

# Season 1: Conservation & Covid-19

## Episode 1: Donor funding, Covid-19 & Conservation: Ed Sayer and Claire Lewis from the North Luangwa Conservation Programme

**Matt Blair** [00:00:00] Hi there everyone. And welcome to this first season of conservation storytelling. My name is Matt and I will be your host for the show. It's great to have you here. And I look forward to sharing these conversations with you.

Welcome to the very first season of the conservation storytelling podcast, in this series of podcasts, we'll be focusing on the way the COVID-19 has affected the world of conservation in Africa. And I think between all of us, there's no denying that the way business is treated as usual is going to change completely. And that means that conservation is no exception.

This week's guests are Ed Sayer and Claire Lewis from the Frankfurt Zoological Society. Ed is the Country Director and Project Leader for Zambia and the North Luangwa Conservation Programme. Claire is the Project Manager, and Technical Advisor to the North Luangwa Conservation Programme.

Last year, we spent some time working on a few film and photography assignments with them up in the North [Luangwa National] Park. And we were able to witness the sheer scale that they're supporting as a project. With the only black rhino re-introduced in Zambia residing in the park, the task at hand is a mammoth one, but the achievements [in North Luangwa] have been nothing short of phenomenal.

In this episode, both Ed and Claire share the impact that COVID-19 is already having on donor support, at a project level, and where they foresee the real issues coming in the near future. Here's my conversation with Ed and Claire.

Ed and Claire Thanks so much for joining me and welcome to this new web series on COVID and conservation.

[intro etc]

Claire let's start with you.

**Claire Lewis:** [00:02:22] My name is Claire Lewis, I'm the Project Manager for the North Luangwa Conservation Program. Which means basically I just try to keep the wheels turning. I spend quite a lot of my time working on funding proposals and donor administration and making sure that there's a coordinated funding strategy as well as activity-planning going forward so that we can achieve what we want to do in the ecosystem – whether that's education, or law

enforcement, or community programs and initiatives, or, just general day-to-day things like making sure everyone's got paperclips and staples. So it's all evolving, and sort of Jack of all Trades, Master of Few, but hopefully, keeping things on the road.

**Ed Sayer:** [00:03:16] I'm Ed Sayer, I'm the director of Frankfurt Zoological Society, Zambia, predominantly my role is here at the NLCP but I also provide some oversight and input to the REPU team – which is the Rhino and Elephant Protection Unit, which is centered around the Black Rhino Project, as well as the elephant population in the park and beyond in the wider North Luangwa ecosystem – which is now 22,000 square kilometers. So it's quite a large area with 400 Scouts as well as our ever-increasing workshop and logistics department. So that keeps us all busy from dawn till dusk.

**Matt Blair:** Yeah, sure. I mean, we were fortunate enough to come and spend a bit of time with you guys there last year and it's a massive operation you've got running there. And a huge area to cover.

**Ed Sayer:** Yeah, it is vast. Especially when you start comparing it to other areas, I mean, it's the same size as Wales in the UK and the same size of some of the States in the US, it is vast, and obviously we have different levels of impact in different parts of scale, we have a much higher impact and role within the park and the core area.

But obviously, the success of these landscapes is based on the much wider areas, which is generally the community areas, and therefore the huge focus in the last few years has been into that wider landscape, because it is that wider landscape that.... brings people on board, and then buys the sustainability for the area in terms of the ownership and feeling empowered to see the vision through for the landscape. And that comes from the people. So we've had to expand into the much wider area, but it is a big area. And the infrastructural costs too, to get around, are massive.

**Matt Blair:** So you've got pretty much seven key focus areas in the project. Claire, I know you started mentioning law enforcement and the education program, maybe you can elaborate a bit on the community side. Maybe you can just run us a little bit through each of the focus areas and what it really takes to get these areas functional.

**Claire Lewis:** [00:05:48] Yeah, I think probably the core [concern] .... would be trying to maintain the security and the integrity of the national park, which essentially comes down to logistics and enforcements. Zambia has a quite strong wildlife act. Its enactment isn't necessarily always the strongest, but the actual act itself is quite robust. And we're very fortunate here in North Luangwa, we have a very good – compared to other areas – compliment of manpower, which means that we can put in place patrolling anti-poaching effectively. And as a national park with the Big Five – with the rhinos – which is essentially the sort of cherry on the cake, you really do have to keep that going at all costs. And then

there's all the logistics that go around that. So that's vehicles in the workshop, and roads, and infrastructure, and the plane, and all this other stuff that goes around enforcement, whether that's training and equipment and rations, uniforms and everything else.

So I think that's probably a sort of absolute, basic core. But then along with that, one has to keep everything else going as well. You can't just do things in isolation. And so you need to be able to appeal to the wider communities, and that involves the game management areas around the ecosystem, which involves people. And for all intents and purposes, wildlife can just get on with their thing. It doesn't really need us at all. It's people that need support and management and help and governance and alternative livelihood options. So yeah, it's trying to support the people that live in this landscape, with wider opportunities.

Agriculture is very, very marginal in these areas. So a wildlife resource base for economic purpose is really in many cases, the only resource natural resource upon which livelihoods can be based. So being able to empower people to utilize that in a sustainable, beneficial, and fair way is the crux of quite a lot of what we do, whether that's through community initiatives or education and awareness, and the enforcement goes along with that as well... making people aware of what's right, and what's wrong and what's possible. And what is legal and what is illegal, and then trying to help people work towards a better, more sustainable future that's [inaudible] and in harmony with the ecosystem.

And that cross-cuts pretty much everything, from policy to really basic small-scale and even larger-scale initiatives that we try to implement, right across through to family planning and awareness around that and female health and education. And so it goes well beyond just anti-poaching.

**Ed Sayer:** [00:09:29] Yeah. I think that's pretty good background and I think what would be useful as well is maybe to look at the last 30 or 34 years now, [at the] history of the project in the North Luangwa, which initially had a real focus on law enforcement, the area was under siege, the elephant population was down to – we believe around about 500 or so. It was pretty much a free for all in the area and the wildlife numbers in the Game Management Areas and community areas were very much in decline as well as in the park. And so it took a huge amount of law enforcement to get that back on track. But what's really made that work is the partnership... And the partnership based on trust. And that's a three-way partnership here. And I think, I'm hoping, if we've got any chance of getting through the next 12 months in terms of the hurdles thrown our way, it's going to be based on that partnership between the North Luangwa community, the Project – which is ourselves FZS, and the government.

So you put those three together. Share the burdens, share the success, and get a joint vision, on the same track, whether it's to do with the community work, the governance work within the Community Resource Boards, whether it is to do with health as Claire was mentioning, or agriculture, as well as wildlife, as well

as decision making, as well as planning and then as well as mitigation measures, to problems, and to buying into that same vision, I think it has held us in good stead the last few years. And certainly I think it has contributed massively to the very low levels of poaching, both for elephant poaching down to zero in 2018 and very low 2019. And again, very low so far this year. I think things will change. And equally obviously with the rhino population, not having [inaudible] any poaching as of yet.

And I think that it's not down to any one thing, it is down to all three partners, being open, honest with each other, and working together through ups and downs – and there's always ups and downs. And I think we've obviously got a down coming up – we've got a tricky period coming up should I say. I think if we [inaudible] really rely upon each other again, to see ourselves through that. I think in Zambia as well, obviously the virus and the impact on lives and people's health is massive and has potential to be massive. But unfortunately I think what's going to be bigger, is economic impact. And that economic impact is going to be longer lasting. I think it will definitely extend into 2021 at least. Because people here are already on the poverty line in many areas. The loss of employment, from our perspective – from both hunting and photographic tourism is significant. But then the revenue from that, on those activities, both into the Game Management Areas, into communities and to the parks and government parks department is going to be massive. And how [will that then impact] those basic costs of salaries of Scouts, salaries of the CRB, personnel and teachers and scholarships and classrooms and schools, clinics, roads – all those projects they've got going on disappear, and the subsequent kind of the knock on effects of that is yet to be seen, but I think we can be pretty sure that there's obviously going to be an impact. And with those benefits being lost – the justification for conservation in some of these households on the breadline: that's a difficult argument to have. So I think we've got to really make sure that we're supporting everybody through that process over the next 12 months. Because I think times will be tough.

We're lucky here. I think in many respects, our key donors that we've brought in are from different kinds of backgrounds. So bilateral as well as philanthropic. And at the moment, they're all staying strong and committed to the grants for this year and next year, which is very positive. So we are going to be able to still function. There will be other costs that come on board that we're not yet aware of but I think the biggest risk is going to be probably in six months' time when salaries are not able to be paid from the Community Resource Boards to all of their staff.

And equally is that I believe there's potential for government revenue to diminish and potentially scout wages not being on time. I know that the impact there could be massive. So anyway, that's a quick synopsis for me [laughter].

**Matt Blair:** Thanks so much. I don't need to carry on [laughter].

**Claire Lewis:** [00:14:28] Yeah. Everything that Ed has said is true and correct. But I think actually going back to the partnership, this can also be seen as an opportunity. There will be economic hardship, and there will be job losses, but if we can keep the partnership strong within – and that includes, I'm going to put a fourth partner in that includes our donors and our supporters – if we can keep the strength within that partnership, then we have an opportunity to maintain this going forward. We have the opportunity to show again, and embed again with the communities that conservation has an economic importance and it is actually going to be one of the few players in this whole field that can keep jobs. We haven't laid off anybody yet. And we hope that we don't have to. We may have to reduce hours. We may have to slow down a little bit on some of the work that we planned to do, because we just can't have large gatherings. We can't necessarily go out into communities and carry on quite in the way we need to, but we're looking very much at how we can make all of our resources that we have in place now stretch for as long as possible to keep people in jobs. And I think potentially at the end of this, some of the only jobs that will be in this area will be through the Project, through national parks and through the community initiatives that we've put in place.

And hopefully that will really strengthen, in the minds of the people that live in this landscape, that conservation can be really important. And [that it's] actually seeing them through this hard time, whilst so many other things have fallen by the wayside and taken away their economic independence.

So, yeah, I think there's a lot of unknown at the moment and a lot that we're not quite sure how it's going to pan out. But I think this could actually be a real opportunity and we have. I had quite a few donors get in contact with us now, being very, very understanding and very flexible on their approach and saying, 'okay, we agreed in the proposals and we agreed in your budgets that you would be doing X, Y, and Z, that we understand that might not be potentially possible within the timeframe of the grant. Do you need more time? Do you need to redirect these resources?'

And we've been fielding a lot of queries on just what we're doing and how we're doing things. But I think it's because it's global, everyone's in the same boat and everyone's being affected and having to change their work plans and their strategies and their thinking.

So we've just been able to be encompassed within that as well. And donors have realized that we're in just as much strife as everybody else and are being very flexible. So that is huge. At the same time, we've also had donors saying that their capital base is very much reducing. Lots of foundations and trusts have their capital held up in stocks and shares and things that depend on a strong stock market. And as that's crashed across the world, people have tightened their belts extremely quickly. So, it's a lot of juggling, as well as trying to keep everyone safe and making sure that we've got enough policies and protocols in

place that we can be as, as strict as we can be in this very open and fluid workspace. So yeah, it's all over the place, but I guess we're not unique in that.

**Ed Sayer:** [00:18:30] In terms of the kind of mitigation measures we're putting in place now in the short term, because I think I alluded to at the beginning, we haven't yet really been hit by a huge number of people contracting the virus in the area yet.

But obviously as it spreads around the country that'll change. So we're kind of planning worst case scenarios with the Rhino Elephant Protection Unit, and how they patrol and how they [inaudible] the area, how we can utilize the aircraft in combination with reduced manpower, how the investigations with intelligence units' work, how are we keeping a regular communication with the communities and the community leadership?

[Looking at] our workshop, which is key to making everything function, so already looking at shifts, and how we'll split that up and potentially doing some of the services, not here in our main workshop, but actually getting out to some of the smaller villages and to the towns and getting it done there and just changing how we operate.

We've also now distributed sanitization equipment across all 28 of the scout camps, at the control room base, at all of our staff bases. And obviously also educating people about how this virus is contracted, how to make yourself safe and how to work in a safe environment.

That's taken some doing as well, getting that out, because it's quite an alien thing to appreciate. And it's very unlike some of the other viruses that we have in that regard in terms of its transmission rates. And we've just ordered 500 masks. So, you know, there's masks now for all the project and DNPW staff, which will be issued at the end of the week, just in preparation.

I think if we speak again in another month or two months once presumably the analysis comes through, I'd be interested to see what impact it actually had and then how we evolved our strategy around that. Because I think it's really about being flexible and dynamic and just kind of going with the flow to a certain extent, but then trying to stick by our core needs and addressing them whilst that happens,

**Claire Lewis:** [00:20:46] As soon as this kicked off we put in place an instant response task team, which was across the country – for Frankfurt involved in the Lusaka office, for here, and for the Nsumbu Tanganyika Project. And then we established lines of communication with the Disease Outbreak Contingency Plan, with various stages, what needs to happen within each stage, as well as all the information and education that's going around that. So what I think has been really interesting is trying to see the positive sides of it and the opportunities here, we've been able to be very flexible. We've been able to be dynamic. We've been able to react to and respond very quickly. And I think we're in a very

fortunate position to be able to do that. And I'm aware of other organizations that for example, rely heavily on tourism for their revenue streams. And here we don't. So the revenue has been literally cut off. The tap is turned off. We have a much broader revenue base, or fundraising base, and we've been able to respond and react very quickly to what's going on. And I think that's been really interesting is that we've never been faced with this before, as had nowhere else in the world and despite none of it being in our fields of expertise, there's enough information out there, and there is enough know-how in the organization that we've pulled this together really quickly. That said, we haven't had any outbreaks here, but we have had people returning. We've been able to isolate. We've put in place all the sanitation and social distancing or physical distancing protocols. So we've been able to respond really quickly to what's going on. And I think that's real testament to, again, the sort of strength and trust and goodwill and relationships that we have. We've been immediately able to just go to the communities and say, 'look, we're still here. We can't come out to meet you. We can't hold big gatherings and the training sessions and all the things that we planned, but we're not going away.' And because we have this long-term relationship with the communities, with the national parks and wildlife department, that's taken as a given and it's understood and it's appreciated.

So yeah, we, I think that the goodwill and the trust and the flexibility and adaptability that we've been able to demonstrate over the last 30 plus years has really come to the fore at this, sort of, moment of crisis and where actually I feel... like we're in an okay place for where we are and what we're doing.

We're okay. Currently. That might change, as Ed said, in a month's time, but we've done all we can for now. And we just need to keep on with that flexibility and adaptability and ever dynamic approach to things. And hopefully that's one of our strengths.

**Matt Blair:** [00:23:53] Absolutely. And I think if anything, that where you are now, and this is a good testament to test the ultimate objectives of the project, which I think in many respects is your community ownership around the park and taking responsibility for the park and seeing the value of the project within the park. It's a long road. I'm sure you guys were on the Project when the first World Recession happened in 2008 / 2009: how much of this is different to then in terms of donor funding, in terms of the donor approach to the situation?

**Ed Sayer:** I think back then was a slightly different era in terms of donor funding in conservation projects. I think at that stage, there hadn't been that move by some of those kind of global philanthropists into that, into the wider conservation world to the same degree you see today. I think equally then the costs weren't the same. We weren't fighting a rhino and elephant poaching war that then picked up 2014, 2015... So the costs were quite different for conserving these areas. So it's slightly different. I think that the impact was definitely there then but on a much smaller scale, because I think conservation wasn't quite so costly then, as it has become in the last ten years with the threat to these ecosystems growing

significantly in that time period: whether it's to hardwoods, whether it's to encroachment from agriculture, whether it's rhinos, whether it's elephants, it has changed a lot. So I think this is going to be quite different. And I personally believe the big impact for us is going to be end of the year, next year, on funding. So it's hard to say at this stage – we're good for now, but I think, once the money stops coming through from tourism and hunting and we get into next year, I think other areas are going to need support. Its going to be a slightly different perspective.

**Claire Lewis:** [00:25:59]. I agree. The times were very different then, it was very different. We had different resources at our availability as well. We didn't have canine unit, for example. We weren't putting as much support in those times into intelligence investigations work, and work outside and around – beyond just the ecosystem level. And very much back then, donors were very much more focused on core law enforcement and, a little bit on communities, potentially with things like conservation education. The holistic approach to conservation has very much come on board over the last sort of five to eight years. And again, that's come on board with the poaching wave that has gone through for elephants and rhinos. I mean the illegal wildlife trade was not a word on anybody's lips a decade ago. Even though it was there and it was – it's still one of the top five worldwide, illegal businesses with organized crime very much involved in it – it just wasn't on the radar. And now it's, it's pretty much unheard of – [to not] you don't write a funding proposal without using the words illegal wildlife trade.

Climate change is another one that's creeping into, and should always have being, part, of fundraising proposal language. The conservation work, and, language of fundraising has changed and therefore the donor landscape has changed and what people are willing to fund, and what people are able to fund. So, yeah, it's a very different project. I think back then we had, we were only supporting operations in an area of about half the size of what we are now. So half the size of Wales, not the size of Wales. So the costs have changed as well as what we're trying to fund has changed as well.

**Matt Blair:** [00:28:14] Maybe you can give me a better idea on this.... So as the scale of the project has grown and the area has grown and you, as you mentioned, incorporate a more of a holistic approach into the whole conservation of the North Luangwa ecosystem, are there future plans to grow bigger in the protected area, or is this a good indicator to halt the size of the project and to manage what you've got for future impacts like this?

**Ed Sayer:** I don't think we had plans to grow bigger here in the short to medium term. I think obviously we had our plans to expand – you're kind of replicating copy and paste what we've done here in other parts of the country, because we think this formula works – which has been Nsumbu from 2017 onwards. I think we would still look for a third site. I think I'd still take a step back though, from that question and take a look at another change that has occurred since 2007, 2008... [which] is this landscape approach.... which is what has worked for us

here. And the fact that that landscape approach, is I believe, what is going to work in most places; incorporating those three partnerships or three organizations: community, private sector – or us – and [lastly] the government. And giving those areas the resilience which is what you need in times like this, but equally at times of other uncertainty or other problems. And I do think that this crisis will show us again how important it is that it's a global responsibility for these landscapes.

So, you know, I think the fact that we don't really rely upon the area's revenue generation for protecting this landscape, but we rely on a global responsibility, because it's global threats that are against these landscapes, I think is key. And I hope the more that that can be seen around the world and the more it's taken on as a global responsibility and not just Zambia, not just North Luangwa's responsibilities to cover those costs, I think the better. And with that in mind, I think that means that there's still opportunity through this, and after this, to look at more areas where we say, okay, listen, 'let us sort out this wider landscape.' I'm going back to Claire's point about IWT, because without landscapes, there is no IWT, because those landscapes are what hosts the wildlife. And that for me, I think, this is going to remind us all to focus on those landscapes, but, now as well, it's not just focused on the law enforcement, its focused on the ownership of the communities within those landscapes.

You know, it's a bit of a contradiction in terms because this Covid virus has potentially come because of IWT, um, whether it is from bats, we're not really sure. Um, so obviously that has been the trigger for this, but in terms of resilience to survive things like this, it's not about IWT, it's about landscapes.

**Matt Blair:** I think that's a very pertinent and very strong close to the conversation. I could talk to you guys for ages about many other aspects of the program. I'm not going to keep too much more of your time. You've got a much bigger job than I do. Thank you so much for coming on board and sharing your strategy in this time. And basically giving us an insight into what you think the future of a donor funding is going to be in your kinds of projects.

If anyone listening or watching wants to get in touch, we'll play a part in your projects where, and how can they

**Claire:** [00:31:59] Instagram or Facebook. We also have the acidosis website where there's no flagger page. Um, yeah. And all your usual social media, um, accounts, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, because

**Matt:** [00:32:12] once again, thanks so much.

And yeah, we'll catch up with you again soon. Good luck up there. So that was it. And Claire chatting to us from the North Uganda conservation program up in Northern Zambia guys. Thank you so much for being a part of the conversation. If we're stopping by, if you enjoyed this episode or made it this far, they are multi-cam.

Please consider supporting these conversations to raise awareness for the effects of COVID-19 is having a conservation in Africa. You can find all the links in the show notes. But until next week, take care, keep safe and cheers winner. .