

Operation Malawi 1986

Chapter 2



Helicopter being refueled & pilot carrying out a pre-flight inspection

...started scanning the wilderness. The initial pilots report was quite disappointing as the numbers were not as one would've liked. This meant that the capture bomas had to be moved quite frequently. There were definite signs of heavy poaching in the park; therefore this became a rescue operation for the Roan, Sable and Lichtenstein Hartebeest of Malawi.

Game capture was started early every morning (at 6:00 am) to utilize the maximum daylight. After every successful capture and full truck load, Dr. Kriek had to escort the animals to Lilongwe quarantine station +/- 250km away while the pilot Johan Lategan, Dr. Hymie Ebedes and Leon van Zyl could take the rest of the day off and get some rest for the next days activities..



Lake Malawi – Team taking a break at Monkey bay

Sundays were their day of rest and sometimes they used this opportunity to visit the beautiful lake Malawi. Some interesting facts about this wonderful lake is that it has 5 rivers flowing into it and only 1 river flowing out. It is as long as the days of the year in miles (365 miles) and as wide as the weeks in the year (52 miles).



Leon van Zyl on the beach – Monkey bay

Lichtenstein Hartbeest were boma captured, tranquilized with short and long acting drugs and were transported in small groups in order to ensure no overcrowding in the trucks, which could result in losses due to trampling.



Roan antelope in the transport truck on the way to Lilongwe

Roan antelope were more difficult to capture. Some losses were experienced due to fighting, so the team decided to boma capture the roan and to dart them as soon as they entered the last compartment, just before the crush area. They were then physically loaded onto carrying blankets, then onto the trucks and transported in this state to the quarantine station at Lilongwe, 250km away. Dr. Kriek had to keep the animals sedated while monitoring the respiration and heartbeat. He also had to keep turning the animals from side to side to prevent too much pressure on the blood circulation to the limbs. Soft bedding e.g. straw was used to minimize the risk of circulation problems. This schedule was very tiring, as the offloading team returned to Kasungu only after offloading (250km away) often getting to bed at 3:00 am and having to start the next days capture at 6:00 am. This pattern continued for 4 weeks, which resulted in Dr. Kriek contracting Malaria twice due to fatigue and stress.



Roan Antelope in the boma at Lilongwe quarantine station

The animals adapted well to the new environment in the bomas. This was largely due to the big enclosures being used, minimum off 50 x 50 meters. The animals were fed with a balanced diet of antelope cubes and good quality lusern, imported from South Africa.



Lichtenstein Hartebeest at Lilongwe quarantine station

Dr. Kriek had difficulty in getting the Lichtenstein Hartebeest to take the feed. Therefore the lusern had to be mixed with Rhodes grass hay (*Chlorus gayana*), which was purchased locally.



Dr. Otto Kriek helping out



Lichtenstein's in the crush

The capture was now nearing completion and arrangements had to be made for the State Veterinarians to fly to Malawi to take the necessary blood samples for the first test. The animals had to be tested for foot and mouth disease (All seven sero types).

The big risk of this operation was that a great deal of expenses had to be incurred, which included the helicopter, building of quarantine facilities, capturing expensed, feeding costs and only after all that, the testing of the animals. If one animal were to test positive, no animal would be allowed to leave for South Africa and this would've resulted in a catastrophic financial loss. With a lot of prayer and blessing from above, all the results came back negative! After the second blood test (21 days later) the results were negative and the animals could leave.

The next phase of this operation was the airlifting, by Lockheed Hercules C-130 cargo planes, from Malawi to South Africa.