



General

I attended the Hwange National Park General Management Plan meeting, conducted by Ian Games, and held at Main Camp. It was a stakeholders consultation session for their input into the planning and future of the Park. The African Wildlife Foundation has funded this park planning operation, and the participation of all stakeholders is encouraging. However, all plans are only as good as their implementation!

On this topic, a plan for the Zambezi National Park is long overdue, as it has been in the past subject to various secretive proposals and schemes, with no consultation at all with local stakeholders. As of today, there has been no open policy put forward from Parks head office on what is planned for the area.

The Friends of Victoria Falls received much appreciated thank you letters from the Regional Managers office for the assistance given to Parks on both the World Wildlife Day and for the Awards Ceremony to deserving rangers held in Victoria Falls.

Zambezi National Park

We have had our trials and tribulations with waterpoints and solar pumps this month! We have been installing extra panels for greater yield, and have learnt some lessons! A great thanks to Chris Lampard for all his invaluable help in pulling pumps, wiring, testing, etc., and thanks to Ian Gloss for his help in getting the solar panels to Kasane for collection.

On Timots, we installed four extra panels, bringing it to 8 panels in total. The difference in flow was noticeable straight away, with the pan now overflowing. We put two extra panels on No1, and this has increased the flow to start filling the pan. We had last month put on extra panels at Thomsons, but after a while the flow rate, which had been very encouraging, had slowed down – found a wiring connection problem when checking the system and the flow rate is back up again.

However, No 3 has proved our major challenge. I added two extra panels, which greatly increased the flow rate. It over-pumped the borehole though, and the switch system was faulty so it did not automatically restart – the pan started to drop in level. We added another 13m of piping to the rising main, and all was working – coming back days later we had a big leak at the rising main pipe connection and limited water in the pan – it kept dropping! We pulled the pipe, (disconnecting the wiring to get it out) repaired the faulty connector and put it down – poor pumping rate but only noticed after a couple of days – the pan continued dropping! Hate to admit it – discovered we had wired the motor the wrong way round on our last repair job, but only after pulling out all the piping again. Rewired, reinstalled and great pumping rate – went to check – another rising main leak at the top join (excess pumping pressure) – pan very low. Repaired and checked and finally all functioning well and pan starting to fill up again!! However, a Marabou Stork took advantage of the situation to snap up the fish!!

Anyhow, the bottom line is that all the waterpoints in the Chamabonda are up and running at their max capacity. The next project is repairing and grading the roads, and adding new loop roads to increase the game drive capability in the Chambonda.

CHAMABONDA WATER RECORDS

Month	Aug-14			
Waterpoint	Vol pumped	No Days	Daily Vol	Notes
Timots	593,000	31	19129	Four new panels installed during month
No 1	629,000	31	20290	2 extra panels added (total 8 panels)
Thomsons	757,000	31	24419	wiring fault rectified during month
No 3	391,000	18	21722	big problems during month
Totals	2,370,000	111	21351	

Note : All pumps/panels now completely installed, and September should give first true readings

A RARE SIGHTING IN THE CHAMABONDA!!





Typical Chamabonda scenes – sable, wildebeest and zebra on the burn area.

Elephant at Timots – trees in their winter colours!



Poaching

There have been three elephants shot on islands in the Zambezi River this month by Zambian poachers. As the inland area of the park dries up, the elephant and buffalo cross onto the green islands, where they are vulnerable to the Zambians. As per normal, we can expect no reaction from the Zambian authorities, although it would take only one competent Zambian police officer to put a stop to all this!!

Some good news, the Zambian who was injured (he was shot in the left arm, abdomen and right thigh) in the contact at Saminungu in the Zambezi National Park in March (reported on when the main poacher was killed and 37 tusks recovered) appeared before the Hwange magistrate and received 10 years in jail – this is sending a strong message to the Zambians, and it is great to see some of our judiciary taking a strong stand on wildlife issues.

More good news! After the five elephants were poisoned in Zambezi National Park, Bhejane Trust put up a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible. This was done in conjunction with Edmore Ngosi (Area Manager) and Charles Brightman of the Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit, who were the contact persons. Locals Richard Cooke, Ian Neilsen and the The Lion Encounter also all chipped in with \$500 each, raising the reward to \$2000. This had the desired effect and an informer approached Charles Brightman with information. This led to the arrest of those responsible, including the recovery of more cyanide. Some of the suspects we are familiar with, having previous convictions for rhino horn and poaching, and these same arrested suspects have outstanding theft cases against them. However, the bad news - due to a dismal performance by the Public Prosecutor, they were released on a \$200 bail – this is when they are facing a minimum nine years in jail! Our informer had to flee to South Africa for his life!

We have had previous problems with some elements of the ZRP in Victoria Falls sympathizing with poachers, and now with the Hwange ZRP and judiciary taking a strong stance on wildlife cases, we can probably expect the poachers to switch their attention to the Victoria Falls region, where they perceive they have a degree of protection - this would not bode well for the tourist industry. The issue has been taken up with higher authorities, and lets hope justice prevails!!

More good news – a patrol comprising of one Zambezi National Parks scout and one ZRP detail engaged an armed group of four poachers at Liungu Spring in the Park, after being fired on by the poachers. Two poachers were killed in the return fire.

The poachers were initially suspected to be Zambians but turned out to be Zimbabweans from nearby Jambezi area They were after elephant, and more information will come out on the follow up on the two that got away One is not sure if they are not in some way involved in the syndicate mentioned above. Yet again though, Parks have handed out a tough message to would be poachers!!

Sinamatella



Recent picture of Borehole No 5 at Sinamatella, thanks to Ron Goatley. This is after only two months of pumping, and is already attracting impala, zebra, elephants and much more!

Report by Stephen Long

Wildlife.

Early in the month we noticed a large amount of carnivore dung at a particular point in the Smith's Mine Hills and suspected that there might be a wild dog den in the area so we set camera traps to check. The first day's pictures confirmed the regular presence of dogs of the "Gurangwenya Pack" so we contacted the Painted Dog Research Project and they came to investigate – eventually finding a den.

The dogs have been seen close to Sinamatella on many occasions since, once making a kill at the number five borehole pan. No pups have been found yet but we hope to see them in the near future.



Rhino sightings were good during the month with many reports of spoor but in all cases they seemed to be some of our very few remaining known animals and not 'new' ones.

Amongst other notable sightings, lions were regularly seen at or near Masuma, occasionally making a kill within view of the picnic site, leopard cubs were seen playing on the road near Mbala and on one of our patrols we were lucky enough to find two honey badgers that were so engrossed in a mock fight that we were able to get very close before they ran away. Buffalo are beginning to congregate in big herds around Sinamatella but the elephant are still mostly away from the tourist roads and not many are being seen for the time of year.

Game Water.

At some time during August, the solar pump at Baobab pumped its three-millionth litre of water for the year. The nearby 'elephant wells' in the Lukosi River have now dried up so Baobab is under considerable pressure and on one day we counted nearly fifty elephants bathing and drinking there in the course of an hour in the middle of the day.

Amazingly, with evaporation and elephant numbers increasing daily, the water level is holding up well and the solar pump is certainly proving its worth.

I can't give such an upbeat report of the situation at Bumboosie South. We have received some replacement pumps, thanks to Sylvie Pons of Makila Tours who kindly brought them from France, but in fact we have discovered that the main problem is with the level of water in the Bumboosie South borehole which is very low so the pump is sometimes pumping air. We plan to add more pipe as soon as we can get some but we can't go very much deeper without reaching mud and damaging the pump so we might have to simply settle for the water we are getting at the moment. It is not as much as we would like but much better than nothing.



Visitors

There was a noticeable increase in tourists during the month. Unfortunately, most visitors stick to the main road from Sinamatella to Shumba and gather at Masuma Dam where the game viewing is good. The situation there has reached the point where the viewing platform is often overcrowded and, with campers sometimes occupying the best viewpoint outside, there is nowhere near enough space for the number of people and the experience is spoilt by noise and bustle. There is plenty of space at Masuma to build further facilities so there is a possibility of solving the problem but it will require investment and careful planning.

Some of the time the visitors themselves make the situation worse. It is not unusual to find a selfish group blocking access by setting up tables and chairs on the platform and we once found a generator and freezer installed by campers taking up valuable viewing space. Worse than all that perhaps, was the visitor in August who attempted to fly a camera-carrying drone over lions at Masuma. Predictably the lions ran away as, I would imagine, did the drone-owner when the other visitors saw what happened!

Camp and infrastructure improvements

The Parks Authority began work during August on repairing some of the facilities at Sinamatella. The roof over the restaurant veranda is being thatched, some of the lodge roofs are being repaired and one of the camp ablution blocks was re-opened after repairs. Outside the camp, the road to Shumba was dragged thanks to Camp Hwange and the Tshakabika road was in the process of being graded. Of course, there is an enormous amount more to be done and it isn't likely that there will be enough funding to do much of it

Unfortunately some visitors have eyes only for the bad things and are all too keen to rush to the internet and publish their views as soon as they get home. Recently a visitor forced his way into a locked ablution block that was closed for repair and took photos inside that were posted online, purportedly showing the state of Sinamatella's camping facilities. I sometimes receive e mails from people who have read such reviews. They are worried about whether they should visit Sinamatella after reading blogs containing expressions like 'disgusting facilities' and 'never visit again'. My usual reply is along the lines that if you come to Sinamatella with an open mind, you might find a few things you don't like but you will also find much that is good and a lot that is excellent. If you come with pre-conceived ideas you will of course find the evidence you want to support them - but please don't spoil the pleasure of others by rushing into print to 'reluctantly' share your experiences



Comment

The shooting of the Zimbabweans poaching elephant in the Zambezi National Park highlights the growing threat to our wildlife from within our borders. The actions of the syndicate alluded to in the article on poaching above, is a warning that we are not removed from organized crime here, and unless urgent action is taken now, we could suffer devastating consequences in the future. The inability or reluctance to act against their own errant members displayed by some organisations will only lead to compounding the existing problem, as it will embolden the perpetrators.

The woeful effort by the prosecutors in the elephant poisoning saga also highlights the urgent need for dedicated wildlife prosecutors, employed to take up all the major wildlife cases. The big question is who to fill the post and how to fund such a person – it should be a Parks position, but would need to be supported by private enterprise. However, I must admit in their defence that the Public Prosecutors are generally very inexperienced and I suspect poorly paid!

I have just read a horrific article about the elephant poaching in northern Mozambique, where the authorities are part of the problem – to quote “Mozambique is losing the battle against the illegal wildlife before it has even begun to fight”. WWF in one area conducted an aerial count, and of the total elephant seen, over 50% were carcasses – the WWF conservationist in that park stated “What a nightmare – total anarchy and the park standing by to watch the carefully guarded resources destroyed – leaving behind a wasteland that will have made one or two people rich”.

There was also an article of ZAWA in Zambia intercepting a truck with nearly 5 tons of dried game meat on it. How many animals died to produce this staggering amount of dried meat!! The driver has not to my knowledge been sentenced yet, and there was no mention of the follow up, which could well be underway. However, how did they manage to acquire so much meat undetected. It also remains to be seen if there is any real conviction by the Zambians.

The point of all the above is that we cannot afford to be complacent in Zimbabwe, as we could end up following the path of our northern neighbours. We have quality rangers in the field, and they need our support. However, they also need the support of the judiciary, to complement their efforts, plus the support of the parent ministry and the senior government officials so we do not reach the stage of “leaving behind a wasteland that made one or two people rich”. It is time to take a firm stand on these organized crime syndicates!!

Grateful Thanks

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

This month, we have had support from:

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RAM Petroleum

Redan Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin

Makomo Mine

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