

Liliana Research Report From Malawi

I wish to thank Agapornis Breeders & Exhibitors (ABE) to let me publish this report.

Website ABE : www.abe-international.com

We are currently trying to help raise funds for Miss Tiwonge Mzumara for her Doctorate dissertation working with the liliana (Nyasa) in Malawi.

RESEARCH INFORMATION (SEE BELOW):

‘Tiwonge Mzumara is an ornithologist based in Malawi and working for the Museum of Malawi. She completed her MSc in Conservation Biology at the University of Cape town in South Africa in 2009. She has currently just registered for a PhD in Ecology with the University of Kwazulu Natal. She has been involved in various research on the conservation of birds in Malawi and is a voluntary research officer for the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi. She is also the country coordinator for the African bird Club in Malawi. Her research on the Lilians lovebird in Malawi began after a simple observation of their poisoning in 2006 during an annual game count. In 2010 a pilot study was done which discovered more hunting in agricultural fields. Her PhD is title the Ecology and Conservation Biology of the Lilians lovebird in Malawi. She will investigate various ecological and social issues to better understand how the lovebird can be conserved in their current habitat.’

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Lilians Lovebird Brief Report (Oct 2011 – Mar 2012)

October 2011

Funding received helped purchase the first two transmitters for the project. Later the Good Gifts catalogue enabled us to purchase 3 more transmitters, a receiver and antenna through BirdLife International. These will be used in monitoring lovebird movement in Liwonde National Park. Towards the end of October Wildlife Society Member, Mr Phil Pile (an expert in radio equipment) volunteered to take the transmitters and other equipment for testing. All equipment was proved to be working fine.

November 2011

During the first week of November, the research team which included two technicians from the Museums of Malawi travelled to Liwonde to try out the new equipment.

For the first two days all mist nets placed carefully at known drinking places did not manage to catch any lovebirds. The rains had come early in the park thus there was more water lying around in places other than the artificial waterholes. During these days we also carried out transect walks with the help of peace corp volunteers and the National Parks staff. 20 transect walks were completed and all points where lovebirds were seen were recorded.

Later mist nets were moved to other known feeding areas. Though unsuccessful during the morning hours, the evening hours brought smiles to our faces. A total of 21 lovebirds were trapped during the period. However since it was very late in the evening and the team had not properly prepared for mounting the transmitters at night, we simply took a blood smear and ringed each bird. The team planned to return to the area the next

Though the lovebirds were hard to come by, we caught many other interesting birds in the nets such as the Diderick cuckoo!!!



December 2011 – January 2012

Several planned field trips were cancelled due to the unavailability of fuel. Where ever possible I managed to get a lift from the tour operators and simply made observations of the lovebirds feeding and other interactions. Around Mid January we managed to get a permit to buy fuel in a jerry can thus organised another trip. Unfortunately all the mist netting attempts were unsuccessful during these visits. Plant samples for all plants that lovebirds were seen feeding on were collected and sent to the National herbarium for identification. A few have also been deposited at the herbarium at the University of Kwazulu-Natal and seed samples will be sent for analysis in a lab in South Africa. We also received a donation of a spotting scope and some binoculars from the RSPB during this month.

February – March 2012

During this month we planned to monitor the agricultural fields and try to mount transmitters in the fields. Maize fields and Sorghum fields were visited from the first two weeks of the month. No lovebirds were observed feeding in the field. The sorghum plant on which they feed, is yet to reach maturity in most of the areas. Communities requested that we return in the early weeks of March. We managed to return to the field in the week beginning 5th March to 12th March but there lovebirds were still not feeding in peoples fields but rather in a large dambo area near Masange river. The next mist netting attempts will be carried out in this dambo area.



Getting in, out and around the park wasn't easy in the rainy season!!!

Next Steps

For the next two months we will be putting more efforts in mist netting to ensure that the current transmitters are mounted on birds. Idea wild has donated another 5 transmitters thus a total of 10 will be mounted. Several identified volunteers will then be using the other equipment to radio-track and monitor movements for a total of 40 days. Another emphasis will be placed on observing breeding ecology. We sincerely thank all our supporters for making this possible!!!!!!



Submitted by Tiwonge Mzumara, registered for a PhD in Ecology with the University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa