



After a long time of procrastinating, I finally got down to re-doing out web site which has been shambolic! Have a way to go yet – some sections still “under Construction” – but is vast improvement and will be fully up and running within the next two weeks. Thanks to Rudolph Potgeiter for his hard work.

It very much looks like we are facing a drought year again! The rain stopped in early January, and since then we have had a couple of scattered heavy thunderstorms (35mm in one storm). The ITCZ seems to have fled north and stayed there! The grasses have all seeded, but I think in north-western Matabeleland we will be alright on grazing, and hopefully will get some late rains to top up the pans. This is where the solar units prove their value, in keeping the pans topped up during the “rainy” season. For the diesel powered pans, they better be getting ready to fire them up now! We will also be looking at early fires this year.

The Zambezi River is 23% lower this year then it was for the same period last year. This is the lowest level since the very poor year in 1995/6. Does not bode well for Kariba Dam levels!

Nicholas Duncan of the SAVE African Rhino Foundation of Australia visited Sinamatella and Victoria Falls, doing his annual trip with board members to familiarize themselves with operations here in Zimbabwe which the SAVE Foundation supports. Nicholas and his Foundation are staunch supporters of Bhejane Trust, and it was good to catch up. SAVE also lends support to Parks, and gave the local Parks guys overalls, boots and GPS's.

Zambezi National Park

Not much to report from the ZNP this month – basic repairs carried out in the Chamabonda at No3 and tidying up at the solar units. Not much game seen lately, as it seems to be mostly on the river front where the game viewing has been really good, especially considering the time of year.

Of interest though, I received a copy of a report by Paul Read, when he was a ranger in the ZNP. This dates back to July, 1965, when he got all the game scouts to record the animals they saw and the distance they patrolled over, for a whole month. The patrols covered a distance of approximately 1500 miles, and recorded a total of 10,966 animals – an average of 1 head per 6.6mile (or 1 head per 4,2km). Of the animals seen: (Note – this is the total number of animals seen, not the population, so gives an idea of the more common species)

Species	No Seen	% Seen	Today
Buffalo	1619	15	Have increased - probably constitute over 30% of sightings now
Bushbuck	123	1	Difficult to know status, but suspect down a bit but increasing
Cheetah	2	0	no change here
Duiker	98	1	Difficult to know - status probably unchanged
Eland	381	3	Difficult to know - seasonal, migratory and mobile. Increased
Elephant	234	2	Big increase.
Grysbok	58	1	Unchanged
giraffe	21	0	Increased - probably over doubled in numbers
Hippo	54	0	Not known if hippo just above Falls counted. Otherwise decrease
Hyena brown	1	0	Very rare sighting in this area
Hyena Spotted	2	0	have increased massively
Impala	514	5	probably similar numbers now
Klipspringer	101	1	Difficult to know - status probably unchanged
Kudu	559	5	probably similar numbers now
Leopard	6	0	probably similar numbers now, or increased
Reedbuck	120	1	None left
Sable	3016	28	have decreased to less then 20% of original population
Steenbuck	2	0	Only occasionally seen - no change here
Waterbuck	2739	25	have decreased from poaching, but recovering. Still low numbers
Warthog	977	9	probably similar numbers now
Bushpig	28	0	probably similar numbers now - mainly western riverine
Zebra	298	3	Have increased in numbers
Wilddog	5	0	probably similar numbers now
Porcupine	8	0	?
	10966	100	

Of interest – no lions recorded! Only 2 Spotted Hyena!

The most striking comparison looking at this is how the predators have greatly increased, especially the hyena and lion. I suspect this was because in 1965 the Park being surrounded by cattle ranchers who eliminated every predator that came their way. Conversely, the sable and waterbuck have declined, especially the sable – this may be due in part to predation but is far more likely linked to the drying up of the Chamabonda (there were 550 sable here in 2002) and also to the increase in buffalo numbers – for some reason sable and buffalo do not seem to mix. However, the sable do seem to be recovering slightly. The waterbuck were badly poached but are recovering well. Reedbuck have disappeared altogether, though a few remain on Matetsi Unit 7. Steenbuck are still rarely seen, but exist. The interesting record is the Brown Hyena – a rare vagrant to this part of the world!

The big gains are buffalo and elephant – the latter were obviously quite scarce in 1965! These two species are putting pressure on the other animals and on the habitat Giraffe and zebra have also increased.

Kazuma Pan National Park



I went with Alan Sparrow (Kazuma Foundation) and Jed Robinson to Kazuma again. The area is very dry already, and the pans are drying up. We pulled up the mono pump and pipes on the “Corner Pan” so as the measure the borehole depth and water table in preparation for installation of a solar pump being donated to the Kazuma Foundation. We also took the opportunity to check the back pan road – the grass seeds!!

We are working on putting in a water program – pumps and pans, plus a couple of minimum development camp sites, in conjunction with Parks – more on this later on in the year.

Pulling the borehole pump out at Corner Pan

Alan and Jed at Corner Pan

Kazuma panorama



Sinamatella

This month, Bhejane Trust launched the dedicated Rhino Monitoring Unit at Sinamatella, in conjunction with National Parks, Camp Hwange and SAVE the African Rhino Foundation of Australia. We employed Nick Long to manage the unit, and Parks seconded two senior rangers to work with Nick. They have seen their first month in the field, and have had an interesting month!

SINAMATELLA RHINO MONITORING UNIT

REPORT – FEBRUARY, 2015

This was the first month of activity for the Bhejane Rhino Monitoring unit. Thanks to Save African Rhino Foundation we had a vehicle to use from the very first day. It has seen better days but it did well on some of the horrifying roads we used during this month's patrols. It really needs some attention and hopefully it will be getting it soon, then it will be even more appreciated.



The Monitoring Unit Land Rover – affectionately known as 'the white rhino'

The aims of the team are to try and find the previously known rhino as often as possible and to discover if there are any others in and around the IPZ. Being a mobile patrol unit we will be able to reach all of the IPZ as well as the outer areas to search thoroughly for the rhino and come up with an accurate number of how many we have.

This month the team mainly patrolled the peripheral areas of the IPZ, but the conditions were quite difficult since there is still lots of long grass which makes tracking very difficult and a plentiful supply of water which allows the animals to be dispersed in a wide area. We did manage to find some rhino spoor and dung scrapes along with some fresh snares in the park which were removed. Four of the snares were very large and we guess the poacher was trying to catch either Buffalo or Eland but a rhino could also be very easily caught by this snare.



Ranger B. Mbewe at one of the snares we located

Also, a very disturbing charcoal making operation was found and all the equipment was confiscated in the hope that it will be difficult for the culprits to acquire more. One person we caught revealed that they were making about \$500.00 from each heap and that their main market is chicken growers in Bulawayo who use the charcoal to keep their chicks warm. He also mentioned that they are not the only ones in the area and that is a booming operation. I hope that something is done about this as it causing huge destruction of the environment.



One of the four heaps we found



Mature mopane in a new heap ready for burning

We spent some of this month setting camera traps on dung scrapes and elephant paths which the rhino have been known to frequent. We have not been able to find out yet if we got any rhino photos as the cameras (apart from one) were still in the field at the end of the month. The one camera that was collected was found by rangers on patrol and removed as it had been damaged by elephants. It didn't have enough time to take any useful photos.

Report by Stephen Long

Unfortunately, Stephen has been experiencing problems with his emails, and has sent his computer off to get the problem sorted. He is thus out of comms at the moment, and has not been able to send in his monthly report. He will have to update for two months in the next newsletter.

The good news is that we have paid for three new Lorentz solar pumping units to be installed in the Sinamatella area – we are putting two at Inyantue as this is a big dam with a lot of elephant drinking at it, and with the large surface area and high evaporation rate, we anticipate one unit would not be sufficient to maintain the dam. These units will be installed in early March.

The third unit will be installed at Shumba Pan, replacing the diesel engine. Shumba will thus rely on solar and wind power to keep it full, but we are installing the frame for the diesel/mono combination at the windmill site just as a precaution for the dry season. This unit will also be installed in March

Stephen will be able to give you an update in his next report.

Poaching

Some good news – the message seems to have got through to the magistrate and prosecutors here in Victoria Falls – Busani Nyoni who was found with 9kg of ivory in a sting operation in the Falls was sentenced to 9 years in jail!! Subsequently to this conviction, the other four ivory dealers all got nine years!! Well done to Charles Brightman and VFAPU for a job well done. Finally we are winning here!

However, of concern is that the ivory poachers who poisoned the elephants in the Zambezi National Park over a year ago are still out on \$200 bail, after being convicted. This is rather suspicious, but this syndicate seems to have some fairly high up officials in their pocket – it is time to sort these poachers out!

This time of year always sees the advent of Zambian ivory poachers crossing the Zambezi, and in February we had two groups cross the river, mainly heading to go poaching in Botswana. In a great example of cross border co-operation, the Botswana authorities found the tracks of a group crossing back into Zimbabwe and notified our authorities. Parks mounted a follow up, and put stop groups along the river. The Zambians walked into one stop group at night and opened up on them. Unfortunately for the Zambians, they had encountered Wildlife Officer Simon Muchibaya with his formidable record against Zambian poachers! In the ensuing punch up, at 2000hrs at night, the Zambians left behind one dead poacher, a .458 rifle and a whole lot of kit. Subsequent information from Zambia indicates there were 13 in the group, with one confirmed dead (shot) and only 9 getting back to Zambia – the fate of the other 3 is not confirmed at this stage. A great effort by all involved, including Parks, Police and VFAPU.

A Zambian cruise boat from a camp up in the Siansimba area of the Zambezi River (near the area of contact outlined above) was on a river cruise a couple of days after the above action, and saw a feeding frenzy of crocs in the river. When they got up close (tourists and all!!) they discovered the crocs were tearing apart a human torso! This could well explain where one of the missing Zambian poachers ended up!

On 21st February, another group crossing out of Botswana heading to Zambia was ambushed by Parks at 2030 hrs in the Kazungula area – it looks like all the Zambians got away unscathed, but they left behind 29 tusks weighing 293,5 kg's, the biggest of which was 28kg (56lb)! I suspect this could have been a group sent to recover the ivory from their previous trip (which was ambushed but no ivory recovered, suggesting it had been hidden once the group was compromised and fled for the Zambian border, before encountering Parks). All told, a very unsuccessful encounter for the Zambians!

The great tragedy is that the Zambians refuse point blank to cooperate on this elephant poaching issue. There is obviously involvement at either a police or political level where the poachers are being protected. On the other hand, the cooperation between Botswana and Zimbabwean authorities is very good, with Botswana Parks alerting our Parks to the last couple of crossings where they had tracks crossing into Zimbabwe.

One must compliment Area Manager Edmore Ngosi at the high level of deployment in the Kazungula/Victoria Falls areas, in conjunction with the ZRP. This is the reason the poachers are now skipping Zimbabwe and heading off into the more vast areas of Botswana. However, one issue that does come to light, agreed to by all the Parks officers here, is the urgent need for a re-training and refresher course for the rangers.

Comment



A bored white Rhino in Mosi-oa-Tunya Park yawns as yet another bunch of tourists snap away!

I recently spent a weekend at Toka Leya Camp in Livingstone (what an outstanding camp!) We went on a game drive specifically to see the white rhino in the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, and ZAWA could not have been more accommodating – they escorted us to where the rhino were and we walked in under their guidance. We were up close and the rhino showed no interest at all – one yawned and flopped down and went back to sleep! As we left the next group of escorted tourists was coming in to see them. ZAWA follow and protect these rhino 24/7, and by allowing interaction with the public, I thought they combined a duty and did a great PR job all at the same time. Well done to ZAWA!

A similar rhino awareness program would be very beneficial for Zimbabwe, and would give a positive spin on our Parks department. Bhejane Trust has put forward such a proposal on a joint venture basis, educating both tourists and locals, especially schoolchildren.

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

RAM Petroleum

Redan Petroleum

Patrick Jacquemin – donated funds for waterpoints, rations

Makomo Mine

Ian Thomson – offer of further assistance

Dr Frank Zindel – of Switzerland, and Stuart and Sue Danks of Simply Africa

Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert for donated solar pump unit for Sinamatella – their 3rd donated unit!

Thor Thorsen – an intrepid traveller – has made a fantastic donation going towards vehicles and waterpoints

Piet and Anthea Erasmus, from Cape Town – yet another generous donation (we hope they are ok after the disastrous Cape Town fires!!!)

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

