



FEBRUARY 2016 NEWSLETTER

Some good news - we have had a couple of terrific storms in Victoria Falls resulting in several billboards being completely blown over - we need a few more of these storms to get rid of all these eyesores!!!

In the last few days of February, we had some relief - overcast days and steady drizzling rain, widespread over the country. All the local rivers were flowing, with water standing around. However, this is only a temporary respite, as the drought still looms large!! Before these current rains, Robins was reporting that it was very dry and the waterhole situation was bleak - the rains have given us a bit of extra time to try and get some pumps in before the drought really bites! Extra waterholes will spread the elephant population, and thus ease the pressure on food stocks around existing water points.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

I found a young elephant bull that had died in the Park, obviously after a desperate struggle. I do not think it was poached as it had been with a big herd, which by the signs had moved on quietly, although there is a possibility it was lagging behind the herd, but the ivory was very small, and still there. You can see in the photo the struggle by the poor animal to get up - it has gone round and round in the Kalahari sands kicking up a circular wall on the periphery, in an attempt to get up. There was no sign of fighting, but I assume it had a damaged shoulder which prevented it from getting up - reason unknown! Another possibility advanced was that it had a blocked digestive system from ingesting plastic (several elephant have dies from this here) and was rolling around in absolute agony, unable to stand! I will go back when the carcass has dried out to see if I can find out anything more.



The elephants AGAIN crossed the trench and broke our pump head off at Timots! Again we repaired it and have now covered it with concrete slabs and blocks!!

After experiencing problems at No 3 with the controller, we now have all the pumps working throughout the Chamabonda system. The effects of the second pump at No 1 water point are already noticeable - the pan is as full as I have ever seen it and expanding.

In the Chamabonda Vlei, the grass has responded well to the late rains and high temperatures, and has grown very quickly. The game has largely moved off the vlei, which it always does at this time. Even with the looming drought we will not have a problem in the Zambezi National Park this year - there is good water and plentiful food. Overall in February we recorded 94 mm rain in the vlei, bringing the total so far to 315mm for the season - about half the annual normal with 6 weeks to go to the end of the season.

The first sable calves were seen this month - unfortunately did not manage to get a snap of them

KAZUMA PAN NATIONAL PARK



Early in the month I took a flight over the Kazuma Pan area, thanks to Mike Johnson. They have had good rain there and the pans in the mopane fringe were all full, with some water in the depression.

I then took a drive out to Kazuma - it was very wet so we had to deviate and could only reach Kazuma Pan itself in the time frame available. We checked out the pump - working well and has sucked about 5 m of loose silt out the borehole, so we will add extra piping to lower the pump again on our next trip. The pan had filled up - a combination of rain water and pumped water - and is looking great.

The Depression was green and lush, with many small pans holding water, and the birdlife is fantastic.

Kazuma Pan - Clive Butler who was helping with pulling and checking the pump





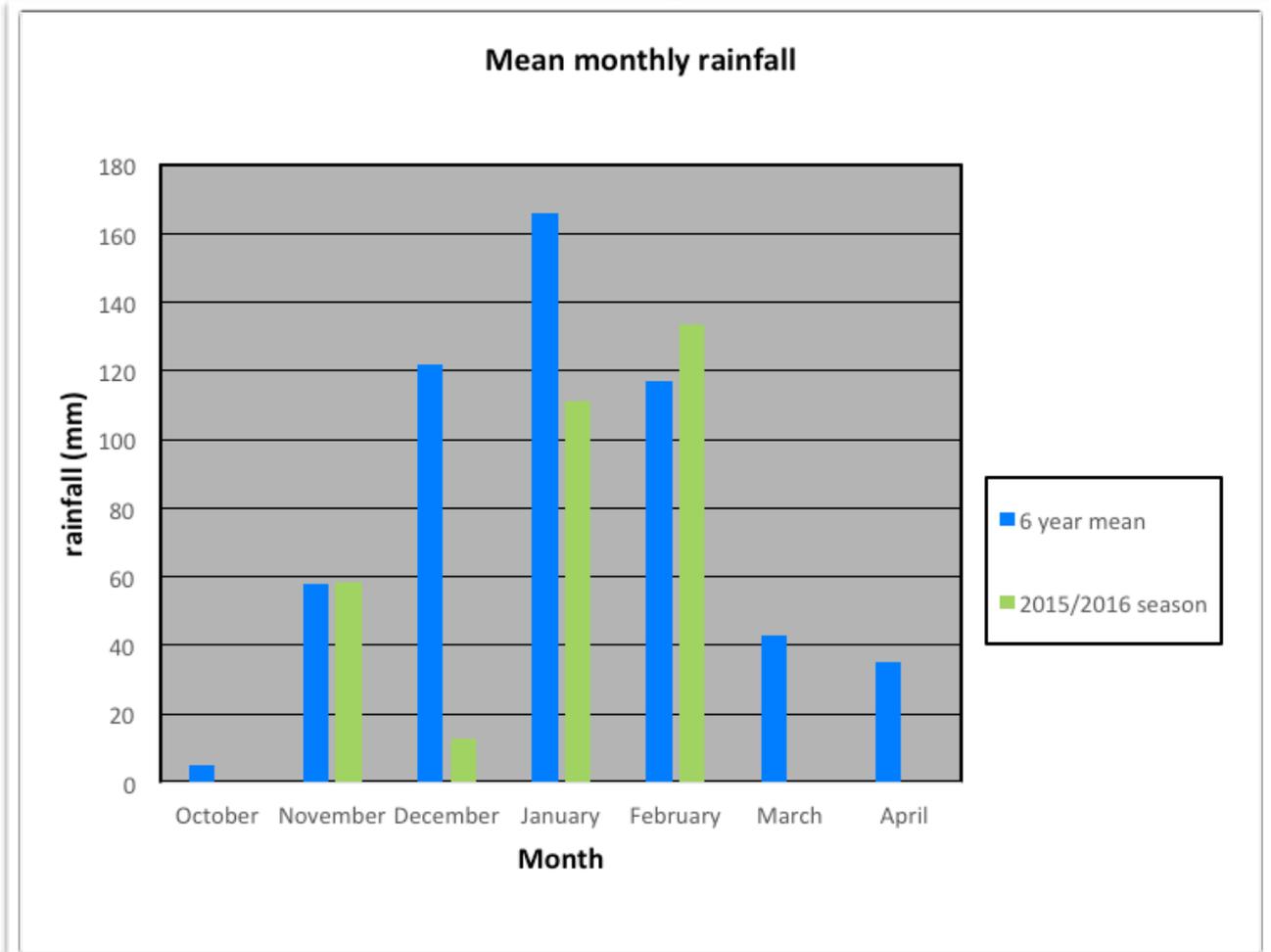
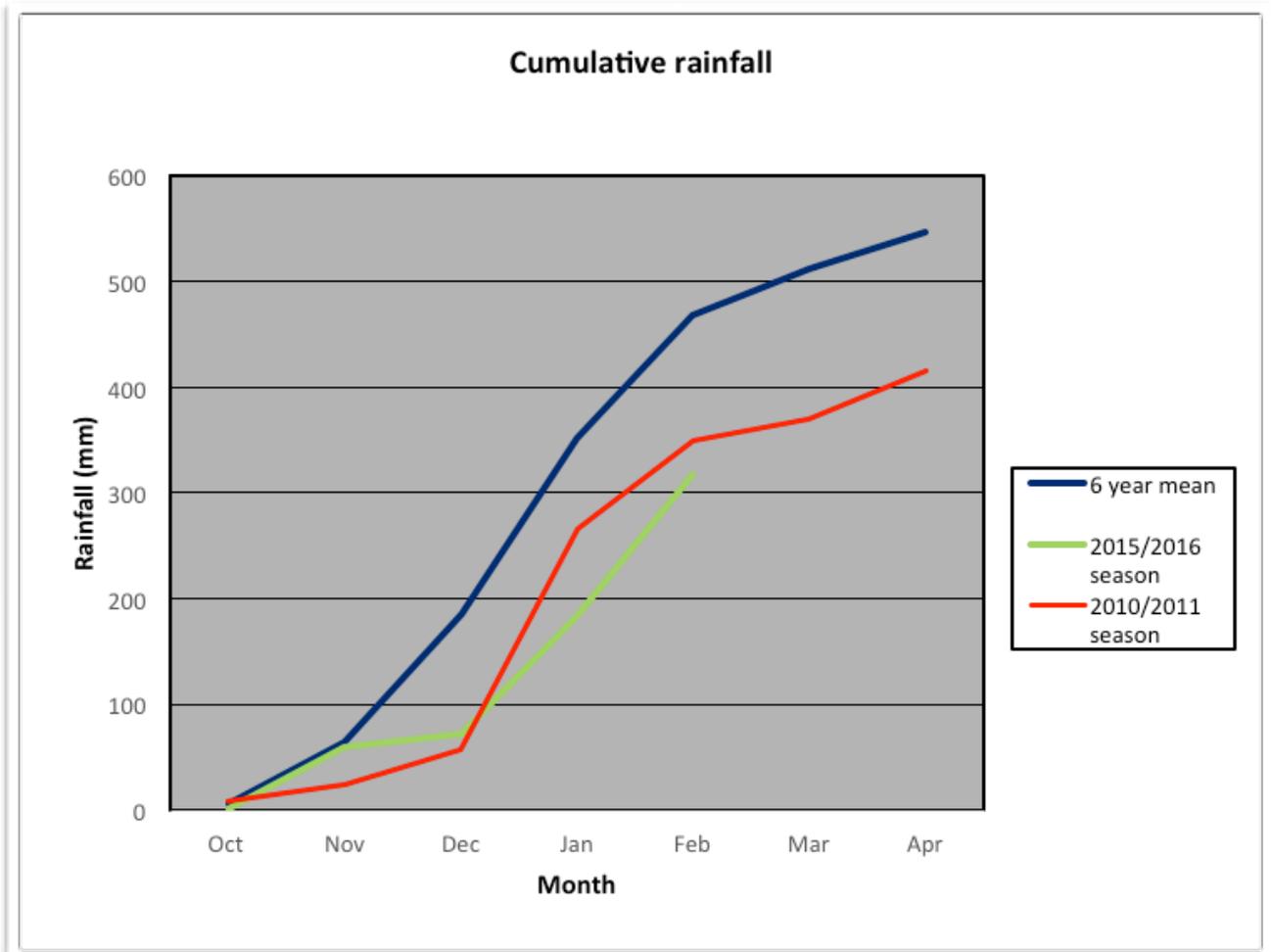
SINAMATELLA

Report by Stephen Long

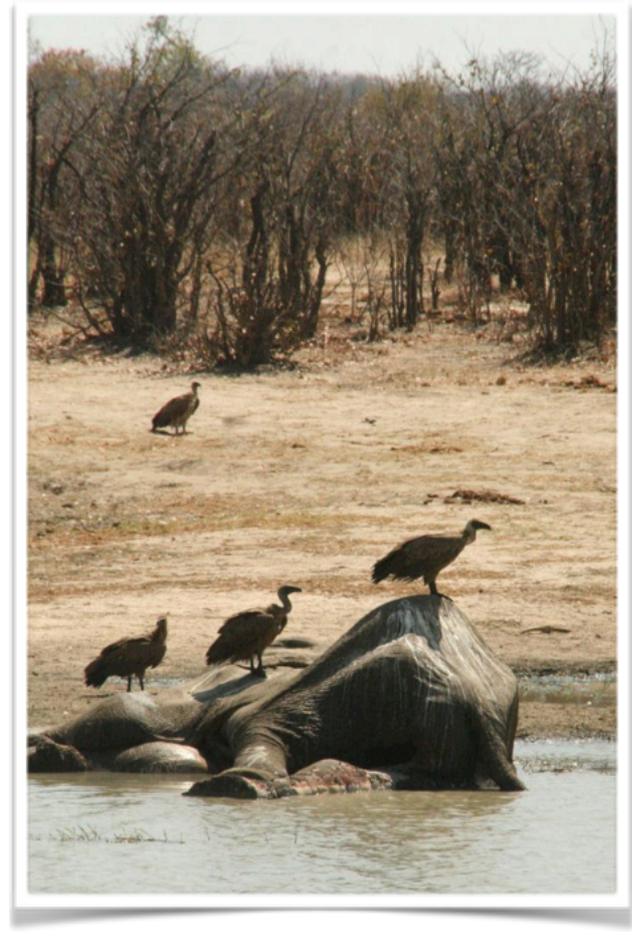
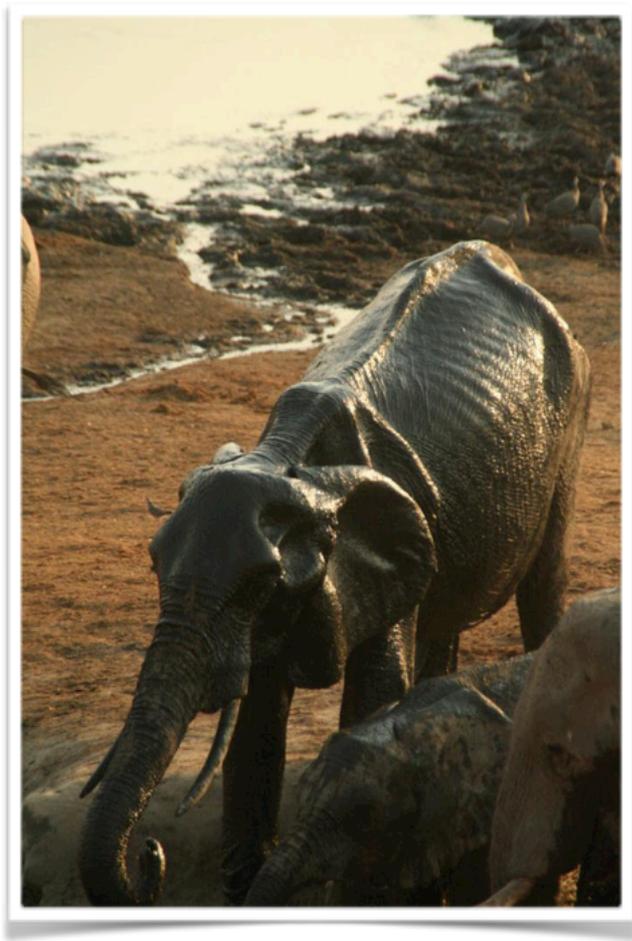
Game water

For most of February the rainfall figures were terrible but in the last few days of the month we finally got some rain, including the heaviest for a single day of the season so far (65mm on the 26th), and we finished with an above average score for the month of 133,5mm.

I wrote in January that the grass was growing and that superficially the Park looked wonderful but the underlying truth was shown up by the rainfall graphs. This still holds true.....



Our rainfall remains below the worst season we have seen since we came to Sinamatella seven years ago and although the Park looks green, the grass growth is probably as far below average as the rainfall - and that is where the problem will be. Here are some scenes from 2011/2012 when we had the second of two poor seasons in a row and animals were starving to death at the water points.....





It may be that this year will not be so bad but for now we must assume that it will be as bad, possibly worse. I doubt that we can do enough to keep the death toll to zero but if we are at least to keep the losses to a minimum, we desperately need help. We have had a very generous response to Trevor's appeals for donations towards pumps for Robins but we are now in urgent need of help with everyday running expenses. The more pumps we install and the more assistance to Parks that we take on, the greater our costs are - and currently our costs are over-running our tiny budget and we are struggling. I spend a great deal of time juggling our limited resources to cover the most urgent of a multitude of small problems - from buying engine oil to getting new pipe fittings and employing people to do the work. I try to manage it all but for once I'm not shy to simply ask - help!

For now though, we are coping and the game water situation looks good. I have not been able to get to all the water points since the heavy rain fell last week so some of the following may be out of date but here is our current situation....

Baobab Pan. Pump running, the pan is full and spilling.

Bumboosie South. The pan is 80% full but there are still problems with the level of underground water and the pump is switched off.

Inyantue Dam. Pump running, the dam is 50% full.

Inyantue vlei. Pump running, the pan is full.

Mashambo Pan. The pan is full and spilling and the pump is turned off for now.

Masuma Dam. The dam is full and spilling and we have stopped pumping. The upper dam wall has been repaired and the dam is filling.

Mbala dam. The dam is full and spilling and the pump is turned off until the level drops.

Shumba Pan. Both pumps running. The pan is full.



Tidying up at Shumba - note how poor the grass growth is!

Tshompani Dam. The dam is 30% full. Both pumps are in working order but the solar pump is switched off in the hope that the water level in the borehole will increase.

During February we continued improving the game water infrastructure and we had a very busy month. Amongst other

things, we, repaired elephant damage at Mbala, completed repairs to the wind pump tower at Tshompani, tidied up and removed old equipment at Shumba, bricked over exposed pipes at Baobab and repaired the upper dam wall and a broken pipe at Masuma. One excellent piece of news to come out of that - while we had all the pipes out of the borehole at Masuma, I was able to check the level of the water table and I found that it was unchanged from the last check in October last year, in spite of the fact that we have been pumping 24 hours a day with a BH50 pump ever since then. I had expected that the level would be significantly down - what a pleasure (in this case anyway) to be wrong.

Miscellaneous

The heavy rain towards the end of February was great for the Park but not so good for the Rangers out on patrol or, as it turned out, for our driver, Abednico "Tshuks" Tshuma. Returning from helping Camp Hwange with their borehole, he found that the Sinamatella river had risen and flooded the main road at Impala Vlei. He was driving the Hilux which is a little temperamental when it comes to selecting 4-wheel drive but as the vehicle is usually very good in soft conditions, he drove into the water without worry. The flood was fairly shallow but for some reason the Hilux wouldn't grip so Tshuks got out, locked the hubs and tried to engage 4-wheel drive. True to form, the gearbox wouldn't play along and it stuck in neutral. What to do now? Well, the sensible thing was to wait for help so Tshuks covered himself with a plastic sheet (the Hilux has no roof) and settled down to wait. Sadly, his wife assumed he had stayed at Camp Hwange so she didn't report him missing and it was late in the day so no other vehicles came along and he ended up spending the whole night huddled in the car with the flood rising until it eventually came over the bonnet and threatened to sweep the car off down the vlei. Early next morning, cold, tired, wet and mosquito eaten, he walked to Camp and Nick went out to tow the Hilux in. We spent a day drying it all out (there was a bucket and a half of water in the fuel tank alone) and it is back in action now though still with an electrical problem to be solved.

The heavy rain also caused us considerable discomfort at the camp as it knocked out the electricity supply for almost a week. We lost whatever contents of our freezer we were unable to eat in time but, as usual, bad news for someone is good news for someone else and the hyenas were so grateful that one of them came right up to us one evening on the veranda - presumably to say thank you. We are used to hearing and occasionally seeing the hyenas pass by along the top of the hill but I have to say that it was a little alarming having one join us at the dining table. Luckily we had already finished the meal and after staring at us for a few moments, he/she ambled off!

My newsletters usually end with some dire transport news or other. This time, to be different, we'll end with the sports news. Sinamatella has long been known for its unsuccessful sports teams (with the honourable exception of the formidable ladies netball team). This seems to be about to change. The football team is under new management with the above mentioned Tshuks Tshuma taking over the coaching role. In mid February they played a home match against old rivals Robins Camp. The afternoon started badly. Sinamatella's goalkeeper was pronounced injured before the match and the reserve goalkeeper was then also declared unfit, having apparently started the victory celebrations an hour or two early. A volunteer was called for and the match started. At half time the score was one-all but Sinamatella was clearly the better team. In the second half, Sinamatella had numerous chances to go ahead but there was no further score until a Robins mid-fielder hopefully punted the ball upfield. It should have been an easy collect for the 'keeper but, in front of the home fans at the water tanks end he flapped feebly at it and knocked it straight to an unmarked Robins player who duly scored. The crowd's reaction was colourful - in a variety of languages, including English (I was there) but the team responded well and dominated the rest of the match, scoring once and leaving the pitch at the end much the happier team. The point of all this football commentary? Well from time to time at Sinamatella's home matches, play has to be suspended while the ball is re-inflated or (worse still) repaired. Would anyone care to sponsor a new ball?

Report by Nick Long

RHINO MONITORING FEBRUARY 2016 NEWSLETTER

We started out the month with the aim to try and locate some of the known rhino as they were no longer being seen where they were last year. We did not manage to achieve this goal due to several factors. Firstly there was the usual problem of a shortage of manpower - but hopefully this will be finally resolved as we were joined by the ecologist on our last patrol and he has seen personally the difficulties we face. Secondly we have received a lot of rain this month and quite a bit of it found us on patrol, on one particular local patrol 65mm fell on us and the funny thing is you start off avoiding the puddles but later you just walk straight through as if they don't exist. Once you are soaked, it's no real problem getting soaked a bit more.

Out of the two 10 day patrols we conducted one based out in the IPZ and one doing locals from camp. During our first patrol we managed to get a visual on a clean animal which we think is the same as we had already caught on camera trap. We found its spoor along the a river and tracked it for approximately 4km before we located it in a thick Mopane and Diospyros clump with the wind blowing round in circles. When we managed to find a good spot to view it we took it in turns to go and see it but it somehow picked up our presence and ran from us. We did however get some photos. The question that now remains is what sex is this animal because it has been thought to be a male but on the day we tracked it, it did not scrape any of its dung and did not show any signs of territorial marking. It is possible that it could be too young or that it might be a female, we hope to answer this question in the coming month's patrols.



Right ear clearly without any ear notches



The left ear also clearly showing no notches.

No other rhino activity was recorded by the team although we received reports of spoor at two other sites, one being very interesting as this could be long lost 345 which has not been seen for some time but was still thought to be alive as no carcass had

been reported. We look forward to going out to the above mentioned area on our next patrol to see if we can locate this animal.

One morning during the month we went to go and tow Tshuma and the Hilux back to camp as he had got stuck in the Sinamatella Vlei on his way back to camp from some game water work. On his way walking back to camp he had passed a lion by the side of the road and it was still there when we went to rescue the vehicle, it did not look like it was very healthy and I suspect it has died by now.

The sick lion mentioned above



During the next month's patrols we hope to try a different approach to trying to locate the rhino by travelling light, leaving the car and patrolling on foot for a few days deep in areas where the usual anti-poaching patrols don't reach as there is now a plentiful supply of fresh drinking water. We also will try to go to look again for number 345 whose possible spoor was recorded by the call sign last deployed in the area where he used to live.

POACHING

The poacher arrested for possession of a .30 06 rifle last month received 18 months with labour

A Zambian was arrested by locals in Jambezi with 25 .375 rounds - his two companions, one with the rifle, managed to escape. However, there was a twist in the tale - their bodies were later found floating in the Zambezi River near Deka It appears they drowned obviously trying to get back to Zambia, and parts of them had been devoured. They were given a paupers burial - justice was served!

An elephant was poached in the Zambezi National Park, by a known poacher. This poacher normally shoots for meat - having shot hippo and buffalo before, and his trademark was visible here as villagers from Zambia came over and took meat from the carcass, plus some skin. With him now having some ivory might change his *modus operandii* into commercial elephant poaching!!



In mid-February, a Zambian poacher was killed in the Matetsi area. Two shots were reported early one morning to a unit manager, who reported on to Parks and they immediately reacted, deploying patrol sticks in the area. Two more shots were then heard later in the morning, and a stick going to investigate found a dead elephant still with its tusks intact. They showed great presence by going into ambush, and soon three Zambians showed up. They opened fire and killed the gunner, but the other two escaped. Recovered was the body, a .375 rifle, 13 rounds and two cell phones. It appears this is the hit and run type tactic now used by the Zambians, where they come in small groups, shoot an elephant, cut out the ivory and head straight back to the river. The two cell phones give invaluable information and will have all their contacts in them, though the Zambian authorities will as usual do nothing! It now turns out that the poacher worked for a well known Zambian Lodge on the river, and the lodge manager phoned the Zimbabwe unit manager to complain about shooting him - the reply was very short and to the point! The Parks rangers involved in the shooting were rewarded for their actions.

There have also been a couple of incidents towards the end of the month of shots fired on an island near a Zimbabwean camp. In the latest incident, the camp staff could hear the sounds of an elephant dying in agony. Parks and VFAPU reacted immediately but were unable to find anything due to the high, thick reeds on the island (a drone would have resolved this!). We know there is a Zambian poacher who operates on this section of river, and Parks will get him one of these days!

Another problem we have with the Zambians is illegal netting of fish. The nets are of nylon with a very small mesh - nothing escapes! The nylon is also indestructible and is a major pollutant when the nets get snagged in the river. This month, 300 meters of net was pulled out of the Zambezi River in the Zambezi National Park by a local fisherman, Joe Rainsford, in a boat. The Zambian fish poachers escaped inland - Parks and VFAPU reacted but without any luck. Joe also assisted Parks to pull out nearly 3km of Zambian nets in the Kazungula sector of the river. It is great to see how everyone is pulling together with Parks in the Victoria Falls area to fight the scourge of poaching!

Lower down the Zambezi at Msuna it is both Zambians and Zimbabweans illegally netting the river. National Parks conducted a raid and pulled over 60 illegal nets out the river



Msuna - illegal nylon nets, burning them, caught in the nets!



COMMENTS

With a drought looming and with the possibility of lots of elephants dying of poverty within Hwange National Park, it was a good time to re-read Prof John Hanks' book "The Struggle for Survival - The Elephant Problem" from 1979. The Professor had a great insight into the whole elephant issue, and the book is well worth a read to anyone trying to understand the complexities of the elephant problems we are facing today. To quote:

" In the days of plenty the African elephant roamed at will: home was the vast continent and he trumpeted his ownership to endless blue skies. His bounty was boundless and undisputed.

Today, disinherited and confined by man, the legacy's been limited. The extravagant and wasteful feeding habits acquired in antiquity now threaten not only the elephant's own survival, but that of the other indigenous fauna and flora within the very sanctuaries set aside for protection. The days of plenty are over, and for his captors now the dilemma is : "to cull or not to cull?""

I think this is a wonderful summation! However, in the last 35 years the world has changed and the possibility of culling no longer really exists, for two main reasons - the expertise is no longer easily available, but this could be overcome, but mainly the unprecedented power of the social media would condemn any cull, and anyone or organisation involved in it, no matter how sound or essential the principle behind it might be.

Over the last few decades, the massive human population growth in Zimbabwe (estimated population in 1960 about 3 million to today's 15 million) has generally compressed the elephants into more and more confined areas, mainly national parks or safari areas. This has led to large elephant populations in small areas, and with this are the associated problems. What to do about the Hwange elephant population though remains open to debate. Many of the old boreholes in Hwange

are not functional, and have not been for years. Between Friends of Hwange and Bhejane Trust, we have or are in the process of restoring many of these waterpoints by equipping them with solar pumps - this will open up more of the remoter areas of the Park in the dry season and hopefully spread the elephant population out more, thus taking some pressure off the existing waterpoints. However, I fear this is just delaying the inevitable and is buying a few years grace period.

Prof Hanks showed great understanding and foresight in his book of all the problems facing the survival of elephant (which are even more relevant today 35 years or so later). His one statement ” **as unpalatable as it may appear, elephants will have to justify their existence by the money they earn from tourism, hunting and sustained yield meat production - there is no realistic alternative**” sums up the situation we are facing now (though meat culling is no longer an option) “**While the economic value of wildlife is now widely accepted in Africa, the ecological value is probably even more important as a justification for conservation, but the benefits are often indirect, and, as they have no immediate economic value, they receive little publicity and are poorly understood**”

I rest my case!!

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.

Mark Unwin and the Clarkson Jersey Charitable Trust

Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert and Le Pal Nature Foundation for another pump this time for Deteema dam in the Robins area

RAM Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin – for continued, invaluable support, including rangers rations. Patrick has now supplied funds towards another water point.

Bud and Guy Cockcroft – donation of a solar unit in memory of their beloved Jane (RIP)

Chris Lampard – continuing invaluable support in the field

Piet and Anthea Erasmus - for their generous donation towards water in the Chamabonda

Makomo Mine – donation of diesel

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

Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert for four donated solar pump units for Sinamatella

Thor Thorsson– an intrepid traveller

Dave Carson and Camp Hwange for helping fund our Sinamatella Rhino Monitoring Unit and game water supplies.

Mike Johnson (Bayete lodge) for flight over Kazuma Pan

Jenny Preston of the Zimbabwe Wildlife Fund for a donation

The Area Managers and staff of Zambezi, Kazuma, Sinamatella and Robins, for all their support and assistance.

To all those who support and assist in many varied ways – thanks and appreciated. My apologies if I have inadvertently left anyone out!!!

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

DONATIONS

Bhejane Trust relies on donations to continue its operations, which includes our daily operating costs, as well as specific projects. As can be seen from Stephens plea, our operating costs have grown as we take on more and more, especially in the running of game waterpoints. We thus need funding in two spheres - capital projects (generally large donations to a specific project) and operating costs (smaller donations - they all help!!).

Projects we are concentrating on at the moment :

- . 1) Robins Camp – waterpoints – The Robins area has been neglected compared to Main Camp and Sinamatella and is in dire need of assistance in maintaining water supplies for the wildlife – the area is noted for its big buffalo herds, lions, roan, reedbuck and of course, elephant. The staff there are trying desperately to maintain the waterpoints, with old engines and diesel supply shortages, and we need to replace all the old diesels with solar pumps with a small generator back when required. The cost of a solar unit (non hybrid) is running at \$ 6000 per unit.

- . 2) Drone—we are looking to acquire a drone to monitor the Zambezi River for Zambian poaching (both fish and elephant poachers).
A drone would detect the mekoro's transporting the poachers and would allow a reaction unit to then position themselves to intercept the intruders. The cost of a drone is running at around \$ 3000.

DONATE

Donate to help us save our wildlife heritage - any donations would be gratefully accepted :

Please note : we are currently having a “Donate button” linked to our web site but are having technical difficulties in getting it to operate. This should be sorted out soon.

Bank details :

**Bhejane Trust,
FBC Bank,
Galleria Building, Parkway Victoria Falls
Zimbabwe
Branch Code : 8512
Swift Code : FBCPZWHAXXX**

Account No : 6145093780178

Bhejane Trust office address:

**231 Sopers Crescent,
P.O.Box 210
Victoria Falls
Zimbabwe**

CONTACT DETAILS

Trevor Lane:

trevor@bhejanetrust.org

+263 777 057 024

Stephen Long

stephen@bhejanetrust.org

