

## NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



### For the love of an elephant

8 August 2024



Dear Family and Friends

An elephant with a very swollen lower leg was standing in the hot, dry bush. Something was wrong, its foot was big and the skin peeling and Kelly watched for a few minutes, took photographs and then phoned Blake Muil. Blake, heading the Rukuru Conservation Unit, went into action immediately; after 30 years of living in the bush and working in the wildlife business, he knew time was critical.

From the pictures it looked like there were two snares on the elephant's lower leg. They had probably been set near a waterhole where poachers set lines of as many as 100 snares attached to trees all around the water with thorn branches placed in between leaving animals no way to get to the water without getting caught.

The young elephant bull was on the boundary of Rukuru and another property in the Zambezi Valley and these cable snares had probably been on its leg for about two months, gradually going deeper and deeper into its flesh and eventually cutting off the blood supply to the elephant's foot. Blake knew that intervention was needed urgently before this young bull would lose its foot.

Blake went immediately to the National Parks offices in Marongora to ask for help. A team of Scouts would be taken to the last known location of the elephant and they would start tracking from there. The young bull probably wouldn't have gone too far with its limited mobility on a painful and very swollen leg. Checking water sources first, the Scouts soon picked up the elephant's track in the soft sand; it wasn't hard identifying the spoor which was scuffed and dragged. A few days after it had first been seen, the elephant was located by the tracking team and by then the National Parks head Vet was also available.

The young elephant was darted and the veterinary team got straight to work. There were two snares on the elephant's back leg, deeply embedded in the flesh above its foot. Two big incisions were made and the wire cable snares exposed. The twisted wires were carefully cut and extracted and the wounds cleaned and sterilized. Antibiotics were injected, the wounds closed and packed and then it was time to administer the reversal drug.

The vet slipped the needle into one of the pronounced blood vessels in the back of the elephant's ear and told everyone to start moving away. From a safe distance they watched and waited. For the love of an elephant had they all managed to save this young bull? This now was the critical moment. Would the elephant make it? The adrenalin was palpable. "How many minutes," the vet called out? Someone answered. The tension was thick in the air, the seconds ticked past and they waited to see if the elephant would come round.

The first sign was a puff of dust as the elephant exhaled, its trunk lying flat on the ground. Then another puff of dust. The elephant's head came up and flopped back down. Its trunk came up, slowly the elephant rocked itself and managed to sit up.

"Excellent," the vet whispered. "So our boy is waking up nicely after about three or four minutes," he said. "Up, up, up my boy," he said, tenderness and emotion clear in his voice. The elephant struggled up onto its feet and there was an audible sigh of relief, a little nervous laughter, whispered chatter. "Well done guys," the National Park's head Vet said, "well done, well done." Everyone shook hands; fantastic teamwork from everyone involved had saved this young elephant bull.

Wonderful work like this needs all our support. Support for transport and fuel, for food and allowances for the trackers; for the vet and the drugs he needs for darting and treatment and then of course for the follow-up monitoring in the weeks to come by Blake and his team and then for the next animal and the next.

This wonderful story from Zimbabwe highlights the fantastic response from National Parks: professional, dedicated and efficient. Blake Muil and the Rukuru Conservation Unit and their helpers need support to continue this critical work for the future of our Zimbabwe; they are there, out of the spotlight, boots on the ground, day after day, saving the wilderness for us and the generations yet to come. Please click this link to support this amazing work:

[https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=2TNMPJHYHN948](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=2TNMPJHYHN948)

Please visit my website and social media sites to see photographs of this rescued elephant. Saving Zimbabwe's precious diversity one single step at a time. Join us.

There is no charge for this Letter From Zimbabwe but if you would like to donate please visit my website. Until next time, thanks for reading this Letter From Zimbabwe now in its 24th year, and my books about life in Zimbabwe, a country in waiting.

Ndini shamwari yenyu (I am your friend)

Love Cathy

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