

HIGH FIVE CLUB

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Human Elephant Conflict Reduction, Zambia

Human elephant conflict is one of the major problems facing local communities living in wildlife areas in Africa and is often the reason for animosity and contempt towards conservation activities and wildlife in general. Mitigating these conflicts is an ongoing and challenging task for all concerned.



These conflicts have been experienced first hand by the High Five Club's Cheryl and Manny Mvula. During a recent visit to their home in Zambia's Luangwa Valley, an elderly lady in a neighbouring village was killed in her field by an elephant whilst trying to protect her maize crop from being eaten. The population of elephants in South Luangwa National Park has increased over recent years and elephants regularly cross the river from the park into the villages when the maize is ripe, along with other tasty fare such as mangos. People in the

villages we met spoke of elephants as their 'enemy', with many knowing someone who had been killed protecting their crops and others having personally lost the crops they had grown as their food security for the next 6 months to elephants, either in their field or by elephants breaking into their grain store at home in the village. Elephants can easily demolish a traditionally built grain store and have learnt how to peel the roofs off brick built granaries, like peeling the lid off a can of sardines to get at the grain inside.

Because of this decline in food security (amongst other factors), poaching via the indiscriminate placing of wire snares in the buffer zone outside of the park has escalating significantly in recent years. Snares are set to catch mainly antelope and buffalo, but of course any animal can get caught. And it is a slow and agonising death for the wildlife victims of this illegal activity. We have never seen so many snared



baby elephants as we saw on our recent trip to Zambia. Over just 2 days we saw 3 baby elephants in great distress with winch cable tightly embedded around their heads. Their mothers desperately tried to pull the snares off by yanking hard on the trailing cable – which resulted in agony for the baby elephants with the noose

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being drawn tighter still. We also saw many full-grown elephants with severed trunks, cut off as they pulled themselves free of snares. The situation really is dire.

One bright, shining light on the horizon is the amazing Rachel McRobb, CEO of the South Luangwa Conservation Society (SLCS). Not only did Rachel come out to every call we made to her re the snared elephants we saw, tracking them down tirelessly over several days with her team of village scouts, and then darting all the adults in the herd to get to the babies safely to remove the snares and treat them, but she is finding innovative ways of dealing with the human elephant conflict problem that is at the root of the problem. These include chilli blasting by locally based hunters, stringing up chilli fencing around villagers' fields in combination with an income generating chilli farming project, and most recently, constructing elephant proof granaries in the villages.



The idea behind the elephant proof granaries is simple – build low-cost, sturdy, brick granaries without roofs in vulnerable, elephant-targeted villages. Affected villagers themselves hand make the bricks, and SLCS supply the cement and the brick-laying expertise to construct the granaries, along with providing vital sensitisation workshops in the community on how to reduce human elephant conflict.

This month we are joining hands with the SLCS to fund the construction of 15 elephant proof granaries in Mnkanya Chiefdom, a notorious hot spot in the Luangwa Valley for elephant raids on villages and where many poachers reside. It is hoped that through this intervention food security in the area will be increased and the number of snared elephants and other wildlife reduced. The granaries cost just \$50 each and our donation of £500 to SLCS will hence go a long way in helping reduce human elephant conflict in Zambia's Luangwa Valley for the benefit of both the local community and wildlife.

For more information contact Cheryl@highfiveclub.co.uk

The South Luangwa Conservation Society is a non-profit community based organisation committed to the conservation and preservation of the local wildlife and natural resources in Luangwa and at the same time ensuring and encouraging community development amongst local populations. See www.slcszambia.org