

A Visit to a Refugee Camp

A recent flight to the east of Chad with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) provided an update on the humanitarian crisis that has been unfolding here since refugees started arriving from war-torn Darfur in April 2023. The purpose of the flight was for the MCC to see the projects that were being run by their partners in the region and establish which ones required financial support. Our new pilot Philemon, being supervised by Becki, flew the team to the nearest air strip in Goz Beida and accompanied them on a 2 hour journey by road to the Zabout refugee camp.

The camp is being run by the UN in collaboration with the Chadian government. As people walk across the Sudan-Chad border, they are picked up and transported to the camp to be registered. This process involves biometric testing to ensure people are not moving between camps, and there are services provided such as a trauma team, to help people deal with the situation they are facing. Families are provided with a ration pack for the month, consisting of a bottle of oil, dried beans and a bag of grain.

Arriving at the camp, the queue of people waiting to be registered was long. One of the officials stated that up 1200 people were registering each day, although the store of ration packs was nowhere near sufficient to provide for this many people. Currently, there are 46,000 people living at the Zabout refugee camp, where they will remain until it is safe enough for them to return to their home country.

Becki joined the MCC group as they were shown around the camp. The most urgent need at the moment is the provision of water. Since 10 days before they arrived, all but one of the seven wells on the site had dried up and the last remaining well is just providing a trickle of water. In the midst of hot season, months before any significant rainfall is expected, this is a critical situation. People are travelling long distances by donkey each day to reach a secondary water station that is still providing water. We are thankful that the MCC were able to see the situation first hand and will be able to fund projects to provide water and sanitation to the camp.

After 2 hours, Philemon, Becki and the team returned to Goz Beida for the night and then returned to N'Djamena the following day.



(Left) Queue of people waiting to be registered upon arrival at the camp (Right) The last remaining source of water on the camp (Below) People setting off in search of water
Elephant Conservation Flight

Becki recently had the privilege to visit Chad's newest national park, Zah Soo, which is in the South-West of Chad, near the border with Cameroon. This area has been classed as a nature reserve for the past 50 years but has seen a dramatic decline in populations of many species including lion, black rhino and elephant. In 2021, the Chadian government agreed to set up a national park to be managed by a third party for the protection of its wildlife and to support development of local communities.

This trip was first time MAF had flown into the nearby Yellow airstrip, the culmination of two years of work to get it ready. Save the Elephants, a UK based charity, chartered the Cessna 182, to survey the park and the area surrounding it, as part of research trip to explore potential projects to support. On board was the research director of 'Save the Elephants' and another member of their team who specialises in building relationships and establishing projects to allow people and elephants to co-exist peacefully.

Becki flew at 500 feet above the ground and successfully located herds of elephants, which gave her passengers an idea of the population of elephants and how far they roam. At the end of the day, Becki stayed with them in the park in a tent, which was considerably more luxurious than the accommodation she is normally given when staying overnight. Spending the evening together around the campfire meant she could learn more about the ways in which 'Save the Elephants' will be able to help conservation efforts.

One of the aims of the trip was to see what vegetation exists in the park and find out what is missing that would normally be part of the elephants' diet. Presently, the elephants wander out of the park into the surrounding reserve in search of food. Although no new houses will be built in the reserve, existing houses are allowed to remain and some of the inhabitants are angry that the elephants have eaten their crops and caused destruction. In other parks where similar situations have arisen, conservationists have been successful in planting native species in the park, which encourages elephants to forage there and minimize human interactions. It is hoped that a similar scheme can be implemented in Parc Zah Soo.

Other possible projects include working with the people who live in the wider reserve, to give them the opportunity to benefit financially from the elephants being there. With their livelihood dependent on the elephants, it is hoped that this will aid conservation efforts as well as benefit the local community. It was a pleasure to partner with Save the Elephants in what, we hope will be a long-term project to help animals and people in this region.



(Top) The 182 at the airstrip at Zah Soo nature reserve (Bottom left) Photo of a herd of elephants in the reserve, taken during the survey flight - credit and thanks to Dr Chris Thouless QGM for sending us his photo.

(Bottom right) Accommodation for the night

Home Assignment 2024

We are currently planning our home assignment for the summer. We will be travelling around England and Wales from mid-June to the end of July. Currently we know the dates that we will be attending two churches (see below). We will publish the other dates on our Facebook page when they are confirmed and will also advertise them in our June prayer letter. Please get in touch if you would like us to visit you at your home in the summer, we would be very pleased to share more about the work of MAF in Chad and answer any questions you have.

Sunday 21st July (11am) - Rosemary Lane Chapel, Devon, EX15 3PQ Sunday 28th July (10:30am) - Martock Christian Fellowship, Martock, Somerset, TA12 6JN

Prayer

* Elections are due to be held in May, with the transition president, who has been in power since his father died in 2021, standing for election. The leader of the main opposition party was killed last month. Pray for peace and stability in the country and that there will be a positive outcome for Chadian people..

* We are getting ready to leave Chad while also preparing for our move to Tanzania. To get a work permit in Tanzania, Becki will first have to sit some exams and complete a flight test there. The timescale for this is not finalised yet but it is an extra challenge to fit into a busy time. Pray for Becki as she tries to juggle studying for the exam as well as doing her job, planning home assignment and packing up our house!

* Phil Henderson and his family who have served with MAF Chad for over 10 years are leaving the program this week. This is a sudden and significant loss to the program, and with Becki also leaving imminently, a lack of managerial experience will provide a challenge for the rest of the team. Currently there is no one lined up to replace Becki as operations manager so, from June, there will only be 2 international staff in the program until new families arrive in 2025. Pray for someone to take on that role and for the program to be able to continue operating while they are short of staff.

Praise

* The staffing needs for the Chad program look set to be partially met with two new international staff joining at the beginning of 2025. One is a pilot and the other an engineer, which the program has not had since 2019.

* Philemon Schelling, who arrived in January has completed his supervised flying hours and is now flying solo in the Caravan. With Becki now the only other pilot, this helps to increase the program's capability to serve our partners.

* We are taking a holiday in Italy at the end of March. We are all looking forward to a break and the chance to enjoy some good food and sightseeing.



Bethan's Blog

For World Book Day I went dressed up as Queen Susan, and Luke went as Aslan, from the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. A few weeks ago, I helped Mummy paint a mural on the wall at Guinebor II hospital which, along with the ones that were painted previously, make up the story of Jesus' life. It was so hot that the paint dried as soon as it touched the wall so we had to go again the next weekend (at sunrise) to finish it! I am going to sell some of my things at a sale this week as we can't take everything to Tanzania with us. Mum and Dad have said that we can get a dog next year so I will use any money that I make to buy treats for it!



A Letter from Luke

If you're wondering what I'm holding in this picture, it's an oarfish, which Mummy made for me. It is my second favourite animal after puffins, and not many people have even heard of it. I spend a lot of time researching fish and drawing them. I even found a song on YouTube, which Daddy put on my music player so I can listen to it over and over again! We have a badminton court on our compound now and every Saturday morning (before it gets too hot), some of our friends come over to play too.