

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

- SUMMER 2025 -

ARMED ATTACK IN  
NIASSA

RECOVERING NATIVE  
MARMOSETS

PROTECTING  
ZAMBIA'S RHINOS  
WITH BEEHIVES



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Wildlife Conservation Network

# Armed Attack in Niassa

*TWO NLP SCOUTS, FERNANDO PAOLO WIRSONE (TOP) AND DOMINGOS DAUDE (BOTTOM), WERE KILLED IN AN ARMED ATTACK CLAIMED BY ISIS MOZAMBIQUE. TWO MORE SCOUTS ARE MISSING, AND ANOTHER SCOUT WAS SEVERELY INJURED.*

Marked by granite inselbergs that rise up out of expansive woodlands, Mozambique's Niassa Special Reserve is a beautiful, sprawling wilderness. Many of Africa's famed carnivores—lions, spotted hyenas, leopards, and wild dogs—prowl through its habitats. About 70,000 people call Niassa home; over 500 fishermen rely on its rich Luganda River ecosystem. Niassa stands as one of the largest conservation areas on the African continent, with Niassa Lion Project (NLP) as one of its long-time protectors. For two decades, NLP and other conservation groups, local people, and park authorities have worked together to help wildlife and communities thrive in Niassa. Those conservationists and communities have recently suffered a brutal attack with a devastating human toll.

On April 29, 2025, an armed group attacked the Mariri Environmental and Skills Training Centre and NLP's Headquarters. The attack has been claimed online by ISIS Mozambique. While NLP's team and assets were evacuated from their camp nine days earlier, after a separate deadly attack on the nearby Kambako

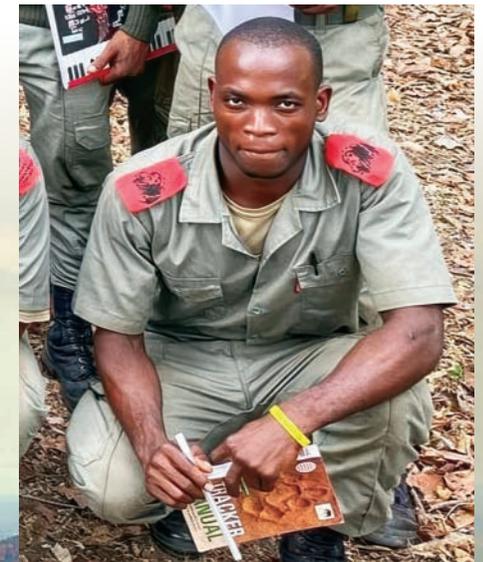
Safari camp, some of their antipoaching scouts stayed on site, supported by Mozambican soldiers. With deep sadness, NLP has reported that two of their scouts, Domingos Daude and Fernando Paolo Wirsonne, lost their lives. Another scout, Mario Cristovao, was severely injured and evacuated to a hospital in Maputo. Two additional scouts remain unaccounted for and are feared dead.

The situation is ongoing, the full extent of damage is yet to be determined, and the road towards healing and repair will be long. NLP has been working with Niassa's park warden, who is coordinating efforts to increase safety there, and they continue to do triage, supporting the families of those who were killed or who remain missing, paying hospital bills, and providing food and support for their team. In response to this tragedy, many WCN and NLP donors have generously raised money to help these efforts. At the time of writing, Colleen, Keith and Agostinho are in Niassa with the team, carrying on their important conservation programs, while making the effort to maximize team safety.

We are sometimes so awed by stories of the fascinating animals conservationists protect

that we forget how dangerous their work can be. The reality is that some conservationists operate in remote, politically unstable regions where they face threats from armed groups, poachers, and sometimes hostile local interests. Organizations like NLP don't just protect wildlife—they create sustainable economic opportunities for local communities, often in regions with few alternatives. Violence and instability imperil both conservation goals and human livelihoods.

In a world of diminishing wildness, Niassa Special Reserve stands as a testament to what we must fight to protect—not only for the lions that roam its landscape, but for the local people who live there and the conservationists who fight for its ecological integrity. The NLP team has shown great courage throughout this heartbreaking ordeal and remain relentlessly hopeful for the future. As NLP's three directors—Colleen Begg, Agostinho Jorge, and Keith Begg—recently wrote, "We will continue to stand by our staff, community, and this extraordinary wild landscape we are committed to protecting. This is not an ending." ■



With the help of our compassionate and generous donors, WCN is supporting NLP during this extremely difficult time. **You can help by donating at [wildnet.org/nlp](http://wildnet.org/nlp)**

# Recovering Native Marmosets

**THE BUFFY TUFTED-EAR MARMOSET'S DECLINE IS TIED TO THE FALLOUT OF AN ILLEGAL PET TRADE. BOUGHT ILLEGALLY AS PETS FOR THEIR CHARISMATIC NATURE AND RELEASED CARELESSLY WHEN THEIR OWNERS GREW TIRED OF THEM—THE ATLANTIC FOREST'S INVASIVE MARMOSETS TRACE BACK TO A SURGE OF TRAFFICKING IN THE '80S AND '90S.**



**Above: Two tufted-ear marmosets born via the MMCC's breeding program.**

**Right: Isabela Mascarenhas provides veterinary services at the MMCC.**

**D**amp fur clinging to its tiny frame, the newborn buffy tufted-ear marmoset (*Callithrix aurita*) took its first breaths pressed against its mother's body. A short distance away, Isabela Mascarenhas watched as the marmoset's twin, no bigger than a mouse, entered the world. Cacau and Castanha's birth in November 2021 marked the first buffy tufted-ear marmosets born at the Mountain Marmoset Conservation Centre (MMCC) in Viçosa, Brazil. As an Endangered species dwindling under pressures stemming from its invasive cousins, the common marmoset (*C. jacchus*) and

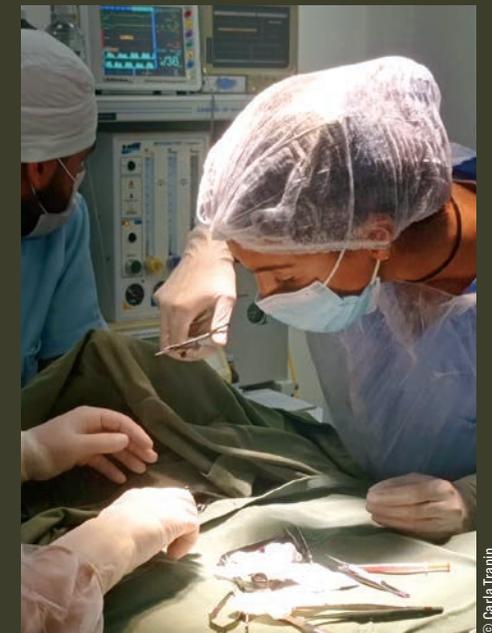
black-tufted marmoset (*C. penicillata*), these twins represented hope for this unique species to once again thrive in their native landscape, Brazil's Atlantic Forest. To support MMCC's vision of strengthening wild populations of buffy tufted-ear marmosets through reintroduction, Isabela, funded by a WCN scholarship, is pursuing veterinary research to develop safe translocation protocols.

Initially as a volunteer in MMCC's educational programs and later as a collaborating veterinarian and researcher, Isabela has been working tirelessly to address the complex threats facing buffy tufted-ear marmosets. Underlying these challenges is the reality that the Atlantic Forest has dwindled to roughly 10-15% of its original expanse, with development destroying around 300 million acres—an area nearly double the size of Texas. This widespread habitat loss set the stage for potential extinction by isolating populations, making them more vulnerable to disease and competition.

In addition to their shrinking habitat, which continues to be encroached upon, the remaining fragmented forest pockets are increasingly dominated by invasive marmosets. Introduced via the illegal pet trade, these non-native marmosets have established thriving populations that compete aggressively for resources and create pathways for disease transmission due to their proximity to people. They also interbreed with the buffy tufted-ear marmoset, resulting in hybrid populations that further exacerbate competition with the native species. With the buffy tufted-ear marmoset trapped in tiny forest pockets, these compounding threats will lead to their extinction if not checked—a loss that would eliminate crucial seed dispersers whose specialized diets maintain the Atlantic Forest's original landscape and biodiversity.

While in her PhD program, Isabela has been actively involved with MMCC's invasive species sterilization program to prevent hybridization

of marmosets. She also monitors MMCC's budding population of buffy tufted-ear marmosets as part of coordinated efforts across multiple institutions to establish a viable safety net population that can help recover the species in the wild. Now, her research focuses on developing veterinary protocols to assess and structure safe translocation of captive-bred marmosets back to parts of the Atlantic Forest. As the breeding program has grown from a single pair to 22 individuals, it is crucial to develop strategies for reintroducing captive marmosets to the wild that navigate the risks of hybridization and disease transmission.



With WCN's support, Isabela is becoming a critical player in helping the MMCC reintroduce native buffy tufted-ear marmosets. Her work will help realize the potential of MMCC's breeding program, transforming what began with Cacau and Castanha's first breaths into something greater: a legacy of descendants born free in the Atlantic Forest. ■

# Protecting Zambia's Rhinos with Beehives



Rachel Ndabala steadied the frame as a young student raised his hammer to join the sides of a new beehive. Around them, several other children from Zambia's Mukungule Chiefdom were building beehives for honey production. These students were participants in Rachel's hands-on beekeeping program, which teaches honey production as a sustainable alternative to destructive slash-and-burn agriculture and charcoal production around North Luangwa National Park (NLNP)—home to Zambia's only black rhinos. Through WCN's Rising Wildlife Leaders initiative, Rachel received career support to implement her beekeeping program in Mukungule. The program has been adopted by 10% of the local schools, introducing its dual benefits of sustainable livelihoods and restored rhino habitat to the community's future leaders.

Rachel was five when, in 1998, the country's black rhinos were declared locally extinct due to relentless poaching. When she asked her mother why this happened, her mother explained that rhinos in their area were

poached, not necessarily out of greed, but out of necessity, driven by food insecurity and economic desperation. That conversation stayed with her into adulthood and helped shape her path to a career in conservation. Eventually, a black rhino population was reintroduced to NLNP and poaching declined (due to increased security efforts by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife and Frankfurt Zoological Society), but now practices like slash-and-burn agriculture are encroaching on habitat that is essential for rhinos to roam, feed, and breed. Roughly 30,000 acres of forest in Mukungule—an area the size of San Francisco—were lost to development and destructive practices between 2018 and 2022. The need to develop land-use practices that do not degrade habitats has become urgent.

Although still in early stages, multiple efforts are underway to better protect the black rhino population through improved landscape integrity and restored buffer zones. Rachel's work aligns with these strategies, but is distinct in its encouragement of conservation for a younger generation. With WCN supporting her growth as Project



Manager at WeForest, a nonprofit focused on global forest restoration, Rachel developed a curriculum that turns conservation from a classroom concept into hands-on learning through weekend beekeeping sessions. While students have only completed the first phase of building beehives, Rachel will continue collaborating with teachers and officials to ensure students experience the full beekeeping cycle and see the results of their activities. By reinvesting honey sale profits into the school's nutrition program and towards providing essential items like uniforms, pens, and books that many students cannot afford, the program will demonstrate to students how their conservation efforts generate real value.

Working with 180 students across participating schools, Rachel is helping shift perspectives about the role of conservation in communities along the western border of North Luangwa National Park. She's ensuring students see the link between conservation and financial stability, promoting livelihoods that protect the land in areas critical to the long-term protection of Zambia's black rhino population. ■



**Despite her degrees in conservation, Rachel needed structured training to meet the challenges in Mukungule. WCN's Rising Wildlife Leaders strategy supported her through five professional courses that helped secure her role as Project Manager.**



**60 YEARS AGO THERE WERE AT LEAST 8,000 BLACK RHINOS IN ZAMBIA. TODAY THERE ARE FEWER THAN 60.**

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