



GENERAL

Apologies for the newsletter being late again! What started out as a thank you note to donors has grown into something not anticipated, and not being of the scribe type, takes up a lot of my time. I was away for a week in October which delayed things. As we are already half way into October, the next newsletter will be in December to cover the rest of October and November.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

A quiet month on waterpoint maintenance as all pumps, panels, etc now functioning properly. Once a month I send a vehicle out with a ladder, knapsack sprayer and mop to clean the panels – total maintenance! We replaced the old pipeline supplying water to the hide at No 3 with a larger pipe, which has improved the domestic water supply there.

We pumped a record 3,285 million litres of water all by solar power in September, and the difference by adding the extra panels is very noticeable, with the pans filling up. It is anticipated the rainy season will give the pans a boost (hopefully fill them up) and the solar units will then maintain the levels.

CHAMABONDA WATER RECORDS

Month Sept , 2014

Waterpoint	Vol pumped	No Days	Daily Vol	Notes
Timots	896,000	30	29867	
No 1	682,000	30	22733	semi blocked borehole
Thomsons	926,000	30	30867	
No 3	781,000	30	26033	
Totals	3,285,000	120	27375	

The elephants have taken it upon themselves to redesign Timots pan – the original pan is bone dry as the ele’s have created a new pan on the opposite side of the drinking trough!



The new pan at Timots created by the elephants!

Of extreme concern however is the number of elephant droppings we are finding in the lower Chamabonda River area containing plastic bags and even bottles!! The elephant are raiding the council rubbish dump and ingesting all this foreign matter. There is an urgent need to fence off the rubbish dump, and in fact, the township of Mukhosana, where there is conflict between humans/elephants.

Another view of the mess created by elephants at Timots



No 1 Pan scene – great to see how the animals are coming back!

Some sad news is that we found a young elephant bull that appeared to have been poached with a light weapon near No 3. We are not sure of the full circumstances yet, and Parks are following up.

I took a helicopter flight up and down the Zambezi River section of the Park, and was impressed with the amount and variety of game seen. However, what was very apparent was that much of the game was inland off the river, and thus out of sight of tourists. This emphasizes the need for an improved road network for access into these middle areas, which would improve game viewing, and also ease anticipated congestion in the Park.

Stakeholders of the Zambezi National Park requested a meeting with Parks to put forward any ideas, concerns, proposals that they had on the future of the Park, and to find out from Parks on any plans in the pipeline. Parks readily agreed to a meeting, and thanks to Victoria Falls Safari Lodge for the venue. The meeting was attended by Arthur Musakwa (Regional Manager), Edmore Ngosi (Area Manager), John Sithole (Senior Ranger) and Hilary Madiri (Ecologist), and a good turnout of stakeholders. The meeting was held in a very positive, open and frank atmosphere, and there were some very good, positive proposals with issues such as roads, night drives, platforms, loyalty cards, operators access through side roads, more local camp sites, canoe operators sites, etc being brought up and discussed. A small team was tasked to look into all the issues and to bring to the follow up meeting with Parks what could broadly be described as a “Stakeholders Park Plan”, for Parks to look at and hopefully assimilate into their Park planning. A big thanks to the Parks team for their open, refreshing approach, which can only bode well for the future of the Park, as everyone is pulling in the same direction.

One interesting proposal brought up by Charlie Hewat (who is following up on it) is that locals can buy a “loyalty card” which will allow them access to the Park without paying at the gate each time. This would particularly be beneficial for fishermen. This would be an annual card, with a purchase value still to be decided on. It would save a lot of inconvenience all round.

One result of the stakeholders meeting was that between Bhejane Trust and Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, we managed to secure 2000l of diesel, and the motorized Zinara grader is already at work in the Park, grading the Zambezi Drive roads, which were particularly bad. Well done to Edmore for organizing the grader!

POACHING

National Parks shot and killed a poacher and wounded two out of a gang of four in the Chete Safari Area – unfortunately the poachers had already killed an elephant cow. They recovered two heavy weapons. This is indicative of the massive poaching that is going on in the Sebungwe region, where the elephant are being wiped out. Well done to Parks but is almost a case of too little too late!

The poachers who poisoned the elephant in the Zambezi National Park are still on bail (a ridiculous \$200 each) but EMA has confirmed the poison used as cyanide, and we wait to see what happens next. Both poachers have previous cases against them!

Six more elephant were poisoned in Hwange in the south-eastern corner – three cows and three calves! This poisoned haul brought in a grand total of 6 kg's of ivory!! One perpetrator went to South Africa to sell the ivory straight after the elephant were poisoned, and the other two perpetrators are now on the run from their home villages, as a Parks investigation team quickly got to the bottom of the story. It is a matter of time until the guilty are brought to justice – well done to Parks again!

SINAMATELLA

Report by Stephen Long

Game water.

At various times in the month, every borehole that is in use needed some kind of attention.

Shumba

The pan is still very full, thanks to Camp Hwange who have provided diesel and assistance at the camp-site throughout the season. Early in September elephants managed to find the end of the outlet pipe for the wind pump but we were able to add more pipe and get it safely out under water in the pan before they did much damage. The diesel pump also had problems, with the pump itself breaking away from the pipe and the engine giving trouble. All of these problems were fixed and the pan looks superb for the time of year.

Masuma

The Masuma pump is running 24 hours a day but the engine has performed well and given no trouble. We did, however have to replace a broken bearing assembly and some of the outlet pipes that had rusted through. The dam still has plenty of water and is, as usual, well used by both tourists and wildlife.

Inyantue

Inyantue has not been pumped for two years but we were able to start pumping it this season. There are no funds for pump attendants so we needed a reliable engine that could be started and left to run on its own. Bhejane Trust obtained an engine on loan and we installed it over two visits at the end of September.



Shumba Pan

Bumboosie South

An elephant managed to locate the outlet pipe at Bumboosie South close to the borehole and, in tearing it up, he lifted the well head and broke the pipe connection. We had to make ourselves a suitable fishing tool to catch the pipe, re-join it and then elephant-proof the pipes. Our fishing tool was, perhaps, typically Zimbabwean, being made out of a variety of unlikely materials including eight gauge wire, strips of old inner tube, a long stick cut from a nearby tree and a golf flag pole. To everyone's surprise it worked and we were able to see water pouring into the trough again before we left

Tshompani

The third of our solar pumps, donated by Le Pic Vert through Michel Buenerd with funds from Le Pal Foundation, was finally installed and started at Tshompani Dam in September. The installation went almost without a hitch. Sue did the technical stuff – installing the panels and connecting the electrics while the Parks team and I did the heavier work.



Fishing at Bumboosie South



Connecting the electrics

Switching on for the first time is always a worrying moment but we were rewarded with two green lights on the control box and, shortly afterwards, water pouring into the Tshompani trough for the first time in two years...



Phew!



Water flows into the trough



Plenty of customers

Number Five Borehole

We have been searching for a name for the new pan at number five borehole and have more or less settled on 'Mashambo' – the Nambiya word for the wild dogs that have been regular visitors there. Unfortunately towards the end of the month the pan lost a great deal of water due to electricity cuts and a faulty switch and, at the time of writing, it is almost dry but we hope to have it back up and running very soon.

Wildlife.

We are still seeing the effects of last year's good rains on animal numbers with only small numbers of elephants in the area compared with dryer years and hardly any animals to be seen feeding in front of the camp.

Rhino sightings were good in September. A mini 'rhino ops' in mid month, with almost every available ranger out in the field, turned up only one 'visual' but there were a lot of reports of reasonably fresh spoor. During the rest of the month, the mobile monitoring team found signs of rhino in some unexpected places and routine anti-poaching patrols located a mother and calf on two occasions.

Towards the end of the month a pregnant female buffalo was killed in a snare outside the Park close to the railway. I was out installing the pump at Inyantue so Sue took rangers to recover the meat for patrol rations. In spite of the good water and food situation this year, an adolescent elephant was found dead, apparently of natural causes, near Tshompani Pan. Young elephants seem to be very vulnerable at this time of year and there is no suspicion of poisoning in this case. The tusks were recovered.

I am not a great fan of baboons when they are in the Camp – we have been 'raided' too many times - but it is hard to dislike one particular female that we have been seeing for some weeks carrying her desiccated dead baby. She puts it down when she stops to feed but picks it up in one hand or even in her mouth whenever she moves away.



Finally, our vulture nest survey is winding down as the young birds become hard to distinguish from their parents. Fifty eight nests have been located around Sinamatella and most of the breeding attempts seem to have been successful. Other notable bird breeding records are young Saddlebill Storks seen near Chawato, Goliath Herons with two young at Mandavu, many Grey Heron nests at Mandavu and at Big Mambane Spring and Giant Eagle Owls breeding in a *Diospyros* at Shumba.



Giant Eagle Owl at Shumba

Miscellaneous

Refurbishment of lodges continues at Sinamatella, albeit slowly as funds become available. Lodge thirteen now has new ceilings and tiled floors and work continues. At the restaurant, the roof repair has stopped temporarily as the thatcher is no longer available.

The transport situation is reasonably good within the Park itself but business trips out of the Park continue to be difficult, often relying on the goodwill of tourists and safari operators travelling to and from Hwange. At the end of the month we received a Land Rover, donated by the SAVE Foundation, which needs some work before it can be relied upon but for which we are very grateful. Once it is up and running properly it will ease the Camp's transport difficulties still further – though not for trips to town as it would certainly not pass even the most relaxed of road blocks.

COMMENT

Bhejane Trust has just completed some road strip counts on Matetsi Units 7 and 6, and it is alarming the way these areas have been hammered by uncontrolled hunting over the last few years. This is also the situation on Units 4 and 5 where uncontrolled poaching and heavy hunting has severely diminished the game populations. The heavy hunting comes from unrealistic quotas, plus from an unsavory practice called quota transferring, where the quota is transferred from one unit to another (although the populations are not!) This decline in wildlife in Matetsi, on top of the disasters that are Chete, Chizarira and Chirisa, does not bode well, as it shows wildlife in many Parks areas is in serious trouble.

There are a variety of reasons for the decline including cases of mismanagement, over hunting (poor quota setting), corruption, inadequate facilities and equipment, etc but they all stem back to the desperate financial situation of Parks, which has caused major stress to managers trying to operate on the ground and has also led to financial reasons overcoming ecological reasons – a recipe for long term disaster!

One of the underlying factors is that Parks have abrogated their role as a regulator of the wildlife and of Parks estate, by the mere fact of becoming an operator. They have been running commercial hunting safaris in opposition to their best customers, and even took a vehicle donated for wildlife conservation and converted it into a tourism game drive vehicle while it should have been used for conservation. The legality of Parks competing on the market with their own customers with an unfair advantage is also debatable. If proper accounting was undertaken, it is very doubtful that these ventures are any more financially viable than if the areas were properly leased out, as per Parks mandate. This type of operation can also be open to corruption though there is no hint of that at this stage.

I feel Parks cannot be an operator and a regulator at the same time – who regulates their hunting?. They need to revert to their original role of being the trustee of our wildlife estate, and leave commercial operations to the professionals (and to Zimbabwean professionals, not outsiders!). They also urgently need to undergo a restructuring exercise to cut costs – to date every company in this country has restructured under the difficult economic situation, and Parks should be no different. A restructured, lean Parks might well attract the donor support it needs to keep rolling!

Where Parks cannot cope, they need to enlist outside help – there are many people and organisations out there willing to help, and there are already some organisations working hand in hand with some Parks stations for the benefit of all and ultimately the conservation of the Park and the wildlife! There are some very dedicated Parks staff operating under extremely difficult conditions, with little thanks, and they need our support. There are also some who are not performing and need to be kicked out. The future of our wildlife is at stake, and we need to act now to stop the slide!!

NOTE

I have just returned from a trip to Buby River Conservancy – this was an eye opener and has to be one of the greatest wildlife conservation efforts in Africa. It is also a model of how good game management policies can produce such prolific results, including the largest Black Rhino population in Zimbabwe, and all operating on a self sustaining basis. I will feature an article on the BRC in the next newsletter

The other news is that the concession lease on Matetsi Unit 7 is about to be finalized, which will bring about the development of the area. Bhejane Trust will be assisting on the recovery of the area and it's wildlife. More about this also in the next newsletter.

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

Barbara Ball and Clidder Mining

RAM Petroleum

Redan Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin

Makomo Mine

Zambezi Helicopter Company

Dave Glynn and Victoria Falls Safari Lodge

Ian Gloss – donation of solar panels.

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

