



MALAWI

# Nkhotakota

Wildlife Reserve

1,800 km<sup>2</sup>

African Parks Project since 2015

Governed by: African Parks Limited in partnership with the Malawi Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW)

Dutch Postcode Lottery, People's Postcode Lottery, Stichting Dioraphte, The Wyss Foundation and WWF-Belgium were major funders in 2017



# Nkhotakota

SAMUEL KAMOTO | PARK MANAGER



**MALAWI** – Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve has had a difficult past. Decades of poaching and lawlessness saw a previously productive 1,800 km<sup>2</sup> reserve with 1,500 elephants in the 1990's reduced to fewer than 100 individuals. Game animals were hunted out. Nkhotakota had become an empty Reserve. With wildlife practically gone, there was no reason to visit Nkhotakota, no revenue, no productivity, and little to no value for the surrounding communities. But African Parks had a different vision for the most extensive remaining wild landscape in Malawi, one that included bringing it back to life. Upon assuming management in 2015, we immediately began preparing Nkhotakota for one of the world's largest wildlife translocations. By August 2017, over a two-year period, the park received almost 500 elephants and 2,000 other animals. Poaching has been dramatically reduced through the presence of a well-trained and equipped ranger team, tourism has begun to increase, and the birth of new calves born in the park from the 2016 translocated elephants has already been documented. Extreme measures were taken to actively restore this landscape, and it was an extraordinary collaboration between the Government of Malawi, our donors and the team in Nkhotakota. It is early days, but in only two short years, already this park symbolises possibility and what nature can do with our help if only given the chance.

## BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Nkhotakota was the beneficiary of one of the world's largest elephant translocations when in 2017 the park received the second and final group of 225 elephants. In total, 520 elephants were rehomed over a two-year period during July and August of 2016, and 2017 with a total of 486 elephants moved to Nkhotakota from Majete Wildlife Reserve and Liwonde National Park (34 elephants were moved from Liwonde to Nyika National Park). Also included were 101 buffalo, 101 waterbuck, 25 eland and 25 zebra in 2017, which amounted to a total of 1,855 game animals

being moved into Nkhotakota over the same two-year period. GPS radio collars were fitted on most of the elephant bulls and the matriarchs to help monitor their movements and better protect them in their new home. This was an extraordinary undertaking with the goal of helping to repopulate and ultimately revive the park ecologically after decades of poaching, and to improve tourism for much-needed revenue. Given this influx of hundreds of new elephants, there were several incidents of elephants breaking out of the fence, mostly east of the park, but they were attended to quickly, and most of the animals were pushed back into the park within 24-hours.



One of the newly translocated elephants in Nkhotakota, Malawi. © Frank Weitzer



One of the 101 buffalos translocated to Nkhotakota. © Frank Weitzer

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

Nkhotakota continued to improve its law enforcement effectiveness and capacity through training, mentoring and provisioning of equipment. All rangers were fully outfitted; 100 percent attended a refresher course in Basic Field Ranger training; six rangers completed an intensive ranger medic course; and two others went to Majete and South Africa for advanced courses in security. Nkhotakota hosted a three-day workshop conducted with the DNPW, together with Judiciary and Police staff, to discuss various law enforcement issues, including the significance of the newly amended Wildlife Act which takes a harder stance on wildlife crime in the country.

Twenty-two poachers were arrested with all but one convicted, compared to 86 arrests and only 27 convictions in 2016, showing increased support by the government for cracking down on wildlife crime. Ten animals were poached, two of which were elephants, compared to 26 animals in 2016, four of which were elephants. Over 100 hectares of illegal Indian hemp were destroyed, and 282 bags of charcoal were confiscated. Thirty-three rangers were employed and with 5,623 patrol man-days achieved, resulting in 227 snares removed, and the confiscation of 16 firearms and seven illegal fishing nets. The number of snares and firearms detected decreased dramatically compared to 2016, showing a marked and positive reduction in the park.

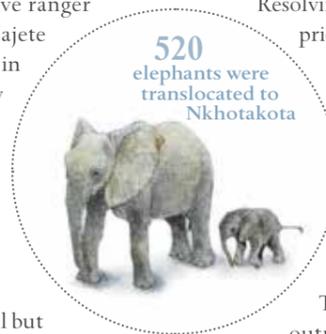
## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Nkhotakota's long-term future is largely dependent on the nearly 107,000 people living within five kilometres of the park's boundary, and it is essential that these communities value and in some way benefit from the park's existence.

Resolving human-wildlife conflict has been a top priority, especially given the newly translocated elephants. In areas with high incidences of conflict, firecrackers were provided to neighbouring communities, which worked well in deterring elephants from coming too close to the fence and reduced incidences of breakouts. Six boreholes were drilled outside of the park, providing safe drinking water to at least 500 people.

The park supported the local hospital's outreach programme delivering much-needed health care services including family planning resources to 10 remote health centres in the most underserved areas. Sustainable alternative livelihoods are vital in reducing pressure on natural resources. To that end, Nkhotakota supported 23 Moringa clubs, one mushroom club, and five beekeeping clubs who received training in honey production. Communities were permitted to harvest bamboo, thatch grass, reeds and palm fronds for use and sale, benefiting almost 800 people.

Malawi is one of Africa's most economically challenged nations, and education has suffered. Nkhotakota provided 126 scholarships to these orphans and students most in



Samwe Nkosi ensures for the safe transport of an anaesthetised elephant. © Frank Weitzer

need so that they could continue their education. We built a three-classroom block to allow for more students to attend the Community Day Secondary School. More than 710 students from 22 schools and three communities visited the park for free, and our staff visited 69 schools, reaching more than 11,000 students in our school outreach programme. Eighty-seven community meetings were held, reaching 8,536 people, to discuss issues concerning the electrified perimeter fence, the elephant translocation, encroachment in the park, illegal firearms and poaching. We partnered with the Nkhotakota Community Radio to establish park-specific and conservation-focused radio programme to increase visibility and inform people about the park in a compelling and entertaining way.

## PARK MANAGEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Nkhotakota made numerous strides in the completion of essential infrastructure needed for the park. The second phase, consisting of 117 km of perimeter fence line, was completed to reduce human-wildlife conflict. The total perimeter fence, completed as of the end of 2017, amounted to 164 km, and the final phase will be completed in 2018. Numerous houses were constructed or improved for the law enforcement teams and senior and middle managers; an office and workshop complex were built, and the visitor and education centre was almost completed. Two dilapidated park entrance gates were replaced; solar power was installed at three ranger camps; and the road network within the park was increased by 28 km.

## TOURISM

Although tourism is not a major push for the first five years of rebuilding and rehabilitating Nkhotakota, there has already been an increase in the number of tourists visiting the reserve since African Parks assumed management in August 2015. This can be attributed to the influx of elephants and other wildlife, and the global media coverage the park received for the historic translocation. In 2017, 1,100 tourists visited the park, up 35 percent from 2016. Revenue also doubled from US\$7,557 in 2016 to US\$14,697. New concession agreements were drafted for Tongole and Bua Lodge, which will be operationalised in 2018. Tongole Lodge added a bush camp that can house 15 visitors and accommodate many more on the campground. These additions and the concession agreements should result in a sharp increase in the revenue generated by 2018 and beyond.

## OBJECTIVES FOR 2018

- Continue to monitor the elephant population and mitigate human-wildlife conflict
- Conduct ecological research including impacts of introduced elephants
- Modernise law enforcement with technology, upgrades, and advanced training
- Complete phase three of perimeter fencing and other essential infrastructure
- Continue to implement the community engagement strategy
- Operationalise Bua and Tongole tourism concessions to increase revenue