



INTERNATIONAL ELEPHANT FOUNDATION.ORG

Final Report 2021 Conservation Lower Zambezi

Project title: Support to DNPW/CLZ K9 Unit Operations in Lower Zambezi, Zambia

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Anticipated completion date: 31st December 2021 (Extended to 28th February 2021 to complete funds)



2. Abstract:

While law enforcement efforts within the Lower Zambezi have increased significantly over the years, resulting in a notable reduction in the number of elephants poached, sustained efforts to maintain wildlife protection are essential in order for elephant and other species' populations to remain strong. Similarly, while demand and value for certain wildlife products such as ivory have decreased, other wildlife products have increased and there is still an urgent need to disrupt these networks and ensure convictions of wildlife traffickers.

In addition, during these unprecedented times of COVID-19 when communities are facing extreme hardships, there has been a rise in poaching and it is imperative to continue efforts to ensure the protection of wildlife while simultaneously supporting the communities.

Funding from The Berry Family Trust through IEF is being used to support the K9 Unit, ensuring continued conservation of elephants and other key wildlife species in the Lower Zambezi.

3. Narrative

3.1 Actions taken to achieve objective

The overall goal of this project is for the K9 Unit to continue their operations around the Lower Zambezi National Park, so that while boots on the ground patrols protect the park from the inside, the K9 Unit, working with specialized units such as the Rapid Deployment Team (formally known as the Rapid Response Unit) and the Investigations and Intelligence Units, will intercept the movement of the illegal wildlife trade on major known road networks.

In 2021, CLZ supported a total of 1,815 patrol man-days for the K9 Unit (Table 1). During this period, the K9 Unit were provided with equipment, rations, incentives, communications, fuel and transport costs for their monthly operations. On average, they have conducted three 10-day operations per month, 6-days around the LZNP, setting up roadblocks and searching vehicles on known trafficking routes, as well as following intel and conducting Village Sweeps and doing joint operations with the IIUs and RDT, and 4-days spent training in camp.

In March 2021, the K9 Unit underwent a refresher training. An instructor from Invictus K9 visited the CLZ Base Camp for two-weeks, which was aimed at building upon their existing skills, identify areas of further training on the dogs and communicating those training methods to the handlers. The refresher course involved both classroom discussions as well as majority of the time spent on practical demonstrations and field work. The Unit were able to learn various tactics from the instructor while on operation during this time. One notable activity during this training period was the two newer dogs (Kalo and Hammer) were introduced to night tracking where they were taught to track a scent in the dark. This has equipped the dogs and handlers with the skills to be able to respond to information at any time of day or night.

Additionally in March and September 2021, CLZ had a special helicopter operation where the K9 Unit were involved. Small-scale panning in the escarpment has become a major threat within that region (including Zambia and Zimbabwe), and continued efforts are being made to address this problem, although it is being uncovered as a political issue. This helicopter operation played a key role in continuing to monitor the illegal small-scale mining in the area, and a trip was used to showcase to the DNPW Area Warden and Senior Warden the extent of the mining in order to shed light on the severity of the threat for further management decisions. During the mining infiltration through the helicopter operations and patrols, a total of 127 suspects were apprehended and mining equipment confiscated with support from the K9 Unit. The dogs have been familiarized with going into the helicopter and are have become comfortable with it.

In April 2021, K9 Unit and the Rapid Response Unit underwent further training covering topics such as values and standards, leadership, operational planning, basic fitness, and close target reconnaissance, to ensure the teams continue to operate at the highest standards possible.

In August 2021, K9 Hammer indicated on a shotgun which was a significant success by the dogs. During that month, the Unit also focused more patrols in the Chiawa Game Management Area where they discovered an elephant carcass and a number of wire snares, which were removed them from the field.

In October 2021, they had a combined operation where they found bushmeat in a police vehicle which is an extremely high-profile case.

In November 2021 they found a live pangolin which was rehabilitated and released back into the wild.

Table 1: Timeline of objectives achieved from January-December 2021. K9 Unit Man-days												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
K9 Unit	49	165	227	186	160	150	143	156	189	181	166	43

3.2 Activities differing from original proposal

No activities have changed from the original proposal. In 2021, Zambia experienced it’s third and most deadly wave of COVID-19 which affected CLZ staff and the communities within the Lower Zambezi. Therefore, while operations were ongoing, protocols for health safety were being enforced and the situation was being evaluated daily. Thankfully, all staff affected have recovered with higher percentages of staff being vaccinated. Due to the nature in which they operate, the K9 Unit have their own vehicle as well as accommodation when at the CLZ Basecamp, therefore it has made it possible for them to continue operating while still isolating from other members of staff.

3.3 Conservation outcomes for wildlife and humans

- Continued operations despite COVID-19 financial shortfalls;
- Sustained manpower to cover a wide geographical range;
- Improved law enforcement efforts around the LZNP and strangling the illegal wildlife trade routes.

There are approximately 1,125 elephants in the Lower Zambezi National Park and surrounding areas, this number is impacted by our project however, the entire Lower Zambezi ecosystem (spanning Zimbabwe and Mozambique) is said to be home to over 20,000 elephants, one of the last population strongholds in Africa. IEF support is ensuring the protection of these elephants including all other wildlife in the LZNP and GMAs.

3.4 Meeting goals

The goal of this project as outlined in the grant application is to increase support and activities around Lusaka Province to deter poaching and trade in hot spot areas, by proactively increasing coverage of major transit routes while simultaneously improving intelligence led operations for the K9 Unit. In 2021, the K9 Unit not only continued to weave informer networks and proactively operate based on intel, they also attended trainings that re-emphasised these skills as well as showed them new ways in which to efficiently operate, thus achieving the goals set out for this grant.

3.5 Major findings

The K9 Unit have been working hard in 2021 to operate through intelligence, in order to have better successes and more targeted approaches. Through further training, coupled with combined operations and more analytical operations, the Unit have developed their approach and are working towards ensuring more successes.

3.6 Problems occurred

The K9 Unit has provided law enforcement with new and more advanced techniques to combat the illegal wildlife trade which are irreplaceable however, maintaining the health of specialised dog breeds in an unforgiving bush environment has proved challenging. Each of the three dogs experienced health issues in 2021 in spite of all the precautions taken to protect the animals including regular preventative medication, tick collars, targets placed around camp to repel tsetse flies, daily tick checks, insect-proof kennels and transport cages, and fly-spray application before and during every field deployment. Thankfully CLZ has been able to rely on a Lusaka based veterinarian who has invested incredible amounts of time and care into the dogs and successfully provided treatment for two dogs with parasitic infections in 2021.

Sadly however, Bar—CLZ's most senior and skilled tracking dog—has faced severe health issues this year. As described in previous reports, Bar fell ill in the first half of 2021 with weeks of severe and intermittent vomiting and trips to the veterinarian in Lusaka. It was very difficult for the veterinarian to diagnose the problem however, finally a small piece of wire was discovered in Bar's abdomen which was determined to be the source of the issue. An operation was conducted to remove the wire however, Bar had also suffered a herniated disk in his back due to forceful vomiting. After attempts at physical therapy were not as effective as hoped, Bar was sent to South Africa to assess if surgery would resolve the issue but unfortunately, the veterinarian determined that surgery would not be a viable option. Bar is a passionate dog who loves to work and for the time being he is continuing to do so at a very reduced level with his health and pain management as the top priority.

CLZ is exploring the option of establishing a K9 project using dogs from the local area as they are more adapted to the region and therefore may be more resilient to local diseases and the harsh environment compared with breeds imported to Zambia from abroad. Dependent on funding, the short-term goal is to begin this project in the next year with one dog selected to pilot the programme. If the pilot is successful, then the long-term goal would be to grow the programme and eventually be able to provide village dogs to other law enforcement and wildlife protection organisations in Zambia.

In the beginning of 2021, the K9 Unit also experienced some staffing issues with the departure of one of the female attachments for personal reasons which left the K9 Unit short one staff member. Thankfully one of the newly trained female community scouts, Patricia Chilala, was selected to be part of the K9 Unit and fill this gap in the workforce.

3.7 Evaluation

Number of poached elephants

While the first six months of 2021 was promising, showing an all-time low of no elephants to have been poached in the LZNP or GMAs, the second half of the year unfortunately did not bring the same results as 17 elephants were poached, 12 in the LZNP and 5 in the GMAs. This signifies an increase from the previous year of 21%. In both 2020 and 2021, a notable difference is that elephant carcasses were more frequently found with their ivory intact and stripped of their meat. Indicators lean towards this resulting from the loss of jobs and income within the communities in the Lower Zambezi due to COVID-19.

Number of Successes

Over the grant period, despite problems faced, the K9 Unit continued to operate and some notable successes include:

Month	Suspects	Illegal Miners	Firearms	Illegal Ivory	Snares	Poacher's Camps	Bushmeat (kgs)	Other Recoveries
Jan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Feb	0	0	0	0	12	0	5	0
Mar	0	7	0	0	0	1	0	0
Apr	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	26
May	1	28	0	6	0	0	0	0
Jun	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	2
Jul	0	43	0	0	0	0	0	48
Aug	2	0	1	0	10	0	0	0
Sep	1	7	0	0	0	0	20	0
Oct	1	0	0	0	12	0	52.7	0
Nov	3	6	0	0	0	2	75.2	33
Dec	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	8	127	1	6	34	3	152.9	109

**Other recoveries include pangolin scales and mining equipment.*

4. Conclusion

CLZ will continue to encourage the Unit to perform at their highest standard. Through the various trainings that the Unit underwent throughout 2021, the Unit are confident they will use their learnt skills in the field to continue to grow their results and will work hard to protect the wildlife in the Lower Zambezi.

5. Budget

Excel spreadsheet to be sent separately, showing financial expenditure on this grant.

6. Deliverables

Photos to be sent separately. See below for credits and captions:

1. Pie Aerts – K9 Kalo and Handler Peter
2. Pie Aerts – K9 Hammer and Handler Sunday
3. Duncan Bam – K9 Unit personnel and dogs exercising
4. Nikita Iyengar – K9 Unit and RDT during Training
5. Nikita Iyengar – K9 Unit and RDT during Training

Video to be sent separately.

7. Acknowledgements

These findings will not be presented at any conferences or symposia.

This project has not received any media coverage.

CLZ Website - www.conservationlowerzambezi.org

CLZ Facebook – www.facebook.com/CLZAfrica

CLZ Twitter – www.twitter.com/CLZAfrica

CLZ Instagram – www.instagram.com/conservation_lower_zambezi