



Winter has arrived and the rains are gone! Everywhere is drying out quickly and fire prevention programs are underway. The Zambezi River had an extremely low flood – it is less than 50% of last year's levels. Lake Kariba is 3,08 metres down on last year – last year the lake in mid May was at 74% and rising, this year it is at 47% and dropping! The Zambezi River Authority has already enforced a 10% drop in turbine outflow, (which means a decrease in power generation) and the situation will only get worse

Very sad news about a rhino poached in Matopos! Lets hope they catch the perpetrators. The good news on the rhino situation is a co-operation exercise between Zimbabwe and Botswana, where 10 Black Rhino from Malilangwe Conservancy are to be re-located to Chiefs Island in the Okavango Delta in June. This was initiated by Wilderness Safaris, working with Malilangwe Trust, and was facilitated

by the responsible ministers from both countries – Minister S Kasukuwere and Minister T Khama. This level of international cooperation can only be for the benefit of rhino.

Copied is a statement by Mark Saunders of the Malilangwe Trust.



*Black rhino ready for relocation.*

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# The Malilangwe Trust

development through conservation

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## **TRANSLOCATION OF 10 BLACK RHINOS TO BOTSWANA**

**June 2015**

In 1998, as part of a range expansion programme, The Malilangwe Trust purchased 28 black rhinos from Kwa Zulu Natal (KZN), South Africa and released them onto the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve in south-eastern Zimbabwe. The population grew rapidly from these founders and has now reached a size where it would be sensible to move a small number of animals off the reserve to reduce competition for space and food.

Ideally The Trust would like to contribute further to the range expansion programme by using surplus animals to start a new population elsewhere in Zimbabwe. However, for two reasons, this is currently not feasible. Firstly, the upsurge in poaching has greatly increased the cost of protecting rhinos and both government and private organisations are facing challenges in financing the protection of existing Zimbabwean rhino populations, let alone the substantial development and operating costs of founding a new one. Secondly, a recent study has shown that black rhinos from KZN are genetically different to those from Zimbabwe. Research is underway to determine the reasons for this difference and, until these are known, experts have advised not to mix Zimbabwean rhinos with those from KZN because this may result in the loss of special adaptations to Zimbabwean habitats.

For these reasons, Malilangwe found itself in the dilemma of having successfully grown its black rhino population to the point where it had sufficient animals to contribute to a new founder population, but having nowhere currently suitable in Zimbabwe to put them.

So when the Zimbabwean Minister of Environment, Water and Climate, the Honourable Saviour Kasukuwere, approached Malilangwe in late 2014 to ask whether 10 black rhinos could be donated to Moremi Game Reserve in Botswana, the request was favourably met. Approval was given on condition that ecologists from both Malilangwe and the Zimbabwean Parks and Wildlife Management Authority were satisfied that the habitat in Botswana was suitable and that the rhinos would be adequately protected post-release. A Zimbabwean delegation visited the proposed destination and all members were satisfied that the stipulated conditions would be adequately met.

This translocation partially fulfils an agreement made between the Zimbabwean and Botswanan Governments in May 2011 at the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint Permanent Commission in Harare, where Zimbabwe reaffirmed its commitment to donate 20 black rhinos to the Republic of Botswana. The move is also in line with the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area Treaty, the Draft Greater Mapungubwe Treaty and the SADC Protocol on Wildlife and Law Enforcement, which calls for enhanced collaboration and partnership in wildlife management and community development between partner countries and member states.

We are grateful to our Botswana counterparts who have shared local information with us, in collaboration to ensure maximum benefit to the rhinos themselves.

## Zambezi National Park

Has generally been a quite month in the Chambonda for game viewing, with most of the wildlife on the springlines or down by the river. However, the elephant population is ever increasing in the Park, and they are now drinking at all the waterpoints on the Chambonda, especially at Timots. The elephants are also back to swimming in the Zambezi – a sight we missed for many years. I suspect we are pulling a lot of elephant away from the Chobe.

We had a visit from Ian and Sue Thomson, who made the initial donation of a solar pump and got the ball rolling. It was our pleasure to host them, with a drive along the vleis, ending in a bush dinner at No 3. This was a fantastic evening, with over 200 elephants coming to drink at the pan and dam during our dinner, sometimes within 15m of where we were dining. Needless to say, dinner was interrupted and the waiter service dropped off for a while!

Ian has pledged more support for our conservation programs, for which we are very grateful!! We will soon be replacing a couple of the smaller Grundfos pumps in the Chambonda with pumps producing greater water volumes, thanks to Ian's support, plus a pledge of funding to start the dam project.



*Ian and Sue at Thomson Pan.*

Our controlled burning program and fire protection/fireguards will start in early June – this is a combined operation with National Parks, Matetsi Unit 7, Unit 6, Bhejane Trust, Jafuta Foundation and hopefully support from some of the camps in the Park. Mowing has also commenced in the vleis. This program will cover the Park and Matetsi 6 & 7 Units.

## Sinamatella

Nick Long went down with appendicitis early in the month and had an operation in Hwange Colliery Hospital. All went well and Nick is back in action again after a recovery period. We took advantage of this period to get his landrover repaired and the engine overhauled. Thus there is no report from the Rhino Monitoring Unit for this month, but we will be back in action in June

### Report by Stephen Long

I spend a great deal of time working on game water repairs and installations these days but we are getting good results for the effort so far, with Sinamatella running twelve pumps at nine sites by the end of May and one other site out of order. The out-of-order site is Bumboosie South but even there we have some optimism that water will be flowing soon as we have obtained a new motor for the solar pump but have not yet had time to install it.

As soon as we could be sure the roads were dry enough, we made a long-overdue trip out to Inyantue to see how the pumps there have been performing. We travelled via Shumba, where the new solar pump continues delivering over 70,000 litres per day, and Tshompani – also performing well considering the poor yield of the borehole. I was nervous approaching Inyantue in case we found that elephants had destroyed the new pump but needn't have worried. In fact, at the vlei site, the elephants are doing us a favour for once by beginning to deepen the small pan into which the trough overflows. At the moment we are losing water down the vlei but I am sure that once elephant numbers build up, the pan will expand as we have seen others do in the past.



*Early days in the development of a pan at Inyantue Vlei.*

At Inyantue dam we were delighted to see a good spread of water and a nice stream running in from the trough



*Inyantue trough with the dam in the background. The trough outlet, blocked in this*

With plenty of water available it has become possible to deploy rangers in the area on a more regular basis than was possible previously and this also keeps a check on the pumps. So far so good but we will soon try to slightly increase the pumping rate of them both.

Mashambo Pan, close to Sinamatella, was filled for the first time last year using a mains-electric submersible pump supplied by Wilderness Safaris and we have been surprised at how heavily it is used and by how much it has allowed animals to extend their dry-season range up into the Smiths Mine Hills. Unfortunately the transformer at the borehole developed a fault during the rainy season and the pan was dry by the middle of May. However, thanks to the concern of the staff at ZESA, Hwange, a new transformer was fitted at the end of the month and the pan is once again starting to fill. We are very grateful to ZESA for their excellent service in getting Mashambo running again, especially as they no doubt have many other calls on their time and resources.

Of course, some aspects of game water provision were less easy in May and our friends the elephants – so helpful at Inyantue Vlei – have caused their usual problems, breaking pipes in various places to get at the freshest water. We've also had mechanical and other problems, first at Baobab Pan where there was an electrical fault on the solar pump then at Bumbumutsa which is a new site for us. As far as anyone can remember, Bumbumutsa has not been pumped since 2006 – possibly even before that, but this year Camp Hwange has supplied a diesel engine and fuel to re-start it.

We went to install the new engine on the 15<sup>th</sup> May and were delighted to see water flowing before the end of the day in spite of a number of unforeseen difficulties. However, two days later the pump had broken down. We returned at the end of the month, accompanied by our latest group of volunteers, and replaced the pump unit, once again leaving water flowing at the end of a long day. The new engine is a small but powerful water-cooled Kubota and Mr Mafa, Sinamatella's game water fundi, pointed out that Kubota sounds like a Tonga word. We looked on the engine for a "made in Binga" sticker but sadly none was to be seen.



*Finalists in the "Mr Scruffy Sinamatella" competition pose next to the newly-filled trough at Bumbumutsa.*

Now that so many solar pumps have been installed it might seem that our work will soon come to an end and we can simply leave the pumps running, just cleaning the panels from time to time. In fact I don't believe this is the case. Here at Sinamatella our boreholes are mostly low yield and the solar pumps can at best supply half the water we might get with a diesel running 24 hours a day. With this in mind I am determined that we should keep diesel equipment in good order and on stand-by so that it can be installed either when there are simply too many thirsty animals for the amount of water we are supplying or when there is a breakdown. Solar is great but I'm not yet convinced diesel is obsolete.

Regular readers of this newsletter might have noticed that I no longer give a round-up of vehicle problems and might therefore think we no longer have any. I really wish that was the case. In May the Parks Land Rover spent far more time off the road than on and our vehicles were the only ones running at Sinamatella. The 'white rhino', donated to us by SAVE on a condition unknown basis last year has continued to work hard though the rattle of the loose bodywork is sometimes hard to live with. However our poor old Land Cruiser, so reliable most of the time, broke down for the second month running. This time it was a wheel bearing that failed, leaving us far from home at Gubombiri with little option but to remove the brake drum,

drum, seal off the brake pipe and limp home, cooling the collapsing bearing whenever we could find water. It was a long journey.

Also broken down in May was Nicholas, our new rhino monitor. After an emergency appendectomy at the start of the month he was not fit for patrol but rhino monitoring continued without him – albeit not quite so mobile. We are now convinced that we have found a new mother and calf pairing that the monitoring unit originally detected in April. They are living in a big stretch of very broken country and their spoor has often been seen, measured and followed but never tracked to a conclusion. A great deal of effort and manpower has been dedicated to these two so there have been very few other reports recently but we expect more sightings as the dry season progresses.

Other animal sightings continued to be poor through May as there is still plenty of natural water available away from the tourist roads and the bush is still too thick for good visibility. This unusually friendly Black-backed Jackal was one of our better sightings of the month though we also got a very close view of a baby Spotted Hyena but a camera malfunction (alright let's be honest – a camera-operator (me) malfunction) spoiled our chances of a worthwhile photo.



*Black-backed Jackal near Masuma.*

By month end the Mopanes were starting to lose their leaves and some of even the larger pans were close to drying so we can expect animal numbers to build up soon at the popular viewing places. A 24-hour mammal count at Masuma at the end of May recorded just over 200 elephants and 130 Impala but, surprisingly, no Kudu or Buffalo. At Shumba, where the pan is 100% full and overflowing into the surrounding grassland, most members of the small herd of Hippo decided to move out of what looks to me an ideal home for them and take up residence in a muddy natural pan instead. Aggression between members of the herd may be responsible – a baby hippo was killed by one of the Shumba males earlier this year and at Mandavu there have been some big fights with the losers dying of horrific injuries. Adult Hippo are too big to have problems with predators so, unpleasant as it may seem to us, this sort of aggression is one of the few ways to limit their numbers.

Finally, at Sinamatella camp itself, we have been battling with too little water and too many mice. The mice are an annual problem. They come into the house in numbers at the start of the dry season then spend each night trying to chew their way back out again. Most we capture with a live trap and release far away, some stubborn ones are too clever for that but the old fashioned break-neck trap usually deals with those. If only the water problem was so easy to solve. After around a year of delay, ZNWA finally replaced a vital booster pump in May and at last we have a quiet and reliable pump to give good pressure at the busy morning and evening periods. In between the pressure is not so great but at least something comes out of the tap. This may be the start of a permanent improvement in the Sinamatella water supply – we can only hope.

## Poaching

Has been very quiet in the Matabeleland north area, with little activity reported. We have reason to believe that Zambian poaching groups might be briefly passing through Zimbabwe to head for the big empty spaces in Botswana, which were hunting areas previously but are now effectively abandoned – an elephant poachers paradise! There continues to be a high level of Parks patrol coverage along the Zambezi River boundary, which is a good deterrent to the Zambians.

It is alarming to note that heavy elephant poaching is still occurring in the Sebungwe /Matusadona area, where the elephant population had already dropped by 75%. Within a couple of years there is a strong possibility that elephants on the Kariba shoreline will be a sight of the past. The poachers were even brazen enough to poach an elephant only 2 kilometers away from a where a conservation workshop was taking place! It appears that efforts to set up a training program for anti-poaching units in the area were blocked by local CIO operatives, even though the project had the blessing of the Police and of Parks, and eventually the conservationist involved had to flee for his life under pressure and threats from CIO.

There is thus a strong inference that CIO in Kariba are involved in the ivory trade and illegal wildlife trafficking, which is another blow to the integrity of Zimbabwe's wildlife program, and further isolates the country from support for its wildlife conservation efforts. It is a sad reflection when a few greedy individuals can get away with this slaughter by abusing their powers – if this situation has been misread by those concerned, then a genuine demonstration of support for wildlife conservation by the CIO would go a long way!

It also appears that in the Binga/Gokwe region of the Sebungwe, the elephant are so depleted in numbers that Zambian poachers crossing into Zimbabwe in this area are prepared to bypass this region and travel all the way to Hwange Park to poach elephant – the punch up last month near Binga was with a Zambian team that had gone to the Main Camp area in their quest for bigger ivory. This is in a way a sad reflection of Chizarira and Chirisa – once great elephant areas!

## Comment

An interesting point raised by Mike Bromwich, following the death of Ian “Gibbo” Gibson, is that are hunters and guides taking it to the last moment (sometimes too late) in shooting in self defense due to fears of the repercussions, investigations, tribunals, etc to follow, often by those inexperienced enough to be judgmental. The suggestion is rather a committee of experienced hunter/guides together with qualified Parks to investigate incidents, which would actually support a “fair hearing” philosophy.



After failing to get any tender offers from safari operators for the Chirisa and Chete Safari Areas, National Parks this year decided to allocate fixed camp dates with set hunting bags in these areas, with additional animals on offer, to be put out on public auction, along with Sapi and Tuli. Certainly for Chirisa and Chete unrealistic quotas and hunting trips were set down for the auction. The auction was duly held, and the results of the auction reflected the dismal state that these areas have collapsed into. Of 10 Chete hunts offered, only 6 were taken – I feel the family hunting/fishing attraction of the camps would have been the reason for some of the camps being taken up. On Chirisa – formerly one of the finest hunting areas in Africa – TWO hunts out of a total of 18 were taken. These results are a serious indictment of the mismanagement and collapse of these once pristine parks areas, and urgent action needs to be taken – it is believed Chirisa even has illegal settlers within the Park. There is no time to procrastinate any longer, and the private sector must be engaged to recover these areas (plus Chizarira and Matetsi Unit's 4 & 5) – it is not too late, but it requires political willpower.

I read a report where the Kruger National Park has closed all the waterpoints in certain sections of the Park, with the ultimate intention of forcing the resident elephants in these sections to move, and thus stressing them so badly that their breeding rate drops – apparently successfully as the rate dropped from about 6,5% to about 2%. I do not doubt that all sorts of boffins have worked on this, but as a layman I do not see the point – it has apparently forced the animals to the more natural waterpoints ie the rivers, and I would rather see smashed mopane around a pan than smashed riverine forest! Highly stressed herds in a tourist park carries it's own risks and I think it is inhumane to force the old and young to die off in extreme circumstances. It obviously will also push the elephants into areas surrounding the Park, which would then expose them to poaching or problem animal control – I guess another way of population reduction! I also query as to the welfare of the more sedentary species – animals and birds - that have established themselves over the years at the waterhole, and now literally have the plug pulled on them – although elephants may be the dominant species, I feel the welfare of the smaller denizens should also be considered. When all is said and done, this is a delaying tactic, but is not the answer!

I hope such a scheme as undertaken in the Kruger never enters the equation in Hwange National Park. The obvious short term solution to Hwange to me is more water – for example the Inyantue/Tshompani area has a good elephant population in the rains but they move when the water dries up, but the vegetation here is tremendously rich and almost untouched. All the waterpoints in the southern sector of the Park have not worked for years – they need to be resuscitated as this area comprises nearly half of the Park. More water would accommodate a lot more elephant, though vegetation damage is also a consideration, with the Kalahari forests being more tolerant than the mopanes to elephant populations. However, the same as for Kruger, there will inevitably be a stage where the population is unsustainable, and as culling is no longer an option, I guess it will be up to Mother Nature to force a solution (anthrax comes to mind!)– however, the over population can have serious side effects on vegetation and other species, before a crash comes about.

A couple of years ago, we saw the first inkling of Mother Natures solution where during the drought at the time, stressed elephant were dying in numbers by the pans in Hwange (and probably out in the bush where it was not visual and not recorded). I do not doubt a big drought will see a repeat of this die off on a far larger scale. One susceptible area for disease and die off that come to mind though is the devastated Chobe area, as this area has been turned into a dustbowl by the huge concentration of elephant heading for the floodplain.

## GRATEFUL THANKS

A grateful thanks to those who have supported us and who continue to support us.

This month, we have had support from:

Nicholas Duncan and the SAVE The African Rhino Foundation

RAM Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin – for a continued, invaluable support

Makomo Mine

Ian Thomson – more assistance forthcoming, with upgraded pumps, and financial help.

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Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert for four donated solar pump units for Sinamatella

Thor Thorsson– an intrepid traveller – has made a fantastic donation going towards vehicles and waterpoints

Piet and Anthea Erasmus, from Cape Town – yet another generous donation.

Dave Carson and Camp Hwange for helping fund our Sinamatella Rhino Monitoring Unit

And a big thanks to the Minister of Environment, Climate and Water and to National Parks staff for their continuing support and the spirit of co-operation!

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