



MAY 2016

NEWSLETTER

The Zambezi River is now dropping at the Falls, and Kariba is rising very slowly now, and is sitting at 30 % utilisable water - it will not rise much more before levelling out, which does not bode well for power generation this coming year.

WE have a young Australian, Patrick Williamson, working with us. He is doing mapping of the Parks - he has done Robins and the Chamabonda to date, plus some of Kazuma. The maps will be given to Parks to add to their web site so tourists can download them onto their laptop/GPS. This will be linked to the online booking system and will show access routes, the camp booked, public roads, water points etc. It will be especially invaluable in Kazuma where there are no maps available.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

All the water points in the Chamabonda holding well, but the elephant damaged the outlet which flowed directly into the pan at No 1, and expanded the pan. We have thus re-routed

the outlet pipe from the second solar unit (Janie's) to link into the outlet from No 1, so all water flows into the troughs now

The hyena chewed through the cable at Andre's for the third time! Have encased it in steel now.

There has been a massive movement of elephant into the ZNP, and they can be seen at every water point in the Chamabonda in the afternoons - putting stress on the pumps. I suspect this influx is from Chobe, where there is heavy pressure and the vegetation has been hammered.



KAZUMA PAN

I took a trip out to Kazuma pan with some helpers. We checked the pipeline at the Parks HQ which we had previously repaired, and it was holding well. At the HQ, we met the Wildlife Officer in charge and he explained his woes - his vehicle is out of action with a broken axle - I will try and source him another axle. He also had no diesel to grade the roads and do firebreaks - I have sourced some.

We then went to Roan Pan and pulled out the pump - we cleaned the pump, measured the borehole depth and watertable and then replaced the pump, reconnected it and adjusted the pump settings. We checked the pan and the flow.

We did a quick check on Kazuma Corner Pan, which is looking good, and is full.

Roan Pan - checking the pump



The team of helpers





Kazuma Corner Pan

SINAMATELLA

Report from Stephen Long

Game water.

With pressure building up on game water supplies, I'm happy to report that on the whole, May was a good month. The biggest down-side was that early in the month Rangers based at Inyantue reported that the vlei pump supplying Thor's Pan had gone wrong. A number of other problems kept us from going there straight away but we made it in the end, travelling via the Mtoa Road which was recently re-opened by us for just this sort of journey. The road first passes Tshakabika Hot Spring then goes through pleasant kopjie country before entering typical Sinamatella mopane woodland and at this time of year with autumn colours starting to appear, it is a lovely journey.....



Some scenes on the Mtoa Road.

The job that awaited us at Inyantue was not so nice. We had to lift out the pump – never an easy thing to do, then on dismantling it we found that it was too badly damaged for us to be able to repair and it will need to be replaced. There's a lot of satisfaction in game water work, especially when we can leave water running into a pan and know that the animals will be able to drink that night. Conversely there is a lot of frustration when things don't go right and none of us likes to go away leaving a pump not working. Luckily the dam pump at Inyantue, just three kilometres from the vlei is working nicely so we know animals in the area can drink while we wait for a new pump to arrive.

Through almost the whole of May, Mashambo Pan pump was also out of order, again waiting for spares. This story has a happier ending than Inyantue's.

Thanks to help from Wilderness Safaris' Kashawe Camp and Dave Learmonth in Bulawayo I was able to get the pump running again on the very last day of the month. The electrical problem that had delayed things turned out to be relatively easy to sort out but then I was faced with re-connecting the pipes. It should have been simple. It wasn't. One particular join took at least six attempts to get it right and each time there is a built in three minute delay before the pump starts and the join can be tested. I'm sure by the fifth or sixth try, that delay was up to at least ten minutes and once or twice I might possibly have resorted to a bad word or two when the pump finally started and yet again drips appeared at the join. Eventually everything was drip-free and I had the satisfaction, as I passed the pan on my way home, of seeing a small group of zebra already there drinking.

Our other pans and dams remain more or less as they were at the end of April, apart from Masuma Dam where, thanks to diesel supplied by Camp Hwange, we have started pumping already and the water level is holding steady at around 90% in spite of quite large numbers of elephants using it.

Wildlife

As usual, May saw mammal sightings increasing steadily. On the Sinamatella flood plain, buffalo and elephants have become regular visitors and we hear lions almost every day though they are frustratingly difficult to see. One of the collared Painted Dogs was seen with a snare around its neck and Painted Dog Conservation tried hard to find him so they could dart him and remove it. The dogs have been spending time up in the Smiths Mine Hills close to where they denned a couple of years ago and we helped radio-track them up there one day.



The scenery is rugged with some beautiful views and even though we knew from the strength of the signal that we were very close to the dogs, we couldn't see them and wouldn't have been able to dart them safely anyway.

Over the full moon, we carried out a 24 hour count at Masuma Dam. The two most important numbers are impala (the main day-time drinker) of which we counted 116 and elephant (the main evening and night drinker) which reached 210. These are very similar numbers to the same period last year so we hope that is a sign that pressure on water supplies will be similar to 2015 throughout the season. We just managed to cope last year but this year we are starting with a much better pump than we did in 2015 and I hope that will give us the edge.

While we were doing our 24hour count we saw one of the crocodiles catch a huge water leguaan which it then carried away up to the top dam to eat in peace. I couldn't help thinking it was a bit unsporting for a croc to kill a fellow reptile but I have no doubt they will get onto more substantial prey as the water level drops and animal numbers rise.

There were a few interesting bird sightings during the month. On the 18th there was an Osprey still at Mandavu Dam. We had hoped it was going to overwinter but on subsequent visits we haven't seen it so I assume it has headed north. Also at Mandavu on the 18th we saw a Darter. This is an unusual but welcome sight at Mandavu where it should be safe from the fishing nets that have killed so many Darters elsewhere in Zimbabwe. We have started our annual survey of vulture nests but so far there is not much activity. In a few places we saw vultures standing close to their nests but we didn't see any birds sitting, in contrast to Zambezi National Park where every nest we saw had a sitting bird. Perhaps ours are anticipating a bumper crop of carcasses later in the year.

Finally, on wildlife, one of our rarest species in May (though not necessarily always to be counted as 'wildlife') was... tourists. With the fall in the value of the Rand, our Parks have become an expensive destination for South Africans so tourist numbers are exceptionally low and most of the small numbers of visitors we have seen are Zimbabweans. We need more.....

Miscellaneous

Two old favourites here – vehicles and football. Let's start with vehicles. We suffered numerous small problems in May, in many cases due to spare parts that simply are not fit for purpose. I know it is true that you get what you pay for and it is false economy to buy cheap but often there is no alternative and it is very frustrating to have to replace suspension bushes that have lasted less than a year, universal joints with a life span of just months or tyres that disintegrate long before they wear out. Not just frustrating but also expensive. Having said all that, with a little care our small fleet continues to give us wonderful service, given the state of the roads we use and they are a tribute to the toughness of Land Rover.

Don't worry Toyota fans, I hope to have our Cruiser back in action in June so I'll balance the books with some praise for Toyota in the next newsletter.

Now football. I said last month I would include a picture of the Sinamatella team as soon as they won a match. Well here they are (some of them anyway),



Sinamatella in blue, Zambezi Gas in orange.....

Given that there are five Sinamatella players in the shot, positional play is clearly something that needs some work but this is in fact the B team – I was called away before the main game and missed all but the last few seconds of Sinamatella's 2-1 victory.

ROBINS

It has been a hectic month at Robins, with test pumping boreholes, and installing solar pumping units. A special thanks must go to Wildlife and Conservation Trust, with the Elephant Group, for funding seven solar units, Camp Hwange for funding one through a client, and Michel Buenerd who funded our first hybrid unit. Area Manager Robins Kwasherai Dzoro and the Parks team deserve a special mention for their support, and Forster Irrigation guys doing the installations were very professional, putting in long, hard hours. Not to mention our Bhejane Trust team under Stephen. The nett result is that Robins is back on the map!!

The borehole/water program in Robins summarised :

Deteema Dam - hybrid solar system installed with standby generator (this is a new system and experimental where the generator will work at night off an automatic day/night switch) . Good water though new pipeline needed. Donated by Michel Buenerd of Le Pic Vert

Big Toms - solar installed - good water - Wildlife and Conservation Trust (WCT)

Little Toms - solar installed - water not great - WCT

Tsamhole - solar installed - good water - WCT

Manzimbomvu - solar installed - flow not great - to go back and put in more rising main as borehole cleans itself - WCT

Dandari - solar installed - three boreholes of which 2 were dry or insufficient water - flow poor - WCT

Mbhejane - tested - insufficient water to warrant installing a pump

Tsokoroko - tested - insufficient water to warrant installing a pump

Viewpoint - tested - insufficient water to warrant installing a pump

Bumbumutsa 1- solar installed - replaces diesel engine - flow moderate - WCT

Bumbumutsa 2 - solar installed - flow moderate - linked to Bumbumutsa 1 to boost flow - Camp Hwange

Sonyathis - checked - borehole seems blocked. Further research needed

Njekwa - mono pump still in position though has not been pumped for 16 years. Will follow up for future project

Dolilo - solar installed - good flow - WCT

Most of these boreholes have not been pumped for many years, and it is hoped with constant pumping now it will flush and clean them, thus increasing flow. We will be monitoring and adjusting them all year. This has now given a good spread of water to Robins, and should spread the elephant pressure out from the previously hammered few points. We will be monitoring the wildlife populations also, which currently seem low, but can only improve with this new spread of water.

Robins Report By Stephen Long

This month we completed the installation of solar pumps donated to Robins by the Elephant Group of South Africa. Nick and Abednico travelled down to

Robins where they joined the team from Forster Irrigation for eight days of hard work.

The first job was to test some of the unused boreholes to see which could best be put into operation. Unfortunately many of the holes they tested were not suitable and eventually, Tsokoroko, Little Sonyati, Bhejane, View Point and two of the three Dandari boreholes were rejected due to low, or in some cases no yield. Of the remaining possible holes we decided to use Dandari #3, two at Bumbumutsa and Dolilo.

Dandari, like Tsamhole, has a fire-tower with a great view. Nick climbed up and took this photo looking down on the old pump attendant's hut and the borehole



It would be nice to report that the yield of the borehole was as good as the view but in fact it was the lowest of the newly installed pumps at just 900 litres per hour.

From Dandari the team moved on to Bumbumutsa where there are two boreholes and we installed two pumps. Bumbumutsa #1 yields 1500 litres per hour and #2, which is twice as deep, only manages 1200 litres per hour. Camp Hwange has been pumping #1 borehole with diesel up to now and there is good water in the pan with plenty of Red-billed Teal, Egyptian Geese and Knob-billed ducks.

Number 2 borehole was drilled in 2000 and has never been used so we have some hope that after it has been run for a while the yield might increase. In three days spent at Bumbumutsa we saw surprisingly few animals considering the pan has held water since last dry season but perhaps numbers will build up later in the year.

Dolilo was the surprise of the bunch. One ranger who has been at Robins for a very long time says he thinks it was last pumped before independence – certainly it didn't appear to have been used for many years but to our surprise it produced a yield of around 4000 litres per hour. With that sort of flow rate the old trough quickly filled and water started to run over into the vlei.



Like Bumbumutsa, there was little sign of animals in the area and it may take a while for anything to find it but we think Dolilo is going to be one of the success stories of these new pumps, provided it can keep producing water at the same rate.

Meanwhile, of the other pumps recently installed at Robins, Tsamhole and Big Toms are doing well, with plenty of elephant and buffalo already using Tsamhole and the water level in the pan actually increasing. Little Toms pump is struggling to put enough water into the dry black soil of the pan for it to hold water overnight. I think it will take some time – probably even until after the next rains, for the soil to be wet enough for this pan to look good but so long as the trough holds up, there will at least be water there by day.

Deteema continues to produce a lot of water. When I checked it on 11th May it had pumped around 37000 litres per day since the last check and since then a generator has been installed so that it can pump at night as well.

With all the pump installations now complete we hope the Robins area will hold a lot more animals than it has in recent years and take a little pressure off other parts of the Park.

POACHING

Melusi Moyo was arrested in Tsholotsho Communal land (bordering Hwange National Park), with four tusks weighing 13,5kg which came from the Park. Cause of death of elephant (2 bulls) unknown. He was heading to Bulawayo to try and find a buyer when arrested. Was sentenced to 10 years with labour within 24 hours in Hwange magistrates court - quick justice!

Moses Masuku from Dete was arrested on 20th April in possession of a pangolin, which he had found in Binga district. He was sentenced on 24th April to nine years, and the pangolin was recovered and released into the Zambezi National Park. Masuku is also suspected of involvement in ivory and investigations continue. Bhejane Trust, in conjunction with the SAVE The African Rhino Foundation, paid a reward for this successful recovery of the pangolin, and the subsequent conviction of Masuku. Congratulations to Parks and the law enforcement agencies for their quick conclusion of this case (4 days!!)

There was a contact in the Zambezi National Park between a Parks patrol and a group of 10 Zambian poachers. The poachers had obviously crossed on the full moon and were making their way inland to poach elephant. The group comprised of one Zambian believed armed with a heavy weapon (375/458), one with an AK for protection, and 8 porters. The Parks patrol engaged them and shots were exchanged - Parks shot dead the poacher with the AK, and a porter - the rest of the group fled leaving everything behind including the AK, 100kg of mealie meal and personal items. They had only just entered Zimbabwe so had not shot any elephant yet. Well done to Parks - a fantastic effort!

In a sting operation in Victoria Falls, an ivory dealer came to the Falls from Hwange with 2 tusks weighing 19kg. An informant notified Victoria Falls Anti-poaching uNit and the police set up a trap, with undercover agents acting as buyers and negotiating the price down from the asked for \$700, to \$550. They then drove to Hwange to confirm the

“deal” with the ivory suppliers. 4 suspects were then arrested and are now on bail, awaiting conviction.

COMMENT

Elephant Poaching and Zambians :

After the shooting of two Zambian poachers in May by Zimbabwe National Parks rangers in the Zambezi National Park, there were a lot of comments on why the Zambians are coming over to Zimbabwe to poach elephant. The answer is fairly simple in that they have already killed 90% of the elephant in Zambia – the population has declined from 160,000 elephant to only 16,000 remaining today. 13,000 rhino also disappeared. This is unfortunately the story of much of the wildlife in Zambia – the once prolific country has been decimated of its wildlife, with only a few sanctuaries remaining.

Unfortunately in Zambia, killing of wildlife is almost considered a citizens right, and poaching is hardly considered a crime.

One company suggested a boycott of tourism to Zambia but I think those in the few havens for wildlife remaining, where there is an ongoing battle against the poaching onslaught, deserve support, otherwise the situation could deteriorate even more. There are still some fantastic game areas left in Zambia which could be the nucleus for a recovery of the wildlife in the country.

Zambian Poaching Excursions into Zimbabwe - the Modus Operandii

Each poaching gang that is going to cross into Zimbabwe or Botswana has two core members – one has a heavy weapon (a.375 or a .458) and his job is to shoot the elephant, while the second guy has an AK and his job is protection from the Parks rangers. It seems the weapons are issued in Lusaka, generally with 150 rounds of heavy ammunition and 150 rounds of AK ammunition. A gang of porters is then recruited from villagers either at the hunters home area or from the villages along the Zambezi – they are promised a cut of the sale of the ivory.

The team will then assemble at one of the villages on the Upper Zambezi, where they contract local mekoro polers to take them across the river. There are a couple of known villages which are favoured, Generally around the full moon these polers will then take the poaching group across the river, and drop them on the Zimbabwe bank. They are then on standby to recover the group back to Zambia when required, using cell phone contact. The poaching group then tries to get deep into the Matetsi areas or the old hunting concessions in Botswana where there is less chance of detection, and may stay there for two or three weeks – the porters carry the food and supplies in and the ivory out.

Should the group be successful, the ivory is taken to Lusaka and sold – it appears to be to the persons who supply the weapons.

The Zambians will not cooperate with the Zimbabweans on curbing these poaching incursions – it obviously goes high up. The poaching could be stopped instantly if there was the political willpower in Zambia to end it.

GRATEFUL THANKS

A grateful thanks to those who have supported us and who continue to support us. This month, we have had support from:

The Conservation and Wildlife Fund, plus the Elephant Group, for donated boreholes for Robins

Nicholas Duncan and the SAVE The African Rhino Foundation – a staunch supporter.

Mark Unwin and the Clarkson Jersey Charitable Trust

RAM Petroleum

Read 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, and the newly installed hybrid solar unit at Deteema

Thor Thorsson– an intrepid traveller

John Nixon of Harare for donation

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

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 it's 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.

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: (please note that Zimbabwe is experiencing a financial crisis again but volunteer organisations and NGO's will not be penalised with any donations made - the monies will be attributed to the relevant account in full))

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