



Zambezi National Park

General

Not much to report this month. The good rains have continued, and the grass on the Chamabonda tall and thick! Not much game to be seen, but could be due to presence of a pride of lion currently resident in the vlei.

Roads on the river section very overgrown – not for those suffering from hay fever!!

Zambian poachers still a major problem, with well armed and equipped gangs crossing over looking for elephant. Parks had a contact in Kazuma , with a group of Zambians that walked into their ambush, but Parks missed them all at close range, which is indicative of the urgent need for ranger weapon training. We have offered weapon training to Parks, but the initiative lost in Head Office!

This cross border poaching is also a sad reflection on the state of wildlife in Zambia, where poaching is rampant, and it appears the law turns a blind eye to it – bush meat is every Zambians right! These poaching incursions into Zimbabwe could easily be curtailed with a bit of co-operation from the Zambian authorities, but this unfortunately does not appear to be forthcoming.

February rainfall recorded in the Falls was only 58mm for February, but the Park received more.

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Boreholes, Solar Units

We are getting some interesting figure back on our solar pumps (readings taken over 24 days in January):

On Thomson pan – lowest daily rate – 10,000l per day – overcast, raining

- highest daily rate – 35,000l per day – clear, hot
- Average daily rate – 23,166 per day – generally overcast
- 556,000l pumped in 24 days – for FREE!

On No 3 – Note – suspect the meter is under reading as the flow is visually very good. Flow rate also drops when pumping to overhead tank at the hide

- lowest daily rate – 13,500l per day
- highest daily rate – 30,000l per day
- Average daily rate – 17,000 per day
- 409,000l pumped in 24 days.

Wilderness Safaris Initiative

Keith Vincent (CEO) and Ron Goatley (Regional Manager) of Wilderness Safaris addressed a meeting of local stakeholders on a Wilderness Safaris initiative to co-manage the Zambezi National Park in conjunction with National Parks. Keith explained the initiative was aimed at developing the Park to cater for the anticipated increase in tourism to Victoria Falls – currently over 50,000 tourists a year go on Chobe day trips from Victoria Falls, and the idea is to capture a lot of that trade for local operators.

Keith added that the initiative would not only incorporate those individuals and entities already involved in the Park, but would enhance their participation. Wilderness Safaris has no direct financial interest in this initiative, and to secure the interests of local stakeholders, it will be run by a board which will incorporate local participation. However, Wilderness will be able to use their clout to raise funds to run the Park.

After a fruitful meeting and discussions, Keith left to pursue the plan with higher authorities, with the support of the local stakeholders.

We commend Wilderness on their open and frank approach, as local stakeholders are extremely concerned about commercial or quasi commercial operations which are apparently planned for the Park, and that are negotiated without any local stakeholder input at high levels in Harare (which raises doubts about the legitimacy of these plans). These plans could have serious a serious impact on the Park, from environmental, game movement and local operators aspects, and it appears that no Environmental Impact Assessments have been done, as required by law, and these EIA's are specific in that stakeholder consultation is a requirement.

Local stakeholders have requested that the Minister and Parks Director General address them to clarify the situation re all these issues. They also appeal to the companies/entities concerned to show the same integrity as Wilderness Safaris and address the stakeholders on these issues which have a direct bearing on their livelihoods, and on the future of the Falls tourism.

SINAMATELLA

Report by Stephen Long

Visitors

We received two visitors from the SAVE Foundation during February. Patrick Williamson spent ten days or so with us in mid month and brought with him a number of donations from SAVE. We were so busy during Patrick's visit that we didn't have time to hand over the donations to the Area Manager so we let our second visitor, Chris Palmer do that.



Chris with a few of the raincoats, radio batteries and gps donated by SAVE.

Many thanks to SAVE for their valuable support.

Tourist numbers were very low in February. The bar and shop have been re-opened at the old restaurant but until the dry season arrives with an increase in tourists they will be struggling to cover their costs. We hope the venture will be a success – it's certainly good to see the restaurant area tidied up and no longer just a haunt for dassies and baboons.

Wildlife.

As usual for the time of year we are seeing very few animals around the Park. The Gurangwenya dog pack spent several days close to camp and we were able to compare all of them with their ID photos. One adult, Sam, is missing but all four pups are doing well. This one is "Misty" – not sure how she got the name!



When Patrick Williamson was with us we spent a number of days following up on reports of rhino in outlying areas. We walked many kilometres, saw occasional rhino signs and set some camera traps but the animals themselves remained elusive. Rangers on patrol would tell the same story, rhino spoor and occasional browse marks but no actual sightings. A call sign deployed in an area that has not been covered for a while found two-day old spoor of a single rhino. It would be hard to guess if that was one of our known animals or perhaps another 'new' one but all the other reports probably related to known rhino.

On the evening of the 23rd we were outside watching distant lightning when we heard something being knocked down in the house. I went to investigate, expecting to find a snake or perhaps a bat but it was a real surprise to find a Giant Eagle Owl sitting on top of the lounge door. Neither of us was keen to try to grab it and take it outside but luckily, after posing quietly for a few minutes it found its own way out.



Vehicles

February was not a good month for transport. Having been hopeful that all would be well with the arrival of the Mbada Diamonds Land Rover, I now find it hard to see the way forward as the Tipper, Canter and Land Rover all became long-term casualties. The Tipper returned from repair at Makomo Mine's workshops with its engine back in order but the gearbox is faulty and will need (no doubt expensive) spares. The Canter is permanently out of order with repairs to its suspension and steering too expensive to be worthwhile and the Land Rover has broken rocker arms after the timing belt snapped. Without these vehicles the operations side of Sinamatella's activities can go ahead using our Cruiser and the new Land Rover but all other movements from road repairs to picnic site maintenance and simply getting staff to and from Hwange become very difficult, if not impossible.

Water

Good rains continued throughout February with a total of 178mm for the month. 123mm of that fell on the 10th causing flooding on some of the roads. We crossed the Gurangwenya bridge when the river was perhaps at its highest but by the following day it was almost back to normal.



Gurangwenya, 10 Feb



.....and 11 Feb

We have not been out as far as Tshompani and Inyatue for a while but the dams and pans everywhere else are full. Masuma Dam was spilling by the 7th (I have never seen it so full) and Mandavu started spilling a week later.



Masuma, 7 Feb
2014.

Unless the rains end early (and there's no sign of that so far) we should have plenty of natural water well into the dry season.