



ZAMBIA

# Liuwa Plain

National Park

3,660 km<sup>2</sup>

African Parks Project since 2003

Government Partner: **Zambian Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW)** and the **Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE)**

Acacia Partners, **WWF-Netherlands** and **WWF-Zambia** were major funders in 2017

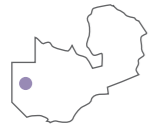


*One of the two resident male lions rests with his cub in Liuwa Plain in Zambia. © Andrew MacDonald*



# Liuwa

DEON JOUBERT | PARK MANAGER



**ZAMBIA** – Liuwa Plain has one of the oldest conservation histories in Africa, where the King of Barotseland, Lubosi Lewanika, appointed his people in the 19th century to be the custodians of the park. They maintain that sentiment today. With 10,000 people living within the National Park, Liuwa is a living example of how people and wildlife can co-exist and benefit in a shared landscape. Each year, this 3,660 km<sup>2</sup> park hosts the second largest wildebeest migration on the continent – without fanfare, this is one of the most glorious spectacles on the planet. But this was not always the case. Prior to assuming management of Liuwa in 2003, wildebeest and zebra were in steep decline, grasslands were threatened by rice fields, and all but one lonely lioness roamed the plains, calling for signs of her own kind only to resort to human companionship when she realised nobody else remained.

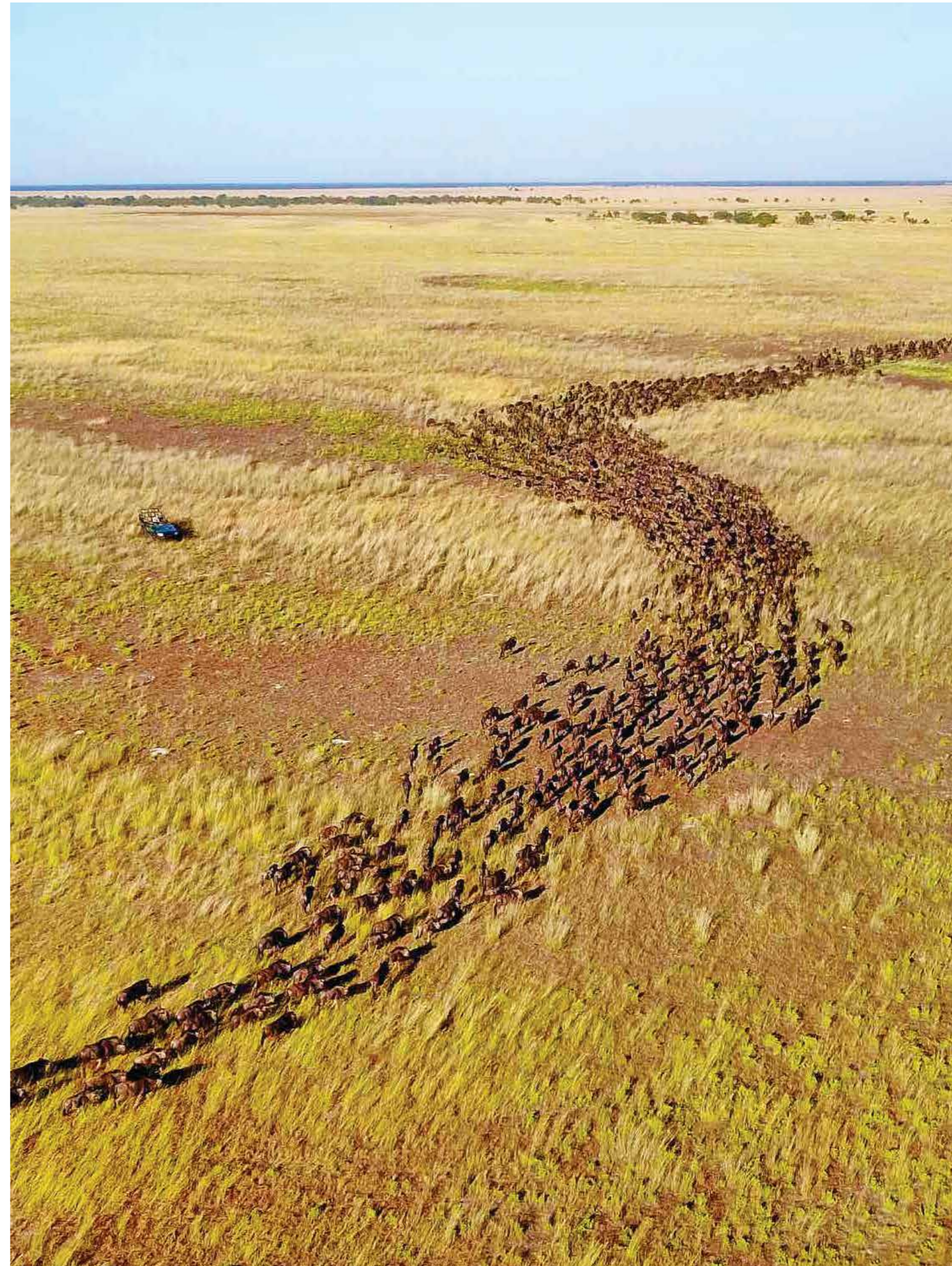
In 2008, African Parks began a series of reintroductions to reunite this last lioness with a pride; and thus new life began. She slowly joined a pride that grew to 10 lions, and over a similar period, eland and buffalo were also reintroduced. The plains game animals began to rise, providing a healthy prey base for the growing pride, along with supporting cheetahs and hyaenas. Poaching levels subsided, and land-use plans began to be implemented along with sustainable fish harvesting and other livelihoods for local people. A new high-end lodge was opened in 2017 – King Lewanika – named after a King who foresaw the role people would play in the preservation of this landscape; and to great acclaim. The New York Times, Travel + Leisure and others are naming Liuwa and the lodge as a coveted destination, where tourism supports the conservation of the wildlife and prosperity of the people in this sacred land. Sadly, 2017 saw the passing of the legendary lioness, Lady Liuwa as she was affectionately known. She died in August, at the ripe old age of 18, of natural causes – practically unheard of for a wild lion. But she did not die alone; and she left behind a legacy of a small but growing pride of lions, living their lives together on Liuwa's flourishing plains.

## BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

August 2017 marked the passing of the legendary lioness fondly known as Lady Liuwa, who died of natural causes at 18 years old. Due to years of poaching and illegal trophy hunting, lions were completely eradicated from Liuwa in the 1990's, except for this one lioness. She roamed the plains for years as the sole survivor in the park, and with no lions to be found she looked to humans for companionship. African Parks assumed management of Liuwa Plain in 2003, and we waited to see if any lions would return naturally from within the larger landscape, but none ever did. After a series of lion introductions of both males and females, a

pride started to form. After waiting for over a decade, Lady Liuwa bonded with one female named Sepo and was finally reunited with her own kind. Unable to produce her own cubs, she helped Sepo raise numerous litters over the years. Sadly, just a month after Lady Liuwa died, Sepo was killed defending her cubs from a competing male. However, four new cubs were documented at the end of the year, adding to the small but growing pride of Liuwa's lions.

A park-wide aerial game census was completed in July, with counts showing increasing numbers of wildebeest, eland, and buffalo, while tsessebe, lechwe and zebra remained stable. The latter could be the result of counting methods



An aerial view of the wildebeest migration, the second largest on the continent, in Liuwa Plain National Park in Zambia. © Andrew MacDonald

and nocturnal movements of the animals. The carnivore populations are thriving and are being actively monitored by our partners at the Zambian Carnivore Programme (ZCP), who play an integral role in helping us protect these species. The male lion reintroduced in 2016 has settled and is interacting regularly with the resident male. Both males and one female lion were re-collared in December. Cheetah numbers are on the rise with all the cubs having dispersed, and four new cheetahs received collars, bringing the total to seven. Liuwa is a haven for hyaenas, and their population continues to surge with over 500 individuals recorded, 14 of which were collared, and a new clan was identified in the north of the park. An additional 19 wildebeest received collars, bringing the total to 32.

Lady Liuwa passed away at 18 years old leaving behind a growing pride



Fifty-five arrests were made, with 45 convictions. Confiscations included 10 firearms, 48 rounds of ammunition, 36 snares, 263 kg of bushmeat, 796 kg of illegally harvested fish, 224 illegal fishing nets as well 31 kg of ivory. A wide variety of other poaching paraphernalia was also confiscated. We received a record of 200 applicants to go through Basic Field Ranger training; 21 were shortlisted and 12 completed the course.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Liuwa is home to more than 10,000 people who legally live within the park, and are on the frontlines of being vulnerable to climatic change and variable weather, including droughts and floods, making community development all the more important. Liuwa supported 28 schools impacting 8,300 children both inside and outside of the park. Scholarships were provided to 77 students to attend Kalabo Secondary School and other schools surrounding the park; 37 boarding students received assistance from the park, and 14 community teachers were provided with monthly stipends over the year to improve capacity within community schools. Over 24 monitoring visits were made in conjunction with the Zambian Ministry of Education to the schools utilising ZeduPads, a rugged

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

The focus for 2017 was on intensifying field effort and efficiently managing resources to ensure scouts spent more time in the field, and to good effect. With the integration of the monitoring tools, CyberTracker and SMART, presence and patrol coverage of our law enforcement teams were greatly improved. The scouts completed an impressive 14,499 patrol man-days, covering 42,955 km, of which 14,469 km was on foot – a 20 percent increase from 2016.



The newly opened King Lewanika Lodge in Liuwa. © Time + Tide

tablet pre-loaded with thousands of lesson plans and in eight languages, and we provided power by purchasing 20 deep-cycle batteries to recharge the ZeduPads. Liuwa staff also hosted environmental and conservation 'lessons' within the park to 1,083 students. A total of 3,000 citrus seedlings sponsored by the Zambian Forestry Department were distributed by Liuwa's community team to several conservation clubs. Eighteen agricultural training sessions were conducted with a total of 460 pupils attending, and three schools successfully established gardens and orchards.

A total of 1,222 community members attended 22 meetings hosted by African Parks about the Pilot Project for Climate Resilience (PPCR). Liuwa's community team worked with communities to develop proposals for 42 projects to be funded by the World Bank including horticulture and winter maize production. Nineteen Village Action Group meetings took place, attended by 136 people to review the 2009 land-use plan and how to prevent and resolve human-wildlife conflict and promote conservation in Liuwa. And lastly, we were honoured with a visit to the park by Her Royal Highness Senior Chieftainess Mboanjikana of Libonda and the Libonda Kuta, whom we hosted at Matiamanene Camp in order to showcase Liuwa's tourism facilities and community projects.

## PARK MANAGEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Deon Joubert joined African Parks as Liuwa's new Park Manager, along with a new Special Projects Manager and land-use planner. The main focus was on completing the high-end tourism lodge, King Lewanika, on time and within budget. This was accomplished under challenging conditions, as the park received over 1,000 mm of rain

during the construction period. Three Induna houses were built and two more were renovated and were handed over to the Chiefs. Digital radios were installed, providing improved communications throughout the park. Two new Land Cruisers were purchased, along with four new motorbikes, and the ultralight received a new engine.

## TOURISM

The new high-end King Lewanika Lodge operated by Time + Tide opened in April to great acclaim. It has been recognised by Travel + Leisure, The New York Times, and Men's Journal as being a top destination for 2018. Liuwa received over 1,166 tourists who generated US\$177,557 in gross revenue, a 30 percent increase from 2016. The park trialled a self-catering tented camp in November; results were favourable, and the camp was at capacity for 20 out of 30 nights, with a 67 percent occupancy rate. New campsites will be investigated in 2018 to maximise this opportunity and generate more income.

## OBJECTIVES FOR 2018

- Incorporate the Upper West Zambezi GMA into the Liuwa mandate
- Increase tourism revenue to US\$200,000
- Develop a dedicated self-catering tented camp
- Complete the park management plan
- Complete the land-use plan
- Complete phase one of the new headquarters



Local children in Liuwa use donated ZeduPads. © Mana Meadows