

Fruit tree project

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EDUCATION — February 2009

Kapanda Community Day Secondary School is now open

Kapanda Community Day Secondary School opened in February 2008 and building work has continued through the year. We now have two completed double classroom blocks with three classrooms open, housing Forms 1 and 2. Two teachers' houses, two toilet blocks, and a new composting toilet are completed, and a new building comprising teachers' offices and a secure storeroom will be ready in March 2009. The building quality and organisation under Joey and Mattias has been excellent.

The area of land which has been set aside for the school covers about 30 acres, and work has started to prepare the football and netball pitches for the students. Some experimental agriculture projects have also been started, and it is planned



Foundations for the second classroom block



The second classroom block



A light and airy classroom with locally made desks



We are trying composting toilets at the school



The first two teachers' houses



Hopefully the quality of the houses will attract and retain good teachers



The new building comprising teachers' offices and secure storeroom



Sally, the new headteacher, is very keen to work with RIPPLE Africa

that the students will participate in this project as part of their agriculture studies.

The government has appointed Sally Msiska as the headteacher. She is very happy in her new house and is looking forward to working with RIPPLE Africa. She is keen to work with our volunteers and benefit from their time and experience, and she is excited about the plans we have for developing the experimental agricultural project which will be run at the school in conjunction with RIPPLE Africa.

Unfortunately, because of the world recession, and in particular the weak pound, the exchange rate has been severely affected and now costs are 30% - 40% more. As a result, we have had to make all of the builders at Kapanda redundant to reduce our overheads. It has been a very difficult time trying to explain how the global financial crisis has resulted in the loss of their jobs because they don't really understand. We still want to continue development at the school and are optimistic that funds will be raised, but we will only resume building when we have full funds for future buildings. Fortunately, the school can continue for the next two years with the structures we have already built but, ideally, we want to build two more teachers' houses and then two more double classroom blocks. We are very grateful to all our donors who have provided funds for this project and hope that they are pleased with the results so far!



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EDUCATION — February 2009

New desks and textbooks

Now the school blocks are built, the next stage is to provide desks and textbooks. Local carpenters have been busy for months making 120 desks for both Kapanda Secondary School and Mwaya Primary School. Donors have provided money for some textbooks which has been wonderful. A full set of textbooks, which are specifically for the Malawi syllabus, costs about £80 per student, and we are always needing money for these books which can be purchased locally.



We employ local carpenters to make the school desks



120 desks have been made for Kapanda Secondary School and Mwaya Primary School



Some textbooks have been supplied, but we need more at an average price of £8 each

RIPPLE Africa trainee teachers

Last year, we employed a total of 13 trainee teachers in four local primary schools but, due to the radical cutbacks we have had to make, all but two were made redundant. However, we have been very touched by the fact that six of the redundant teachers are still teaching without being paid. We really want to re-employ them again but need additional funds of approximately £450 per teacher per year.



Some classes at Mwaya Primary School did not have desks, but now desks have been made for them



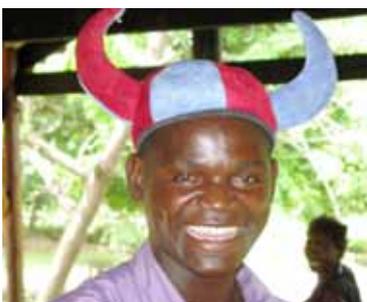
Philemon, a RIPPLE Africa teacher at Kachere Primary School, who is currently working without being paid



The recently completed building comprising teachers' offices and storeroom at Mwaya Primary School

News from the nursery schools

We now have 18 nursery school teachers working in six local nursery schools. Unlike the primary schools, the government does not support these schools and so the help given by RIPPLE Africa is vital. Many of our volunteers have worked in the nursery schools, and we have now appointed Jimmy, one of the teachers, to be the Nursery Schools Coordinator for RIPPLE Africa. Rachael, one of our volunteers, has spent a lot of time with him visiting all of the schools, and he has taken to his new role like a duck to water.



Jimmy, our new Nursery Schools Coordinator



Rachael, who spent a lot of time working with Jimmy during her volunteer placement



Emily, a previously sponsored student who is now working in one of the nursery schools



Washing hands before tea and food at Mazembe nursery school



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EDUCATION — February 2009



Mazembe nursery school is now completed and fully operational



Locally made wooden toys supplied to all six nursery schools



Volunteers and staff at Mazembe nursery school



A locally made abacus

Mazembe nursery school, which was built last year, is now completed and fully operational. We have supplied locally made wooden toys to all of the nursery schools and, although there are never enough for all of the children, they are very popular. It has been very noticeable that the children have much more fun at the nursery schools rather than just learning by rote the Malawian way thanks to the input from many of the RIPPLE Africa volunteers and from Jimmy. Most of the nursery schools have been painted with fun and educational pictures on the walls, and the children will definitely benefit from a better understanding of English and other skills once they start primary school at six years old.



Tea and sugar are supplied to the nursery schools



Energetic singing and games in the nursery schools



A new RIPPLE Africa tree planted outside a local house



Joey and one of his grandchildren

Mwaya Community Library is now three years old

Three and a half years ago, three students from Stowe School, England, funded the construction of a library at Mwaya, and at the end of November 2005 the library opened with the help of Donncha, a volunteer who is a librarian at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. Donncha has been back several times and helped recently with another shipment of books, many from Hayes School in Bromley, England. We now have 3,503 books and, under the guiding hand of Mr Longwe, the librarian, who runs a very strict regime, we have only lost one book in all that time. We now have enough books but could always do with additional money to purchase books written in the local vernacular language and secondary school textbooks which are always in high demand.

A donor gave some money last year for some additional books and a new library extension comprising a reading area and storeroom, so that people can read their books in peace and quiet. Work on this building has started, and we hope it will be finished in a few months.



The start of the library extension — a reading area and storeroom



More books arrive, shipped from England, for sorting and cataloguing



3,503 books — the Library at Mwaya is now three years old and only one book has been lost!



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ENVIRONMENT — February 2009

Force flies to South Africa — a reward for planting two million trees

Two previous volunteers, Matt and Pauline, promised Force that they would pay for him to fly to South Africa when he had planted two million trees. As you can imagine, South Africa is a dream destination for many Malawians, and Force was very excited about this trip for a long time beforehand. Finally, the day arrived, and Geoff and Liz met Force at the airport in Johannesburg. It was a new world for him, and he couldn't believe the number of cars and all the things that we take for granted in the West.

On the first day of his visit, Matt and Pauline took us all to Rosebank shopping mall in central Johannesburg. At one point, we thought we'd lost Force at the top of an escalator. It was the first time that he'd seen a moving staircase, and he wasn't quite sure what to do, but he quickly mastered this. After lunch and a bit of shopping, we all went Ten Pin Bowling and, within a few bowls, he was knocking the pins down as well as, if not better than, the rest of us. The following day, Matt arranged for Force to take a trip in a small plane with Russ, a good friend of his — yet another first for Force.



Force arrives at O.R. Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg, South Africa



Matt, Pauline and baby Alex take Force to Rosebank shopping mall



Ten Pin Bowling — another first!



Russ, a good friend of Matt's, took Force for a flight in his plane

After this wonderful experience, Geoff and Liz took Force on a trip to Kruger National Park. Then they travelled through some beautiful countryside from White River to Blyde River Canyon and on to Tzaneen, which is a major fruit growing area. Geoff and Liz were keen for Force to see fruit tree growing on a large scale, and there were thousands of hectares of bananas, oranges, avocados, etc. Although we don't want to replicate fruit tree growing on this scale in Malawi, it was good for Force to see how the farmers in South Africa produce fruit on a commercial basis. As a result of this trip, he now has a clearer vision of how our fruit tree project can develop in Malawi.



A lucky sighting in Kruger National Park



Oranges in South Africa



Force saw thousands of hectares of oranges and bananas near Tzaneen



Blyde River Canyon

176 community tree nurseries

Over the past year, we expanded the tree planting project to include 176 community tree nurseries. The project has been very popular with local communities as many of them do realise that they need to invest in planting trees. But it has been a huge undertaking and, although we have had tremendous successes, we have learnt a lot about the problems of growing trees, particularly with the quantity of tree nurseries and the geographical accessibility of some of them. However, that being said, we expect that about 1.5 million trees have been planted out this planting season, and we have been encouraging communities to plant the majority of these trees in community woodlots rather than as individual trees which are difficult to monitor. The trees planted during the rainy season in 2008 have survived well and, with the ongoing programme, we are encouraging communities to look after the trees for the first few

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Some of the supplies for the community tree nurseries and forest guards



Trees are planted in community woodlots and are looked after by the tree nursery members



An acacia which had been planted in January 2008



Community tree nursery members clearing and maintaining the woodlots

years after they are planted. This has really paid dividends, and we can now see the results.

Force has developed a good team of supervisors, and we now have four reliable and enthusiastic supervisors who are making sure that the nurseries are working efficiently. They will be monitoring the planted out trees on an ongoing basis so that we have data on the number of trees which were planted and which have survived. Due to the global economic situation, we will be reducing the number of community tree nurseries we support in 2009 in order to reduce costs and maximise effectiveness.



Quick growing acacia trees which are now two years old



A tree at Kachere Primary School



Makuzi tree nursery



Chigwiti tree nursery

Citrus project

Initially, we started developing the citrus project with a large number of the community tree nurseries who grew hardy lemon rootstock in preparation for budding with improved citrus varieties. Then we purchased improved budwood for oranges, tangerines and grapefruit from the south of Malawi. Due to the logistics of getting the budwood to all of the nurseries and then training the community members how to bud, we experienced a larger than expected failure rate. Half way through 2008, we took on Fumbani who used to work as an agricultural extension worker and who has had a lot of experience of budding fruit trees. We also took on Catherine to manage the fruit tree project at Mwaya where we have a large greenhouse. With Fumbani's help, we have changed our budding strategy, and we are developing 20 community tree nurseries in key geographical areas in addition to our main nursery at Mwaya. With this system, we have experienced a very good success rate with the budded trees, and we are now planting budded fruit tree orchards so that these trees can grow and provide improved budwood locally rather than travelling to the south of the country, which is obviously very expensive.



Budwood has to be kept cold — each twig has four buds



Children with an improved orange tree



A new budwood nursery typically with 60 improved trees for future budding



Alupro visitors at one of the tree nurseries

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At the end of October 2008, Alupro, who have been sponsoring our fruit tree project, brought out four of their competition winners — two teachers and two local authority recycling experts. They visited a number of our projects and were interested to see the progress being made.



Fumbani, who is in charge of the fruit tree project



Catherine, the manager at the Mwaya tree nursery, doing some budding



6,000 improved citrus trees were budded in four days at Mwaya tree nursery



Catherine with a successfully budded orange tree

Banana tree project

It has always amazed us how few bananas are available in Malawi when banana plants should grow very easily. However, what has happened is that many of the banana trees have been infected by a virus and, although this doesn't necessarily kill the trees, the leaves tend to curl and many of the trees do not bear fruit. In addition to this, most Malawians do not grow banana trees in the best way, leaving them to grow in clumps rather than detaching the new suckers and planting them elsewhere. If they were to plant the trees at the correct intervals and manage the suckers, they would have better crops.



An improved banana tree producing suckers



Hopefully, thousands of these will be produced in the near future



A recently planted pawpaw tree



A mix of compost, soil and sand is needed to give trees a good start

Our banana tree project is very simple and exciting. We have made our experimental vegetable garden into a banana plantation with 250 improved banana trees. Each planting station is at three metre intervals and has been prepared with good compost. The trees are growing well, and they will develop at least four suckers each per year. The idea is to find farmers, probably through our community tree nursery groups, who are prepared to provide land and free labour to prepare a site and then 50-100 banana trees will be loaned to them. They will then grow suckers for RIPPLE Africa to distribute to new farmers who will do the same thing. The farmers will have the benefit of the fruit and will eventually own the suckers. They will then be able to generate a reliable income from the crop. If everything goes well, we could establish between 20,000 and 100,000 banana trees in two to three years. People will be very interested to purchase these banana trees for their homes, and RIPPLE Africa can assist with the overall planning and with providing transport to the different areas within Nkhata Bay District. We're also very keen to extend this project to schools for two reasons — firstly, it will teach the children about farming, and, secondly, the bananas will provide valuable nutrition for them.

Deforestation in the hills is still a huge problem

The dry season is a lovely time to be in Malawi but also a very sad time. The Malawians, like many other Africans, have an urgent need to set fire to almost everything in the belief that it will improve the environment for the following year. There is also tremendous pressure on the natural resources because of the burgeoning population. We were horrified by the bush fires in October and November, and some evenings it was difficult to breathe because of the smoke in the atmosphere — it was the worst we have



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ever seen. One day, a member of staff, who lives in the hills, came to tell us that his house had been burnt down, and we decided to go and see for ourselves. Sure enough, a bush fire had burnt out of control and a spark had ignited his thatched roof during the day whilst he was at work. The house and contents burnt very quickly, and he lost virtually everything other than the clothes he stood in.



Bush fires rapidly burn out of control



Musa lost everything when his house burnt down



Many houses were burnt down due to bush fires burning out of control



There were even bush fires next to Mwaya Beach which the volunteers had to extinguish

On the way to and from his house, we had a very interesting walk along forest paths and witnessed dreadful scenes of devastation where farmers had indiscriminately cut down trees and set fire to them where they had fallen. One particular farmer had cleared an area of virgin forest of 5-10 acres single-handedly and had just set fire to everything. When we arrived, it was still smouldering. We asked the farmer why he had done this, and he told us that he had a family of 11 children and his existing crops were failing because the soil was exhausted. He had more forest left and plans to cut this down in the future.



Before — how the forest was!



After — destruction like this is happening incredibly quickly



This farmer cleared and burnt between five and 10 acres of forest in just three months

We decided to try and do something about this. Unfortunately, in 1994, authority for these areas was decentralised by the government and devolved to the local chiefs with the result that the farmers just do what they like. Very quickly, the beautiful forests of Nkhata Bay District will be gone for ever and farmers will struggle to grow their crops once the top soil has washed away from the steep slopes which inevitably it does very quickly once the trees have been cut down and the land cleared. It is one thing to grow new trees, but we are really keen to work with the communities to try and save the existing ones. To this end, we assembled a group of chiefs, Forestry Department staff and other interested parties, and we took them on the same walk to see the extensive damage for themselves. They were as horrified as we were, and they realise that something has got to be done. We are currently working on a simple set



Deforestation just starting — next year there will be far fewer trees



A fact-finding meeting with local chiefs, Forestry Department staff and other interested parties to find a solution to this problem which is devastating their environment



Bush fires burn fruit trees, destroying the fruit



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of bylaws for all chiefs to use in Nkhata Bay District. These will control which trees can be cut down and which areas need to be preserved. It will be a huge task but one worth pursuing if the trees of Nkhata Bay are to remain for future generations.

We also visited lowland areas along the lakeshore where general bush burning is endemic for a variety of reasons. Mainly people burn the bush as an easy way of clearing the land ready to plant crops at the beginning of the rainy season, but there are other reasons as well including hunting and for fun. But, as you can see from the pictures, it causes untold damage, and we saw many houses which had burnt down, and many fruit trees and indigenous trees destroyed.

In conjunction with the bylaws, we are also offering advice on improved agriculture. The Malawian communities in our area grow only cassava all year round and some maize during the rainy season. They quickly exhaust the soil and, together with the bush burning, destroy any organic matter. We are encouraging farmers to make compost rather than burning and to intercrop with potential cash crops like groundnuts and beans which will not only produce additional income but will put nitrogen back into the soil. We are very keen to develop this area of activity over the next few years and, with the help of David Newman, an experienced horticulturist, Fumbani, and Ruben, who is in charge of local vegetable projects, work is already starting in this area. But, as we've already experienced with previous agricultural projects, there are always many obstacles — whether it's too much or not enough rain, or pests and insects destroying crops — but it is essential that solutions are found so that communities can grow crops on the same land rather than continually expanding into the forests and causing even more destruction.



A groundnut shoot



We encourage intercropping with groundnuts to improve the soil



David Newman and Ruben want to develop a local vegetable project



Ruben composting the old reeds rather than burning them!

Beekeeping

We have now constructed 50 beehives for two local projects. These have been hung, and we understand that there are now bees in some of them. It is still early days, but we hope that these hives will be producing honey during 2009. Early in 2008, a Canadian volunteer, Carol, did some research on making bee suits prior to starting her placement at Mwaya Beach, and she worked with a local sewing group to create some very good quality suits. It is hoped that the group will be able to continue to make these suits as a business, and we are also encouraging them to make school uniforms for the local students.



MacFancy and team making the beehives



50 beehives made



Carol, a Canadian volunteer, established a sewing group to make bee suits



Finished bee suits



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The mbaula project

There are now 30 clubs making mbaula (fuel-efficient wood stoves), and these are very popular with the people who use them. Typically, they are burning less than a quarter of the wood that they used to burn on the traditional three-stone fires.

However, there has been a problem with selling the mbaula, and very few of the groups are selling in the quantities that they should be. Many of the groups who make the mbaula think that selling is waiting for a customer to knock on their door and ask to buy one. We employed a marketing team to help to solve this problem but, as a result of the cutbacks we have had to make during the current financial crisis, the team has been made redundant. However, our supervisors and Catherine are now taking over this role. We will be trying new strategies throughout 2009 to try and develop the market and to find suitable sales people who can earn a reasonable commission for selling the mbaula.



This enterprising group are advertising their mbaula on the main road



Mbaula being transported ready for sale



Typically, people are using less than a quarter of the wood with the mbaula

The fish pond project

Sadly, our fish pond project has not come up to expectations, and we have experienced all sorts of set backs along the way. One of the main problems has been lack of good quality food to feed the fish. In the absence of being able to make our own fish food, we have had to use chicken feed which has increased in price over the last year by almost 200%. Without a doubt, the answer for the future is to make our own fish food, but a vital ingredient is soya protein which is in short supply in Malawi so we are getting local farmers to grow soya.

At Chiomba, we started off with 10 fish ponds, but the fish were nearly all stunted because of a lack of food. This year, we are only stocking two of the ponds, and we have already bought all the food needed for the season so we will see if this project is viable for the future. We certainly hope it is because fish protein is an important part of the local diet and, with dwindling fish stocks in Lake Malawi, projects similar to this one are vital nutritionally.



Extra maintenance has been carried out to make the ponds more watertight



Feeding the fingerlings



We will be growing soya which will provide protein for fish food



A disappointing catch — the fish need a regular and plentiful diet to grow



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OTHER NEWS — February 2009

Healthcare

Over the past year, we have had a steady stream of healthcare volunteers who have been helping out in various capacities at Kachere Health Centre. There have been a number of nurses who have carried out valuable First Aid training courses with members of the local communities in addition to helping at Kachere Health Centre and assisting with the different clinics. We were very fortunate to have two doctors volunteering with us in 2008. Dr Ruth, who was at Mwaya Beach for six weeks, and Dr Marc, who volunteered with RIPPLE Africa for six months. He really helped to develop systems at Kachere, and he assisted at the hospital at Chintheche on one day a week. He also worked with Fletcher, our Healthcare Coordinator, to develop a better induction programme for future healthcare volunteers.



Fletcher and Tania at an Under 5s clinic



Kachere Health Centre before being painted



The painting team — Tania, Yotam, Nester, and Ali



Kachere Health Centre after being painted

Kachere Health Centre has been completely redecorated courtesy of Tania and Ali, two nurses who volunteered with RIPPLE Africa in 2008, as it was in a very shabby state. The incinerator has had a wall built around it to stop people, especially children, from being exposed to contaminated dressings, needles, etc. In addition, some bicycle ambulances have been constructed and are now working in the local area.



A new bicycle ambulance



A bicycle ambulance in operation locally around Mwaya



Dr Marc, who worked at Kachere and the hospital at Chintheche



Fletcher and Alec redesigning the incinerator to include a secure wall

We did have plans to build a new community clinic at Matete and, towards the end of 2008, five of the local chiefs had made the bricks for this building. Unfortunately, however, with the recession and the weak pound, we have had to put this project on hold as we cannot afford to start it. However, we still have every intention to build the clinic in the near future. Traditional bricks are moulded from mud and dried in the sun. The dried bricks are then built into a kiln with openings underneath. The kiln is covered with mud and fires are lit in the openings, and the bricks are burnt for 24 hours. Although this method uses a lot of timber, it is a method by which the local communities can contribute to the project by giving their time and labour for free.



Community bricks made by Chief Mphero



Community bricks made by Chief Chibako



The bricks are moulded, dried, and built into a kiln and covered with mud



The kiln is then fired for 24 hours



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Frank, our senior builder, has died

For some time now, Frank, our senior builder, has been getting weaker and thinner, and we weren't quite sure what was wrong with him. At the beginning of our visit in May 2008, Frank came to see us one morning but, as we were very busy, we had a quick chat with him and said we'd come to see the building project at Lowani Beach later on in the week. Two days later, Frank's wife Mary came to Mwaya Beach to ask us if we could take him to Chintheche hospital as he had come home after work that evening complaining that he was feeling very weak. We took him to the hospital, where the nurse assured us that he had low blood sugar, and she said they would keep him overnight. Sadly, he died in hospital three days later. In accordance with Malawi tradition, he was buried the following day — it was a very moving funeral. We're sure that all of our volunteers will remember his happy, smiling face and his white cap with blue stripes.

Mary and her family have been coping very well, and RIPPLE Africa has assisted her with building a new house within the community. We are very pleased that she has decided to stay on with RIPPLE Africa as a nursery school teacher at Kachere.



Frank, our senior builder, who died in May 2008



Frank's funeral was attended by all the community



Mary, Frank's wife, and Esther, their daughter



Mary's new house being built by RIPPLE Africa

New video being made, and dancing on Mwaya Beach

Two volunteers, Laura and Tim, have been working hard to put together a video about a day in the life of a young girl from Mwaya Primary School, together with a summary of the work that RIPPLE Africa is doing. The video is due to be completed in the next couple of months, and we'll e-mail people when it is ready for viewing. We have seen a sneak preview, and it looks very good. Hopefully, it will help us with fundraising in schools, etc.

On a number of occasions in the past, we have organised for the chilimika and malipenga dancers to come down at Mwaya Beach. The whole community are invited, and it is a great opportunity to celebrate. Martha and Gedess, two of our staff at Mwaya Beach, are always keen to join in and even Chief Chibako did at the last gathering in May 2008!



Tim and Laura making a soon-to-be-released video about RIPPLE Africa



Geoff joining in with the malipenga dancers



Chief Chibako and Martha joining in with the dancing



Erynn watching the dancing with some of the children



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Sense from Mike Restaurant

Ruben, who works for RIPPLE Africa and who is a bit of an entrepreneur, opened a restaurant in May 2008. It is called Sense from Mike Restaurant after Mike, a volunteer who suggested to him that it would be a good money-making opportunity to open a restaurant in Matete. The volunteers and Geoff and Liz were invited to the opening evening, and we were treated to some wonderful food. The restaurant has proved popular with volunteers and passing trade since then, and it is a credit to Ruben and his wives that they find enough time to run it because they are always busy working on one thing or another!



The opening night of Ruben's restaurant at Matete — wonderful food!



The restaurant is named after Mike, a volunteer who suggested Ruben should open it



14 volunteers in the Land Cruiser on the way home



Drinks on the deck after a hard day!

Johnny Durex and news of the other cats at Mwaya

As past volunteers will remember, there have been varying numbers of kittens and cats resident at Mwaya Beach. Among these, Johnny Durex was a big favourite with volunteers who were at Mwaya at the end of 2007 and during 2008. His story is as follows:

In mid October 2007, we found a very young kitten, with its eyes still closed, abandoned in our garage, and Geoff had to rescue it from a cobra that was just a few metres away. Sadly, its brother had already died. So now we had this young kitten and didn't know how to look after it. Fortunately, one volunteer, Nicky, had experience of raising very young kittens, and there was also a doctor, Dr Zee, volunteering for RIPPLE Africa who was able to give medical advice. It was decided to feed the little kitten with powdered milk through a Swiss condom initially, although a baby's bottle was purchased soon afterwards! The kitten survived and was christened Johnny Durex. While he was small, each of the volunteers took it in turn to nurse Johnny — he even went to Ngala Beach Lodge with everyone for pizza night! Consequently, he became a firm favourite with everyone, and was very friendly and cuddly. Unfortunately, however, not every story has a happy ending, and we're very sad to report that Johnny went missing in late November 2008. Volunteers will remember that he had a liking for snakes, and we presume he was bitten by one but we're not sure.

However, Tilly has had some more litters of kittens, some of which have been kept at Mwaya, but none of them will replace Johnny. Alie has had to be rehomed because she was attacking Tilly and her kittens, and she is now catching mice for Force in Chintheche!



Johnny was abandoned and raised by the volunteers



Always inquisitive!



Johnny before he went missing — he was probably bitten by a snake



Tilly produces another litter of kittens!



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Volunteers just love coming back to Mwaya!

It's really wonderful for us to know that many RIPPLE Africa volunteers love their experience at Mwaya so much that they want to return, and there have been a record number of returning volunteers this year. They have either stayed for a few weeks at Mwaya or have just popped in for a few days. On our last visit at the end of 2008, there were six returning volunteers, and it was great to see them all. In fact, one of the returning volunteers, Megan Canning, who visited with her husband, Ryan, on their honeymoon, is now going to be working with RIPPLE Africa in a fundraising and administrative capacity.

You may have seen that Ali Gaskell, who volunteered at the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008, joined RIPPLE Africa full-time as UK Project Manager. She has since decided that she wants to pursue a teaching career, but she is continuing to work part-time for RIPPLE Africa and is in charge of the volunteer programme.



Morton has been appointed as the Volunteer Projects Manager



Our volunteers keep returning! Megan, on the right, will be fundraising for us



Maggie, another returning volunteer, will be raising money for us with her new CD



Ali is now managing the volunteer programme

At the beginning of 2008, we had a number of volunteers who felt they were not given enough direction as to which activities they could become involved with, so we decided to take on Morton as the Volunteer Projects Manager. He was originally employed by RIPPLE Africa as a trainee teacher at Mwaya Primary School teaching maths, and he was also doing the charity's accounts. He's very intelligent, has very good people skills, and is a keen member of our team. We're pleased to say that he has really improved the induction programme for new volunteers, and they are being given the choice of having a more structured programme or to have the freedom to choose what they want to become involved with. Inevitably, we do find that most volunteers take quite a long time to settle in, and this is largely because living in a rural part of Africa is so completely different to our lives in the West. But certainly, once people are settled in, they don't generally want to leave, and it's been lovely to see returning volunteers welcomed back by people like Martha and Gedess who give them a big hug when they arrive.

Developments at Lowani Beach

Lowani Beach has been developing slowly, but the new washroom facilities are nearly completed. This is always the most expensive building because of the drainage, plumbing, pumps, solar panels, etc. The sandy track through the property has now been rehabilitated, and we're planting over 1,000 trees this rainy season. Work will start shortly on the main dining and lounge area, and we have our first visitors coming to stay in July. This is a group of 12 students and four teachers from Aldenham School in Hertfordshire, England.



The new washroom at Lowani Beach is nearly finished



The track has been improved for vehicle access



Evening drinks with Robinson and the volunteers



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OTHER NEWS — February 2009

We have taken quite a few people to see Lowani Beach, and we really believe that there is lots of potential for visiting groups. It's a smashing place to have a beer in the late afternoon and chat with Robinson, our wonderful manager of Lowani Beach.

A bit about the recession and our wonderful donors

Geoff went out to Africa with his son, Neil, in September 2008, and while he was away lost in the bush in Tanzania the recession really took hold. When Liz came out in mid October, the news was dreadful. We decided that our best course of action was to make immediate cuts. We have always run the charity very close to the wind and, as you will have seen from all the projects that we're involved with, virtually all of our income is spent on these in Malawi. Because of this, we had almost no reserves to speak of. Geoff had meetings with Force, Joey and Morton about how our costs could be cut. At this stage in Malawi, there was really no evidence of the mayhem that was taking place around the rest of the world, and the Malawians found it difficult to understand the problems. We decided to put on hold the building work at Kapanda, but to finish off the buildings which had been started, and then to lay off all of the staff. Geoff spoke to them all, giving them one months' notice but, unfortunately, the Labour Office became involved, and it all became rather difficult. Because of the additional costs of redundancy, we had to lay off more staff than we originally planned. This has now been done and roughly 80 of our original 160 staff have now been laid off. This hasn't been easy to do because there is no other employer in the area, but it is important that RIPPLE Africa is able to continue its work.



Geoff talking to some of the staff about the difficult times ahead and redundancies



The world recession — with the weak pound, prices are now 30% - 40% higher in Malawi



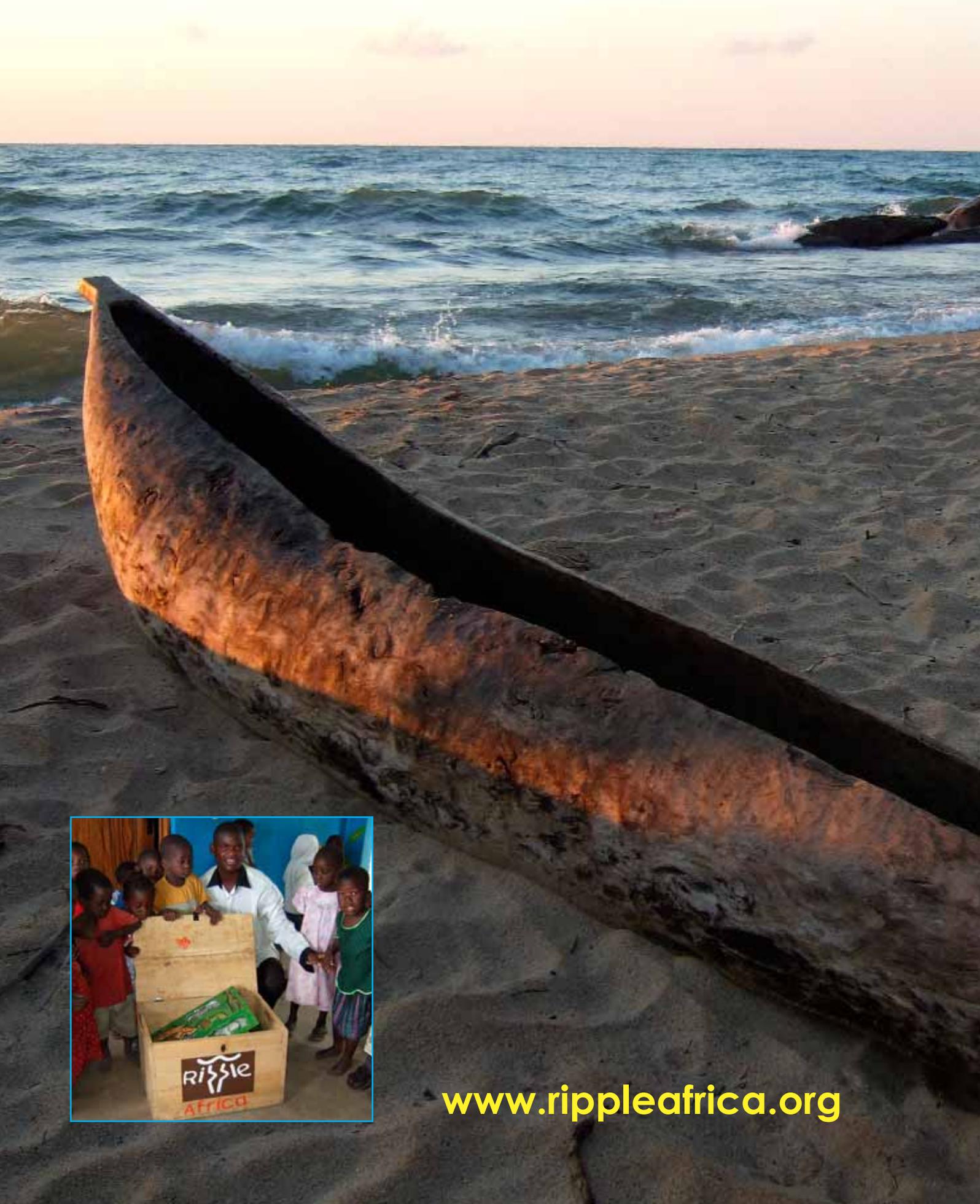
We are still optimistic about the future and are so grateful to our wonderful donors

In December, we sent out an urgent request for money to our donors, and we are incredibly grateful for the fantastic response we received. In particular, our thanks to a few donors who made quite sizeable donations and really helped us in our hour of need. We are also very grateful for the many e-mails of support we received from people who have encouraged us to keep going.

The whole experience has been very exhausting for us and the managers in Malawi but, by quickly dealing with the problems, RIPPLE Africa is in very good shape to continue through 2009. We are, once again, excited about the positive prospects for the future, but we really do need your help to build up reserves and continue with the work that RIPPLE Africa is doing in Malawi.



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