Title

Park scouts of Liwonde National Park (Malawi) and students from neighbouring schools have now teamed up with a member of Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM, BirdLife in Malawi) to save the Lilian's Lovebird. Lillian's Lovebird Agapornis lilianae is a near-threatened bird species occurring in the central southern Africa, including Malawi. It occurs in large flocks and associates with Mopane woodlands where birds feed and roost. In Malawi, the species is mainly known from Liwonde National Park where about 1000 individuals have been estimated.

Hunting activities of the surrounding communities pose a great threat to these birds. Hunters poison small pools of water during the dry season, aiming to catch small mammals and larger birds such as doves for food. Lilian's lovebirds fall victim of this hunting as they come to drink in the same pools in large numbers. Communities also hunt these birds in their maize and rice fields during the lovebirds breeding season for food. In part, the communities say that it is done to protect their crops as the lovebirds are seen as agricultural pests. Between March and June 2012, Tiwonge Mzumara, a member of WESM with help from staff from the National Museum of Malawi initiated efforts to really assess the current status of this bird, fondly referred to as the "Liwonde Jewel".

With partial support from the Good Gifts Catalogue and other well wishers, the team started engaging park staff in running transects across the park recording sightings of the lovebirds. Briefings were done with park scouts from four camps in the park and each camp was given a GPS set to help in mapping localities of the birds sightings and poisoning incidents. Three birds were fitted with radio transmitters to follow their movements. Awareness talks were also initiated at local schools. Exciting news were received in September 2012, park scouts are still sustaining the efforts and are doing a great job patrolling, recording lovebird sightings and listening out for poisoning incidents. Already they have filled quite many record forms and returned them. Luckily their efforts are yielding. By mid-September 2012, no poisoning incidents had been reported and all the areas that were previously frequently poisoned now under watch by scout camps. Also, one of the nearby schools has taken interest in the project and some students are reporting localities where they often see the species in their villages as well as places where traps are often set to capture the species.