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PRESS RELEASE
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Armed attack on Mariri Environmental Centre and Niassa Carnivore Project Headquarters in Niassa Special Reserve

On the evening of 29 April 2025, an armed group attacked Mariri Environmental and Skills Training Centre and the Niassa Carnivore Project (NCP) Headquarters in southeastern Niassa Special Reserve in northern Mozambique. The attack has been claimed online by ISIS Mozambique. This marks a troubling expansion of the ongoing conflict in northern Mozambique into one of Mozambique's most important protected areas. Our team and assets were evacuated from our camp on the 20th of April following an attack on the Kambako Safari camp by the same group on the 19th of April.

Our antipoaching scouts were on site at Mariri to keep a presence, supported by soldiers of Forças de Defesa e Segurança de Moçambique. The attack happened between 5 pm and 6 pm. During the aftermath, many residents of the nearby Mbamba Village (2000 people) ran into the bush for safety. Over the past three days, our team has worked tirelessly to find and support affected staff and community members and bring them to safety to Mecula, the district capital.

It is with deep sadness that we confirm the deaths of two NCP scouts, Domingos Daude and Fernando Paolo Wirsonne as a result of the attack. Another scout (Mario Cristovao) was severely injured, rescued yesterday and has been evacuated to a hospital in Maputo where he is stable. Two scouts remain unaccounted for. We are doing everything possible to find them. We are grateful that the rest of our team are safe and we can provide them with the support they need. We send our heartfelt condolences and unwavering support to the families of Domingos and Fernando and to the families whose family members are still missing. We are all devastated. Our immediate priority is to ensure the safety and well-being of all affected. After that, we will rebuild and restart our work. Insecurity is deeply damaging—not only to conservation but also to the livelihoods of the ~ 70 000 people who call Niassa home and to tourism across the region.

The Niassa Carnivore Project is a conservation organisation that has been working inside Niassa Reserve in partnership with the Administração Nacional das Áreas de Conservação (ANAC) for 22 years. We work across the whole protected area with all 47 communities and with other conservation partners. Our mission is to secure lions, leopards, spotted hyaenas, African Wild dogs, and their prey in Niassa Special Reserve by promoting their coexistence with people and through a shared respect for people, their culture, and the environment. In concession, LS South (580 km²), where the Mariri Environmental Centre is located, we work in partnership with Mbamba Village through our Tchova-Tchova community conservation agreement to deliver both conservation and development. We, as a team have a strong connection to the Niassa Reserve, with 85% of our nearly 100 staff born in the protected area. This is home.



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Each year, NCP alone creates over 500 local jobs and supports more than 3000 households through education, community, and livelihood programs. We reach many more through our outreach programs across Niassa Reserve. Our work includes having 1000s of local children with their teachers coming through the Mariri Environmental Centre for 4-day bush visits and taking part in our Joy Of Life program. We, and Chuilexi Conservancy, support more than 57 children on secondary school and University scholarships as well as professional training. More than two tons of honey are harvested each year through the beekeeping program from seven villages, creating more than \$ 30,000 of direct income for households. Since we were founded, we have invested millions of meticaís into local development, including over USD 18 Million in support of conservation, education and community development in Niassa Reserve in the past ten years alone. Together with our concession neighbours, conservation is the biggest employer in Mecula District.

This insecurity threatens the future of all the tourism operators operating in Niassa Reserve and affects Mozambican tourism nationally and regionally. In 2019, we partnered with Mbamba Village to open the first community tourism camp in Niassa Reserve, Mpopo Trails, to generate revenue for Mbamba Village and deliver a community scout and school lunch programme. This is now at risk.

Niassa Special Reserve is one of the largest conservation areas left on the continent, containing Mozambique's largest wildlife populations. Spanning more than 42,000 km², it is critical for national and regional conservation efforts. The Reserve is home to between 800 and 1,000 lions, one of Africa's seven most important lion populations. At least 350 critically endangered African wild dogs of a global population of only 7000 live here. Its value and beauty are immeasurable and cannot be monetised. The Lugenda River, which flows through Niassa Reserve and is where Mariri and Kambako camps are situated, is one of the most significant wildlife-rich river ecosystems in Africa, supporting more than 500 fishermen from across seven districts. Insecurity has already affected their food security and livelihoods.

Insecurity is devastating for people, conservation, and tourism. The livelihoods of the people who live and work in Niassa Reserve and the ecological health of Niassa must be safeguarded. This growing insecurity puts all of this and the work of all conservation partners and ANAC at risk.

We continue to work under the leadership and in close partnership with Administrator Terencio Tamele, the ANAC warden of Niassa Special Reserve, who has been coordinating efforts to increase safety in Niassa and work with conservation partners on the ground. We are grateful for all he has done in the past few days. We are also profoundly grateful to the many individuals and organisations that have reached out and continue to support us. Our team has demonstrated extraordinary courage in rescuing and assisting others under complicated circumstances in Mbamba Village and Mariri in the past few days.

We will continue to stand by our staff, community, and this extraordinary wild landscape we are committed to protecting.

This is not an ending.

Directors: Colleen Begg / Agostinho Jorge/ Keith Begg