



GENERAL

While driving along the Namakana River in Matetsi Unit 7, I came across an unusual incident – a Winterthorn tree had split at the base of the trunk, and came crashing down. There were three dead monkeys lying around, one still in the branches – obviously they had been in the tree when it came down and were killed on impact with the ground. There may well have been more bodies inside the entanglement of branches.



I was driving down the road by Saminungu Spring in the Park and found a young vulture on the ground, with a broken wing. There are no powerlines or phone lines of any sort in the area, and can only assume it's first flight had ended disastrously with a collision with a tree. I took the bird to Roger Parry of Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, and we gave it water – very thirsty!. It ate and was taken to Bulawayo and the wing amputated by the vet, Gerard Stevenage. Unfortunately the stress was too much and the poor bird died despite all the efforts.

I attended a function at Main Camp in mid-October, which was a commemoration of the “Poisoning of the Elephant” incident a year previously. It was well organized and run, with a very good turnout of communal residents from the areas surrounding the Park, plus local NGO's, government departments and safari operators. Dignitaries included the Hon Minister Saviour Kasukuwere, Minister Cain Mathema, the DG Edson Chidzia, plus other ministers, and the surprise guest speaker was Dr Grace Mugabe. The atmosphere was very jovial, but the message delivered by Min Kasukuwere and Dr Mugabe was a very strong one – poaching will not be tolerated!! The afternoon was a great success, and was an opportunity to mingle with all sectors with an involvement in the park and it's surrounds. I must compliment Warden Jura for the show, but also for the state of Main Camp and the Park – I have received a lot of complimentary reports from visitors, and this has been achieved despite the limited resources available.

We recorded our first thunderstorm of the season on 26th October – a whole 2mm!. It was extremely hot and dry going into November. On 7th November, we had our first good rain – 25mm. The transformation overnight of the bush from brown to green! However, we have experienced an extremely hot November, with it building up daily but no rain – a paltry six millimeters for the month (excluding the one storm)!! The grass has wilted and we need a some good rain to freshen up! We are also hoping for a good rainy season to fill the pans, which we can then maintain.

The rain storm in November also brought welcome relief from fires with the greening of the bush. Lightning started a big fire between the Park, Unit 7 and Unit 6 (ie between Vic Falls and Kazungula) This were brought under control after several days of fire fighting. Parks were at the forefront of the fire fighting, putting in a great effort, but also encouraging was the support offered from various other organisations – Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, VFAPU, Matetsi Unit 7, Jafuta Foundation. .

Through the Friends of Victoria Falls, and as a follow on to the meeting between Parks and FOVF held in September, a Stakeholders Parks Plan has been drawn up – this is what stakeholders view as requirements, requests, ideas and plans for what they would like to see in the future development of the Park. The plan has been submitted to Parks, and we hope for ultimately a realistic Park plan for the ZNP.

Some bad news from Nakavango Estates – their 2,5year old male Black Rhino calf was killed by a crocodile in their dam. As if the odds weren't stacked against the rhino as it is!! A distraught Ian du Preez gave thought to killing the croc, but decided to let it be.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

An adult bull elephant was found dead near the town of Victoria Falls with no apparent cause of death. National Parks cut the elephant up looking for any cause, and found the stomach was full of plastic bags – this had caused an obviously miserable death from a blocked stomach. The plastic bags come from the elephants scavenging in the municipal rubbish dump.

This problem of elephants ingesting plastic has been noticeable for a while, with the bags appearing in the dung found in the Park. It has been mooted for a while to fence off the rubbish dump, and the township of Mkhosana, where there is a human/elephant conflict zone – a couple of fatal incidents involving elephant attacking people have occurred in the past. We have initiated a joint venture with Environment Africa to look into the feasibility of fencing off Mkhosana and the rubbish dump – this would need input from the residents, the Town Council and Parks, but we feel it is a win/win situation – the people are protected from the animals, and the animals are protected from human influence! We are only requiring about 5,5km of fencing.



The carcass of an elephant which died close to Victoria Falls. It is believed the cause of death was a blocked stomach due to ingestion of plastic bags. Some of the bags that came out of the stomach can be seen in the foreground .



Elephant dung with plastic in it. As the dung dries and disintegrates, it releases the plastic, littering the Park!

The game viewing has been good on the Chamabonda, with lots of zebra, several sable herds (including a couple of new ones) which have now established themselves around the new waterpoints, the buffalo herds have moved in, the eland herds are back, plus the normal mix – hyena, hogs, jackals, kudu, impala, etc

In late October, there were about 500 elephant drinking daily at No 3 pan, flattening the water in the trough and this has resulted in the water level in the pan dropping. Compared to four years ago, when not an elephant was recorded in the Park!

We had a problem on No 3 solar unit – the rising main had a join in it and the pumping pressure was too much, causing it to leak badly. We replaced the rising main with one complete length of pipe and hopefully no more problems. However, the loss of water to the pan was over several days until detected, which shows on the attached water table for October. The pump is now operating a full volume again, and the pan is filling up!

The drop in water flow at Timots is difficult to explain – we checked the voltages and amperages and all seems ok. This borehole is not on the underground lake system but on a drainage line, and we checked the water level – still sitting high at 18m. Cleaned out the trough – had filled with clay and was blocking the outlet pipe. We checked the wiring again and will have to see if we have solved the low volume rate.

CHAMABONDA WATER RECORDS

Month Oct , 2014

Waterpoint	Vol pumped	No Days	Daily Vol	Notes
Timots	454,000	31	14645	
No 1	720,000	31	23226	semi blocked borehole
Thomsons	984,000	31	31742	
No 3	378,000	22	17181	Unreliable as not known how many days off
Totals	2,536,000	115	21,698	

Note : we had a broken pipe on No 3 and lost several days of pumping - hence reduced days.

Month Nov , 2014

Waterpoint	Vol pumped	No Days	Daily Vol	Notes
Timots	498,000	30	16600	
No 1	618,000	30	20600	semi blocked borehole
Thomsons	854,000	30	28467	
No 3	991,000	30	39700	
Totals	2,961,000	120	24,675	

As can be seen from above, we still have a couple of problems to resolve on solar water, but generally is working very well, with a minimum of maintenance

The Zinara grader has been working on the road network along the Zambezi River, so this is much improved. Diesel donations were required – Bhejane Trust and Victoria Falls Safari Lodge providing 1400l between them. However, a comprehensive road rebuilding is needed for some of the road, rather than a scrape over with a blade. This would include gravelling and shaping. Still, the road is still a big improvement, and well done to Edmore for organizing this operation.

Thanks to a very generous donation from Frank Ziegler in Switzerland, through Stuart and Sue Danks, we have been able to gravel and grade the first 10kilometers of the Chamabonda drive. This was the worst section of road, and was impassable during the rainy season. We will continue to work on the remainder of the road system over the coming months.

This means the Chamabonda can be accessed all year round from the main gate, and will be vital for tourism in the future, when the Zambezi River drive is inaccessible. It also opens up the vlei during the rainy season, when some of the best game viewing is to be had on the vlei, as it greens up.



The new Chamabonda Highway takes shape!



Sinamatella

A big thanks to Ian Thomson for the donation of a satellite phone for Stephen to use. This greatly helps his security in the more remote areas he covers!

Report by Stephen Long

October and November

Water.

No rain fell at Sinamatella in October and temperatures reached the high thirties. Sixty eight millimetres fell in November. This is above the average of fifty seven for the past five years but around seventy five percent of it fell in just two days at the start of the month, to be followed by weeks of very high temperatures. Scattered rain fell in the Sinamatella area but by the end of November, elephants were starting to appear in numbers at Masuma and elsewhere – a sure sign that there is no water available deeper in the Park yet. Under these circumstances game-water pumping was a high priority but luckily we did not have too many problems to contend with.

At the start of October, seven pans were being pumped.

Mashambo.

The faulty switch that I reported back in September was quickly sorted out by Wilderness Safaris and the pan soon re-filled and was well-used by a wide range of animals.

Inyantue

Our attempts to get this, our furthest-away pump, up and running failed. On our first visit in October we found the engine had hardly run at all and the dam was dry. We adjusted the running speed of the engine and left it pumping but nine days later when we returned we found the engine seized and the pipes pulled off by elephants. We have since received a very kind offer of help at Inyantue from Paul Bennie but as the dam had been dry for some time we didn't think it was worth wasting diesel at this late stage of the season as most animals had left the area. I hope we will not live to regret that decision!

Tshompani

The solar pump at Tshompani has been running well but unfortunately the water meter is not working so we are not sure how much is being pumped. As soon as time permits we will have to spend a day or two there trying to set the pump speed to match the inflow rate of the borehole. For the moment we have it running below optimum to avoid over-pumping.

Baobab

The pumping rate is down to about 14000 litres per day. Presumably due to increased head as the underground water level drops. Even at this slightly reduced rate the pan is looking good and is well used – including by a couple of Spoonbills that were seen there in November



Spoonbill at Baobab Pan, 28 November

Shumba

Both the wind and the diesel pump gave us trouble in October. A pipe broke on the diesel but we were able to fish it out surprisingly easily and put a new pipe in place as well as new bobbin bearings to cut down the vibration. At the wind pump, elephants twice broke the outlet pipe and once lifted the outlet at the pan itself.

Natural water

November's rain was enough to make some of the rivers flow so there is plenty of natural water available. Visiting Tshompani, Sue and I stopped to look at an apparently un-named spring about 4km from the dam that we had been shown earlier this year. Amazingly, amongst very dry bush, in great heat, we found a small pool of water with warthogs drinking and an elephant just leaving. No doubt there are little-known spots like this in many other places.



Un-named spring near Tshompani with water at the base of the rocks.

Along with all the usual difficulties with water for animals, we also faced severe problems with water for the camp. The camp's water system broke down completely and ZNWA were unable to provide assistance. Much of the problem lies with the ZNWA infrastructure but there is also a great deal of lime blocking pipes throughout the camp for which Parks are responsible. ZNWA have not resolved the situation with their equipment but Parks have supplied, and are rushing to install, a new main pipe and pipes to the lodges throughout the camp.

Wildlife

In spite of the high temperatures that prevailed throughout, animal numbers remained low. On our regular road transect count on the 9th of October we counted just eight elephants – well down on the average of eighty three for that time of year over the previous four years. Travelling out to Inyantue however, we found many elephants and signs of a great deal of elephant around Tendele and Tshompani Pans which still held water from the last rains well into October. The WEZ 24 hour count was carried out on the 7th October and the data will be very interesting.

Rhino sightings have been much improved recently and positive identifications were possible in most cases. The rhino monitoring team has worked hard but there are still a

lot of questions to be answered. This recent improvement in sightings by rangers is very welcome indeed.

Sightings become much more difficult in the rains so we have been running a camera trap operation alongside normal ranger deployments and we have also been mapping patrol coverage to try to identify gaps in the patrols and get as much data as we can while conditions are good.

On October 15th, a sick lion was reported at Masuma. We went to have a look at him and were able to get very close as he was almost blind and clearly extremely ill.



He died later the same day and there was some question about the cause of death. Initial reports were that he had been kicked by a giraffe but he clearly showed symptoms of Anthrax though samples that were taken came back negative for the disease. Four rangers and I attended a workshop on wildlife disease run by Chris Foggin at Main Camp in November. At the end of November an elephant died at Masuma and we were able to put our new knowledge to use by collecting blood and tissue samples for analysis.

Miscellaneous

After a lot of work, Parks were pleased to be able to re-open the restaurant on the possibly inauspicious date of 13th October. Customers have been few and far between up to now but it is nonetheless good to see infrastructure improving rather than deteriorating. At the camping site, work was started on upgrading the ablution blocks which have been sub- standard for some time.



Patient Mugande preparing blood smears

Away from Camp, one of the biggest challenges of October was fire. We had a series of fires in the Inyantue/Tshompani area and around Tshakabika and Gubombiri which entailed a huge amount of work, not only to fight them but also simply to get to them as these are some of the furthest and most difficult areas for us to access. Our driver Abednico Tshuma and his vehicle, supplied by the SAVE Foundation, worked particularly hard getting rangers and equipment out to the fires.

Our Land Cruiser, which has travelled thousands of kilometres on bad roads over the past few years was really showing its age by October so we took it to Bulawayo for major repairs, costing nearly \$5000 but giving the vehicle a new lease of life (we hope). Thanks to a generous donation from SAVE African Rhino Foundation, we were able to solve the desperate tyre situation of our two Land Rovers and also to begin to get some minor repairs done. On the other hand, thanks to the hyena that took a liking to the indicators on one of the cars, we now have a few extra repairs to carry out!

POACHING

It has been a busy period on the poaching/anti-poaching scene, but I feel gains are being made. The Parks patrol coverage is good along the Zambezi River frontage and seems to have curtailed the Zambians. However, the biggest problem still remains with the law enforcement agencies in Victoria Falls and their failure to do what is required of them. We have reason to believe that the corruption prevalent has been drawn to the attention of higher authorities and we hope it will be sorted out soon. There was a damning article in the Herald (copied further down) which highlighted the problems faced here.

One would think that knowing the importance of having a good wildlife population for the tourism industry would put Victoria Falls in the forefront of combatting poaching and wildlife crimes. It is frustrating that these wildlife crime syndicates still operate freely, knowing they have strategically positioned supporters in the ZRP and in Parks, who report to them and cover up for them when they get arrested.

The saga of poisoning of elephants goes on! Another suspected member of the poaching syndicate here in the Falls area was arrested by Parks with cyanide in his vehicle – he was apparently going to poison waterholes at Deka. The police apparently took the matter very lightly, and the prosecutor declined to prosecute! This is a far cry from Hwange, where two poachers in possession of cyanide were given the maximum sentence permissible – a measly one month in prison, but better than nothing! However, the two are now being charged under the Environmental Management Act, but unfortunately only got a two year sentence rather than the maximum 10, due to appearance before a junior magistrate. However, the ZRP, Public Prosecutor and magistrate in Hwange must be commended on their more professional approach to wildlife crimes.

A local so-called safari operator, with a very dodgy track record, who was caught red-handed poaching with a client a few months back, was released by Victoria Falls magistrate court when the case finally came to court months later “for lack of evidence” – you can read what you want into this!! He was involved in an illegal zebra hunt on Unit 6 – a senior police officer managed to deliberately fudge this so that he got a minor fine and the vehicle (South African!!) should have been confiscated but was not. He is also responsible for the unlicensed overshooting of game in Matetsi, but still carries on hunting, despite the fact that I was assured by Parks he would have his licence pulled two years ago.

Acting on a tip off, a combined ZRP and Parks team stopped a vehicle out of Binga and found a live Pangolin in the boot. The villager who had caught the Pangolin got nine years jail, while the car owner is on bail awaiting trial (lets hope the car is confiscated as a lesson to all!). The pangolin was released in Chizarira National Park.

Two Zambian fishing rigs were caught illegally fishing on the Zimbabwean side of the Lake near Mlibizi. The two rig were impounded and forfeited to the state, while the 8 Zambian crew members are in custody pending sentencing. Well done to the law enforcement agencies - -they now need to go for the illegal netting around Msuna.

The Zambians shot an elephant on an island opposite Matetsi Unit 7 – seems to be the new tactic rather than the risk of crossing onto the mainland, although the onset of the rains might see another influx of Zambian poachers.

The Zambians, through ZAWA, arrested 8 members of a poaching gang at Kazungula, including one Zimbabwean well known this side for his nefarious activities. This is a major occurrence in that the Zambians have actually done something about poaching, but could well have something to do with the tour operators in Livingstone taking a stance and they have made great gains in getting some law and order along the river. Well done to Peter and his crew and long may this effort flourish!

We have just had an unusual incident where the Zambians set a noose snare, baited with rotten meat, for a crocodile. A large croc was caught, but a member of the public passing by noticed, and managed to release the croc, which was still thrashing around, and dismantle a second snare. We are puzzled at this snaring of crocs!

On the bright side, a delegation of magistrates is coming to Victoria Falls for a mini symposium of wildlife crimes, and presumably the seriousness, and the sentences that need to be handed out. I have also heard that a couple of high ranking police officers have been tasked to investigate what is happening in Vic Falls. However, what is highlighted is the need for a dedicated wildlife prosecutor for the region.

Congratulations to Herald reporter Jeffrey Gogo who has publicly exposed the situation relating to poaching and the law enforcement agencies in this part of the world. He has produced an excellent, well researched article, which I have taken the liberty of reproducing in full here. This article exposes all the issues we have been complaining about here in the Falls,

Herewith the article is reproduced :

Zimbabwe: Anti-Poaching Efforts Under Pressure From Corruption

By Jeffrey Gogo, The Herald

November 10, 2014

POLICE in Dete recently arrested two suspects on allegations of killing three elephants by cyanide poisoning. However, the real kingpins behind wildlife gangs remain untouchable, even after previous convictions, due to alleged corruption within the justice system. Acting on a tip-off, police two weeks ago nabbed Ishmael Sibanda (32) and his accomplice

Anold Ndhlovu (26), both from Sihazela Line under Chief Mswigama, Tsholotsho, in a joint crackdown on wildlife murderers with the Parks and Wildlife Authority.

The duo confessed to killing two elephants in the Hwange National Park in December 2012 before slaughtering another in August this year, according to a police report obtained by The Herald Business.

They were also charged with contravening the Environmental Management Act for the illegal possession of 6,850 kilogrammes of cyanide, which was buried underground.

Poachers are now killing wildlife by poisoning watering holes or salt pans with cyanide, a deadly and fast acting chemical compound. By using poison, poachers avoid the risk of a gunshot being overheard by rangers. This is an emerging sophistication in wildlife crime that has got authorities and conservationists greatly worried.

At different times, Sibanda and Ndhlovu allegedly sold their six pieces of ivory loot for just \$520 to one Busani Moyo - believed to be one of the syndicate's ring leaders - and to Stanley Alias SaOga. Not much is known about this SaOga, police said, but he's techno savvy, even in crime. Ndhlovu received \$20 as final payment from SaOga through EcoCash - a mobile money based payment platform, which was settled using a third party's phone, that of Mr Collen Ncube, a teacher at Sihazela Primary School.

In South Africa, a pair of elephant tusks is believed to fetch as much as \$16 000, making illegal ivory trade a lucrative business.

HIGHER ORDERS

Now, the arrested accomplices are just two small-time fish in the swelling pond of wildlife poaching teeming with powerful sharks, and were merely acting on higher orders. And the orders were from suspected kingpins, Busani Moyo and Lukas Nhliziyo, who supplied the cyanide for free. Police confirmed 1,850kg of the poison originated from Moyo and 5kg from Nhliziyo, who would later purchase the ivory

The two, who remain at large, are believed to be part of a "well-known" and organised criminal syndicate operating in Hwange and the Victoria Falls, terrorising wildlife with impunity. Sources said the Moyo/Nhliziyo "syndicate has National Parks and ZRP details working within their ranks, and we strongly suspect they have corrupted the prosecutors."

Interestingly, Moyo was convicted for illegal possession of 237kg of ivory last year and sentenced to 9 years imprisonment with labour. He is currently walking free, ostensibly on bail pending appeal. However, it is situations such as Moyo's that have raised questions on the integrity and competence of Zimbabwe's justice system in effectively tackling rampant poaching, particularly of the endangered rhino and elephant

"These syndicates are very brazen, and have been operating with impunity for years now," sources said, adding if the vice was not contained "Victoria Falls and Hwange will become the epicentre of elephant poisoning and illegal ivory trading."

Some conservationists recently "arrested" one of the Victoria Falls gang leaders carrying unquantified amounts of cyanide in his vehicle, as he headed towards Deka Safari Area, possibly to poison drinking water.

But "the police here were very accommodating to him, and the prosecutor apparently has refused to take any further action," alleged one conservationist who cannot be named for fear of victimisation.

"If the law is going to turn a blind eye to poaching, it will not be long before we have massive poisoning of elephant, on an unprecedented scale, which will have serious ramifications for the tourist industry and the economy."

Last year Zimbabwe suffered its worst wildlife carnage in a quarter century after 300 elephants and several other animals were killed by cyanide poisoning in Hwange.

When asked about the corruption allegations, Prosecutor General Mr Johannes Tomana first hurled insults at this writer, saying "this was childish, you cannot just make wild accusations."

He later calmed down after evidence of such claims were presented to him confirming that ZRP Dete were actually investigating the case and were on the hunt for Moyo and Nhliziyo. While Mr Tomana had not yet responded to questions sent to him by email on October 30, he told me by telephone last Thursday that "you know we have zero tolerance to corruption.

"We are working with the Wildlife Authority to investigate the matter. Will advise when investigations are complete."

Parks and Wildlife Authority spokesperson Caroline Washaya Moyo was not immediately available to answer to allegations of corruption against her organisation.

Environment, Water and Climate Minister Saviour Kasukuwere has at various times called for stiffer penalties against wildlife offenders, tasking the Wildlife Authority to strengthen its 'foot soldiers' in affected areas and work collaboratively with the police and the Environmental Management Agency.

His deputy, Mr Simon Musanhu told The Herald Business in an interview in September that the Ministry was "now aiming and pushing for a minimum mandatory sentence of 15 years in jail for wildlife offenders."

FRIGHTENING DEVELOPMENTS

While some arrests have been made, it is shocking how individuals can get access to 7kg of

cyanide, a chemical supposedly tightly controlled in Zimbabwe.

Wildlife conservationists working in Victoria Falls said that much amount of cyanide was enough to kill hundreds of elephants in Hwange National Park, the country's largest game reserve holding half of the estimated 80 000 elephant herd here.

At least 15g of the poison will be enough to kill an adult 6 tonne elephant, according to Dr Kathryn Harkup, a UK chemist and freelance science communicator. That means with 7kg, the poachers could have easily laid to waste over 450 elephants.

It cannot be said enough Zimbabwean authorities need to do more against poaching, but they must now also begin to tightly monitor the movement of cyanide as well as root out corruption from the law system.

In September, renowned conservationist and Zimbabwe's rhino ambassador Charlene Hewat expressed disappointment that "poachers are caught and are let off on a very small bail." "The key to putting a stop to poaching is to make sure that our laws are enforced and that poachers do not get the bail that is the current trend," Hewat fumed after seeing two suspected poachers in Victoria Falls released on \$200 bail.

Wildlife trafficking is now a multi-billion dollar industry. Worldwide, \$10 billion worth of wildlife and wildlife products are traded illegally each year. The major source markets of illegal ivory in Africa are South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania.

Poaching is also rife in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Uganda and in other African countries in the north and west.

In 2013, over 20 000 African elephants were killed illegally for their ivory, according to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The figure was a decline on 2011 and 2012 poaching levels, but remains unsustainably high.

Legal ivory trade is strongly controlled by the CITES. But over 500kg of ivory meant for the black market were seized before they left the continent last year

CITES blames the high poaching incidents in Africa to poverty and weak governance structures.

In most African countries, weak funding from central governments has left multi-national donors and private individuals having to dig deeper into their own pockets to combat poaching.

Here, over US\$750 000 has this year been poured by donors towards rhino and elephant conservation.

The 2014 National Budget transferred twice that much money to the Parks and Wildlife Authority, primarily to finance the purchase of vehicles for anti-poaching activities. That money is insufficient in an industry controlled by wealthy, organised and powerful thieves.

JOHN HUME

While in South Africa recently I visited a rancher, John Hume, on his rhino farm. This was an experience as John (an ex-Zimbabwean) has over 1000 rhino in large paddocks under tight security on his ranch – a stocking ratio of about one rhino to 9 hectares. It was quite something to drive around and see rhino everywhere, like cattle! They are nearly all white rhino - he only has a few black rhino due to space and habitat restrictions. He also has a rhino orphanage which currently houses 23 orphans, all undergoing various stages of rehabilitation into the wild.

John's rhino program, which represents just under 5% of the world's white rhino population, is very complex and expensive, with all the rhino receiving supplementary feeding, under an intense monitoring system. There is a full time veterinary team employed, who also undertake de-horning of the rhino (it takes about 3 years for the horn to regrow) The average cow reproduces every 30 months, and John has close to 400 breeding females.

John has instituted a genetical cross breeding exercise with his rhino to secure as much of a broad genetic base as possible, which will ensure the continued survival of the rhino from what was originally a narrow genetic base. To this end he has brought in rhino from all corners of South Africa.

However, to maintain such a large population of rhino is expensive- John spends over \$ 400,000 per annum on security alone! John's argument is that he should be allowed to sell the rhino horn he harvests to pay for the upkeep and development of the rhino and of the sanctuary. Should the day come when the program gets too expensive to maintain, then what?

This comes back to the arguments for and against trade in horn. There is a lot of emotion involved, but not always practical reality. The anti-trade lobby tend to be strong on vocal and emotional arguments, but short on practical solutions to conserve the rhino. It is the guys like John on the ground who are actually saving the rhino, and who need a solution to help them in their efforts.

I have attached a missive from John's wife, Albina Hume, which she addressed to Sir Richard Branson, but which I feel puts across very clearly one side of the argument:

“Dear Sir [Richard Branson](#),

As the wife of the biggest private rhino breeder in the world, John Hume, who bred over 700 rhinos in the past 20 years, I feel that you have been simply misled with this whole rhino poaching crisis. Rhino horn is a renewable product, it grows back just like the wool on the sheep.

By continuing banning trade in rhino horn, which been in place for over 37 years and failed to save the rhino, we are heading towards rhino extinction. The ban on trade in rhino horn has only provided monopoly for criminals, who trade in rhino

by killing the rhino. To understand the cause of rhino poaching crisis we have to understand that it's not the demand for horn that kills the rhino but the method the demand is supplied. Illegal trade in rhino horn kills the rhino when legal trade offers supply of horn where rhino stays alive, breed more rhinos while horn grows back. To trim the horn is a 10 minutes safe procedure for the rhino. We trimmed over 1000 horns which kept our rhinos safe from poaching for 5 years during rhino wars. The tragedy is that while our legal horn is kept in banks not allowed to be traded, the wild rhinos keep losing lives to the criminals. It's time to address demand for horn via changing the law, which currently bans trade in rhino horn. As we know, prohibitions are not the ultimate form of regulation; in fact they create perfect conditions for illegal trade where the horn is taken with the rhino's life. It's time to stop the war on trade in rhino horn and legally manage the trade. After all, there is a demand for rhino horn not rhino life. Horn grows back- poached rhino gone forever”.

Food for thought!!



A typical scene on Johns ranch – note the thorn bush scrub in which they thrive. Also the adult cow has her horn re-growing after obviously being dehorned previously.

BUBYE RIVER CONSERVANCY

In early October I spent a week at the Buby River Conservancy (BRC). This Conservancy has got to be one of the greatest and most successful wildlife conservation programs in Africa. Years ago, in the mid 90's, Charles Davy had the vision and guts, and with the aid of international investors, to take what was an old cattle ranch "Liebigs Ranching", get rid of the cattle, erect a 240km double game fence around the 350,000 hectare property, and develop it into one of the finest game areas in Zimbabwe.

The BRC is typical lowveld, with a wide variety of landscapes and vegetation. The Ripple Creek section has beautiful kopjes, with roads winding between them. Here are klipspringer, kudu and the black eagles. The rest of the conservancy is mainly flat, with rocky outcrops. It is intersected by typical African sand rivers, with reedbeds and pools in the sand. There are several impressive big dams, with good bass fishing, and fantastic bird life. Scattered around the property are nine well constructed, luxury camps, primarily for hunting clients. One really gets that "bushveld" feeling here!!

Today, the BRC has about 14,000 zebra. 12,000 wildebeest, countless thousands of impala, several thousand each of waterbuck, buffalo, giraffe, eland, and kudu, plus populations of elephant, nyala, sable, bushbuck, klipspringer, etc. It has a large predator population – lions (It apparently has more lions than Hwange National Park), leopard, wilddogs and both hyena. It also has the largest Black Rhino population in Zimbabwe, which is increasing yearly, and a good population of white rhino.

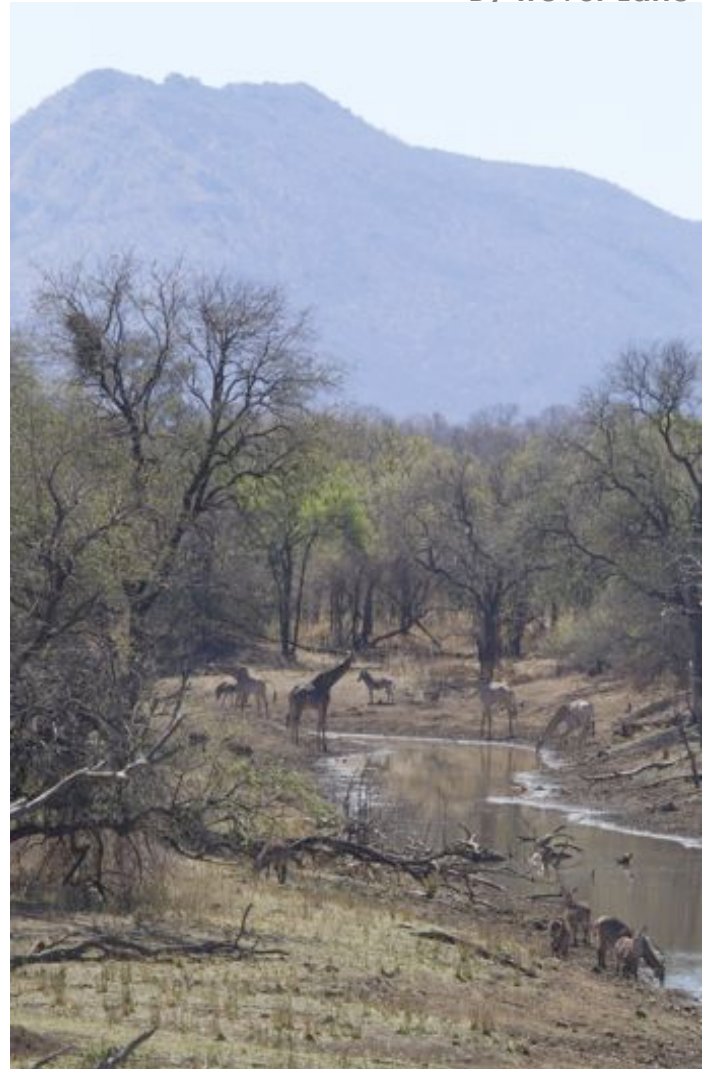
The BRC has been managed from its inception by Blondie Leathem, an old Parks veteran, and it stands as a shining example of how to manage a large conservation area. Water is well spread over the conservancy, from rivers such as the Buby to large dams, and to a unique piped water system with evenly dispersed troughs which work on an innovative pressure gauge/ ball valve system to keep the troughs full at all times. This wide spread of water also gives a wide spread of game.

Anti-poaching is obviously a high priority and is very well organized. Several rhino poaching gangs, including those sponsored by the notorious Roos from Messina, have tried their luck, but they have generally left the BRC in body bags! When one considers the area to be protected, the boundaries to be patrolled and the limited staff, the success of the APU and the failure of the poachers is remarkable. No doubt more will try, but they are faced by a highly motivated anti-poaching unit, ably led by Norman English (ex-warden of Sinamatella).

Without getting involved in any debate on hunting or otherwise, the fact is that this wildlife gem is funded entirely by hunting, and without any hunting revenue to cover costs, it is doubtful whether the investors would be willing to dig deep into their pockets to keep it going. The cost of protecting the rhino population alone is considerable, and this is all funded through hunting revenues.



Nyathi Dam, with Mt Towla in the background



Nengo Dam – Mt Towla towering behind.

Nyathi Dam – a birders paradise!





Nengo Camp – you watch a constant stream of game drinking at the dam





The Ripple Creek section of the Conservancy – stunning beautiful country



COMMENT

I have just had sight of the hunting quota's set for the Gwayi/Shangani area. This is an area I know well and was involved with in the 80's and 90's, when they were declared as a conservancy, and the wildlife protected therein.

The quotas I have seen (as published by Ian Games so I am assuming they are correct) are:

Buffalo.	149
Sable.	80
Elephant	79
Eland.	76
Kudu.	150
Leopard.	25
Zebra.	60

This would suggest populations of about 10,000 buffalo, 8,000 sable, 16,000 elephant, 5,000 eland, 10,000 kudu and 3,000 zebra! This would give a density of over 50 animals per square kilometer, which would make it the finest game area in Africa (and far superior to Hwange National Park)! However this is unfortunately far from the truth, and in some cases I think the numbers on quotas exceed the actual physical populations of the species on the ground for the whole area! The area is very depleted from what it used to be, from over hunting and lack of protection - the one new landowner, when caught poaching in the Zambezi National Park frankly admitted to me that his property in the Gwayi did not have a living animal left on it and hence he needed to hunt (legally or illegally!) on Parks estate. This leads to the question of how these unbelievable quota's came to be, and there can only be three possible options:

- 1) the ecologist responsible was smoking some good stuff!!
- 2) Ian Games got the population figure mixed up with the quota figure!
- 3) these quotas were not set for hunting only on the Gwayi/Shangani but for an ulterior motive - they were used for a cover for animals shot elsewhere, especially when the so-called ration hunts were taking place on Parks estates. The stopping of ration hunting on Parks estate has certainly put the brakes on this little scheme.

It might be time to stop all hunting on private land in Mat North until this whole corrupt mess has been sorted out, with proper wildlife assessments put in place, including an analysis of what the new landowner has done to protect and enhance his wildlife populations, and to put in place proper quotas

As a matter of interest, the elephant quotas issued for the whole of Matabeleland north would suggest that Parks estimate of the elephant population stands at over 400,000 ele's, although in all fairness the animals allocated in communal areas are not necessarily trophy animals.

The articles on Bulye River Conservancy and John Hume highlight probably the two most successful rhino conservation programs in Zimbabwe and South Africa, and the common factor is that they are both privately initiated and funded and they do not get any assistance from any outside source. This brings to question the practical reality of saving the rhino when brought down to hard facts as opposed to emotional outpourings often put forward. I do not know what the solution is, but I do believe in putting your money where your mouth is!

The wildlife gem that is the BRC is funded entirely by hunting, and without any hunting revenue to cover costs, it is doubtful whether the investors would be willing to dig deep into their pockets to keep it going. The cost of protecting the rhino population alone is considerable, and this is all funded through hunting revenues

While I understand the sentiments of the anti-hunting groups, I do believe in Africa's harsh reality, hunting has its part to play. When I established and ran the Wildlife Unit of Forestry Commission we operated on the basis of "use it or lose it", and successfully built up some fantastic wildlife areas on funding from hunting. I feel the ban on hunting in Botswana will be responsible for the elimination of more animals than it will ever save - what the anti-hunting lobby do not seem to understand is that there are large areas of Botswana such as Tamafupa or Bottle Pan which are totally not suited to photographic operations as they are largely teak forest with odd pans - you do not have teeming herds and photo opportunities such as the Delta. These pans have been pumped for years by hunting operators, and this has allowed territorial species such as sable to establish populations. Suddenly removing the water by the withdrawal of hunting operators will condemn these populations to a bleak future and no doubt they will die off in a very miserable fashion. The future of this land as wildlife land is now in doubt as it is now worthless from a wildlife point of view. The land is currently abandoned (which the Zambian elephant poachers have discovered!), and it might eventually be turned over to cattle ranching.

The arguments are also raging back and forth on the sale of rhino horn. There is some fine work been done to tackle the trade issues in Vietnam and China, but the reality is that the poaching pressure is relentless, the demand insatiable, and much funding is required to tackle the protection issues on the ground. The big question is where is the funding to come from? A carefully monitored program of sale of horn on a sustainable basis would provide sufficient funding to ensure the continued survival of the rhino. The argument that the legal sale of horn will increase demand holds no water - the demand already exceeds the horn that could be supplied by the existing rhino population! To me, the main worry would be the channelling of illegal horn into the system, but careful monitoring should keep this in check. The big proviso should be all funds raised from sale of horn is directed into rhino conservation (though in reality this could be difficult to monitor). If activists can come up with an alternative funding option to save the rhino, and produce the funding required, then all parties would be happy!!

GRATEFUL THANKS

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

This month, we have had support from:

Minister Saviour Kasukuwere in our anti-poaching efforts

Nicholas Duncan and the SAVE The African Rhino Foundation

Barbara Ball and Clidder Mining

RAM Petroleum

Redan Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin

Makomo Mine

Ian Thomson – satellite phone and an offer of further assistance

Richard Jones (UK) – donation

Mike Bromwich - donation

Dr Frank Zindel – of Switzerland. Frank is President of the Turtle Foundation and has given a very generous donation, which has enabled us to put an all weather road into the Chamabonda, plus we hope to be building the dam with this donation. Frank has also given a considerable donation to Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit.

Stuart and Sue Danks (Simply Africa) – for facilitating the donation from Frank Zindel

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

NOTE

Mike Bromwich has produced a very comprehensive book on the history of National Parks – Rhodesia and Zimbabwe- from 1928 to 1990. A must for anyone interested in the history of our Parks. Anyone interested in the book can go into his website “www.bromwich.uk.com” where you can preview and order a copy.

Congratulations to Mike for a lot of hard work to record a vital part of our history and the history of wildlife conservation in Zimbabwe.

