

CSL
CONSERVATION
SOUTH LUANGWA

Wildlife Protection & Coexistence in South Luangwa

2024 Annual Report

Report prepared for members of the Luangwa Conservation & Community Fund (LCCF)

Dear LCCF Members,

2024 has been a landmark year for CSL, not only in terms of operational achievements but also in making our largest financial investment into anti-poaching and human-wildlife coexistence since our founding over 20 years ago. Your ongoing contributions through the LCCF — a record-breaking $183,488 in 2024, a 25% increase from last year — continue to provide the critical, flexible funding that enables CSL to respond to continue to grow and invest in long-term conservation success for South Luangwa.

With your steadfast support, CSL's impact continues to grow. Ground patrols, K9 Unit operations, aerial surveillance, and intelligence-led efforts remain crucial in combating wildlife crime. At the same time, our human-wildlife coexistence program has expanded significantly to meet rising conflict challenges driven by drought, population growth, and shifting wildlife movements.

We were thrilled this year to see the team's work recognised on the international stage. We were honoured to receive the Marsh Award for Wildlife Conservation, our HWC Rapid Response Unit was named Best Ranger Team at the African Conservation Awards, and our K9 Unit placed as 2nd Runner-Up in the same category. Additionally, CSL's K9 handler Janet Sakala was awarded the World Female Ranger Leadership Award, a testament to her dedication and the growing role of women in conservation. This recognition not only motivates the teams but builds CSL's international reputation, enhances credibility and helps attract further funding and support.

A special thanks once again to all LCCF member managers, guides and guests for remaining vigilant in reporting any snared or injured animals seen throughout the year, alerting the Control Room Hotline and enabling rescues. We continue to depend on these extra 'eyes and ears' in the park throughout the year.

From all of us at CSL, thank you for standing with us yet again in 2024. We look forward to continuing this journey together in 2025, ensuring that South Luangwa remains a safe haven for wildlife and a source of pride for the communities that call it home.



Rachel McRobb
CEO, Conservation South Luangwa

Anti-Poaching in South Luangwa

2024 saw the consolidation of the strategic law enforcement developments made in recent years in collaboration with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW). Further capacity was built within all teams, as well as major investments made in patrol equipment and vital capital items such as vehicles. These enhanced resources, combined with a second consecutive year of prioritizing intelligence-led operations, led to significant operational gains across CSL's anti-poaching units. Notably, foot patrol coverage increased by 23%, specialized target operations rose by 55%, and helicopter operations saw a 65% increase. Advancements in conservation technology have further enhanced the capacity for strategic management and CSL continues to be at the forefront of exciting (albeit confidential) developments.

Poaching trends in 2024 continued to reflect a concerning shift toward bushmeat poaching, with consistently high detection rates of poachers' camps, drying racks, and snares. Despite increased capacity and resources, overall results remained comparable to 2023. However, a notable and growing challenge emerged along the Park's western boundary, where poaching pressures have intensified. This region is home to historically marginalized, isolated communities that receive little to no support from government or NGO programs and do not benefit from tourism, unlike other areas surrounding the Park. Extreme drought, rapid population growth, and shifting wildlife migration patterns have exacerbated the situation, driving a sharp rise in incursions and poaching activity in these western sectors. In response, CSL has expanded its support for scout camps inside the park, many of which become inaccessible during the rainy season. Enhanced logistical support has already yielded notable improvements in these emerging hotspots, reinforcing CSL's adaptability in addressing new and evolving threats to South Luangwa's wildlife.

In 2024, the following anti-poaching effort and results were seen from CSL/DNPW operations:

- 64,889 km of foot patrol coverage
- 32,889 patrol person days
- 224 day foot patrols
- 46 short foot patrols
- 569 long foot patrols
- 68 aerial surveillance patrols
- 129 aerial surveillance patrol hours
- 112 helicopter support operations
- 117 helicopter support hours
- 178 K9 Unit operations
- 146 Community Clean Sweeps
- 740 wire snares removed
- 110 firearms confiscated
- 656.5 kg of bushmeat confiscated
- 46.5 kg of ivory confiscated
- 187 wildlife crime suspected arrested
- 79 poachers' camps detected
- 175 poachers' drying racks detected

CSL Community Scouts

In October 2024, eight men proudly celebrated their graduation as CSL Community Scouts from the DNPW Nyamaluma Wildlife Training School during a passing-out parade in the Lower Lupande Game Management Area. The scouts completed a comprehensive three-month training programme that included human-wildlife conflict resolution, ecology and ecosystem management, as well as capture, arrest, and weaponry. They gained essential field skills, such as survival techniques and GPS mapping to build the skills necessary to protect wildlife confront the very real threat posed by armed poachers. The recruitment of these new scouts brought the total CSL Community Scout force to 118 – an increase of 29% since 2021 – representing over 40% of the overall scout force under DNPW's South Luangwa Area Management Unit.



Community Clean Sweeps

Since being implemented in 2020 as an activity to address the impacts of COVID, Community Clean Sweeps remain a vital source of additional anti-poaching resource both providing anti-snaring patrols in key hotspots within the GMAs as well as directly linking community members with the direct benefits of conservation. This year 146 Clean Sweeps collected 27% of the total snares recovered in 2024 and involved over 600 participants in hands-on conservation action.

K9 Unit

Throughout 2024, the K9 Unit remained a critical asset in combating wildlife crime, conducting 178 operations, including 144 roadblocks and 15 building searches. The K9 Unit's highly trained detection dogs screened 21,759 vehicles for contraband, comprising 10,218 vehicles, 6,083 motorbikes, and 5,458 bicycles. These operations directly led to:

- 17 wildlife crime suspect arrests
- 17 firearms confiscated
- 5.5 kg of illegal bushmeat seized
- Confiscation of one pangolin carcass

Since September 2022, the K9 Unit has also played a key role in intelligence-driven operations, working alongside the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), Investigations and Intelligence Unit (IIU), and Zambia Police to target high-priority individuals and locations. As part of these 'Target Team' operations, the K9 Unit contributed to an additional 73 arrests and 64 firearms confiscations in 2024. This strategic shift-focusing on integrated, intelligence-led missions-has resulted in fewer direct arrests by the K9 Unit alone but a significant overall increase in enforcement outcomes. This collaborative approach continues to prove highly effective, delivering exceptional results.

The K9 Unit's impact remains substantial, accounting for 9% of all wildlife crime suspects apprehended by all anti-poaching units and 15% of all firearms confiscations. When factoring in combined team arrests, these figures rise to 39% of all arrests and 58% of firearms confiscations-highlighting the unit's growing role in Zambia's anti-poaching efforts. A particularly notable success in 2024 was the conviction of three suspects apprehended in 2023. These individuals were sentenced to six years in prison for ivory and bushmeat trafficking, demonstrating the long-term impact of the K9 Unit's work.



Aerial Unit

Throughout the year, CSL's fixed-wing aircraft continued to play a vital dual role in conservation and law enforcement, supporting aerial surveillance for anti-poaching ground operations while also facilitating the Zambian Carnivore Programme (ZCP) large carnivore research through aerial tracking. In addition to anti-poaching patrols and wildlife monitoring, the aircraft serves as a powerful deterrent to poaching. Its consistent presence over the protected area signals active monitoring, discouraging illegal activity before it even begins. Regular aerial patrols ensure that both law enforcement and conservation teams can maintain a watchful eye over the ecosystem, ensuring year-round protection of wildlife

In 2024, the aerial team achieved the following in support of anti-poaching efforts:

- 162 hours of anti-poaching effort on 68 aerial patrols dedicated to surveillance and 14 flights with duel objectives shared between CSL and ZCP
- 65% of the South Luangwa National Park and 8% of the Game Management Areas covered by all aerial patrols
- 7 observations of people suspected to be in the park illegally
- 10 elephant carcasses observed (11% of total detected in 2024)
- 1 piece of ivory observed away from a carcass
- 26 buffalo, giraffe and hippo carcases observed
- 35 poacher camps seen
- 33 drying racks spotted, often together with the observation of a poachers' camp
- 242 points along suspected poachers' routes mapped
- 4 incidents of illegal fires being set detected



Beyond its critical role in anti-poaching operations, the aerial team also documents notable wildlife sightings during every flight. These observations provide valuable data that support the DNPW research department and partners such as ZCP as well strategic decision-making for law enforcement efforts.

In 2024, recorded sightings included:

- 297 observations of bull elephants
- 241 observations of herds of buffalo greater than 100
- 196 observations of Luangwa giraffe (in support of ZCP's ongoing giraffe monitoring programme)
- 132 observations of large antelope (eland, roan or hartebeest)
- 103 observations of ground hornbills
- 15 new active vulture nests and 9 previously known vulture nests located
- 2 new active marabou stork nests were located
- 6 saddle billed stork nests were located
- 11 active water bird and stork colonies were monitored



The continued use of helicopter support for anti-poaching operations in 2024 has once again proven to be a game-changer. The helicopter is funded by private and international donors. Building on the successes of 2022 and 2023, the helicopter has remained an essential asset for rapid-response deployments, particularly for Quick Reaction Force (QRF) teams, allowing them to reach critical areas swiftly and effectively. Alongside the Cessna 180, the helicopter also serves as a powerful deterrent to poachers. Additionally, its presence provides a significant morale boost for ground teams, reinforcing their confidence and effectiveness in the field. The end of 2024 saw the trial deployment of the helicopter during the driest season, when reduced tree cover and improved visibility made aerial surveillance particularly effective. The ability to spot individuals and activities with minimal hiding opportunities significantly enhanced operational success, further validating the strategic use of helicopters during this period.

In 2024, the helicopter achieved the following:

- 112 operations
- 56% of the South Luangwa National Park and 5% of the Game Management Areas covered
- Operations included: 71 ground patrol deployment/extractions 30 surveillance patrols, transportation of 4 injured or sick scouts and 1 rations drop
- 9 suspects apprehended
- 17 firearms confiscated
- 3 elephant carcasses identified



Snaring & Wildlife Rescue

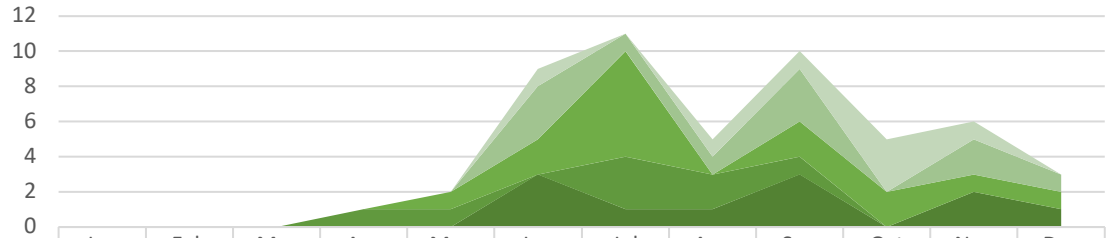
Alongside habitat encroachment, snaring remains the greatest threat to wildlife in the South Luangwa ecosystem. Seasonal snaring trends over the last year have remained consistent with trends seen over the years, with snaring increasing annually during the drier months.. Interestingly, as snare recoveries have increased over recent years, the number of de-snares has reduced indicating the impact of ongoing, rigorous and strategic anti-snaring activities with both CSL/DNPW scout patrols and Community Clean Sweeps and critical data provided by partners at the Zambian Carnivore Program which has helped to maintain a healthy and increasing wild dog population and stable lion population . (However, it is important to note that this analysis does not take into account snared animals that were reported but not located by the veterinary team).

Throughout 2024 the CSL/ZCP wildlife veterinarian, Dr Mwamba Sichande, received a total of 15 reports of snared animals (many from LCCF member lodges and tourists). Alongside CSL, ZCP and DNPW team members, Dr Sichande subsequently led the de-snaring of a total of seven animals – four elephants, one lion, one hyena and one leopard. An additional seven rescue operations were made including: helping transfer a very young elephant calf to Chipembele (sadly the calf died two days later); one sick vulture and one sick fish eagle rescued (sadly neither survived); a female giraffe who had failed to give birth due to a stillborn calf (the mother survived); two elephants and one buffalo tuck in the mud all of which did not survive after rescue due to prolonged dehydration, a lack of blood circulation and intense pressure on organs.

A special thanks to LCCF member teams, guides and guests for their vigilance in spotting, reporting and monitoring cases of snared and injured animals – it is vital to have the extra ‘eyes and ears’ on the ground to support the veterinary team.

In addition to de-snaring and wildlife rescue operations, the CSL/DNPW anti-poaching units recovered a total of 740 deadly wire snares. Of these, 27% (200) were recovered by Community Clean Sweeps, a vital additional programme supporting anti-snaring in hotspots throughout the Game Management Area.

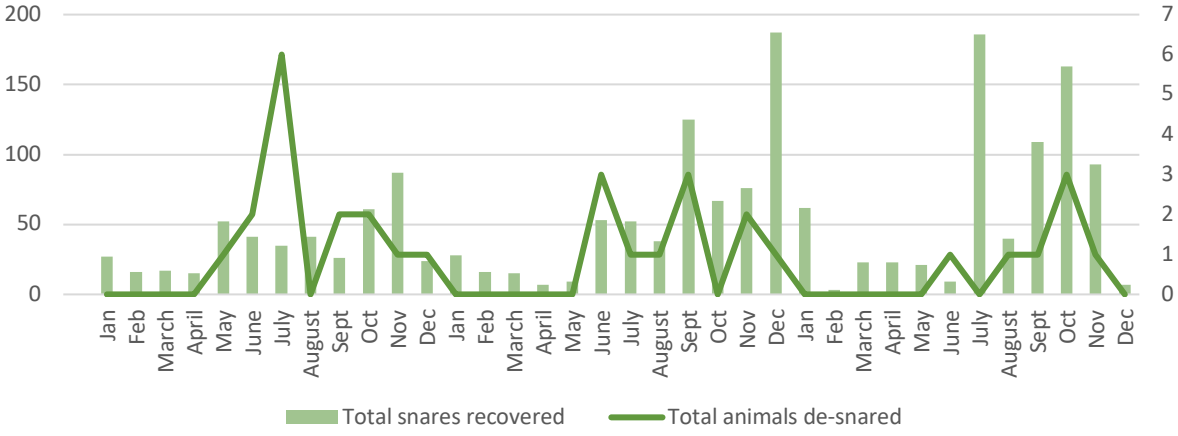
Animals de-snared, South Luangwa, 2020 - 2024



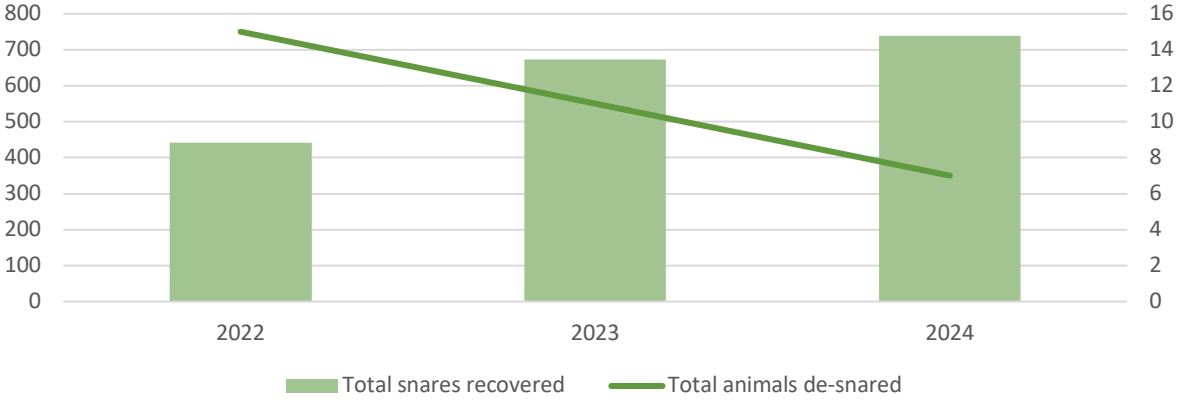
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2024	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	1	0
2023	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	3	0	2	1
2022	0	0	0	0	1	2	6	0	2	2	1	1
2021	0	0	0	1	1		3	2	1			
2020	0	0	0			3	1	1	3		2	1

2020 2021 2022 2023 2024

Total snares recovered vs de-snaring wildlife rescues by month, South Luangwa, January 2022 to December 2024



Total snares recovered vs de-snaring wildlife rescues by year, South Luangwa, 2022 to 2024



Animals de-snared in South Luangwa in 2024:

Elephant x 4
Hyena x 1
Zebra x 1
Lion x 1
Leopard x1











Spotlight On: Collaborative Action Saves Snared Lion

When the ZCP team carried out a routine check on South Luangwa's Muphamadzi Pride, it initiated a coordinated response that highlights the importance of collaborative conservation efforts. Using VHF tracking from the CSL/ZCP aircraft the pride was successfully located, enabling a ground team to further investigate. Upon arrival, the team discovered not only the malfunctioning collar, but also a male lion with a loose wire snare around his neck. With Dr Sichande already on-site in preparation for a collaring operation, the team was able to safely remove the snare and treat the lion. Fortunately, the snare had not yet tightened to the point of causing significant injury, allowing for a successful intervention.

This operation highlights the importance the CSL and ZCP partnership, where collaborative efforts and quick response capacity make it possible to protect wildlife across the vast landscapes of South Luangwa. It also demonstrates the far-reaching benefits of collaring: a single collar on a lioness not only aids in tracking her movements but also provides a safeguard for other pride members.



Veterinary Outreach

In 2024, Dr Sichande remained devoted to offering free veterinary care to communities bordering South Luangwa National Park. Throughout the year, over 1,000 animals were seen for routine check-ups, vaccinations and treatment both at the CSL vet clinic and during community outreach visits with the following results:

- 571 animals treated during 23 community outreach visits
- 445 animals treated at the Mfuwe clinic
- 45 dogs and 15 cats neutered/spayed
- 669 dogs vaccinated against rabies
- 24 dogs vaccinated against parvo/canine distemper

Dr Sichande's community outreach initiatives continue to make a significant impact, with growing numbers of communities participating in vaccination and neuter programmes each year. These events are essential not only for improving the welfare of domestic animals but also for safeguarding the delicate balance between human and wildlife populations. By controlling the health and population size of domestic animals, the risk of disease transmission, including rabies, to wildlife in and around South Luangwa National Park is greatly reduced.

Additionally, these efforts contribute to building trust and fostering positive relationships between local communities and conservation initiatives. They highlight the interconnectedness of animal welfare, public health, and wildlife conservation, showcasing how holistic approaches can support both community livelihoods and ecosystem protection.



Human-Wildlife Coexistence (HWCx)

In 2024, CSL recorded 1,107 incidents of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) in communities bordering the South Luangwa National Park. Of these, 64% were elephant conflicts, 13% lion conflicts, 10% hyena conflicts and the remaining due to smaller numbers of conflicts with of buffalo, bushpig, crocodile, genet, hippo, honey badger, leopard, snake, monkey and baboon. The majority of conflict incidences were crop damage (47%) followed by livestock predation (26%), property damage (23%) and lastly human injury and death (4%). Encouragingly a 300% reduction in human deaths due to HWC were recorded in 2024 (2023 = 12, 2024 = 3) indicating a positive shift in behaviour following consistent conservation messaging, community support and the expanded HWC Rapid Response Unit, now made up of 18 full-time team members with two dedicated vehicles.

In total, over ZMW 1,000,000 / $40,000 in livelihoods was estimated to have been lost through HWC, 54% from livestock predation, 32% due to crop damage and 14% from property damage. It is interesting to note that around the same level of loss was recorded in 2023 from fewer incidences. However, these loses remain high and potentially devastating for rural farming households typically reliant on subsistence agriculture for survival.

The CSL Community HWCx team expanded this year, and is now made up of the Programme Manager, Database Manager, six full-time Field Officers, 15 community volunteers, RRU Manager, RRU Engagement Officer and 16 scouts dedicated to the HWC Rapid Response Unit with two interns also joining for placements team in 2024.



The CSL DNPW HWC Rapid Response Team is the first dedicated unit in South Luangwa to actively address HWC on a 24/7 basis. Formed in 2021, the team is responsible for addressing severe threats to lives and livelihoods. In 2024 the team grew significantly and underwent training with Frontier to enhance efficiency and effectiveness and are now a highly respected unit in South Luangwa.



Throughout the year, the team continued working across the four key programme areas: conflict mitigation strategies; HWC data collection; alternative livelihood support; and community engagement. Over 3,000 rural subsistence farmers and their households participated in or benefitted from the HWCx programmes in 2024, through the following activities:

- 513 Rapid Response Unit operations covering 53,342 kms
- 63 chilli patrollers active across five chiefdoms
- 40 km of solar fencing installed to protect 312 hectares of farmland
- 13 km of 'smelly' fencing installed to protect 5 farming blocks totaling 294 hectares
- 1.8 km of solar fencing maintained around 4 villages to reduce property damage
- 5 community vegetable gardens protected with solar fencing
- 1 borehole drilled to support year-round chilli farming
- 416 kg of chilli harvested, raising over ZMW 10,000 for farmers and cooperatives
- 855 farmers trained in chilli growing in preparation for the 2025 harvest
- 45 Community Game Drives for 382 participants, 62% for the first time
- 31 hours of *The Conservation Hour* radio show, including 7 hours of the new *RRU Breakfast Show*
- 21 theatre performances reaching an audience of 9,146 with conservation messaging

Tetezani Luangwa Alliance

In August 2024, we were thrilled to formalize our partnership with ZCP and Chipembele Wildlife Education Trust (CWET) under the Tetezani Luangwa Alliance (*Tetezani* meaning 'We Protect'). Between us, we effectively address the core pillars of successful conservation work - community empowerment, resource protection and conservation science. The Tetezani Luangwa Alliance aims to strengthen relationships and enhance the effectiveness of existing human-wildlife coexistence programmes in South Luangwa as well as develop new joint conservation initiatives.

Historically, ZCP, CWET and CSL have independently managed programmes to address human-wildlife conflict. Together, we have also collaborated on initiatives such as weekly radio shows reaching 50,000 listeners, guided game drives, theatre performances and events such as the annual Fun Run/Carnivore Cup. Alongside these successful programmes, the Tetezani Luangwa Alliance aims to scale up collaborative efforts to foster sustainable and mutually beneficial coexistence between people and wildlife.

The Tetezani Luangwa Alliance will work to facilitate discussions and address challenges in implementing effective land use planning, increase knowledge about coexistence within the local community, and improve transparency and accountability. By bringing together our expertise, resources and networks through this partnership, we can move towards long-term coexistence that benefits both people and wildlife in South Luangwa.

Many LCCF members support two or more Tetezani Luangwa Alliance members and we look forward to updating you further as the partnership develops.



Conservation Fun Run

2024 saw the return of CSL's annual Fun Run event, held in June and attended by over 6,000 people. Hosted by the newly formed Tetezani Luangwa Alliance, consisting of CSL, Chipembele Wildlife Education Trust and the Zambian Carnivore Programme, and further supported this year by Wildlife Crime Prevention, Project Luangwa and the Elephant Charge, the theme for the 2024 Fun Run was *Tetezani zachilengedwe chifukwa cha anthu ndi nyama* (Protecting the environment for people and wildlife).

The day began with a 10K run, and new for 2024, an almost half marathon, following the introduction of a 20km run in 2023 to mark CSL's 20th anniversary. Other activities included mixed executive relays featuring a 50m sack race, a 50m egg and spoon race, a 100m three-legged race, and a 100m sprint. There is also the much-anticipated tug of war, as well as games of volleyball, netball and the Zambian Carnivore Programme (ZCP) Cup football final.

A highlight this year was the attendance of renowned Zambian footballer, Collins Mbesuma, who joined the Tribal Textiles team in the tug of war final against the eventual winners, the Zambia Police Service.

Thank you to all LCCF members for their support and attendance at the 2024 Fun Run – this event is a huge undertaking and we rely heavily on support from partners and stakeholders to ensure a successful event.



Awards & International Recognition

We were thrilled this year to be recognised by a number of different international award programmes. This included:

- Marsh Award for Wildlife Conservation

Run in partnership between the Marsh Charitable Trust and the Environmental Investigation Agency, this award recognises the work of a local organisation who has made an outstanding contribution to wildlife conservation throughout the year.

- African Conservation Awards

We are thrilled to that the HWC Rapid Response Unit was awarded as the Best Ranger team by the African Conservation Awards. Adding to this achievement, the K9 Unit was awarded 2nd Runner-Up in the same category. This honour celebrates their outstanding efforts in South Luangwa.

- World Female Ranger Awards – Leadership Award

We were also immensely proud to see CSL K9 handler Janet Sakala (pictured below) receive the prestigious World Female Ranger Leadership Award in recognition of her dedication and outstanding contributions to conservation as a K9 handler since 2017.



2024 Financial Summary

For 14 years, LCCF members have played a crucial role in funding CSL's efforts by providing vital flexible funds that have enabled CSL to grown considerably during this time. 2024 was a record year for LCCF contributions with **$183,488** donated to support conservation across the South Luangwa ecosystem – a remarkable **25% increase** on 2023 contributions.

A huge thank you to each of you and your teams for your unwavering commitment, dedication and support for our work.