

October 2009

Dear Everybody,

The Kalahari sand storm began as an eerie, orange glow on the horizon. As it moved toward us, fingers of grit and dusk twisted hundreds of feet into the sky. We rushed around camp, securing the tents and throwing supplies into the truck. The storm seemed to move slowly, but once it reached the dunes east of us, it slammed us with gale force winds. Sharp sand crystals blistered our faces and blinded us as we jumped inside the Land Rover. Strong gusts shook the truck and actually pushed it backwards. The world disappeared in a swirling blanket of angry sand and dust.



Besides sand storms, we have survived droughts, fires, and poaching. Somehow we always pulled through. This recession has been like a sand storm. Last year we thrived, even as it approached. You generously donated the funds for the Mobile Clinic that now provides health care to villagers – and that also saves elephants. But when the recession finally hit it was tough, as it surely has been for many of you. We have always had very low overhead – our office has been Mary Dykes' old sewing room, but we have scaled back even more. We are continuing our conservation work – but we need your help.

YOU are the Owens Foundation for Wildlife Conservation - not a mere LIST of names - but friends we made on our lecture and book tours. You found us even though we were 'lost' in the Kalahari Desert or the Luangwa Valley, and you supported our work, even sent tubs of peanut butter! We know you are feeling this economic pinch, and so we hate asking for donations, but if you donate we will do everything we can to make good things happen for people and wildlife and hope to make it through these hard times.



ELEPHANTS: Africa elephant poaching is again on the rise since the ban on commercial ivory trade was weakened in 2007. **An estimated 38,000 elephants have been shot illegally in one year to satisfy the insatiable appetite for ivory.** At this rate, most populations will be decimated in 15 years. **Yet, North Luangwa National Park's elephants are safe.** When we started in North Zambia in 1986 it seemed like such a simple idea – give people loans, training, education and health care, and they will stop shooting elephants. Simple - but extraordinarily successful!

Hammer Simwinga is expanding our model of agricultural, micro-industries, education and health programs into new areas in North Zambia, so that more and more people have environmentally sound, sustainable jobs and food – and do not have to poach to survive. The Mobile Health Clinic that you helped purchase last year is the only health care available to some villagers. At present Hammer lacks sufficient operating funds to reach all of the villages that send pleas for service by this amazing vehicle and staff. We also need donations so Hammer can continue replenishing forests with tree planting, converting farmers from slash and burn to environmentally sound agriculture, installing beehives and much more. We must support this success.



SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE: We have published a scientific paper in the *African Journal of Ecology* on the impact of intense poaching on the reproductive biology and social structure of North Luangwa elephants. It can be found on our web page. Our work demonstrated that, because most of the adult females have been shot, the surviving young female elephants are reproducing at half the normal age.

WOLVES: I recently watched 5 wolves testing elk in a meadow between two mountains. They never made a kill, but found and fed on an old carcass, bald eagles and coyotes circling behind. Some curious Canada geese landed nearby, but after watching the array of predators, wisely took off again. Honking as usual. I've seldom seen geese

lift into the sky without a lot of “goose music.” It was a beautiful scene, but made me sad. Even though wolves are still extremely rare, **there is now a wolf hunting season in some western states, including Idaho and Montana.** Hunters can shoot 220 wolves in Idaho each ‘season’. That is far too many for the small number of wolves in the state. I know there are two sides to the issue - wolves do occasionally kill domestic stock; it’s hard not to with so much cattle occupying former wolf range. But ranchers are compensated for their losses. Wolves are not for theirs. The presence of wolves is a sign of a healthy ecosystem, and they keep wild prey species strong by culling the weakest individuals. A federal judge recently failed to stop hunting of wolves, but indicated that there is a chance wolves will be returned to the Endangered Species List, which would stop hunting. That is their best chance.

WETLANDS: With the help of some wonderful volunteers, we moved 30 tons of rocks to restore a mountain brook to its historic channel. Decades ago it had been diverted to dry up the meadow. But next spring, for the first time in 80 years, water will tumble down the toes of the mountain bringing the wetland back to life. Seeds have been waiting patiently all this time for the water to come home again. Now there will be habitat for moose, bears, beavers, geese and ducks. Instant solution – just add water!

GRIZZLIES: Mark is in the mountains on his horse with his bear biologist sidekicks, protecting and observing grizzlies. There is good and bad news about the grizzlies. Bad news: some populations in the USA are declining at such a fast rate that (good news) they have been returned to the Endangered Species List. Also in Canada their numbers have dropped dramatically over a short period of time. We must keep wolves and grizzly bears protected by endangered status because of their extremely low numbers.

Mary Dykes (wife of my twin brother, Bobby) has helped us since the 1970s. She and Bobby brought lion collars to the Kalahari, and were Mark’s passengers when he first flew into the desert, and ended up sleeping under the plane in the bush! Mary has done everything from order airplanes parts, ship enormous boxes, keep our accounts straight, somehow communicate with us in the wilderness, and a million other things. Mary has taken a leave of absence to take care of her mother and to help us downsize. She still volunteers for the OF. We will be thankful – forever. Bobby has always worked as a volunteer – maintaining our web page, sorting out all our computer and photographic needs. Tammy Johnson, who has also worked tirelessly for the OF for years, has taken over some of Mary’s duties.

We will always be grateful for the support each of you has given us over nearly four decades of wildlife research and conservation. Together, we have helped protect and revitalize some of earth’s largest and most magnificent wilderness regions and the wondrous creatures who live there. **Please help us continue!**

Cheers,

Delia and Mark

Delia and Mark

HABITAT FOR GRIZZLIES! There is a beautiful 98-acre parcel of land on a forested mountainside in Idaho that overlooks a river valley. It provides habitat for grizzly bears, black bears, elk, deer, moose and other wildlife. The OF owns this land, but we must sell it to a conservation buyer so that it will be protected forever. (We cannot afford to keep parcels of land indefinitely.) By purchasing this land: You will (1) Help protect grizzly bears and other wildlife, (2) help the Owens Foundation, (3) and if you hold the land for several years it will probably appreciate, and might sell for a profit. Obviously, we can’t guarantee this. In the meantime, you can obtain a tax benefit by enrolling the land in an easement. (Cost: \$350,000)

