



GENERAL

Apologies for the late issue of this June newsletter, but I have been corrupted (!!)
– my computer lost the June newsletter when I tried to edit it, so I have had to redo from scratch!

We were able to help out Parks at Kazuma Pan National Park with 200l of diesel for them to do their firebreaks, which have now been done.

I was flattered to receive the following email from the Hon Minister Saviour Kasukuwere :

Hi Trevor,

Am sure you will be surprised that I am reading the monthly magazine.. so early ;it's because it's my favorite update on the events and happenings in our most important wildlife area .I am appreciative of the support you have rendered to my staff and biodiversity in particular .I can assure you that the Ministry will do everything in our power to protect our wildlife and work closely with all those interested in the the success of our nation .

Trevor, thank you very much for the work and your commitment.

Best regards;

Minister Saviour Kasukuwere

One significance of this email is that the minister is pro-active and obviously takes a keen interest in his portfolio. We now have a minister that is hands on, and who we can communicate with, which can only bode well for the future

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

Winter finally arrived in mid-June, and the Chamabonda got frosted. The bush and the grass went from green to brown overnight, and the danger of fire increased substantially. Parks and the Jafuta Foundation have been burning fireguards, and so now there is some protection from Unit 6 (Kazungula) across to Victoria Falls.

The solar installation at Timot's Pan was completed and on the 1st June, the pump was turned on. Being on clay sidagga the pan filled quickly, but suddenly started draining – I had obviously broken the clay sealing on digging it out. However, a herd of elephant trampled in the pan and resealed it! Many thanks to Stephen Kiggen and Kiggen Builders who are currently helping in putting in the drinking trough.



Timots Pan after only 14 days of pumping.

Some interesting stats on water pumped for the month of June:

Timots Pan	440,700l	av 14,690 per day	water table at 22m
No 3	610,000l	av 20,333 per day	water table at 23m
Thomsons	623,000l	av 20,766l per day	water table at 11m

No 1 374,000l av 12,466l per day water table at 15m

(note : on No 1, the pump was initially at 17m and was only delivering on average 9800l per day. Chris Lampard and I managed to get the solar pump past the blocking dropped pipes – after several attempts to fish the old rising main out – and got the pump down to 28 m, ie in 11m of water, with the average delivery going up to about 14,500l per day)

Thus in June, we pumped 2,047,700 litres of water for game, all on solar power!!
We plan to install more panels and increase this output in July



AWARDS CEREMONY

The Awards Ceremony for meritorious conduct by National Parks rangers and Forestry game scouts was held at the Zambezi Explorer jetty on 5th June. The meeting was coordinated by Area Manager Edmore Ngosi, with AM (Robins) Midwell Kapesa in the chair on behalf of the Regional Manager, and AM (Matetsi) Victor Nqwebu was the MC. There was a good turnout of local operators, hoteliers and NGO's, many of whom provided drinks and snacks for afterwards (thanks!!).

Edmore gave a welcoming introduction, followed by a prayer and the national anthem. The game rangers then gave a drill display, followed by a brief address by myself on behalf of The Friends Of Victoria Falls. The rangers/scouts were then all called up individually and presented with a SAVE Foundation Certificate, a National Parks Meritorious Conduct certificate, \$200 cash each and a cap from African Albida.

Well done to these guys on doing a great job! Closing remarks and thanks were by Charlie Hewat of Environment 2000, with a final prayer by Catherine Hove.

A big thanks to all who contributed to making this event possible, especially Ian & Sue Thomson, Elephant Satib (Brian Courtney, Julian Freimond, Des Stephens, and Satib staff), WEZ Matabeleland Branch, Trevor Lane, Bud Cockcroft, Geoff Stork, Keith Vincent, Roger Parry, Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, Sue Archer, Chris Lampard, Shane White, Malcolm Pringle-Wood, Ketayi Zifudzi for donations.





Midwell Kapesa and Edmore Ngosi during the National Anthem



Myself, Amos Gwema (receiving his award) and Mayor Sifiso Mpofu



A proud recipient with Mayor Mpofo, AM Kapesa and Charlie Hewat from Environment Africa



Victor Nqwebu, Catherine Hove Hilary Madiri

POACHING

In early June, the Botswana authorities had a contact with a gang of Zambian poachers and killed one Zambian. They recovered some ammunition, kit and 37 tusks. This was most likely the gang that crossed into Botswana on the night of 18th March with an AK47 and a .375 with 150 rounds. They will thus have spent about 6 weeks in Botswana poaching, shooting at least 19 elephants (they only shoot big bulls). The names of the poachers and the porters are known to us, but despite claims by the Zambians they are following up, we can probably expect no further reaction from Zambia!

A sting operation mounted by Parks investigations and the ZRP, resulted in the arrest of three suspects and the recovery of a .458 and a .375 rifle. The weapons were tied under a minibus, which was nabbed at a special roadblock. The suspects had poached four elephants in the Sikumi Forest and Main camp area. All three suspects have previous convictions involving poaching. These poachers are from Dete, which appears to be a thriving center for poachers!

In another sting operation mounted by Charles Brightman and VFAPU, National Parks and the ZRP, two poachers trying to sell ivory were trapped in possession. They were arrested at 0140 in the morning and sentenced to nine years at 1530 the same day – this has to be an all time record in the administration of justice!!!

A big thanks to Nicholas Duncan and the SAVE the African Rhino Foundation for their support on the efforts to control poaching. They have assisted by funding informer rewards, and by supporting the Parks Investigation unit.

The stopping of “ration” hunts in the Parks has also decreased the amount of poaching (illegal hunting) going on. The ration hunting was a cesspool of corruption and illegal hunting, attracting the worst of South Africans tied in to dodgy local operators. This gave Zimbabwe a bad rap on what was previously a good reputation for standards and quality.

What is alarming is the amount of ivory coming out of the Binga/Siabuwa area. It appears there is large scale poaching going on here, by both locals and Zambians. This seems to be the hot bed of ivory poaching in Zimbabwe, and I fear the elephant population in the communal areas plus in Chizarira and Chirisa are in danger of being wiped out. Urgent action is required here, by whoever is able to assist.

On the bright side, the stirring efforts by the rangers in Hwange and Zambezi Parks seemed to have curbed the appetite of the Zambians for poaching here. At a ministerial meeting in Livingstone, the Zambians complained bitterly about the Zimbabweans shooting their nationals, but were told in no uncertain terms that the law of Zimbabwe would prevail, and armed Zambians would be dealt with accordingly. If they stay in Zambia they have nothing to fear from the Zimbabweans!!

SINAMATELLA

At a meeting in May between myself, Ron Goatley from Wilderness Safaris and Dave Carsons from Camp Hwange (reported in the last newsletter) it was decided to be more proactive in assisting Parks at Sinamatella with game water. It was discovered that ZESA had gone ahead and installed the transformer at Borehole 5, so Wilderness Safaris donated the required pump, piping and electrics to get this borehole functional. Dave Learmonth came up from Bulawayo and installed the wiring and the pump in his own time and at his own expense. Once the pipeline was put in to a nearby pan, Dave came back and commissioned the pump set up, and a new pan was born!!! A great effort by all involved.

At a meeting with Area Managers Moses Gomwe and Midwel Kapesa, Dave volunteered that Camp Hwange would remove the windmill at Shumba Pan, and would move the diesel engine to where the windmill currently stands. Dave also agreed to commission the Bumbamootsa Pan with the assistance of the Bhejane Trust. It was agreed to try and improve the water situation all round.



Dave connecting the pump wiring to the switchbox – No 5



Installing the pump – 100m of rising main going in



Dave Learmonth notices the water coming in!!



No 5 Pan before.....



.....and after seven days of pumping. – A PAN IS BORN!!

REPORT FROM STEPHEN LONG**Poaching and anti-poaching.**

As we were in May, we were helped in June by increased numbers of ZRP personnel, so it was possible to patrol a few of the rarely-visited areas. A patrol in the vicinity of Chibungo Springs located and removed a large number of snares, both big and small and as a result, the springs were covered by patrols for most of the month but with no further illegal activity detected. On a local patrol in the nearby De Rust farm sector on 12th June we located a pack of six dogs but unfortunately their owner must have heard the vehicle approaching and made a fast escape. We can only hope that all the patrol activity, and the loss of his dogs will deter this poacher, and others, from returning in the near future.

Other illegal activity located in outlying areas included more charcoal burners with one arrested close to the Deka Safari Area and a report from hunters in the Colliery concession of a poacher following a small herd of Wildebeeste that had mysteriously appeared in a place where none has been seen for many years. Rangers were deployed to patrol the area but no further signs were found.

In an attempt to make it easier to patrol around Matijoni Hill, a road to the top of the hill where an OP was often located in the past was re-opened. Considering the terrain, the road is not bad but it is first gear with low-range country in places. On the other hand the view compensates for some of the wear and tear on the drivers nerves!!



Two armed poachers were known to have entered the Park in the Main Camp sector around the 17th of the month. Their spoor was detected near Inyantue Dam and we deployed a number of patrols to intercept them but they were not found and there was no sign that they had killed any animals. Tracking is still exceptionally difficult at the moment and it is relatively easy for a small group of poachers to make their spoor almost invisible - luckily the conditions also make it very difficult for the poachers to track the animals.

Game Water

There is still very good natural water around the whole Sinamatella sector. At the pumped pans, Masuma, Shumba and Baobab are still excellent. We were finally able to re-connect the wind pump at Shumba in mid month and it is contributing a significant flow of water to the pan though elephants continuously interfere with the outlet pipe. Inyantue is not yet being pumped but it has plenty of water and seems to be heavily used.



Elephants enjoying the good water remaining at a natural pan near Sinamatella Camp.

We visited Tshompani on the 27th and confirmed that the wind pump is once again not working. Bumboosie South was also reported out of action and we found it pumping at only half strength – a problem we are so far unable to solve.

During the month most of the parts of the new solar pump donated by Le Pic Vert through the hard work of Michel Buenerd finally reached Sinamatella and we will collect the rest in early July. Many thanks are due to Michel for his tireless efforts.

Transport.

In June our Land Cruiser's brakes and steering were repaired at Coronation Motors in Hwange and it is now considerably safer to drive. Two second-hand tyres, both much better than anything else we are using, were received from Dambari Trust and Mike Karassellos kindly donated a set of wheel bearings that were needed for the Land Rover.

The transport situation at Sinamatella is extremely difficult. Parks have only one vehicle, the 'Mbada Diamonds' Land Rover and as a result we are having to shoulder a burden we simply don't have the resources to cope with. We stick very strictly to providing vehicles for 'operations' only (shopping trips and the like are simply not possible) but even so we are not able to do everything we would like to and many jobs that are not urgent are continuously deferred due to lack of transport.

It isn't just the vehicles that work hard – drivers are under pressure too and I am very grateful to our driver Abednico Tshuma and volunteer helper Chris Palmer for all their hard work, careful driving and care for the vehicles.

Wildlife monitoring.

Rangers and other observers have been building up a list of vulture breeding sites in Sinamatella as part of the national efforts to discover more about the status of these birds. We made short trips to the Bumboosie and Inyantue rivers to look for nests and now have a list of nearly thirty active sites – all White-backed Vulture. There are certainly more to be found and by the end of the season we hope to compile a list of sites as well as monitoring the breeding success (or otherwise) at as many as we can.

At a day-time animal count at Masuma on 23rd June we counted relatively small numbers of the normal daylight-drinkers (121 Impala, 15 Kudu, 3 Zebra, 27 Warthog). The numbers are well down on the 2012 counts but similar to 2013, presumably reflecting the excellent natural water availability in the past two seasons. It's good news for the animals but not so good for the tourists or their guides!

For some time we have been considering a fixed point photography survey to build up a picture of the vegetation around the area as it is today. We did some trial runs in 2013 and have now (we hope) perfected a simple protocol. It is our aim to take four photographs in fixed directions at each of the concrete and stone signposts around Sinamatella during this dry season and store the photographs for comparison in the future. With help from volunteers from Planete-urgence (France) we started this project in June. The photographs are not exciting but they could be of great value to Park managers some time in the future and will perhaps help to show the extent of the elephant damage that we so often talk about but have no data on.

Miscellaneous

In early June, Makila Tours and Camp Hwange arranged for a volunteer, Sacha London to help at Sinamatella School. He has been helping in the classroom, painting

blackboards, fixing play equipment and (judging by the stream of children visiting him) making friends!

Finally, an apology. Our internet and e mail connection was down for the whole of June. For a brief period we were able to send mail but not receive so to anyone who has e mailed us and received no reply, my apologies. We are fully back on line now and I will do my best to work through the backlog of mails as soon as possible.

COMMENT

This month a new Parks Board was announced. A couple of members of the old board were carried through, which will give much needed continuity. I did not recognize any names as coming from the recognized wildlife fraternity, which I thought was disappointing, but can only assume the new board members have been selected on the basis of having something special to contribute to the future of wildlife in Zimbabwe. I wish them all the best, and hope they prove to be a pro-active board.

However, and I stand to be corrected on this, it would appear the board are all from Harare, as has been the trend. This lack of regional representation can lead to some bad calls by the board, as happened with the last board, through them being misinformed or badly advised on issues, especially by biased presentations pushing commercial interests. There was not much stakeholder consultation to provide a balanced overview and local input when it came to planning on Parks estate utilisation. This is noticeable in Victoria Falls where there has been some particularly bad planning in the past, which could have had and could still have unfortunate consequences.

Lets hope that the new board does not become Harare-centric but gets out and meets and interacts with stakeholders, which would allow for a better understanding of what is at stake, and how to handle it. In this line, I would respectfully suggest that maybe regional sub-boards could be set up, as an advisory to the board. These would be entirely voluntary, made up of carefully selected local stakeholders and local Parks staff together, and which would be tasked to liase with local stakeholders on all issues relating to the well being, planning and operations of the wildlife estates and the wildlife and tourist industry within their region, so as to advise the board fully and knowledgably on any regional issues. Matabeleland North would be an ideal starting point for such a sub-board, and could be launched as a trial run.

I think the new board should also take cognizance of the public/private partnership model, of which several examples are in operation today throughout Zimbabwe, and which can be of tremendous benefit for the future of the wildlife estate. National Parks have derived tremendous benefits from such arrangements to date – Gona re Zhou, Tashinga, Sinamatella, Zambezi National Park, Umfurudzi, Matopos all being examples.

GRATEFUL THANKS

A grateful thanks to those who have supported us and who continue to support us. Your help has been invaluable and I think the results are there to see. I have not had the time to reconstruct this page – will do so in the July newsletter.

