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In the heart of Malawi's Capital City, Lilongwe, lies a Nature Sanctuary; 180 hectares of pristine habitat, with a dazzling array of fauna and flora. For many years, the Sanctuary had offered those living within the City an opportunity to escape the rigors of urban life into a more natural African setting, and gave visitors a taste of what tourism and wildlife conservation had to offer in the rest of the country. In recent years however, the area has become a haven for thieves, and this has largely deterred locals and tourists from enjoying the Sanctuary and all it has to offer. In a country that desperately requires economic diversification, the Nature Sanctuary and its proposed development of a modern day Wildlife Centre could hold one of the "golden keys" to creating a greater awareness amongst Malawians of the benefits that tourism could bring to their country.

**People and Wildlife** – In 2006 Malawi National Parks and Wildlife Service opened discussions with Land and Lake Safaris in an attempt to create a new facility that would help protect the Lilongwe Nature Sanctuary from further degradation, and provide an alternative to the current zoo. The result, the Lilongwe Wildlife Centre, which is to be built in Zone B of the Nature Sanctuary, is to be created under non-profit making Trust status, and in accordance with a concept that is not only new to Malawi and Africa, but the world. It could lead the way, if successful here in Lilongwe, for many other zoos around the World that currently lie in a state of disrepair. The PAW (People and Wildlife) concept requires establishments to approach wildlife conservation and wild animal rehabilitation differently, and to look at creating financially stable facilities that will aim to address human related issues through education and recreation.

According to National Statistical Office figures, Malawi harbors some 12.7 million people, who squeeze into a country just 1/8 the size of Zambia (a country with a population of just one million less). It is not surprising therefore that there are many major environmental issues that require urgent attention, issues that include severe deforestation, protected areas that are heavily poached and dwindling fish populations in the lake. In order to resolve such issues for future generations, it is important that 'people issues' are addressed, as ultimately, environmental degradation and human related issues are intrinsically linked. It is now commonly accepted that problems regarding wildlife and the environment cannot be resolved without also addressing human related issues such as health, education and unemployment. The new Centre will therefore attempt to combine this basic philosophy with international animal rehabilitation practices that will support the countries injured, orphaned and confiscated wild animals.

*"Conserving for Today for a Brighter Tomorrow"*

### **Mission Statement**

**"To develop a site-specific, self-sustaining, 'People and Wildlife' wild animal rescue and education centre that promotes a holistic appreciation and understanding of animal welfare, wildlife conservation, environmental protection and humanitarian issues and actively engages in wildlife release and *in-situ* conservation programmes."**

The Lilongwe Wildlife Centre Trust recently developed a 4 year business plan that will help the new facility meet one of its key objectives; to create a conservation centre that can become financially self-sustaining after just 4 years, and that will in-turn meet its conservation objectives for many years to come, independent of international support.

**Sanctuary space for Malawi's wild orphans** is urgently required to cater for the many animals traded illegally each year within Malawi, many of which still sit in private household and collections within the cities. The Centre shall not only provide the care and attention needed to rehabilitate all these animals brought in, it shall also attempt to return its orphans back to the wild, whenever possible, rather than retain them for purely recreational and educational purposes. The Centre, under the PAW Concept, shall enforce a strict *non-breeding* (for those animals not being released) and *no contact* (between visitors and animals) policy and will refrain from selling, trading, exchanging or commercially exploiting any animal. Where possible the Centre shall support and encourage statutory authorities to enforce and improve legislation that prevents the illegal exploitation and cruel treatment of wildlife, and indeed domestic animals.

**Education** is a prerequisite to the success of any developing country, and it is through improved education that a country like Malawi can develop economically and thus improve the lives of its entire people. Education also ultimately holds the key to wildlife conservation in Malawi (long-term) and it is through facilities such as the Lilongwe Wildlife Centre, that a new breed of Malawian conservationists will be born. It is also hoped that the Centre can help promote conservation and environmental practices within the City, amongst the masses, which should in turn help create greater understanding for and appreciation of, conservation and environmental efforts in the field.

The Centre will offer an arena in which school education programmes can be enhanced and will provide a valuable resource for those involved in the 'training of trainers'. It is hoped that within 3-5 years that the Centre will be in a position to reach out to those schools and its teachers that are unable to afford transport and entrance fees to the new Centre through an outreach programme, thus disseminating the conservation message even further afield.

The Centre shall, through the development of partnerships with Government agencies and Non-Governmental organizations, build awareness, provide education and advise on local and national humanitarian issues relevant to Malawians, a programme that is referred to by the Centre as the 'Life Skills Programme'. HIV, AIDS, Malaria, TB and famine are words are often associated with African countries and indeed most countries in the developing world. Millions of dollars are spent each year on advertising and public awareness campaigns in order to safeguard future generations from these diseases and problems. Facilities, like the Lilongwe Wildlife Centre, can play a huge role in educating the younger generations (who are largely forgotten in such

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campaigns) on such issues, and can help disseminate and instil key messages regarding safe sex, malaria prevention and treatment, primary health care, agriculture and healthy living. Bee keeping, bamboo propagation, use of solar cookers, reforestation and agricultural training are programmes that will be also promoted at the Wildlife Centre through its partners, in order to help disseminate useful and practical information that will support urban and rural communities develop through eco-friendly routes.

**Recreation** will become an important component of the Centre. At present, there are very few recreational opportunities for families and groups to enjoy within Lilongwe, and there are certainly no opportunities for the majority of Malawians living within the City to enjoy a true wildlife experience. Due to the costs of travelling to, and entering one of Malawi's National Parks or Forest Reserves, the Nature Sanctuary will become the only opportunity for many, to view wild animals, in a semi-wild environment. The Centre will ultimately provide a very unique facility in which recreation, education, culture and wildlife conservation are combined for the people of Lilongwe to enjoy.

**How will the Centre be funded?** Due to the nature of the project and its locality within Malawi, the project should offer very exciting funding opportunities for local companies and embassies, as well as International welfare organizations and their partners. In the longer term, after an initial 3-4 year period where external funding will be required, running costs shall be generated internally, through visitor gate fees and additional income generating schemes such as adoption and 'friends of the Centre' programmes, summer camps, fundraising events, a gift shop and additional rental income from a café/restaurant.

The development of the new Lilongwe Wildlife Centre at the Nature Sanctuary should be a welcomed addition to the City of Lilongwe and indeed Malawi. Not only will the new facility provide a badly needed recreational attraction for those visiting or living in Lilongwe, it will also provide a facility that will support the countries development expectations through tourism and wildlife conservation, training and education.