









BUMI HILLS ANTI POACHING UNIT

Quarterly Report April/June 2023

	<p align="center">BUMI HILLS ANTI POACHING UNIT, LAKE KARIBA, ZIMBABWE</p>	
<p align="center">Operations Report Summary 01 Apr,2023 to 30 Jun,2023</p>		
 <p align="center">121 Patrols Conducted</p>	 <p align="center">21,049 Kilometres Patrolled</p>	 <p align="center">1,244 Hours spent on Patrol</p>
 <p align="center">10 Verbal Warnings Issued</p>	 <p align="center">0 Fines Issued</p>	 <p align="center">7 Arrests Made</p>
 <p align="center">272 Snares Recovered</p>	 <p align="center">32 Fishing Nets Recovered</p>	 <p align="center">10,262 Length of Nets (Metres)</p>
 <p align="center">11 Animals Poached</p>	 <p align="center">7 Dinghies Stopped & Searched</p>	 <p align="center">5 Kapenta Rigs Stopped & Searched</p>
 <p align="center">2 Animals Immobilised & Treated</p>	 <p align="center">1 Dinghies Impounded</p>	 <p align="center">0 Kapenta Rigs Impounded</p>

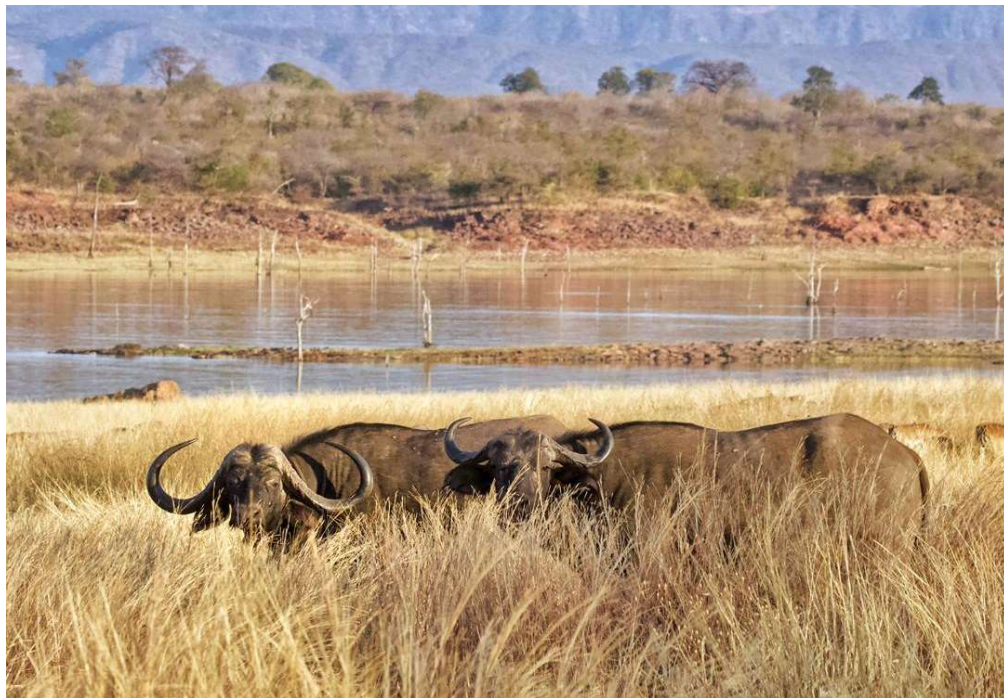


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Newsletter April/June 2023

As I write this, a most unusual, bitterly cold wind is sweeping up the Zambezi Valley – the tail end of a massive cold front which hit Southern Africa in the last couple of days. In sheltered, sunny corners, mongooses are stretched out, soaking up the thin winter sunlight, and out on the floodplain, the elephants only emerge from the shelter of the bush in the late morning, standing blinking at the very edge of the scrub, reluctant to venture out into the biting wind.



As we enter the dry season, the bush turns from lush and green, to golden savannah

To be fair, the temperature is 15 degrees Celsius, which is not particularly cold in the grander scheme of things, but the wind chill is outrageous, and we are not accustomed to the cold! We are right in the thick of winter now – the grass has dried out completely, the brittle yellow colours contrasting against the deep blue winter sky, which echoes the deep blue of the Lake water – the life-giving waters that will see our animals through even the harshest dry season – which this next one promises to be, due to the El Nino prediction.



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But that's still to come – what's important is what we have been up to these past 3 months, which is quite a bit.

The most exciting news is that the last remaining Bumi lioness, whom we have named 'Tariro', (which means 'Hope' in the Shona language), has had 5 cubs, first spotted two months ago. This wonderful news was a huge lift to our spirits after the tragic loss of her sister and mother earlier this year, and we pray that this means the beginning of the resurgence of the Bumi lions.

As Tariro's mother was shot for stock theft in the neighbouring district, it is imperative that we fit her with a tracking collar as soon as it is safe to do so, (when cubs are young, it is extraordinary how lion mothers often 'adrenalin fight' against drug effects and can be almost impossible to sedate), enabling us to warn the relevant communities should she start heading in their direction. (By doing this, the 'Lion Guardians' in the villages have time to alert local stock owners, and also to assemble noise making devices to chase the lions away should they venture too close).

We don't have many pictures of them, as Tariro has kept her babies well hidden, but we do have a still from a video, seen below.



Tariro carries one cub in her mouth, whilst one of the five hides under her tummy!



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The three males, known collectively as the ‘Bumi Boys’, have been regulars in our area and so far, have shown no signs of aggression towards Tariro and her cubs, which is very good news. As you know, we have a tracking collar on ‘Blondie’ (see Q1 newsletter), and are thus able to track the movement of the coalition.



The ‘Bumi Boys’ recovering from their long swim...

The most extraordinary adventure they have been on recently, was a visit across to the Matusadona National Park – where there is an exceedingly healthy population of lions! After venturing deep into ‘enemy territory’, the lads found themselves pinned on the shoreline directly opposite Bumi – and eventually swam back across the Ume River!

The swim entailed one leg to an island, where they presumably thawed out a bit (the lake waters are cold!) and then carried on to our shores – they took quite a risk as there are many, many crocodiles in these waters, we assume that the winter lethargy of these reptiles was in the lion’s’ favour!



The blue line showing the trip done by the lions; the swimming part is most unusual



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Our biggest challenge, both in terms of the size of the animals, animals and the scope of the operations this past three months has to be the darting and treating of elephant youngster “Kutwi”, which means ‘ear’ in Tonga.



‘Kutwe’ a young female elephant with a snare going from the ear to the tusk

We first spotted Kutwi at the beginning of winter – a sturdy 8-year-old female calf, with a terrible snare caught around the back of her left ear and snagged onto her small left tusk.

We had not met her family before – they are not regulars in our area, and after that first sighting, we did not see them again for weeks, despite constantly being on the lookout for her. (Kutwi’s mother was extremely protective of her injured calf, and chased us off with determination on that first meeting).

There was little we could do until her herd moved back into our area, which happened during early June. This time however, they moved even closer to our area, being seen several times in the thick bush, and on occasion on the lake shore – but each time they had either slipped away when we got there, or, more importantly, were in a totally unsuitable area for safely darting and treating her without having to worry about a spirited defense from her mother



Elephants have extremely strong maternal bonds, and will stop at nothing to defend their calves.



As can be appreciated, these exercises, when carried out on foot, have to be planned extremely carefully and thoroughly, with many variables to be considered – with safety of course being the overriding factor. The last thing one needs is for someone to be injured (or worse still killed), let alone having to shoot the mother in self-defense, because of poor planning.

And so it was, when another report came in of the herd being seen on a nearby road, that we decided to try a last ditch attempt at darting by foot. If this failed, our only other option was to call in a helicopter – a very expensive option indeed.

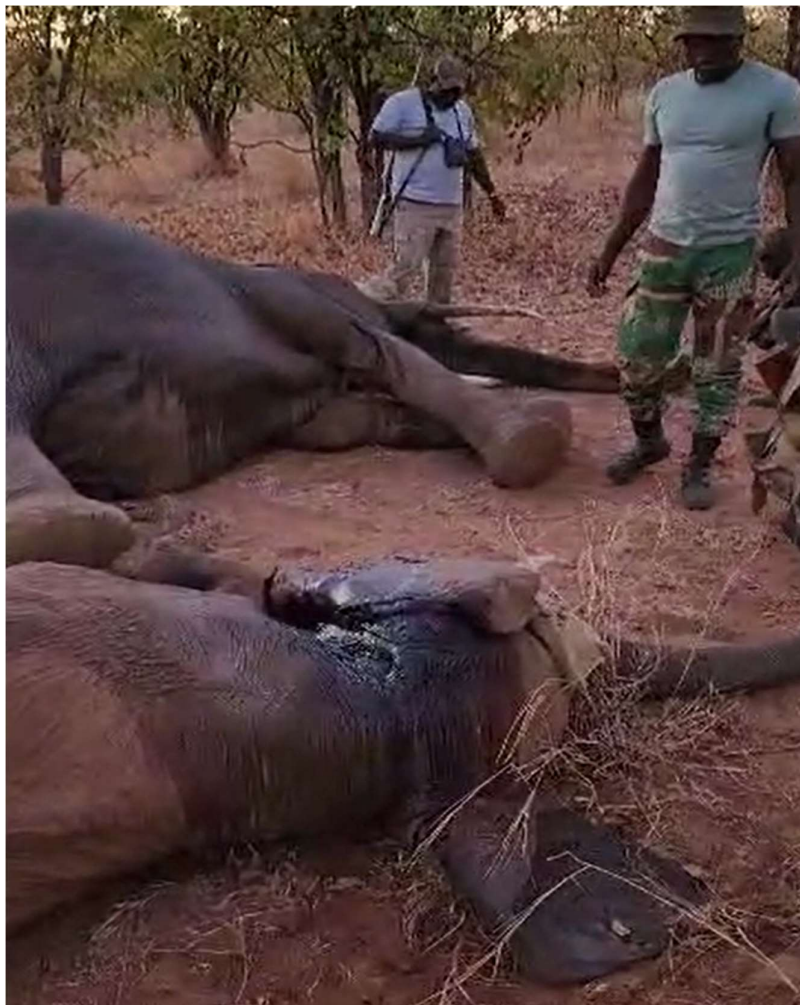
However the ‘gods’ were with us this time and we managed eventually to dart ‘Kutwi’ successfully from a vehicle. We waited for the immobilizing drug to take effect, then cautiously approached the by now recumbent ‘Kutwi’ on foot. This was short-lived however, because mum came thundering back through the undergrowth trumpeting noisily in anger and uprooting trees in her wake – scattering the ground team in all directions! Fortunately she stopped when she got to her sleeping calf, and stood over her protectively, glaring angrily at her would be tormentors, daring anyone to come a step closer!

So, the decision was then made to dart her as well – something we will do from now on as a matter of routine in any future similar snaring cases. Dart mum first, then deal with her calf safely!



This was duly done, and again, we waited for the drug to 'kick in'. BUT due to her elevated adrenaline levels caused by the anxiety over her calf, she fought the drug furiously, swaying from one front foot to another, determined to stay upright. She eventually decided (in her half drugged state), to reverse up to her sleeping calf and – **horror of horrors** – she sat down, using her calf as a 'pillow' for her posterior!!! The waiting ground team immediately bolted into action, and managed to get her standing again, then, by pulling her tail to one side, managed to get her down and onto her side

Fortunately, and amid huge sighs of relief, but having aged the ground team members by another ten years (!), the rest of the procedure was a matter of routine – removal of the offending snare, treating the horrible wound as best we could, applying topical ointments and antiseptics, an injectable long-acting anti-biotic, plus a vitamin boost jab, then all was well. Both Kutwi and her mum were then reversed from the immobilizing drugs and rejoined their herd shortly thereafter, no doubt wondering what on earth had just happened!



This gives a really good idea of the complexities of darting and treating an injured animal – it took us over three months from the initial report, to finally concluding the operation, after dark, and exhausted but exhilarated that we had freed Kutwi from what must have been a terribly painful, human created, wound.

It makes it all worthwhile, and the troubles are quickly forgotten and only the happy outcome remembered – and we would not do any of this without the support of you all, reading this.

Thank you!

Please follow us, if you are not already, on our social media channels:



bumihillsfoundation and bumihillsantipoaching unit



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[And if you would like to email us – it's cath@bumihillsfoundation.org](mailto:cath@bumihillsfoundation.org)

<https://linktr.ee/bumihillsantipoachingunit>



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