

Dear Everybody

November 2011



ELEPHANTS: Twenty-five years ago this month, Mark and I stood among the dusty foothills of North Luangwa National Park, the forested Muchinga Escarpment rising 3,000 feet behind us. Beside us lay a dead elephant, shot by poachers for its ivory. We soon learned that commercial poaching was the only local economy and that to save the elephants we had to help the villagers find alternative micro-industries and improve their agriculture. Along with our elephant research,

we began a project to do just that. This work continues today, expanding under the direction of Hammer Simwinga, our Zambian protégé. Not many projects in remote regions celebrate a quarter century of success.

We first hired the women of Mukungule to cut thatching grass. And then we employed scores of men, using axes, hoes and rakes, to make primitive roads into the national park. We began offering loans and training for fish farms, beekeeping, maize-milling, pressing sunflower seeds, carpentry, sewing, cobblery, and other sustainable industries with local markets. We built schools, offered clinics, trained birth attendants, initiated women's clubs, and more. Slowly, the elephant poaching declined as the local people improved their lives.

Recently Owens Foundation supporter, Mischa Tryzna of Holland, visited Hammer and his work in and around North Luangwa. Five years ago Mischa and his wife Hanka started a non-profit in Holland (*Save African Animal Resource*) to expand support for Hammer's project and several others in Southern Africa. Mischa kindly shared the following with us:

"Hammer talks gladly and a lot," writes Mischa. "[He] picked us up at the airport in Lusaka and we went all the way up to Mpika in his car. I offered to help him drive several hundreds of km. It was in the night and it was a horror! Hammer has shown us the work during the long two days, traveling in his car from village to village. Impressive!"

Mischa quoting Hammer: **"The poaching in the national park is not any more an issue."** (Remember - when Mark and I began in North Luangwa in 1986 poachers were shooting 1,000 elephants a year.)



Mischa continues, "We all know that Hammer's work and that of Mark and Delia Owens contributed significantly to the notion of the obsolescence of the poaching. The local people now know that there exists better, safer, and easier ways to look after their livelihoods than poaching, and that wildlife is important in their future. But of course, this notion has to be maintained. Hammer is now working with four cooperatives, [teaching and assisting them] to grow crops and breed domestic animals in excess of their basic needs and



surpluses are sold on the local markets for profit. Wildlife conservation and the need for wildlife is a strong base of his presentation and the under support of the project.

People see well that the welfare of the members of the past and present cooperatives is increasing, often to such an extent, that they do not need any more of Hammer's assistance and they are fully self-supporting and able to generate considerable income."

With your help Hammer builds on a solid foundation:

- **Schools.** Just as Mark and Delia began so many years ago, “Hammer helps to establish, build and run...basic schools in the villages, which are considered by the government to be too remote and insignificant.”
- **Business Management.** “Another activity of the cooperatives is the marketing branch, which advises the cooperatives on marketing strategies, so that they receive good prices for their products.”
- **Forest Protection.** To fight deforestation, “Hammer has devised a scheme in which each of the cooperatives has gained (leased) an area of native forests of 100 acres to be used in a sustainable manner. The members can collect forest fruits and set up bee hives, but cannot burn for charcoal or slash.”
- **Small Business and Livestock.** “Hammer offers a loan in the form of living pigs as a small livestock program. The loan can be paid back by demonstrating that they have planted 200 well-tended trees per one pig.” ((Wow – good idea, Hammer.))
- **Children Camp.** “Hammer is also starting a children holiday summer camp in the forests. It will serve as a place to offer children an opportunity to have a nice holiday and to combine it with the classes about nature conservation and sustainable development. One of the camp cottages will bear the name of Hanka [who recently passed away] and I was honoured to lay down the founding stone. It was emotional.”



And on it goes. As I write this, I can hardly believe it was so long ago that we sat under a thorn tree with Chief Mukungule, explaining how we wanted to help his people. As we talked about fish farms and sewing machines, part of me never thought it would happen. How would we get grinding mills and ram presses to villages with no roads? How could we

teach people, who knew nothing of money, about the need to make profits; and that it was moral and essential to do so? But Chief Mukungule, the oldest chief in Zambia, encouraged us and taught us to be patient. “Panono, panono” he said, which means ‘little by little.’ It will take time, but it will happen little by little.

We thank Mischa Tryzna and his wife Hanka Kotrla for their generous support of Hammer’s work and for sharing these inspiring updates with all of us.

WOLVES: Now Mark will share one of his adventures in the Northern Rockies with you.

IDAHO



MARK: The Selkirk Mountains stood tall around us on a fall morning not long ago, their golden tamaracks ablaze under a gray somber sky. My Fish and Game colleague (Greg) and I urged our horses upslope on an old logging road paralleling Cow Creek, scanning the ground for wolf and grizzly bear tracks – and those of hunters who might be jumping the gun on the renewed wolf hunting season. We were also looking for signs that wolves or grizzlies had killed any of the cattle being grazed in this basin of US Forest Service public land. Seven miles from the trailhead, we left the track, crossed a rocky creek, climbed a steep sandy bank, and wound our way through tough alpine ‘pucker brush’ so thick it several times

stripped my feet from my stirrups. Almost two hours later we reined in near the base of Phoebe’s Tip which stands next to sister Molly’s Tip in the Selkirk Crest northwest of Bonners Ferry. Miners named these mountains in the late 1800s, but more recently the US Forest Service has modified these appellations only slightly to make them more ‘PC.’ Greg and I lunched there while mulling the future of wolves in this

landscape. Idaho boasts more wilderness than any state other than Alaska and has a mere 700 – 1300 wolves, about one wolf for every one thousand square miles. Hunting of wolves re-opened in Idaho and Montana this year mainly in response to ardent claims from some hunting and ranching lobbies that wolves are killing too many elk, deer, cattle and sheep. This persuaded the federal Department of the Interior to down-list Grey Wolves from ‘Endangered’ to merely ‘Threatened,’ claiming that wolf populations had recovered their numbers sufficiently, and to turn over the management of their ‘recovery’ to state governments where wolves are found. But these governments are institutionally biased against predators, especially wolves. The result is now a determined effort by these states to reduce wolf population numbers making them ecologically impotent as functioning apex predators.

- Since August 30th, 134 wolves have been killed statewide in Idaho as of November 14th.
- Some wildlife managers worry that by April 2012, wolves in Idaho will be seriously depleted.
- Trappers are baiting wolves to leg-hold traps and snares.
- Hunters shoot wolves lured with calls that mimic other wolves, wounded coyotes, rabbits, etc.
- Idaho Fish and Game have begun shooting wolves from helicopters to protect elk in certain areas.
- Animal control officers kill ‘problem’ wolves - more than one hundred in Idaho and Montana.

Wolves and other predators do kill domestic stock: According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistic Service, in 2010 Idaho ranchers lost 6100 head of cattle out of a statewide herd of 2.2 million (human pop 1,567,582). 6.6% of these 6100 were attributed to predators with just 1.98% of the dead cows and 3.1% of the dead calves blamed on wolves. In Montana and Idaho combined wolves have reportedly killed 152 cattle, 108 sheep, 12 dogs and 3 horses in this period. But there may be reason to question these numbers because officials reporting depredation are often politically biased against predators.



Ranchers are justifiably upset by their losses to predators. But respiratory diseases accounted for 25.6% of deaths among cattle and 33.9% among calves compared with just 2 to 3% of deaths attributed to wolves. Coyotes and dogs caused the majority of deaths by *predators*, not wolves. Defenders of Wildlife and other groups are compensating ranchers for their losses to wolves. Most of the depredation of domestic stock occurs on *public land (your land)*, which is being leased by ranchers from BLM and our National Forest administrators for a pittance, and at great environmental cost. Regarding the idea of wolves threatening humans, the average Idahoan has a greater chance of being killed by a piece of falling space junk than by wolves.

As for the claim that wolves are killing too many elk and deer: Wolves are vital to the health of our ecosystems, controlling elk and deer numbers so that they do not over-browse their habitats. Wolves feed on the weak, sick and injured to keep prey populations genetically fit. When wolves were removed from Yellowstone in the 1940s, elk and deer numbers doubled and vital aspen-birch-willow-cottonwood riparian habitats and their diverse amphibians, songbirds and beavers virtually disappeared from over-browsing. There is growing evidence that this response to lost predators has happened all over the West.

“Lords of Nature: Life in a Land of Great Predators,” by Greenfire Productions, documents the importance of predators and we strongly encourage you to buy a copy (www.greenfireproductions.org) and show it to everyone you can. The question is not whether wolves are killing too many of their prey, because if they did, they could not have co-evolved with those prey species for eons before modern man

appeared on the landscape. Furthermore, many of the characteristics of elk and deer that make them appealing to hunters have evolved in response to eons of predation pressure.

The question really is who gets to kill these prey: wolves or hunters? And whether we should maintain artificially dense elk and deer populations at the expense of their habitats and our ecosystems just so hunters can be more assured of getting 'their' elk or deer. To do so risks the health and even the survival of these species, because overpopulations over-browse food resources, and they often crash, sometimes to extinction, as happened to the now extinct Kaibab Deer when predators were removed from the Kaibab Plateau by hunters in the 1930s.

Wolves are your resource and you have a right to demand their protection just as much as hunters or ranchers have a right to demand their elimination. Idaho plans to reduce its wolf population to a mere 150 individuals. In our opinion that will not represent a viable population.

If you agree, get involved and let your voice be heard. President Obama can re-establish wolf protections by executive order with the stroke of a pen. Write to the Whitehouse and to the Secretary of Interior and urge them to re-designate the Gray Wolf as an endangered species.



- **For Address Info:** Write - *The Office of the Clerk of the US House of Representatives/US Capitol* -- Room H154 - Washington, DC 20515 – PH: 202-225-7000, or email for info www.clerk.houses.gov - or email your representatives directly through the following link: www.house.gov/writerep
- **US President**, The White House - Washington, DC 20500 Email: www.whitehouse.gov/contact
- **U.S. Department of the Interior**, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240. feedback@ios.doi.gov

Greg and I found no evidence of wolf or grizzly depredation of cattle despite our cheek-chapping 20-mile ride that day. Indeed, predators have been cohabitating with each other and cattle in this drainage for decades, and yet so far as anyone knows, not one domestic animal has been preyed upon.

Almost every winter when the first snow falls, Delia and I have scanned a large meadow where the wolves play. We watched the spring pups, now lanky and big-pawed tumbling like puppies. We have known some of the adults for years and seen the young grow tall. But this year, so far, no wolves have come to the meadow. We heard one calling far in the distance. It was alone.

Thank you for help. We cannot do it alone.

Cheers!

Mark and Delia



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