



General

The Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit (VFAPU) received a diesel landrover from the SAVE the African Rhino Foundation of Australia. Bhejane Trust has supplied Charles Brightman's team with a base and handheld radios, from stock donated to us. The landrover is to be based deep in the Zambezi National Park, at Siansimba, which is a problem area from Zambian poachers. This is a joint National Parks/VFAPU operation, with Imvelo Safaris and SAVE supporting this initiative. This is a very positive action and will bring greater control to this back area.

Good news from Nakavango Estates is that they have had another Black Rhino calf born. Nakavango started with 2 adult cows and one sub adult cow in 2009. They brought in a bull from Imire. They are now (with the new addition) up to 8 rhino – a great achievement. Round the clock protection is provided by the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF), who have an exceptional record in looking after these rhino. Nakavango does show how even small protected populations of rhino can be viable, but the problem they now face is inbreeding!

Zambezi National Park

Digging out the trough at Timot's

This has been a busy month, with waterpoints, mowing and burning programs! On Waterpoints :

Timot's Pan was completed this month, with Kiggen Builders putting in the drinking trough. It is already getting good usage from elephant, buffalo, giraffe and zebra.



Kiggen Builders just completed the trough, including escape ramp!



The new trough filled and spilling into the pan.



I have erected an extra solar panel frame at Timots, and am awaiting four extra panels to install. Once installed these hopefully will increase the flow by over 50% (from our experience at Thomsons – see below) and this will create an overflow into adjoining pans.

I am also going to install extra panels at No1 (have put in two extra now, but awaiting an extra two) and this will start filling the pan itself, not just the troughs.

At Thomson's Pan, we installed a new bank of four solar panels. This has increased the wattage and amperage. It was wired up (after much deliberation and debate) with the help of some French volunteers from Planete Urgence. There was a very marked increase in flow, and the pan went from a holding operation (inflow = seepage, evaporation and ele's drinking) to starting to fill up. I also took a whole lot of sidagga clay dug out of the trough at Timot's and lined the side on Thomsons Pan – the seal on Thomsons is poor as it has a lot of sand mixed in the clay, - and this way I hope to achieve a better seal.

Happy volunteers after successfully wiring up the new bank of solar panels



Thomsons Pan lined with clay sidagga to increase the seal



At No 3, I installed two extra panels and rewired the set up. This will give increased outflow as the pan was starting to drop slightly. Hopefully, this will keep the pan at a constant level.



Wiring up the two extra panels on No 3 – noticeable extra flow straight away

Water pumped in July: (note – this time of year is when we expect our lowest pumping rates as the days are at their shortest, and the sun at it’s weakest)

CHAMABONDA WATER RECORDS

Month July, 2014

Waterpoint	Vol pumped	No Days	Daily Vol	Notes
Timots	492,000	31	15871	New meter installed during month
No 1	483,000	30	16100	2 extra panels installed on 19th, increased flow
Thomsons	629,000	30	20967	4 extra panels installed on 3rd july
No 3	655,000	29	22586	2 extra panels installed on 27th
Totals	2,259,000	120	18825	

Note : effects on flow of adding new panels will only be noticeable in August

I would also like to congratulate Edmore Ngosi, John Sithole and the Zambezi Parks staff on the condition of the Park, in that fireguards have been done, fire protection in place, some roads graded, patrols out – the Park is being restored !



The lower Chamabonda River (spring fed). In the whole Zambezi National Park now, if considering the boreholes on the Kalisosa, at Sekuti, on the Chamabonda, plus the springlines and the Zambezi River frontage, no animal is more than about five kilometers away from a water source at any time – an exceptionally good coverage!

On Mowing and Burning

The mowing program has started on the Chamabonda Vlei. Mike Karasellos has moved in this crew and we have started around Thomsons Pan – this area has not been mowed before. This is the third year of mowing sections and has proved a very successful management tool. The grass is already greening up, and the zebra moving in.

We have also put in place our burning program, working with fire gangs from the Jafuta Foundation, National Parks, Nakavango Estates and the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust. Two large controlled block burnings were undertaken – one large section from No1 borehole to the entrance gate, and the other on the south side of the Kalisosa Vlei. These are relatively cold burns, aimed at removing the old moribund grass, and to bring on a green bite to carry the animals through winter. Within a week, the green shoots started coming through, and the sable and zebra began moving into the burnt area.

Later on in the year, it is planned to do a hot burn in one of the sections – the aim here is to knock back invasive vegetation on the vlei – especially Mangwe (*Terminalia*)



I (rather belatedly!) checked on the Comments Book I had left at No 3 for visitors and was pleasantly surprised to find a couple of nice comments:

“ Wonderful! Congratulations on providing the best facilities at a waterhole anywhere in all of the National Parks! We know since we are currently doing a feasibility study on how to upgrade tourism facilities in all 11 National Parks. I would like to contact Bhejane Trust to see if this model can be followed at other destinations/Parks”

These were South Africans and not sure what Parks they are working on. Have dropped them a very belated line to see.

From a couple of Americans:

“Amazing hide/camp. Grateful for running water and flush toilet. Spent most of the night listening to and watching breeding herds of elephant come to drink. 6-7 largish herds of 9 – 18in herd. Lots of calves. We had to be absolutely silent as they became nervous. Such a privilege to see them, thought the ele’s in the Park seem very nervous and unrelaxed. Thank you to all with the Bhejane Trust for providing this wonderful venue to view wildlife overnight”

I have been talking to Stephen Kiggen of Kiggen Builders about erecting a hide at Timots Pan. It is early days yet, but we are getting together a list of required materials and possible donors!!

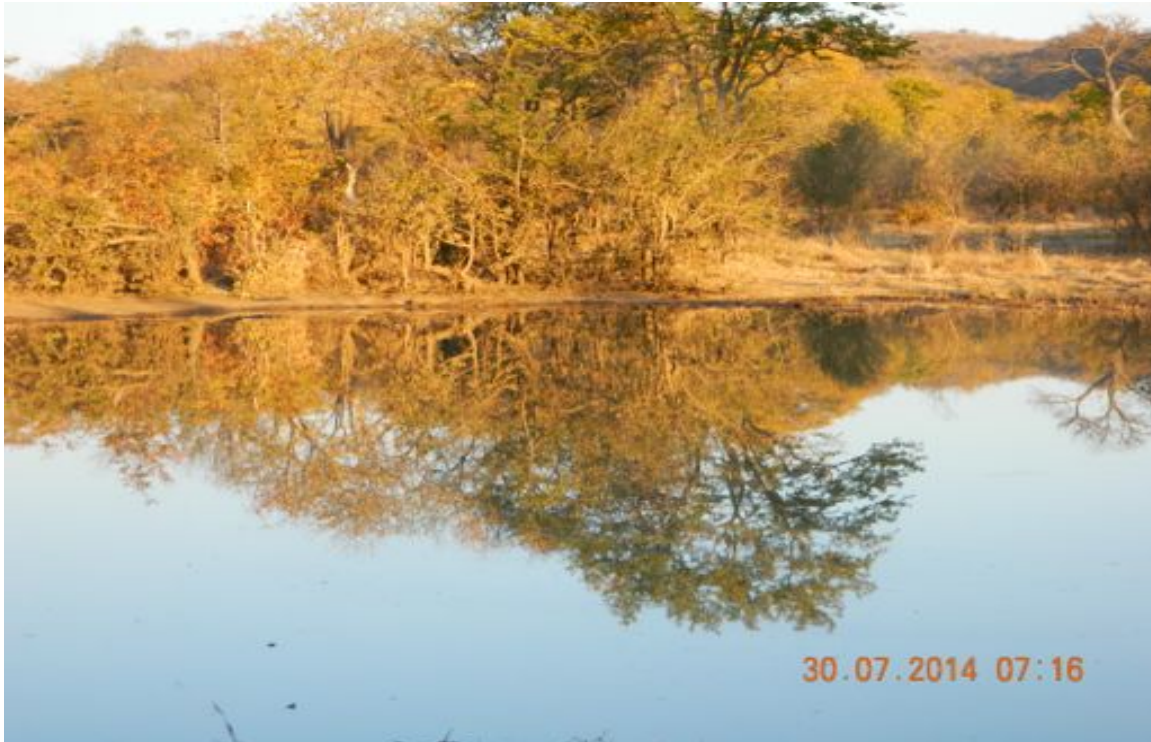


Another development is I managed to trade some donated diesel for loads of gravel, to fix the road in the Chamabonda and make it all weather. The next load of diesel will go into the tractor and grader for upgrading the road.

Sinamatella

At the end of July, I took a trip to Sinamatella to check on the water situation. My first call was the new No 5 pan, which we started last month. The pan was full, and showing good usage by elephant already.

No 5 Pan, showing Smith Mine Hills in the background



Tshompani Pan





Tendele Pan

Inyantue Dam



Report by Stephen Long

Poaching and anti-poaching.

The Chibungo area continues to be a focus for local poaching activity. Rangers on patrol at the Spring arrested two poachers on the 15th but four others, some with dogs, managed to escape. These were not big fish in the poaching pool and they were simply cautioned and fined but their presence on the edges of the Park is a real problem. They may only be setting out to catch small game but their snares are perfectly capable of killing more valuable animals. I have seen a hippo that died from having a small snare around one leg and back in 2009 we lost a rhino in the same way so it is important to control the 'local poachers' even though it seems to use a disproportionate amount of resources and time just to collect a \$20 fine.

Inside the Park itself, many snares were located close to the railway line at Pongoro but no animals had been caught and no poachers were seen. One further sign of poachers was tracks that we located, leaving the Deka Safari Area and heading towards Hwange from around little Gobo Spring. This was probably simply fish poachers but, again, considerable resources will be needed if that area is to be as well patrolled as it needs to be.

Wildlife

(i) Rhino.

Tracking conditions have improved a great deal in recent weeks and we are beginning to get reports of rhino 'visuals' from patrols. In the course of the month, six visuals, involving three separate animals were reported and another animal was detected by spoor only. We were able to use the Land Rover donated by SAVE Foundation to get a mobile patrol into the field and much ground was covered with one sighting and three unsuccessful tracks. Having a vehicle allows one patrol to visit and check for spoor at many places in just a few hours and is much more efficient than a simple foot patrol for our very large and very under-populated area. We are also able to make use of camera traps at this time of year and we placed a camera on a well-used midden on one of our tracking days. So far no rhino have returned to the midden but if we are patient we will eventually be successful.

(ii) Birding.

In mid month we carried out waterfowl counts for the African Waterfowl Census. We counted at Mandavu, Masuma and a number of pans in the Shumba area. Bird numbers are always low at this time of year so we did not get any spectacular counts but altogether we recorded three hundred and thirty three birds of twenty six species with some of the highest numbers being sixty five Spurwing and forty three Openbills in the



In spite of its deformed wing, 'Lucky Goose' has survived at Masuma for over two months.

Rangers are still bringing in reports of vulture breeding activity and so far forty one active nests have been located. A pair of Black Eagles was seen on their nest in the Smiths Mine Hills and there were reasonably fresh leafy branches on the nest but in five subsequent visits we have seen no more activity so it looks as if the breeding has failed for this pair for the third year in succession.

(iii) Game viewing.

By the end of the month game viewing was finally improving with plenty of elephants to be seen as well as lions, buffalo etc. Amongst many notable sightings, a leopard made a kill in full view of the restaurant veranda at Sinamatella, buffalo were seen vigorously chasing lions on the Sinamatella flood plain, wild dogs killed at Masuma, a cheetah was seen several times around the Mandavu/Salt Spring area and our tiny herd of Wildebeeste took up residence close to the Kashawe loop. Not quite so welcome, but no less dramatic, two Cobras twice fought with each other right outside our kitchen door, drawing a surprising amount of blood from each other and making us much more careful to look around properly before stepping outside at night.

Miscellaneous

In the course of the month, various game-water tasks were carried out. We finally outwitted the elephants at Shumba by carefully burying a pipe carrying the outflow from the wind pump and continuing it right into the pan where (so far) they haven't found it.



The victorious cobra!!

On another occasion we replaced the diesel engine at Shumba so that the old engine could be serviced and we did the same at Masuma. At Bumboosie South we had planned to take up the pump to find out why it is under-performing but when we arrived we found many Guinea Fowl and other birds were there using the little water available and there was plenty of sign of elephants drinking at the trough so we decided to leave the pump working while Trevor consults some experts.

The end of July is the deadline for fireguard-burning so a team of rangers worked hard to complete the long strip from Mbala/Makomo to the Deka River. They had a few 'escapes' and once needed extra manpower rushed out from Sinamatella to help them but they finished in the end and that boundary should be fairly safe from fire for the rest of the season.

On transport, I am delighted to report that we finally bought new tyres for our Land Cruiser. We had three punctures on the way to Bulawayo to get the tyres but have had none since. In the six months from February to now we have used just over sixty proper patches and uncounted bits of old tube repairing punctures and I was thoroughly sick of finding the car down on one side every other morning or so.

The Parks Land Rover was not always available on station during the month, especially after a collision with a giraffe, so Camp Hwange and Kapula Camp helped with deployments and, of course, our two vehicles were always busy

Poaching

There was a bad incident this month in the Zambezi National Park, where five elephants were found dead, having been poisoned at a salt lick, suspected with cyanide. It was an extremely strange case, as the salt lick is only a couple of kilometers from the Park gate, and was only 60m off the main game drive road, which is fairly heavily used – there was no way such an action could have gone undetected! I suspect that it was done by a person (persons?) on foot who was totally unfamiliar with the area, had walked along the river for a while (there is a stream of fishermen up and down this section so would be unnoticed), and then had cut inland on an elephant track, found the salt lick, and put down the poison, total oblivious to the fact that the main road was right there (it cannot be seen from the pan site). There was a strong reaction from the authorities, with the carcasses burnt after forensic samples, and guards mounted to make sure nothing else was poisoned), a full investigation conducted by Parks and CID, and VFAPU checked all the other salt licks in the area to make sure they were clean. Parks immediately intensified their patrol coverage. There is a reward of \$2000 offered by concerned locals for any information leading to arrests on this incident.

An elephant was poached on an island near Sansimba in the Zambezi National Park. This island is very attractive to elephant and buffalo as the mainland dries up, as it has good reed beds, and we have had poaching problems here before – there is an armed poacher lives opposite in Zambia, and frequently shoots on this island. However, I feel it is a matter of time until he is dealt with.

There are still alarming reports on the amount of elephant poaching happening in the Sebungwe area - the poaching seems to be out of control there, and will add to the USA Fish and Wildlife arguments against opening elephant trophies to the USA. Urgent action is needed to deal with this problem, even if Park should have to bring in outside help. The decimation of Chete, Chizarira and Chirisa is tragic, as these once great wildlife areas have had the wildlife severely depleted.

One big problem encountered in many of the anti-poaching operations has been poor prosecution, with some appointed prosecutors not being fully proficient in the wildlife act, and also in some cases being overawed by smart lawyers who suddenly arrive in their Mercs to defend the suspects. There would be a strong case for one or two highly specialized wildlife prosecutors within the Parks organization, or to be privately funded, in each region who handle all the natural resources offences. This would greatly increase the effective prosecutions of offenders.

However, I must add that over the last 18 months we have seen a very much harder attitude by magistrates, with generally severe sentences being handed out to wildlife offenders, as opposed to the slap on the wrist we had almost got used to! It is encouraging to see the law meting out deserving sentences, as this previously was always a weak point in the poaching battle.

Comment

The demise of Chete, Chirisa and Chizarira as premier wildlife areas is a great tragedy. Chirisa once at once considered one of the finest game areas in Zimbabwe. The uncontrolled poaching, combined with overhunting, has decimated these areas, to the extent that when they went on auction for safari operators, there were no acceptable bids – a reflection of the extent of the damage!! Parks has now decided to sell block hunts by auction in the two hunting areas, which unfortunately is going to compound the already disastrous situation. The quotas allocated appear unrealistic, and the hunting will be of the worst type imaginable, where the hunters attitude is that if the animals are paid for, they will be shot, regardless of size, age or any other considerations. Chete is also too small to cater for more than one group at a time, so trouble is brewing here. The elephant have been so badly poached in these areas they should be strictly off quota.

I fully understand Parks financial distress and their need to raise revenues, and this pressure can put them in situations where the money issues can be an overriding consideration. I know they have been looking for a solution to these areas, but operators are not keen to put up much to take them on. However, maybe it is time to think outside the block on these areas, and look at a long term strategy. These areas need to go out on long term leases (minimum 25 years) to companies that can afford to invest for a long term recovery program. It will take many years to recover these areas to a viable status again. Parks may not realize any revenue from the areas for a while to come,(they won't see much anyway in the future), but they will not incur any costs in the process. This could however safeguard these areas for future generations.

I may have jumped the gun on this issue, and Parks may well have a recovery program in hand for these areas. If so, it deserves our maximum support.

I have just read Oscar Nkala's excellent synopsis of the Dawie Groenewald/Out of Africa fiasco. Groenewald was a particularly unpleasant South African safari operator who plundered the wildlife in Zimbabwe, especially the Gwayi Valley. The chaotic situation in the early 2000's opened a door to the very worst of South African hunters, tied in with new, inexperienced operators, which led to the depletion of the game in much of the private land in Matabeleland. It was interesting to note at a recent meeting at Hwange Safari Lodge, the Gwayi operators are now talking of the need for protecting wildlife, conservation measures, etc – there seems to be an urgent realization set in that wildlife has to be managed like any other asset, and this is a positive step forward. Anyhow, lets hope Groenewald gets the book thrown at him in Musina court, where he is currently on trial for a long list of wildlife crimes. It is disturbing to see there are a couple of these dodgy type of South African hunters still running around in Zimbabwe, though in much diminished numbers. The positive step by the Minister to ban commercial safari hunting in National Parks estate will have been a blow to these corrupt individuals, and will go a long way to clean up the rather messy image that Zimbabwe has acquired in the hunting industry.

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 reconstructed this page after the wipe out last month!

This month, we have had support from:

Jenny Preston and the Zimbabwe Wildlife Fund

Nicholas Duncan and the SAVE The African Rhino Foundation

Barbara Ball and Clidder Mining

Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert (Solar Unit)

RAM Petroleum

Redan Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin

Makomo Mine

John & Stephen Kiggen – trough at Timot's

Ian Gloss – assisting in solar panels – acquiring and importing

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

