



Recovery of Murchison Falls Programme

Report: 5th September 2020

International Elephant Foundation & Global Conservation





Introduction

Since reporting in April, 2020 the parks have been under considerable pressure. Whilst not unique in terms of the COVID-19 crisis, the Murchison Falls region has also faced the impact of the lockdown, a locust invasion, the River Nile rising to record levels causing floods blocking any means of crossing, not to mention the political impacts of an election, and in QEPA anthrax and ebola.

UWA's man power, already well below the required level has struggled – but due to the foundation of park management being put in place by the Recovery of Murchison Falls programme, has proved far pretty resilient across the whole park. That said, poaching has risen sharply, and targeted killings of lions and vultures for niche markets has for the first time been identified.

The greatest impact has been on the lockdown – depriving subsistence farmers from trading what little they have. Most would normally go to market to sell a small 'excess' harvest of maize or tomatoes, and have a the equivalent of \$1 to \$5 money to pay for the other home necessities and food they need. This has forced many into illegal activities. In addition, unscrupulous traders have stripped areas north of the park of trees, predominantly for charcoal for Kampala, and Kenya.

The lack of fire and construction wood is now an extreme problem for the communities, forcing yet more pressure onto the park. Unfortunately, whilst illegally collecting firewood from within the park they are setting snares, butchering animals, monitoring UWA movements and carrying carcasses out. Whilst arresting and sentencing community members in crisis is happening, the community conservation department and UCF have been trying to work with local communities to provide alternatives.

The RMF programme has now generated 100 jobs for local youth, each selected from different families and areas. They went through apprenticeships at the Pacer Community College first, and are now employed in a wide range of areas, from construction with Mutoni Construction, to UCF's tree planting programme.

Recovery of MFPA and Grant focus:

UCF has been focused on establishing the foundation of protected area management in MFPA. This has included the necessary infrastructure in the strategically appropriate areas, the team being skilled and equipped, park wide communications be established and the transport required being put into place. Filtering through all of this is making the whole system operational, realizing the benefits of the investments since 2012.

This grant focuses on two key areas – the dangerous and heavily poached north east of the park, and making the Law Enforcement & Operations Centre fully functional.

Progress:



Central & NE of MFPA
1 – Ayago 3 Ranger Post & radio tower
2 – Atil Camp Ranger Post

In the next month UCF will be searching for lions in the area and satellite collaring them. Lions are there – but very few, and with the level of poaching, especially wheel traps and poisoning, we need to understand the important areas for them – we know, literally, nothing.

Activity 1: Atil Camp Ranger Post.

Atil Camp will be built once Ayago 3 Ranger Post near completion. There are three reasons:

- Regional safety. The area is heavily poached and we will ensure a greater permanent anti-poaching and security presence for the safety of the construction team once Ayago 3 and the radio system is operational;
- Financial management. For efficiency we could have run both projects concurrently. However, with impacts of COVID we have spread the project over time to keep the team active over the entire year; and
- The track to the Atil Camp RP site needed considerably more work to clear and make passable.

Activity 2: Ayago 3 Ranger Post, ablution block and tower.



Progress: 25th August, 2020. The second picture shows three of the Directors of UCF monitoring construction progress. All bricks were made by the community youth programme, supporting local development.



10th Sept, 2020 – the construction team are waiting for the delivery of the roofing, window and door materials. On the same lorry will also be the paint and guttering.

The solar power for the ranger post and the repeater radio tower has been contracted to White Mare Technology who also installed all of the power and IT solutions in the Law Enforcement & Operations Centre.

The radio repeater and equipment has been procured by the Forgotten Parks Foundation and is currently being shipped to Uganda.



The Ayago 3 tower was made by Mutoni Construction and delivered to the site. The tower paid for by Wildlife Protection Solutions.

The slab is currently being cast. Once dry the tower will be erected.

Once the ranger post is complete the solar power system will be installed, the tower earthed, and the radio repeater installed.

This is all expected to be finished by the end of October 2020.

The 120km track along the north bank of the River Nile has large sections that needed to be reopened.

UCF's community programme provided the opportunity for a new team of apprentices to do paid work. In the mornings the Ayago 3 construction team cleared the road – and then in the afternoons, they all worked on the Ayago 3 construction site.

Under the vegetation on the right, is a track.....

The track is now clear, including up to the site of Atil Camp (activity 1).



Activity 3: Law Enforcement & Operations Centre

The Law Enforcement & Operations Centre was built and the IT installed as the lockdown was announced. Since then the focus has been on adding communications systems, training and ‘operationalizing’ the centre and management capability.

Providing microwave internet, laying fibre cables to connect all administrative buildings, ensuring wiring and wireless coverage, installing the servers and software, and 24/7 power has all been completed. Branding has been installed on all buildings.



The Law Enforcement & Operations Centre gate signage.



The complete Joint Operations Command & Control Centre.



The Operations room – EarthRanger installed, digital radio system installed and registered on EarthRanger.



The Guard Room and Main gate. The whole facility is fenced. Below: the Mubaku Police Post.



The storage centre. Shipping containers placed on a concrete slab and painted. One is for Law Enforcement equipment, one for the veterinary equipment, one for food and stores and, a general store (inc cement).



The battery bank is charged by the generator – between 0900 to 1700, and then keep the JOCC with power over night. The server room is part of the Operations room.

Communications and signals all link back to the operations room and EarthRanger.

Digital radios

The final two towers are now in Murchison Falls, and as we write are being erected in Ayago 3 and Waiga Ranger Posts. Repeaters, radio handsets and the necessary accessories are enroute to Uganda, arriving in September.

The Forgotten Parks Foundation technician will then travel from Goma (DRC) to install and test the entire system, and register all new radios on TBRONet and EarthRanger. This will complete phase 1 of the communications network, with four towers covering at least 75% of the park. Previously coverage (of any sort) was less than 15%.

We have been fortunate to have had Lt Col Mike Nicholls undertake two Voice Procedure (VP) training sessions in MFPA. Two training days were hosted in the JOCC. VP learning and reference sheets have also been developed, laminated and put onto the walls of the JOCC. They will be put onto the walls of all ranger posts.



Telephone coverage:

UCF is installing a basic Airtel booster at the MFPA HQ. This will improve communications around the administrative areas, which in turn ensures improved links to regions where coverage does exist.

UWA Hotline:

UCF has installed an official Murchison Falls Hotline to support calls from anyone, be they tourists who have crashed or got stuck, or lost, or they have seen something they should report such as an injured animal or illegal activity. Communities can also call supporting UWA's ability to respond to elephant or lion problems, or indeed if communities wish to inform UWA about poaching or other illegal activities.

Thuraya Satellite Phones:

UCF has removed all phones from QEPA and deployed them to MFPA. They were serviced and software was re-installed. UCF will be providing an update report on the phones to Global Conservation in order to have data installed in the next two weeks.

The phones will be deployed into the areas where communications 'dead zones' continue to cause considerable problems. Many of these areas such as Atil Camp and the Sengege Hills are also very dangerous areas. In time some of these will be sorted out by the radio system, but large tracts of land in southern MF's will remain in need of the phones.

WPS Watch camera traps:

WPS software is registered and installed, three camera traps are in Uganda, and we now have the necessary batteries and SIM cards. The WPS Watch system integrates into the EarthRanger system. This is to be tested by UCF / UWA and WPS in mid Sept 2020.

UWA Closed User Group:

UCF is setting up an Airtel closed user group for the MFPA management, NCO's and 'ranger posts'. This means that UWA stops handing out 'airtime' which is hard to account for and time consuming to manage. The SIM cards costs a standard \$3 / person / month and calls between staff are then unlimited.

This will support information sharing and greater communications, including with data such as waypoints and pictures. It is important to recognise that the ranger community will have official smart phones. It will also eliminate the need for individuals to have their own phones and unofficial lines of communications. Personal phones can be a source of collusion between rangers and poachers.

Destroying snares – forever:



10000 snares buried in concrete in the storage unit slab.

Another 30,000 snares are buried under the JOCC, 5000 under the Guard Room, 10000 under the Police Station and 30000 under the armory.

This clears some space from the Armory – which is then filled again as soon as we empty the stores in the 42 ranger posts.

However, these snares will never be used again – removed from circulation and temptation forever.



The community group made 15000 bricks using the hydrafoam machine. These are for both Ayago 3 and Atil Camps.

By doing this UCF / UWA is able to ensure regional development and vulnerable youth have a positive way forwards. All are now fully employed and many are keen to become Rangers.

Due to COVID and the collapse of tourism, UWA will not be recruiting for a year. Each youth member gets paid – and those funds help support their families during this difficult period – and lessens their likelihood to engage in poaching.

Executive Director and Top Management of the Uganda Wildlife Authority visits to Law Enforcement & Operations Centre in Murchison Falls National Park.



In early August the Executive Director of UWA and his top management, including four out of the six Chief Wardens visited MFPA to inspect the facility, and see first-hand how the foundations of protected area management integrate and enable far more efficient and effective management capability.

Presentations included by the UCF Carnivore & Scavenger programme who at the request of the ED had responded to three lion incidents, two in QEPA and one in MFPA.

The operations were presented on EarthRanger and the senior management presented with direct lion research information and real time mapping from EarthRanger – stimulating immediate debate and conservation action. This was our objective – and they all recognised the absolute need to continue to roll the programme out, into QE and Kidepo NPs.

Activity 4: Towards the purchase of a UCF Project vehicle, a Land Cruiser double cabin.

The vehicle has been purchased from Toyota Gibraltar for \$46,400 which includes bull bars, winch, and essential fittings and accessories.

The car is expected to arrive in Uganda on the 13th Sept, 2020. UCF will have to now pay duty, tax, registration on the car and will of course have to make the necessary field modifications.

Over the past six months UCF has had to respond to countless responses – supporting anti-poaching, pushing elephants out of crops, searching for lions and much more.

Our Hilux car is too low and old to manage off road driving. We spend most of our time off road and so this car for UWA and UCF is incredibly important.

Tusk Trust also provided funding support for the car - \$23,500.





High level update on park operations in MFPA Q1 / Q2 2020:

With so few smart phones information is very limited. UCF will be providing smart phones in the next two months – to provide total coverage – including Cybertracker covering all problem animal control, intelligence and veterinary response information. Considerable caution is also placed on SMART as a patrol passing through a 1km² grid in smart means they have patrolled the whole 1km², which they have not.

MFPA LE EFFORT Jan -June 2020

1. January – March 2020 quarter

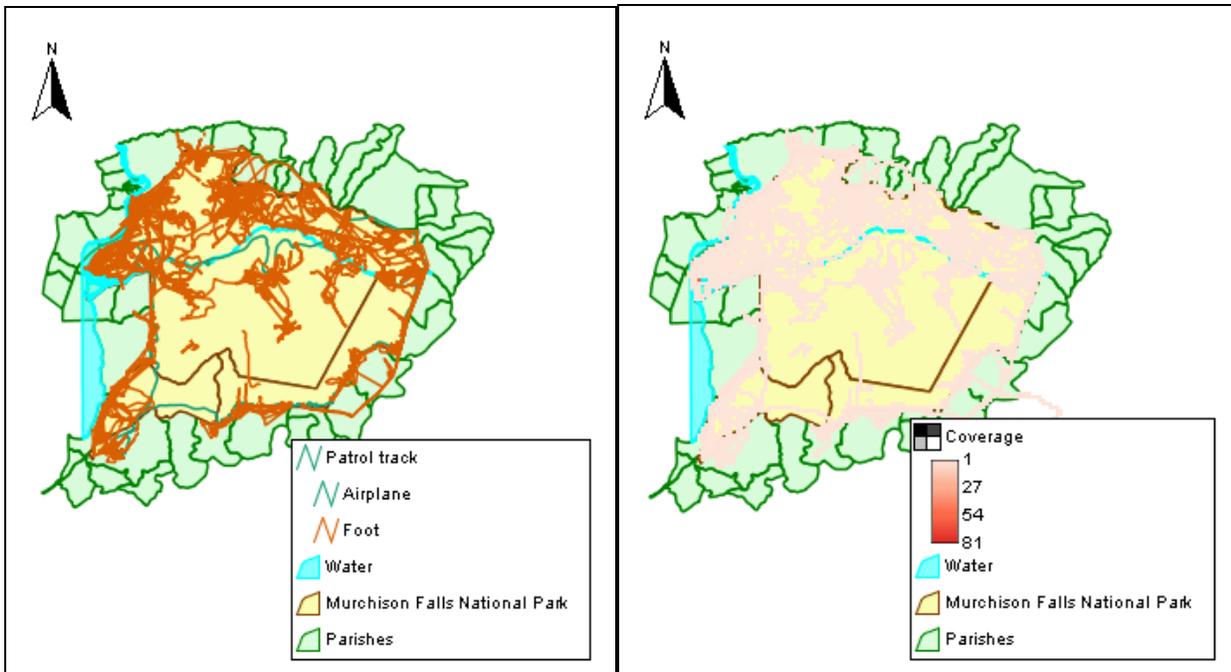
- During the quarter, a total of 711 patrols (189 extended, 135 overnight ambushes, 314 rounds patrols, 49 marine operations and 24 spot checks were conducted to combat illegal activities.
- Patrols and operations conducted during the quarter led to recoveries of 01 AK 47 No 56-131JJ6255 with no rounds of ammunition, 66 Spears, 3,676 Wire snares, 81 Metal traps, 21 Pangas, 24 Knives, 76 fishing gadgets, 23 Canoes, 35 Oars, 6 sucks of opium, 2 hand saws, 3 motor cycles and 3 bicycles, 6 pieces of ivory and 89 cattle were recovered. Cattle, motor cycles and opium were impounded in Bungugu wildlife reserve.
- A total of 101 suspects who were arrested were charged before the magistrate courts in Buliisa, Masindi, Kiryandongo and Nwoya for committing wildlife related offences.

2. April -June 2020 quarter

- A total of 626 patrols inclusive 202 extended, 115 overnight ambushes, 191 rounds patrols, 35 marine operations and 118 spot checks were conducted to combat illegal activities within MFPA during the quarter. This resulted into the arrest of 162 suspects and domination of the ground by rangers that deterred some poaching activities.
- Patrols and operations conducted during the quarter also resulted into the recoveries of 02 rifles AK 47 NO 22508, 303 UG IND 4106602270Z, 84 rounds of live ammunition, 03 empty magazines that were being used for armed poaching in the areas of Atil camp, 74 Spears, 2,504 Wire snares, 35 Metal traps, 69 Pangas, 65 Knives, 24 Fish nets, 16 Canoes, 26 Oars, 81 hook lines, 06 Hoes, 02 Spades, 01 Umbrella nets, 27 hoes, 03 bicycle and 68 Fishing Baskets that has helped to suppress the poaching economy in surrounding areas.
- A total of 162 suspects who were arrested for committing wildlife related crimes were produced before court in Buliisa, Masindi, and Nwoya by the end of the quarter. This helped to reduce on the poaching pressure by the communities surrounding the protected area.

Patrol effort and coverage

Patrol coverage area



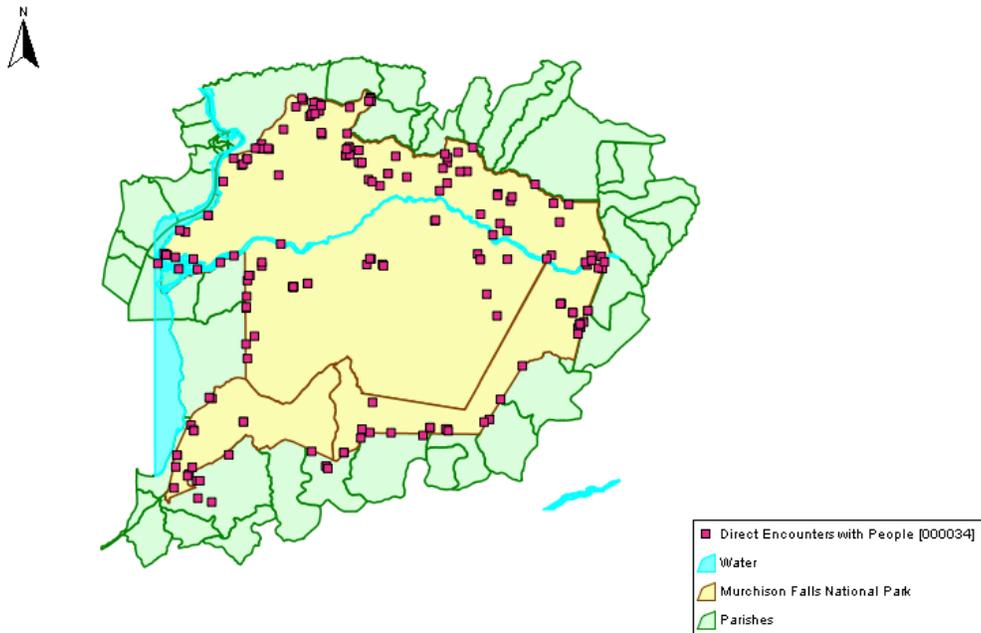
Transport type	No. of Patrols	No. of Days	No. of Nights	Distance (km)	Person - Days
Airplane	1	1	0	431.63	2
Foot	859	1666	808	15331.46	5950
Motorized	24	27	3	471.56	64
Observational	4	5	1	36.37	11
Water	64	84	22	1575.38	269
Total	952	1783	834	17846.40	6296

Patrolling was very distorted for a number of reasons:

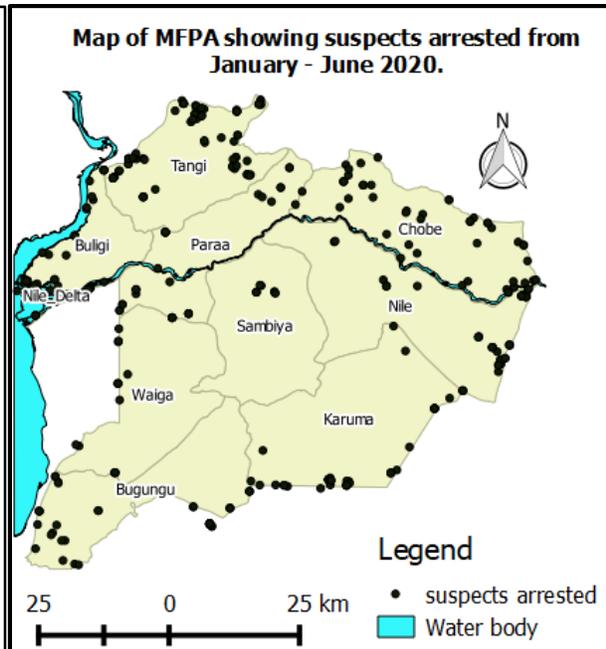
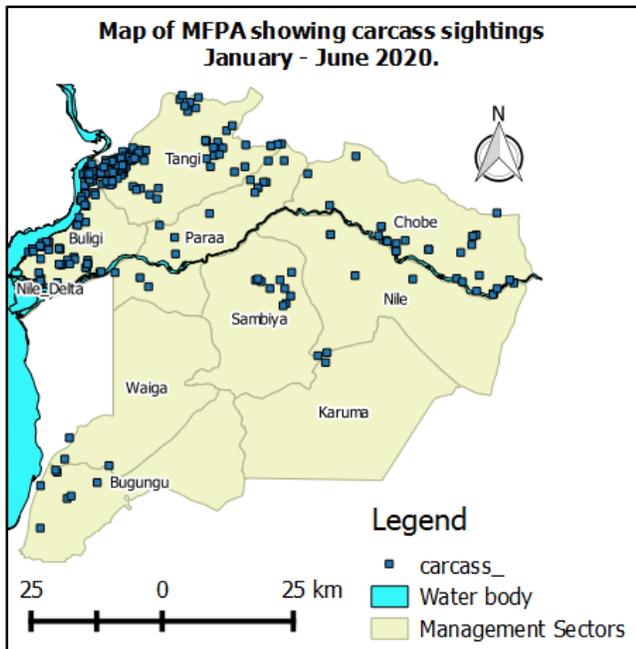
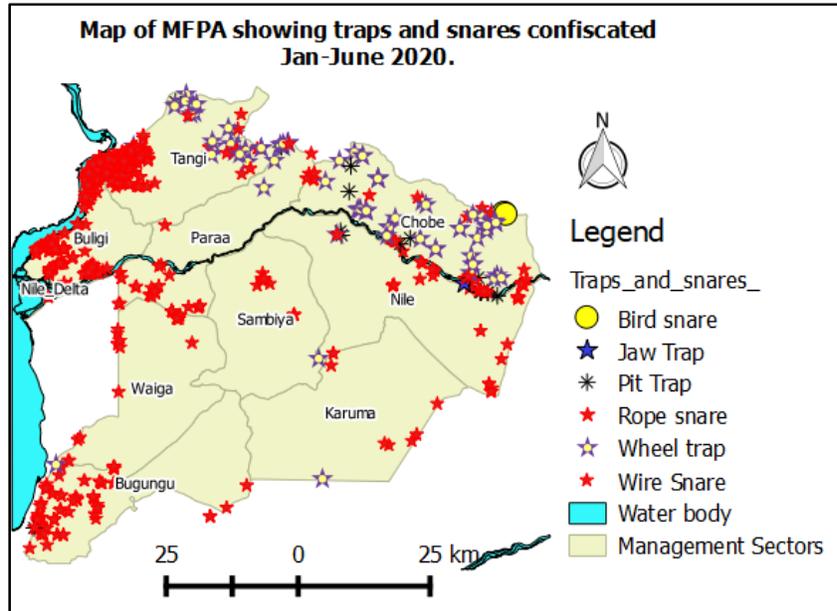
1. COVID / Lockdown – very restricted movement of vehicles and resources
2. 100 Rangers being taken from MFPA to support Government efforts to control the locust swarms
3. A sudden surge in poaching
4. Realization that UWA Operational budgets were being cut back due to the collapse of tourism
5. UCF stepping into underwrite a lot of MFPA Law Enforcement operational budget

Threats	Arrested	Observed Only	Unsuccessful Pursuit	Verbal Warning	Written Warning
Agriculture	1	1			
Fishing	23	2	20		
Poaching	72	39	209	4	
Livestock grazing	2	2			
Logging and timber harvesting	55	26		2	
NTFP collection	9		4	24	

Distribution of Direct Encounters with People in MFPA Q1 / Q2 2020:



Note the amount of encounters within the park in the NE / Central MFPA – hence Ayago 3 & Atil Camp RPs.



There are a number of problem areas, including the Delta – Kabim, and the Central & North East of the park.

Veterinary Response Unit – rescues from wire snares:

RESCUE REPORT 2020						
SPECIES	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
Elephant	2	0	1	0	0	0
Giraffe	3	2	9	10	10	24
Buffalo	0	1	0	4	2	2
Waterbuck	0	0	0	1	0	0
Kob	0	0	0	1	1	0
Warthog	0	0	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	5	3	12	16	14	28

Budget update:

Activity 1 – full budget remains.

Activity 2 – Budget amount: \$65,000.

Construction payments v's contract value: \$43,873 / \$57,922

Operational budgets (car, fuel, staff, food, accommodation): \$3820

Activity 3 - JOCC

3.1 – Solar power, battery installation. \$10,000 fully spent in White Mare Technology contract.

3.2 – Computer screens, computers, technology installations, furniture and storage facilities. \$8000 fully spent in White Mare and John Kalungi furniture contracts.

3.3 – EarthRanger – no phones have been purchased yet.

3.4 – Internet. \$4000 spent on Airtel microwave installation and \$4 months of service fee before handing contract over to UWA.

Activity 4 – UCF Project Vehicle.

\$20,000 fully spent on the initial purchase price from Toyota Gibraltar of \$46,400. Land Cruiser double cabin purchased and is due to arrive in Uganda week starting 13th Sept, 2020.



Conclusion

We expect Ayago 3, all communications systems and the UCF project car to be completed by the end of October leaving only Atil Camp to complete.

Our original wish to complete the programme by the second quarter of 2020 was severely disrupted due to COVID. However, as the report clearly shows, considerable progress has been made.

The North East and Central MFPA are key to the recovery of Murchison Falls. For decades UWA has deployed patrols into the area, each at a significant operational cost. To have the teams in the strategically important places permanently is a huge boost and incredible disincentive to poachers in the region. We can expect a large increase in wildlife numbers across the region and of course – tourism.

The Recovery of Murchison Falls has set up the foundations of protected area management for UWA. Whilst not fully complete, they now have the means to manage the park and challenges far more effectively and efficiently. The Law Enforcement & Operations Centre is a world class facility. However, it is only as good as how it is used – so most efforts are focused on operations now.

MFPA has been under extreme pressure over the past two quarters. There is no way we could have coped without all of the effort, encouragement and of course the foundations of protected area management investment that has been put in.

The Recovery of Murchison Falls is an incredible programme – we are far from finished but we are incredibly proud of what we have achieved together. In 2011, the park was on the brink of no return – and no means to recover. Today – well, we just keep achieving and the hope created in UWA and Uganda, shines very bright during this difficult time.

On behalf of the Uganda Wildlife Authority, the Uganda Conservation Foundation and all of our supporters and friends, thank you Global Conservation and International Elephant Foundation.