



There has been a cabinet reshuffle and Hon Minister Saviour Kasukuwere has been moved from Environment and Water to Local Government, while Hon Minister Oppah Muchinguri takes over the position. We wish both ministers the best in their new positions!

The Victoria Falls community lost two of its iconic senior citizens in July. Joan “Gogo” Rabinovitch was a well known figure in Hwange and Vic Falls, and a dedicated golfer. Ron White, the “godfather” of Wild Horizons and a character of note, who had a series of chequered careers before branching into tourism with the establishing of Imbabala, Jijima and the original Elephant camp. Our condolences to both families.



Frank and Christine Zindel at the sign acknowledging their donation.

Frank Zindel, his wife Christine and family members from Switzerland visited Vic Falls and Hwange in July. Frank has been an invaluable supporter, and it was a pleasure to show him around the Zambezi National Park, and where some of his donor funds had been used, and what is still on the drawing board. He went on to Hwange where he had the chance to get his photo by the signboard acknowledging his donation of the Shumba Pan solar pump. Frank ended up in Main Camp at a braai held by Friends of Hwange Trust, which gave me a chance to catch up with fellow Hwange operatives Dave Dell and Gary Cantle and for us all to express our appreciation to Frank!

Birdlife Zimbabwe held a Vulture seminar at Elephant Hills Hotel, followed by their AGM. There were some very interesting speakers on vultures, including Peter Mundy, who I reminded of a speech of his I went to in 1978 for the 50th anniversary of Hwange National Park, when the pet vulture he was holding leant over and bit him on the nose – the impact of the rest of his speech was lost while he tried to talk, stem the blood pouring from his nose, and prevent the vulture from repeating the trick! However, we will be marking all vulture nesting sites located in the Zambezi Park/Matetsi 6 & 7 area, and monitoring them, as the future of the vulture is currently threatened from poisoning.

The Zambezi River is dropping quickly, after a very poor flood. The effect on Lake Kariba can be seen from the attached graph – basically the lake on 17th July was sitting at 40% full (at 481m) compared to 80% (486m) full for the same time last year. The graph is heading towards the 475,5m mark, which is the lowest level for the power turbines to still operate – not an encouraging scenario!



Zambezi National Park

After installing a new pump, donated by Ian Thomson, at Thomson Pan last month, we found the outlet pipe to the pan was too small, being only 40mm, and thus giving a high resistance – we put in a second 63mm pipe, and the difference in flow is very marked and has gone up by about 65%, with the pan now rising slowly but surely.

With the help of Chris Lampard, we have tried what we think is a fairly novel idea – we have put two pumps down the borehole at No1. The borehole is partially blocked by dropped pipes, but we managed to get two slim Grundfos 2,5 pumps down past the obstruction. We previously only had one of these pumps down, but it has a maximum pumping ability of 2500l per hour, which was not sufficient. Hopefully with two pumps operating, we should get at least 4000l per hour – time will tell!

We have ordered more solar panels for Timots pan – we put down a new high flow pump into the borehole but the pump needs boosting due to a 19m head of water. By putting in more panels connected in parallel there should be an increase in amperage (power) and thus an increased flow to this pan. This will be done in August.

The controlled burns in the vlei have started greening up, and the zebra and sable have moved into these areas, along with a lone wildebeest! The zebra have started dropping their foals. However, the arrival of a pride of lions at the end of the month has disrupted the tranquil scene and scattered all the animals.

I have been monitoring the sable and zebra populations for survival rates of the young – I reckon about 30% of sable youngsters survive the first two years, while probably 15% of zebra foals. I am convinced this is due to the very high hyena population, which is preying on the youngsters. We do not have proof however, and a hyena survey is a project we would like to institute – the monitoring of the hyena population, which is large, and its effect on other populations such as sable and zebra. Any research students out there??

Kazuma Pan National Park

I took a trip out to Kazuma Pan National Park (KPNP) to do an assessment of what is required to help Parks in resuscitating the Park. I wanted to principally look at the water situation, as the Kazuma Pan Depression in the west needs pumped water during the dry season, whereas the eastern sector has the permanent water of the Katsechete River. I picked up a couple of rangers from the Parks base, and we went and GPS'd and measured the 8 known boreholes, plus looked at possible minimum development camp sites – hides would be perfect – and into all the issues affecting operations here. Many thanks to the KPNP rangers – their enthusiasm and their desire to get the area up and running again was commendable.

I prepared a draft management document of what I feel needs to be done in KPNP, with a costing, and this has gone out to a possible donor – we will wait and see!

The KPNP certainly is a unique area, with stunning scenery of open grasslands, including the depression, interspersed with Kalahari woodland, Mopani and then the basalts, going into the crystal clear Katsechete River in the east. Once permanent water is established in the Depression area it will turn the area into an exceptional wildlife area. This is a birders paradise, especially in the rains with the migrant waterfowl, plus it is home to some species rare in this part of the world – oribi, gemsbok, tsessebe, reedbuck, roan antelope, cheetah - plus big buffalo herds, plentiful lion, elephant, sable, etc .

What was noticeable was the number of big elephant bulls in the Depression area – I think that with the closure of hunting in Botswana, the pans the elephant used to frequent are no longer pumped and they have now crossed into Zimbabwe looking for water.



Kazuma – Corner Pan on the edge of the Depression – many years since pumped.

Katsechete River – permanent water and home to large herds of buffalo, elephant.



Sinamatella

Derek “Gomez” Adams who is operating in the Deka Safari Area adjoining Sinamatella has persuaded his patron, who has financed the concession, to support the efforts to save the Sinamatella rhino. They have opened an account and are asking their hunting clients to donate towards the rhino conservation efforts and they will match dollar for dollar any donation – many thanks to Gomez for organizing this (Gomez is ex National Parks and an ardent conservationist, falconer and birder).



Mashambo Pan looking towards the Smith Mine Hills.- this is the pan we put in last year in conjunction with Wilderness Safaris

Report by Stephen Long

Game water.

We finally made it to Inyantue early in July to see how the solar pumps are performing. Both are supplying around 3000 litres per hour and 30000 litres per day. The dam is now very low as it always is in the dry season, even with a pump running, and there are plenty of elephants using the water. The vlei though is a very different place from what it was a few months ago before we provided water. In the years since this borehole was last pumped the bush along the edge of the vlei and around the trough had grown very thick. Now it has become a mass of mud and broken trees....



We had hoped the small hollow below the trough would become a beautiful pan surrounded by trees but in fact the elephants have broken down what little there was to hold the water close to the trough and it has run some distance down the vlei creating a series of small muddy puddles, a couple of muddy pools and a rather unattractive length of swamp.



The elephants love it and there are large numbers using it through the afternoon and evening. Unattractive it may be, but one thing it certainly is, is a success. We want to keep elephants in the Inyantue area so that the damage to other water points is lessened and we want to provide water that cannot be dominated by elephants. The two pumps at Inyantue are doing just that and until there is another answer to the 'elephant problem' this seems a good way forward.

We have not been so successful elsewhere. Bumboosie South pump is still not running and though we have two possible solutions to the problem, they are both going to take some time. Ideally we would install a diesel pump in the meanwhile but, as I mentioned last month, we are critically short of diesel. Our long-term sponsors, Makomo Resources, helped by a kind donation from Kashawe Camp, Wilderness Safaris, supplied us with enough fuel in July to keep vehicles moving and to run the pump at Masuma for around twelve hours per day. Towards the end of the month two further donations, from Camp Hwange and an anonymous donor, gave us enough to move to 24-hour pumping and the dam should therefore drop more slowly (though inevitably it will still drop) through the rest of the season. Many thanks to everyone who has helped. This is what you are supporting.....



Transport

For most of the month, only Bhejane Trust vehicles and the Parks tractor were running at Sinamatella and we carried out all the ranger deployments as well as a wide range of other tasks. All our vehicles (and drivers) worked very hard. The tractor was used for roads and fireguards grading and covered a lot of ground, including grading the terrible stretch of road from the Sinamatella flood plain towards the turn-off for Kashawe spring and the entire road from Inyantue to Shumba.

Our old, white Land Rover was out with the rhino monitoring unit throughout the month and included amongst its many journeys, a trip along what used to be known as the Mtoa Road, from Tshakabika to Inyantue to check on a fire report. The Land Rover apparently dealt with the road pretty well though the driver (Nick) looked fairly worn out by the time he got back to Sinamatella. The Land Cruiser soldiered on, gearbox and various other parts protesting vigorously and the green Land Rover also squeaked and rattled its way over hundreds of kilometres. It isn't a very stylish fleet but it gets the jobs done and without our three vehicles, Sinamatella would certainly be struggling.

Miscellaneous

In the June newsletter I mentioned that there had been a number of unexplained elephant deaths in the Shumba area. In July there was yet another carcass to puzzle us, this time at Roan Pan. Once again there was no obvious cause of death so we sent samples to the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust laboratory. So far there is no cause for alarm over these deaths and the numbers are extremely small compared with our huge elephant population but it is a mystery that I would love to see solved.

Less of a mystery in July was a fire outbreak at Inyantue – we caused it ourselves strip burning fire-breaks that got out of control. Our driver Abednico Tshuma put in a great deal of work carrying rangers out to fight the fire, including two lengthy return journeys one night followed by a few uncomfortable hours sleeping in the driver's seat of his Land Rover. When I went out to help bring the firefighters back to camp I found an exhausted group resting on the ground under trees, tired, hungry and thirsty but thanks to a lot of effort the fire was out and not much had been damaged. Dedication and hard work like this are not hard to find. A pity then that some of those who claim to support conservation don't sometimes highlight the good things rather than whipping up a media frenzy about one poached lion.

Report by Nick Long

RHINO MONITORING - JULY 2015

This month we made two extended patrols. For both patrols I went out to join call signs already deployed at certain points so was unable to be fully mobile although we still managed to see rhino signs in the areas we patrolled. We tracked a single adult for 15 km before we had to stop tracking and return to base as it was getting late in the day and we were a long way from base. This single animal is assumed to be a female as it does not scrape its dung the way a bull does and there were no territorial spray markings seen while tracking. Also we tracked the mother and calf (159) to try and see where she might be spending her days but did not track for long as the spoor was 2 days old. During the second patrol we saw two-day old spoor for the animals mentioned above but did not track them as they were heading into another call sign's area of patrol. This coming month I am hoping to get to a different part of the IPZ where I think will have some good results as there has been spoor reported a few times this year in the areas but no physical identification has been done. Also we should start to get more visuals as the natural water has mostly gone and the rhino should start to frequent the same water source and not be spread out. Finally the mystery mother and calf have been seen and photographed by a call sign while I was away on off days at the beginning of this month, well done to P.Chikande and T.Sibanda for the effort they put in to track and identify the rhino. Prosper Chikande was one of the rangers who was with me when we first discovered the general whereabouts of this mother and calf so it is good that he should be the one to get these excellent photographs.



While out on patrol we had a very persistent visitor at both of our bases, a honey badger would come each night and spend its time trying to steal our food and cooking pots from us. I have always heard that these animals are very tough and I can fully appreciate this now as no matter what we did to scare it away it would just come back again, even a catapult did not bother this determined animal!



The honey badger in question

I also did some bird lists for the SABP 2 programme and it surprising how little you know until you actually try to get a list together. I managed to atlas two 'pentads' but I am sure there were a few birds that I will have missed.



A crested barbet which was also a frequent visitor to our base but not such a pest as the honey badger.

We also assisted the station by going out to Inyantue to check on a fire which had been seen on the horizon for several days. We drove there along a road from Tshakabika hot spring which has not been used for several years but surprisingly it was not very badly damaged, there were a lot of loose stones on the road and a lot of fallen trees which we tried to clear along the way. The fire turned out to be of no worry as it was a block burning programme initiated by Main camp. It would be nice to have the road re-opened as it is very scenic and there are some wonderful views from up in the hills it goes through, and also there were a lot of animals along the road.



One of the fallen trees we did not manage to clear, a rotten Baobab tree

A curious herd of buffalo we met along the road. They haven't seen a car here for many years.



Poaching

The never ending problem of Zambian poachers continues, with them shooting an elephant on an island in the Zambezi above Victoria Falls, and after the poacher took the ivory all the local villagers brazenly came and collected the meat. They are also setting big wire snares for buffalo on the islands. They are doing this with impunity as the Zambians have entered an agreement with Zimbabwe that any incident involving islands in the Zambezi will be dealt with jointly by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife and the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA). Naturally, ZAWA will not react as they are suspected to be sympathetic, if not involved, with the poachers, and this has led to Zambians brazenly poaching on the islands, knowing they are fully protected. Very frustrating for Zimbabweans!!!

Otherwise I think the armed Zambian gangs penetrating inland are avoiding the Matetsi region of Zimbabwe and concentrating on the big blocks in Botswana left vacant by the cancellation of hunting. However, there is some serious poaching around Main Camp, which appears to be the Zambians coming through from the Binga area. Again we have the names of these poachers but again they are protected by Zambian officials!

The major poaching incidents to have caught the headlines this month is the illegal shooting of Cecil the Lion by a client of Theo Bronkhorst, and that of another lion shot illegally by a client of Headman Sibanda. Both these lions were shot on the Hwange Park boundary, both without a valid permit, and both to be “quota transferred” ie the operators were going to claim they were shot in a totally different location where there was a permit (both these permits issued in areas where there are no lions!!). Both operators are on bail awaiting trial. However, it very much appears that these lions were shot in the full knowledge that this was illegal, and that there was a devious plan to register the trophy as having been shot elsewhere. To me this is a worse offense than the tribesman living in poverty who is poaching for survival, as this lion shooting offense is all about greed and no ethics – inexcusable in a so-called professional!

Comment

The capture and export of elephant calves to China created a news and media furore, which has now been superseded by Cecil the Lion. However, hopefully some lessons can be learnt from this unfortunate saga so we do not get a repeat. The first point to be aware of is that the initiative for the capture and export of these calves was in all probability a political one, which Parks had no alternative but to obey. Unfortunately Parks no longer has the expertise and resources to conduct this type of operation professionally, or to look after the traumatised calves thereafter, and they failed in their PR as they were understandably not prepared for the social media blitz. However, it would be very disappointing if this sorry saga was held against Parks, as they did their best in what I assume was a situation inflicted on them, and this should not detract from the many stalwart rangers out in the field doing a good job under extremely difficult circumstances. However, although this episode had a reaction that took Parks completely by surprise, they must learn from it that they cannot act as an isolated entity whose actions can be detrimental to the safari industry and the reputation of Zimbabwe, but must work together with all stakeholders for the common good. Stakeholders are prepared to help and advise Parks within reason whenever requested

It seems a lot of money was made available to look after these calves – it is a pity such funding is not available to look after all the remaining elephants in the Park. There were offers made to purchase the calves and pay for their rehabilitation over 15 years. I personally do not believe that Hwange has reached its full carrying capacity on elephant – some areas are currently under heavy pressure but there are vast areas of Hwange where the waterpoints have not been pumped for years, and if opened up they would immediately reduce the pressure on existing waterpoints. No-one has a clue how many elephants are in Hwange with estimates ranging from 23,000 to 85,000, and no-one has a clue on the carrying capacity – all data is from many years back and at best a guesstimate. With good funding channeled through the likes of Bhejane Trust and Friends of Hwange Trust, we could initiate a joint venture with Parks to resuscitate all the old waterpoints, thus spreading the pressure at existing points. There also is an urgent requirement for a proper 3 year survey to establish exactly how many elephants are in the Hwange/Matetsi system, and what effects they are having on the habitat. However, I do understand that inevitably at some stage in the future there will be a total overpopulation, and I guess it will be up to nature to intervene as the old method of culling would invite a massive backlash – nature's reaction would either be disease such as anthrax, or starvation and thirst when the elephant have eaten themselves out of house and home.

PUTTING CECIL INTO PERSPECTIVE

There was a media storm around the illegal hunting of Cecil the Lion which took everyone by surprise at the volume and intensity of it. Then came the false rumour on Jericho, which created another media frenzy. With the hype now dying down, it is time to take a look at some of the good and the bad that has come out of this whole saga.

1) THE GOOD

- a. Exposed corrupt hunting practices in Zimbabwe – conservationists and ethical hunters have long complained about the corrupt and unethical practices of a few operators in Zimbabwe. The issue of Cecil has finally brought them to light, and hopefully the hunting industry will get a major cleanup, and Parks will realize that they have a duty to fully enforce the law, as failure to do so to date has allowed the problem to blow up.
- b. National Parks have come out with an immediate and forceful reaction, and have vowed to clean up the illegal elements in the hunting sector. Parks are now realizing (as we all are) the power of the social media and have been quick to react to the problem.
- c. Landowners abusing their land rights have been exposed and hopefully will either lose the land or have a full hunting ban imposed on them. This will send out a strong signal to any other transgressors.
- d. Has highlighted the value of the research work being undertaken by WILDCRU, and similar research units, and hopefully highlights the need to support all those striving to keep our Parks functional.
- e. Publicity for Zimbabwe – under the theory all publicity is good publicity, but the incident has brought much attention to the wildlife situation in Zimbabwe. The influx of journalists visiting Victoria Falls and Hwange, and seeing for themselves the true wildlife situation on the ground and interacting with Parks staff, conservationists and hunters can only be beneficial for the country.
- f. It has brought together the photo operators, hunting operators, NGO's and National Parks with a spirit of cooperation not seen for a while

2) THE BAD

- a. Cecil has portrayed the hunting industry in a bad light, and this might lead to a hunting ban. Although this will be great news to many, the reality on the ground is a funding replacement need to be found if hunting is to be stopped, otherwise a destitute Parks will not be able to function in the current hunting areas, and it will open the door to massive poaching, both commercial and subsistence, which will eliminate far more animals than hunting ever would. This is the harsh reality and could precipitate a wildlife disaster far greater than anything seen so far
- b. People trying to cash in on it – I do not agree with people or organisations trying to cash in on the demise of Cecil. WILDCRU have deservedly benefitted, but not through trying to cash in, but as an unintentional spin-off. There is no problem with genuine conservation bodies benefitting from those who wish to help, but some dubious “fund raisers” have reared their heads with schemes including golf days, engraved cell phones, statues, etc which might not benefit the proposed intended target!
- c. Power of media – the media frenzy which surrounded this story took everyone by surprise, and has showed up the power of the social media as never seen before, but it has also highlighted how this could be very dangerous if misplaced – it can be judgemental and damning, and ruin lives.
- d. Publicity for Zimbabwe – this issue has highlighted some of Zimbabwe’s hunting practices in a poor light but I think overall the publicity, with Parks strong reaction, has been good rather than bad.

As a follow up, at a couple of meetings held between Safari Operators, Hunting Operators, various NGO’s and wildlife bodies, National Parks and the Ministry of Environment, the following major points were agreed to :

- a) Photo safari operators support hunting operators provided a Code of Conduct and ethics are adhered to
- b) Parks agreed there will be no more “quota swapping” tolerated
- c) Parks agreed there will be no more commercial hunting in any Park
- d) The issue of hunting bans and buffer zones around Hwange to be finalized – a deadline of one week given to resolve these issues
- e) Clients names and identities to be protected at all costs in future

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 – a staunch supporter.

RAM Petroleum

Eco Energy Fuels

Patrick Jacquemin – for continued, invaluable support, including rangers rations

Makomo Mine

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

Dr Frank Zindel – of Switzerland, and Stuart and Sue Danks of Simply Africa

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.

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

Gomez Adams for supporting rhino campaign

Chris Lampard – continuing invaluable support in the field

Liz Read for donation

All those who support and assist in many varied ways – thanks and appreciated

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

Contact Details

Trevor Lane:

trevor@bhejanetrust.org

+263 777057024

Stephen Long

stephen@bhejanetrust.org

