

Theresa Warth – The passing of the “Elephant Lady” of Zimbabwe

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Theresa Warth, passed away suddenly on the 2 June 2015 aged 56 in Harare, Zimbabwe. Theresa was born in Austria in 1959 and came to Zimbabwe as a baby. In 1997, she moved to Wasara Ranch, located in the Chiredzi River Conservancy in the south-east of the country. For nearly 20 years Theresa was a devoted conservationist and leading figure in anti-poaching operations in the area.

Theresa was well known and respected for her passion for wildlife, and in particular elephants. She became someone that people across the country turned to when they had a sick or injured elephant. Her dedication and incredible connection with elephants set her apart, and she devoted her life to rescuing and rehabilitating them.

Elephants that came through the Wasara herd over the years included 12 babies orphaned by the severe drought that swept through the Zimbabwean low veld in the early 1990's; Marula and Lewa, rescued by Clem Coetsee in 1993; Mungwezi and Chitora who were rescued in 1999; Kimba in 2008; Jinja in 2011 and, last but not least, little Turgwe in 2015.

The wild herd of elephants in the area were a particular concern for her. Twenty-five elephants rescued from the drought were released into the Chiredzi River Conservancy area in 1992; through migration and breeding the population had grown to 72 by 2010.

One of the guests at Theresa's Memorial at Mteri Dam had this to say, in summing up her life dedicated to wildlife:

“It was such a privilege to witness her incredible relationship with the rehabilitated elephants and to watch how she worked with them.”

Unfortunately, Zimbabwe's complicated and turbulent political situation took its toll on wildlife in the area, as well as placing Theresa personally under great pressure and stress. Never one to stand by the wayside, Theresa formed a team of game scouts and funded their anti-poaching operations, which continued despite retaliation attacks against their patrols.

The Wasara Foundation (<https://wasarafoundation.wordpress.com/>) has been set up to honour Theresa and her work and to carry on with what she started.

It became her life work to protect what she loved, and educate people as to why it was important to care for wildlife and preserve the land. By raising funds and awareness, the Wasara Foundation has pledged to keep Theresa's legacy alive and turn the future she saw and fought for into reality. Tracey Bridges will continue to run the Wasara Foundation focusing on Theresa's work. (See Plate 13, centre page vii).