



December 2016

Dear Everybody,

I don't know if you've ever noticed, but Mark and I have always tried to keep our letters to you as positive as possible. Against all the discouraging news, we also strived to share the heartening progress about Kalahari lions, Luangwa elephants, grizzly bears, wolves and wetlands.

Staying positive is becoming very difficult. African lions as well as elephants are now endangered. A few years ago, wolves, who had almost disappeared, recovered at an unbelievable rate, venturing into the meadows and mountains where we often observed them. All it took was a little bit of protection. That lasted only five years. Now, once again, they have been nearly exterminated – mostly with cruel traps – in much of the range. The wolves came and went so fast, my heart couldn't keep up. Climate change is occurring so fast that the goals set out in the Paris accord, are now believed to be too little, too late.

How to move forward? First of all, we can't give up. Second, we have to take a walk. That's what I do when I feel all is lost.

Here I am, walking through the meadow in the northern Rockies. It's drizzling. No snow yet even in mid November, the warmest ever recorded. The ducks are still here!! The water plants are as green as July, and the tail-wagging ducks, are swishing among them, yapping at me to move on. Leaning over the pond's edge, I watch water bugs darting across the surface with their wide circular feet. (Last winter I saw water bugs swimming under the ice – I promise that is the truth.)



Against the rain, a great blue heron (GBH) balances miserably on a spruce branch high above the water. He peers at me with his concentric eyes, but decides to stay put. Most of the time, he hunts frogs by stalking as slow and graceful as a bride's maid through the water plants, but yesterday I saw him dive on the wing, his entire body pointed like an arrow, and grab a gopher.



Oh, and there is a frog now. In November! A small leopard frog hunched on a mud splat watching those whizzing water bugs.

I leave the pond, but even in the meadow my boots sink five inches into the water from all this rain (another record). Forty-five wild turkeys, shoulders hunched against the weather like old men in overcoats, stroll across a drier spot. Now and then, one fluffs up his back feathers, or shakes out a wet wing. Mostly they are females, but a few males track the ladies step by step. No, I say. It is not yet spring.

A herd of twenty-one white tail deer graze grass on the eastern meadow that slopes up toward the forests. The mountain looms overhead, and I see five elk on a rocky outcrop. They browse mountain maple leaves, still red with autumn. Taking out my binoculars, I scan the entire valley for moose, but don't see any. Of course, I also look for mountain lions and mule deer, but none are out. Although there is no snow even on the highest peaks, I assume the bears are in their dens. Or maybe not. Maybe they too are foraging this long-autumn bounty, and will have more fat for their shorter winter sleep. Just 2 years ago, I would have looked for wolves, now there is no reason.

On my way back to the cabin, I swing by the creek and am greatly rewarded. At one of the bends, the creek widens to a small pond, and two otters are playing on a floating log. I freeze because they are more timid than the other critters. I'm guessing they are last spring's pups. One races down the log, slides into the water, then swims back to the other end. Repeat. The other one follows. Their fur glistens even in the dim, watery light. After a few minutes, they change their game. Now they crawl onto the middle of the log, roll over it, and slip into the water on the other side. Over and over, they circumvent the log, even as they also move up and down it. I watch for forty-five minutes!! They never stop. Even though now it is pouring rain.

I'm soaked through, and cold. I back away so as not to disturb them, and head toward the cabin. I tuck under my hood and hunch my shoulders, looking very much like the GBH. Can't wait to warm my feathers by the fire. Tonight, I'll sleep with the window open. You never know, there might be one lone wolf left, who howls. He and I hoping for an answer.

Aldo Leopold began his book with the words, "There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot." Those of us who cannot live without the wild are becoming fewer and fewer. That means we have to work harder and harder. The little bit of wild left is in our hands.

I mean it. Go to the woods and take a walk.
There is something special under every leaf.
We must strive to protect each wonder.

Debi and Mark



How You Can Help: Any donation extends sustainable village development as a means of saving people AND the wildlife living near them in North Zambia.

1. **TRUCK!** Hammer Simwinga – that young man that appeared at our project offices volunteering to help more than 30 years ago, continues to introduce environmentally sound, sustainable programs in 10 remote villages surrounding the ground breaking Mukungule Nature Conservancy located near Zambia's North Luangwa National Park. His truck that we propped up nearly three years ago is now well and truly dead. Unless Hammer can get to the remote villages with his message of life sustaining **Wise Use** – the cycle of success he has valiantly built and expanded may falter. We **MUST** get him a new (used) truck. After Hammer, a truck is the single most important tool in conserving wildlife, habitat and the people who depend on and protect them. PLEASE – the people and wildlife of North Luangwa need your help.
2. Hammer also needs funding for beehives, oil presses, bean seeds, tree cultivation for reforestation, education and health initiatives. An intriguing new option has come to light – worm farming as a means of creating high quality compost to enrich the soil upon which the food supply for the villagers depends so they do not have to poach elephants to survive.
3. And please select The Owens Foundation (Tax ID 58-1749339) as you **Amazon Smile Charity** and a percentage of every dollar you spend will be donated to us and costs you not one penny.

Owens Foundation, P.O. Box 870530, Stone Mountain, GA 30087, www.owens-foundation.org, 678-648-1267