be expanded to other regions and for other pangolin species.

Our research team also conducts long-term monitoring of lions, cheetahs, wild dogs, vultures and other 'species of special concern' in partnership with African Parks in Liwonde National Park. This year we supported a number of critical park management operations, including monitoring of a newly translocated pack of wild dogs as they established their range in the park. Liwonde's lion numbers continue to grow, with seven cubs born over the course of the year. To prevent an over-population of lions, we assisted with implementing contraceptives for one female and two male lions and also supported park management to deploy VHF and satellite collars on three lions from different prides. Our team also assisted African Parks during a rhino tagging operation, during which we gathered immobilisation and morphological data for three rhinos.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR WILDLIFE RESCUE WORK

We were delighted that Lilongwe Wildlife Centre was re-accredited for another five years by the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA), reflecting our continued commitment to the highest standards of animal care. Our Centre management team also presented at the annual PASA Sanctuary Workshop in South Africa on two panel discussions related to wildlife crime and capacity development. On site, we constructed a new aviary for our increasing number of rescued birds. Intakes during the year included seven young servals, several of which recently underwent a soft-release into a protected area which included spending four weeks in a pre-release boma, allowing them to acclimate to their new environment.



SAVING WILDLIFE IN CRISIS

The use of snares to catch wild animals for food or illegal trade has increased across Malawi's protected areas, likely driven by worsening economic conditions over recent years. Our rapid-response Wildlife Emergency Response Unit continues to play a crucial role in rescuing wild animals from snares and other life-threatening situations. During the year we responded to 23 separate incidents. Cases included reports of snared elephants and zebras, illegal bushmeat trading of duikers, and a number of human-wildlife conflict situations involving buffalo, hyenas and monkeys. Our law enforcement team also continues to support snare removal operations by park rangers. In two months 345 snares were collected from Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve and three poacher camps were identified.

PROTECTING CRITICALLY ENDANGERED VULTURES

Vultures play a vital role in maintaining healthy ecosystems by removing carcasses and preventing the spread of diseases. However several vulture species in Malawi are Critically Endangered. Our ongoing research, including using satellite tags to monitor vultures, seeks to understand how vultures use different habitats in order to develop conservation actions to boost their survival. This year we recorded a total of 17 re-sightings of tagged birds, with the largest cluster of 25 vultures recorded in September 2024. Real-time mapping of vulture movements is uncovering new patterns in their range and behaviour which will form the basis of a new publication we are preparing. We also convened a Vulture Conservation Action Plan meeting in Liwonde National Park with stakeholders from across the country. During the session we shared our research findings and helped to develop key points for the upcoming draft of the Action Plan, which will represent the first coordinated framework for vulture conservation in Malawi.

VOLUNTEERS AND COMMUNITY SCIENTISTS

Our volunteers continue to provide critical support, both operationally and financially. During the year we hosted 87 volunteers from 16 countries, including Malawi, across our sanctuary, veterinary medicine and research placements. We also established partnerships with five new agents spanning a range of geographical markets to further diversify our placement programme. In September 2024 Biosphere Expeditions supported a fifth community science expedition to Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve (VMWR), focusing on biodiversity surveying using camera trapping, transects and dung analysis. Data collected during each annual expedition contribute to a long-term monitoring programme in VMWR and the Malawi-Zambia Transfrontier Conservation Area, aiding local conservation strategies. Expedition activities helped to identify a focal area for law enforcement patrols to enhance protection of the VMWR elephant population.

DETERRING INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE TRADE

The Wildlife Detection Dog Unit acts as an important deterrent to the illegal trade of products such as ivory, rhino horn and pangolin scales. No international seizures of ivory or rhino horn originating from Malawi have been made since the unit became operational in 2018. Over the year the unit carried out 241 deployments at Malawi's two international airports, border posts and other key transit points around the country. It also played a stronger role in IWT operations around Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve and the Malawi-Zambia Northern Transfrontier Conservation Area. Handlers completed a nine-day refresher training course with the American Society for Canine Trainers, covering kennelling, transportation, search procedures, and animal welfare. Members of the unit also attended a two-day training facilitated by the Lilongwe Society for the Protection and Care of Animals, focusing on canine welfare, proper kennelling practices, and basic first aid.

INSPIRING ACTION THROUGH EDUCATION

Our education team engaged over 6,000 children through forest-based lessons, a three-day career fair for school and university students, immersive children's camps, and green 'micro-projects' at schools and homes. We also hosted a series of learning sessions for diverse stakeholders also working on environmental education and community engagement programmes in Malawi, to share knowledge and encourage collaboration. As a result, Liwonde National Park invited us to mentor students engaged in its conservation leadership programme, focusing on wildlife club leadership and community engagement.

MODERNISING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

The Wildlife and Environmental Education Sourcebook, which we developed in partnership with the Government, was formally ratified and launched with the Ministry of Education at a special event at Lilongwe Wildlife Centre in August 2024. This book includes lesson materials for primary school children on a wide range of subjects, from wildlife crime and wildlife conservation to climate change and water management. Excitingly, the book will now be rolled out across Malawi's national network of primary schools and will also serve as reference material for the ongoing review of the national curriculum.

EXPANDING THE REACH OF LILONGWE WILDLIFE CENTRE

Visitor numbers increased by around 31% from the previous year in a positive sign of growing interest in nature-based recreation. In addition to running forest-based events, such as guided bird walks, yoga and kids clubs, we launched a new immersive audio tour, allowing visitors to learn more about the site's unique flora and fauna. We also participated in the Malawi International Tourism Expo to raise awareness of our work with key travel and tourism buyers. Towards the end of the year, we secured a new grant which will continue throughout 2025 to support community engagement and eco-tourism through a high-profile visibility campaign, new interactive visitor facilities, community-centred events, and a new biodiversity monitoring project to map the diverse mammal species that inhabit the forest.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

We carried out awareness raising activities on human-wildlife conflict for 22 communities and 20 schools near Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve, engaging over 15,000 community members. The outreach, which had a specific focus on vulture threats and conservation, included film screenings, public meetings, drama, dances, sports matches, and interactive education sessions. We also hosted two stakeholder meetings and three rallies around Liwonde National Park and Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve to sensitise communities bordering the protected areas on the importance of wildlife and natural resources conservation and the penalties for illegal wildlife trade.

NEW CHANNELS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Through the year we continued to seek opportunities for staff to build and share learning. This included hosting a primate expert from Ape Action in Cameroon, another PASA-accredited sanctuary, to train our animal care team on primate behaviour. Various staff members across our wildlife justice, education and campaigns teams also took part in international exchange visits with different organisations, including the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association, the Zambia Primate Project and the Frankfurt Zoological Society. The latter involved a training workshop on human-wildlife conflict management which was delivered in Malawi to stakeholders in the Nyika/Vwaza region. It aimed to enhance understanding of effective human-wildlife coexistence strategies by sharing practical experiences of proven and cost-effective wildlife deterrent techniques.

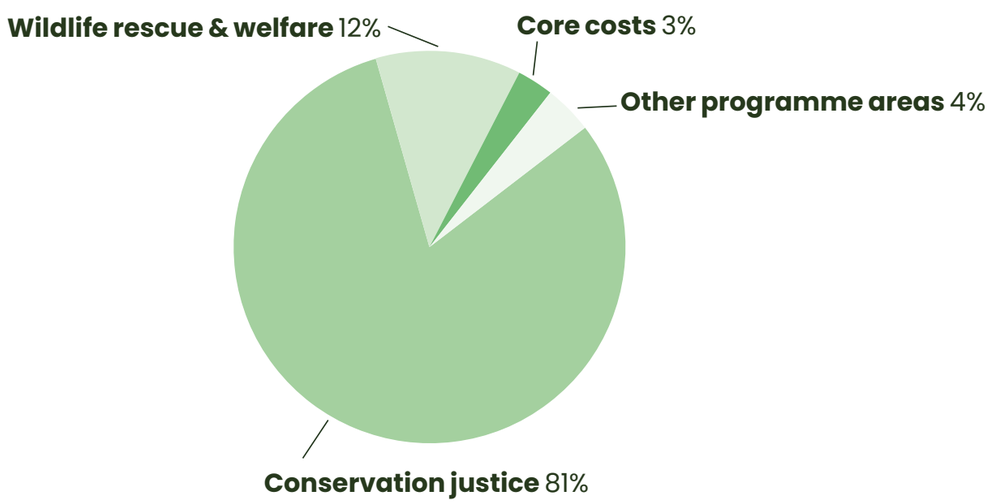
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

In our last financial year, **$4,004,069** was raised for Malawi-based conservation initiatives, thanks to the support and generosity of our donors and partners.

Direct project costs accounted for **97%** of our spend with **3%** on administration/core costs.

For full audited accounts please contact trust@lilongwewildlife.org

EXPENDITURE BREAKDOWN



OUR NETWORK AND TEAM

DONORS & PARTNERS

Donors: The Beit Trust, Born Free Foundation, Elephant Crisis Fund, Embassy of Ireland in Malawi, Emergency Wildlife Rescue, Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust, Fondation Brigitte Bardot, Fondation Segré, Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, Marchig Animal Welfare Trust, Nyika-Vwaza Trust, Olsen Animal Trust, Pangolin Crisis Fund, 'Partnership against Wildlife Crime in Africa and Asia', implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Paul Allen Family Foundation, Perivoli Foundation, Stichting Amfortas, The Thomas Family Charitable Trust, Tusk Trust, UK Government through Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, United States Agency for International Development and the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office through Tetra Tech in the implementation of the Malawi Modern Cooking for Healthy Forests project, US Agency for International Development, US Forest Service, US Department of State INL, Wildcat Foundation, The Woodtiger Fund.

Major donors: Carole Alexander-Robertson, in honour of Dr. Samhita Bhargava, Ian Campbell, Jim Chapman, Edward Denny, Dennis Dougherty, Derek Fahy, Sallyann Garner, Christine Hake, Hampton School Adventure Society, Jo Hill, Tom Kennard, Annette Kotzur, Roger Lloyd-Williams, Kimberly McDonnell, Tim Mead, John Mullen, Christoph Parsch, Tina Rhea, Gary Sambol, Jeffrey Silver, Ralph Spencer, Nona Valiunas, Mike Varndell, Liz and Jeremy Venable, Gitta Voss and Arthur Roose, Charlotte Walford, Christine Wex, Paul and Glynis Young.

Partners: African Parks, Association of Environmental Journalists in Malawi, Biosphere Expeditions, C4ADS, Conservation South Luangwa, Conservation Synergies, Elephants for Africa, Emerald Network, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Environmental Investigation Agency, Forestry Accountability Journalism Initiative in Malawi, Global Law Alliance for Animals and the Environment, Hawk Conservancy Trust, Kuti Wildlife Reserve, Land & Lake Safaris, Lilongwe City Council, Lilongwe Society for the Protection and Care of Animals, Malawi University of Science and Technology, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Movement for Environmental Action, North Luangwa Conservation Programme, PAMS Foundation, Platform for Investigative Journalism Malawi, Schillings, Tikki Hywood Foundation, US Homeland Security Investigations Wildlife Action Group.

Government partners: Anti-Corruption Bureau, Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development, Department of Forestry, Department of National Parks and Wildlife, Directorate of Public Prosecutions, Directorate of Quality Assurance Services, Environmental Affairs Department, Forestry Research Institute of Malawi, Malawi Police Service, Malawi Prisons Service, Malawi Institute of Education, Ministry of Education, Office of President & Cabinet.

ACCREDITATIONS & MEMBERSHIPS

LWT is a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Nature Crime Alliance, the Malawi representative for the Species Survival Network and the Secretariat for the Malawi Parliamentary Conservation Caucus. Lilongwe Wildlife Centre holds full accreditations from the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries, Pan African Sanctuary Alliance and Born Free Foundation's PAW initiative. LWT is a member of Malawi's Inter-Agency Committee for Combatting Wildlife Crime and Malawi's CITES Expert Advisory Group (acting Scientific Authority). The Wildlife Detection Dog Unit – a partnership between the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, the Malawi Police Service and LWT – is accredited through the American Society of Canine Trainers International and locally for animal welfare standards through the Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development and the Lilongwe Society for the Protection and Care of Animals.

PATRONS

HRH Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester
Dame Virginia McKenna, DBE

TRUSTEES AND GOVERNANCE

Mark Sprong (Chair), Simon Cousins, Anton Evans, Gerard Grant, Rod Hagger, Brighton Kumchedwa, Maggie Munthali, PhD, Rob Royle, Julie Saunders, Bev Trataris, Laurie Webb, Jonny Vaughan, MBE (CEO), Arthur Nyirenda (Secretary)

Lilongwe Wildlife Trust is a Malawian not-for-profit trust, registered under the Trustee Incorporation Act of Malawi since 2008 (No. TRNR 3Z3TZ6) and has been a Council of Non-Governmental Organizations of Malawi member since 2009 (No. C466). LWT is represented in the UK by Malawi Wildlife Trust which is registered with the UK Charity Commission (No. 1176185).

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Lilongwe Wildlife Trust was established in 2008 when we opened the doors to Malawi's first wildlife sanctuary, Lilongwe Wildlife Centre. Since then we have grown to become one of the country's leading conservation NGOs.

Our mission is to save wildlife, deter nature crime, and secure healthy landscapes for people and wildlife in Malawi. Working in collaboration with local and international partners, we respond to urgent conservation challenges as well as drive long-term social and institutional change.

Visit **www.lilongwewildlife.org** for more information.

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WILDLIFE TRUST