



# **MARCH 2016**

# **NEWSLETTER**

In early March the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) finally arrived, with overcast days and intermittent drizzle and driving rain. Although too late for agriculture, it is bringing great relief to the Parks, filling the pans and giving the vegetation the extra boost to get it through winter. It is however patchy, with some pans overflowing and a few kilometres away other pans are almost dry. We have almost gone from one extreme to the other, with the Zambezi River now rising quickly and all reports upstream point to at least a normal to above normal flood - the river is already 50% above last years levels. Kariba has risen from 12% to 21% utilisable water.

On March 13th, we had the tragic deaths of Claudio and Max Chiarelli while assisting Parks on deployments at Mana Pools. This field assistance program run by the Zambezi Society with volunteers putting in their time and vehicles to deploy Parks rangers had been working very successfully. This terrible mix up with the Chiarelli's happened while they were out to deploy a replacement Parks patrol stick. The statement by Parks on the incident read :  
"Over the past two days gun shots were heard in the Mana Pools area which led to the pair assisting the Authority with anti-poaching deployments. On the fateful late Sunday

afternoon, 13 March 2016, rangers who had since been on deployment pursuing the spoor of suspected poachers and were due for uplift came across a fresh fire place in dense vegetation, which they suspected to have been used by poachers. The rangers continued following the spoor of the poachers, they later saw movement in the thicket, heard voices and opened fire, accidentally shooting and killing the pair on the spot. Unbeknown to them these were fresh deployments who had come to replace the rangers and had stopped to attend to a mechanical problem”

This tragedy serves as a reminder that this war on poachers is deadly, and spare a thought for the rangers involved who were putting their lives at risk chasing armed poachers through dense bush in a tense situation where they could be ambushed at any minute. The rangers will be devastated by this terrible mix up.

Our deepest sympathies go out to the Chiarelli family on the loss of a father and son. They were two brave men who died trying to conserve out national wildlife heritage. We salute them!

A reaction in the aftermath was for Parks to temporarily suspend all assistance programs in all National Parks, so our operations were all halted. However, after a meeting with the Director General of Parks, we were given to all clear to continue, though we have voluntarily suspended rhino monitoring until the issues are cleared up

I had a very good meeting with the Director General of the Parks and Wildlife Authority, Edson Chidzia, and I thank him for taking the time to meet when he is obviously under pressure! We discussed all our operations to date, what we were currently undertaking, and what we hoped to achieve in the near future, and he assured me of his support and that of his department at all times. He also thanked us for all done to date.

We have had a fantastic response to our appeal for Robins game water requirements, with financing for 8 solar pumps on offer. We are working on the finalisation of these offers, but this will go a long way to recovering the Robins area and in spreading the elephant pressure, taking the strain off some of the Sinamatella points. We are currently checking out all the old boreholes and water points to assess their current status., and to prioritise pump installations.

## ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

The late rains have boosted the grass growth in the Chamabonda Vlei and the pans have filled up. Game viewing is difficult, with the game avoiding the longer grass, preferring the shorter grass of the basaltic areas.

The picture I posted last month of an elephant that died in extreme agony, spinning round and round creating a trench, has elicited some comments as to whether this was from plastic ingestion blocking the digestive system or not. However, one relevant point pointed out to me was the lack of any dung in the trough - an animal dying in such a fashion would normally defecate, and this animal had not, which would strongly indicate an obstipation i.e. plastic

blockage. This puts more emphasis on the urgent need to put a fence around the Victoria Falls Municipal rubbish dumps - a project which has been taken on by Environment Africa

The elephant that died in agony from suspected obstipation from plastic ingestion - no dung evident from dying stage



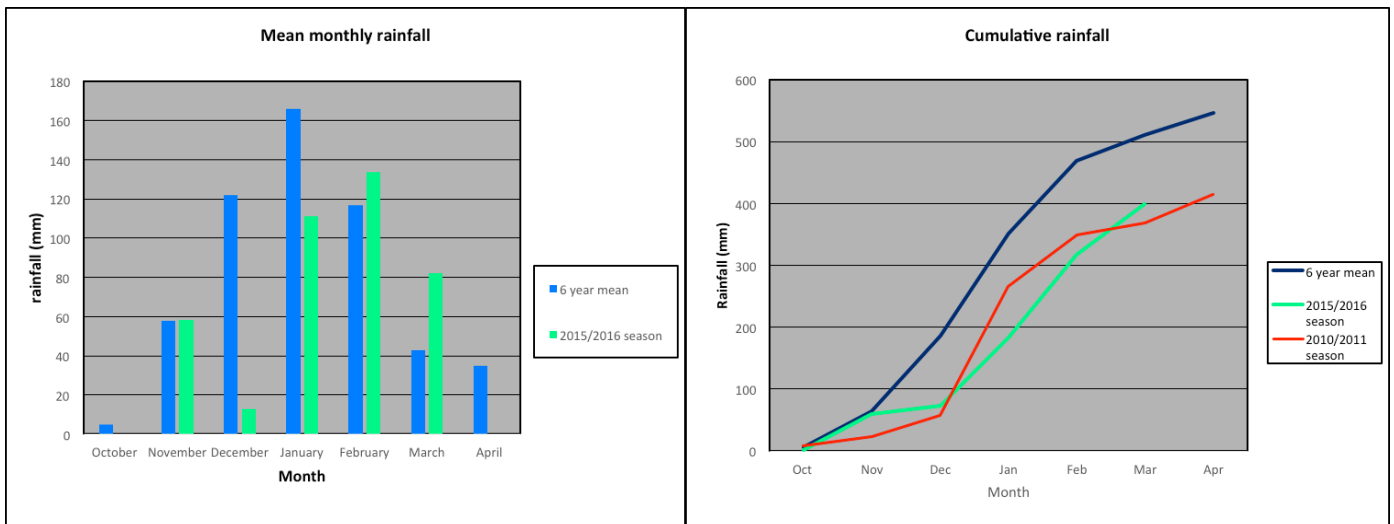
## SINAMATELLA

### Report from Stephen Long

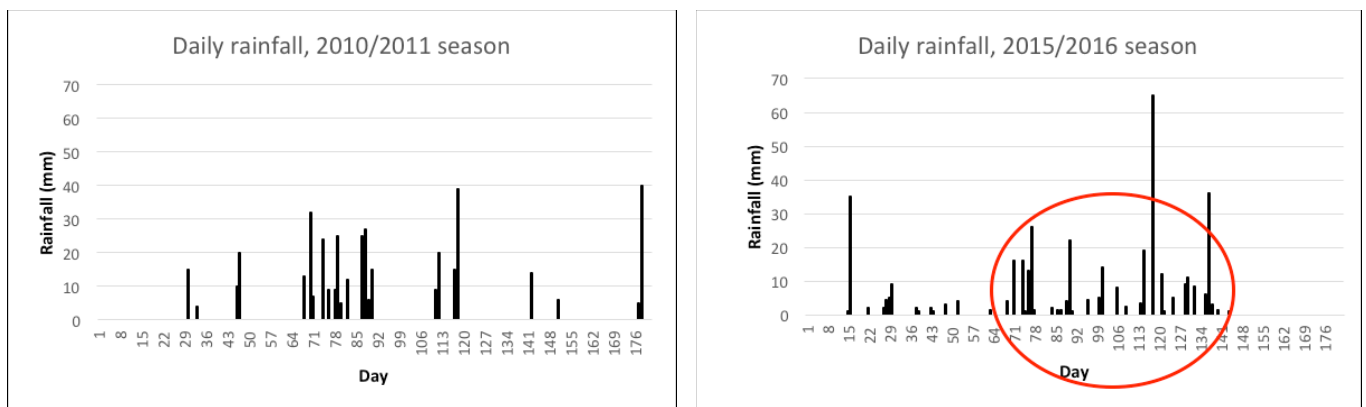
This was a very slow month at Sinamatella. In the wake of the tragic deaths of the Chiarellis at Mana Pools, all volunteer Parks assistance programmes, throughout the country were suspended, so we spent half of the month unable to work. The issue is being resolved though.

#### Rainfall.

March was the second consecutive month with above-average rainfall, thanks mainly to a fall of 36mm on the 16th which helped the total to 82mm for the month. The graphs show that we have now crept above the very bad 2011/2012 season but are still well below the recent average.



Interestingly though, there was phenomenal grass-growth in March and the Park is looking much better than would be expected. A comparison of the spread of the rainfall in 2011/2012 and the current season perhaps shows the reason....



This season, in the period shown by the red oval, between days 71 and 145 (mid-January to mid-March) the rainfall has not been heavy but there have been no lengthy dry spells and the ground has stayed wet enough for grass to grow. In 2011/2012 there was no such lengthy growth period and animals starved. Maybe we can hope, after all, for a reasonably good dry season this year.

#### Game water.

Early in the month we once again went to Masuma Dam to fix the dam wall. In February it was the upper dam that needed repair, in March, the main, lower dam looked as if it was in danger so we filled the potential breach with big rocks and covered it all over with soil. Within a week or so the dam level rose until it reached our repair and was (I'm relieved to say) held back, allowing the dam to reach its full mark for the first time in a while. The upper dam is also holding water so for now, Masuma is about as good as we can get it.

Continuing our aim of getting all the water points as tidy and elephant-proof as we can, we finished off the work at Shumba in March, covering all exposed pipes and cables with brick-work. The pan, like Masuma, is absolutely full.

### Miscellaneous.

Although we are in theory not allowed to operate at the moment, we have not been entirely idle. The state of our vehicles has long been a worry to me, so I'm very happy to report that all the vehicles were serviced in March and some of the various faults they have were solved. We were greatly helped in all this work by Clive Butler who came down from Victoria Falls on two occasions to work on the cars with Nick, Tshuma and myself acting as his assistants. With three of the vehicles being Land Rovers, I was reminded on several occasions of the filthy, dishevelled, oil-covered mechanic who is asked what on earth he has been doing and answers "oh, just changing a headlight bulb on a Land Rover". In Land Rover's defence though, I should point out that, when Nick and Tshuma were under the Toyota Land Cruiser and called out to me for a particular spanner, the job was so oily I was unable to tell whose hand and arm it was that reached out to take it. Our fleet is now in better condition (and certainly cleaner) than it has been for some time. Unfortunately we are now somewhat hampered by a shortage of diesel so we are having to be extremely careful about our vehicle use and I can foresee that becoming a major problem once we are properly back in action again.

As well as working on vehicles, we have tried to keep ourselves busy with a bit of local bird atlassing. A recent card Sue and I did for the Mandavu pentad, which includes Sinamatella camp, had just over one hundred species which we were very pleased with, especially as Mandavu itself is surrounded by flooded vegetation and birds are hard to see. One bird that was hard not to see, was a pied kingfisher that we found hooked up in a nylon net on one of the dead mopane trees standing in the dam. I have (stupidly) swum in Mandavu once before, trying to retrieve a pump but I'm not that stupid twice so Sue and I took the canoe from the picnic site and I paddled out safely and released the bird. Normally, birds (however small) savage me mercilessly if I handle them but this Kingfisher obviously knew when it was onto a good thing and it behaved 'impeccably'.

Early in March I attended the national Rhino Meeting in Harare. As always the reports from Parks stations and private conservancies took up most of the time but I was pleased that there was growing recognition that something must be done about small rhino populations (whether growing or shrinking) around the country. This could have interesting implications in future for Sinamatella.

Finally for this month, no sports report but a brief poaching round-up instead. Normally we would not expect subsistence or what is usually known as 'local' poaching to be much of a problem at this time of year - it is usually more of a dry-season activity. However, this year, with the agricultural outlook so poor, we have been seeing ominous signs of heavy poaching to come. During March,



rangers and Police patrolling in the Deka Safari Area took up over four hundred snares, found a long-term poacher base, chased but failed to catch three snare-setters and made two arrests. Most of the snares were made of old copper overhead wire - something that is in almost inexhaustible supply and, I suspect, something we will be seeing a lot more of in the coming months.

## ROBINS

By Stephen Long

As we have mentioned in several recent newsletters, we aim to help Robins with game water this season and I'm delighted to say that we have now installed our first pump there. The pump is a hybrid solar/diesel, installed at Deteema Dam and has been funded by Le Pal Nature Foundation thanks to great work once again from Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert naturalist's association. This is the fifth pump of a planned series organised by Michel and funded by Le Pal. We are very grateful to them. The pump was installed over two days by a team from Forster Irrigation (Bulawayo). It is able to pump over 6000 litres per hour but the pipeline to the dam is over a kilometer long so friction loss cuts the output considerably - even so, Rangers based at Deteema assured us the output is greater than that of the old diesel pump and of course it is much cheaper to run - and



environmentally friendly as well. The borehole is in the middle of a huge grass-filled vlei so the finished set-up doesn't look too exciting in a photograph.....

We have surrounded the solar panels with a trench to deter inquisitive elephants and bricked over the exposed pipes and cables at the borehole so we hope the pump will be undisturbed right through the dry season.

There were not many mammals to be seen at Deteema but the grassland was alive with Red-billed Quelea and there were thousands of them drinking at the dam all through the day. A pair of Lanners were hunting over the dam but they seemed confused by the numbers and we didn't see them make a kill. We saw a large crocodile, cruising the dam and it was a lot more successful but virtually impossible to predict and photograph when it came up under a ball of drinking birds, snapped up a mouthful and disappeared again. Plenty of Quelea but no crocs in the photo.....



## POACHING

Was generally a quiet month, though we do believe there was a group of Zambians crossed over near Kazungula to poach along the Zimbabwe/Botswana border region. Follow ups are continuing

Two employees of Ingwe Safaris which is owned by a prominent government minister were arrested selling game meat poached on the Riverside Ranch where they worked. Their evidence in mitigation is they hadn't been paid in 22 months so the magistrate let them off with a suspended sentence. However, the point was missed - poaching is poaching, and if you do not get paid, then move on.

15kg's of cyanide were recovered in Hwange, coming from an area near the Park boundary. However, the problem still remains of a maximum sentence of 3 months for illegal cyanide possession!

Three people were arrested in Plumtree for illegal ivory possession - they had 10kg - and are in custody and can expect the mandatory 9 year sentence.

## COMMENT

Following the unfortunate incident in Mana Pools, Parks and the private sector have been working overtime to put agreements and procedures in place, including indemnities. One thing that is highlighted though, is how many Zimbabweans have come to the fore in assisting the strapped Parks authority to protect the wildlife and natural heritage of the country. There are numerous organisations all quietly doing their bit - well done to all! We also have our share of staunch supporters outside the country putting in tremendous effort.

## 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, which was installed this month.



## RAM Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin – for continued, invaluable support. Patrick has now again come to the fore with rangers rations funding, water point maintenance funds, and vehicle maintenance costs. Thanks Patrick - much appreciated.

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.

Jenny Preston of the Zimbabwe Wildlife Fund for a donation

James Wessels for helping get our Landcruiser gearbox repaired

The Director General of Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Edson Chidzia, for his support

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 Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and 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. However, at the moment our financial concerns are related to our operating costs - these have grown as we take on more and more, especially in the running of game waterpoints and the expansion into the Robins area.

Once we have finalised our Robins program with the survey of old water points, and the installation of new pumps, we will be able to reassess how many boreholes still require to be kitted out with new pumps. We will also be assessing Kazuma Pan National Park to assess the requirements there, and will come up with a comprehensive project requirements list for 2016.

## DONATE

Donate to help us save our wildlife heritage - any donations would be gratefully accepted. Donations can be through our "PayNow" button on our website "bhejanetrust.org" or direct to our bank account:

### **Bank details :**

Bhejane Trust,  
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