



AUGUST 2016 NEWSLETTER

Some really good news - our old friend Michel Buenerd of Le Pic Vert has come through with funding for a drone, through Le Pal Nature of France. The drone project was mooted as a dual venture - to obtain and operate a drone for rhino monitoring, for research work, especially of the hippo population on the Zambezi River, and for anti-poaching operations, notably against Zambian poachers in both tracking and monitoring the Zambezi River at recognised crossing areas. We will have a dedicated vehicle, and on anti-poaching there will be a reaction unit with the vehicle. We will update as we progress.

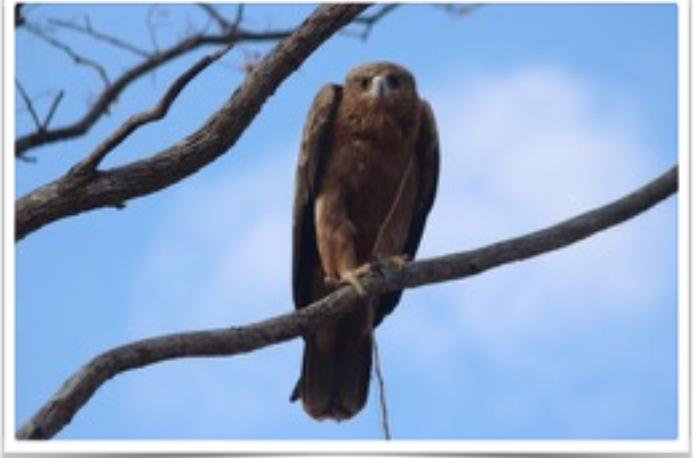
We had a fleeting visit from Nicholas Duncan of the SAVE the African Rhino Foundation. It was good to catch up with Nicholas, a staunch supporter of Bhejane Trust, and who does tremendous work in funding rhino conservation programs in Zimbabwe

On my way to Kazuma I noticed a Tawny Eagle in a tree with a stick dangling down. When I got closer I noticed a string from the stick wrapped around the eagle. The eagle flew off when we tried to scale the tree it was in, but crash landed a short distance away, and we recovered it

and removed the snare (a Guinea Fowl snare). Roger Parry of Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust collected the eagle, gave it rehydrate and successfully released it. How the eagle got tangled I have no idea!



Just prior to release (right)



The Tawny Eagle in the tree with the string snare clearly visible.



ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK



There is a problem in Victoria Falls with elephants visiting the Municipal rubbish dump and ingesting plastic - bags etc which obviously smell good! Some elephant have died from ingesting too much plastic, The elephant then spread plastic litter all over the Park via their dung. I sent in a team to clean up in the Chamabonda along the roads only and they recovered 4 bin bags full of plastic litter in a morning!



*The
clean up
and the
result*



We undertook some road maintenance this month, graveling some sections of road ahead of the anticipated rains!!!

Victoria Falls residents and operators were shocked to find that Econet had erected a mast in the middle of one of the prime areas of the Zambezi National Park. This tower was put up with no prior consultation, no EIA and was to serve an enterprise outside the park. Econet did not even inform the Area Manager they were coming in. There have been strenuous objections and Econet have apparently agreed to move this eyesore to a more discreet location.

The Econet eyesore on Chundu Loop



KAZUMA PAN

Patrick Williamson was sent to Kazuma Pan to complete his map work of the road system, to peg out some new roads which will loop Roan Pan into the Depression road system, add new access routes to his maps, and to explore minimum development camp sites to replace the existing ones, which are extremely poorly sited.

We put in some link roads connecting from the main Katsechete Road through to Roan Pan and to the Depression track. This will allow for a through flow on game drives, without having to backtrack.

The SAVE the African Rhino Foundation donated GPS's and tents to the Kazuma ranger staff, to assist in their field activities - many thanks to SAVE and it was much appreciated by the rangers.

I did a field trip to Kazuma to log vulture nest sites with Roger Parry of the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, and also took the opportunity to check the water points. We only found White Backed Vultures nesting, and logged over 20 new nest sites.

Checking on vulture nests

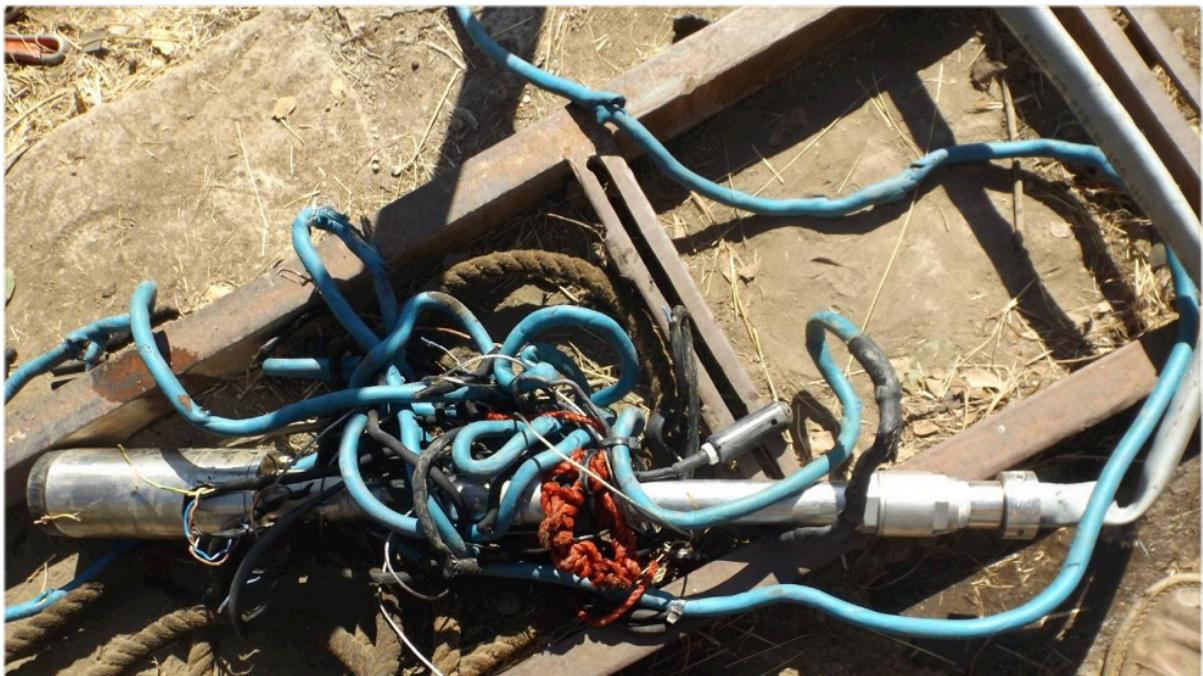


SINAMATELLA

Report from Stephen Long

Game water.

I reported in July that the Tshompani solar pump was stuck in the borehole and we were having trouble getting it out. Having tried a blunt instrument in the form of a home-made pile driver in July, we decided on a very slightly more clinical approach this month - chopping the blockage apart with a sharpened Land Rover drive shaft welded on the end of the pile driver. After dropping it down the borehole twenty or thirty times we were not at all confident that we were making a difference but we tried pulling the pump anyway and to our amazement and relief it came up in a tangle of mangled cable and pipe.



We think the borehole casing has somehow broken, the pump was stuck below it and our sharpened pile driver cleared enough of the damage to get it out. I quite liked the alternative theory that there is a tokoloshe/mermaid in the borehole but I generally don't accept any irrational things like that – though see my comments on water divining later in the newsletter.

Anyway, tokoloshe or broken casing aside the important thing was that the pump and motor were not damaged. The water level probe was completely destroyed but Nick and I spent the evening making a temporary one out of parts of a couple of 'dead' probes, we re-installed the pump the next day and it has run well ever since. The nearby Tshompani wind pump set a new record averaging more than 17083 litres per day over fifteen days in mid August so between that and the solar we are seeing a decent inflow to Tshompani dam and the level has held up well.

Our other wind pump, at Sinamatella flood plain, has also done well but we have no meter on this pump so we don't know quite how well. What we can say is that there is a little water in the pan and we have seen kudu, impala, warthogs and elephants using it. With the Sinamatella River almost dry, the elephants finally located the wind pump trough towards the end of August and families have been coming every evening to take advantage. On the last day of the month there were over forty elephants around the trough but it was too dark for a photo. This was a few days earlier before the word got around.....



As usual at this time of the year, most of the game water news involves elephants, and most of it lists the damage they have caused.

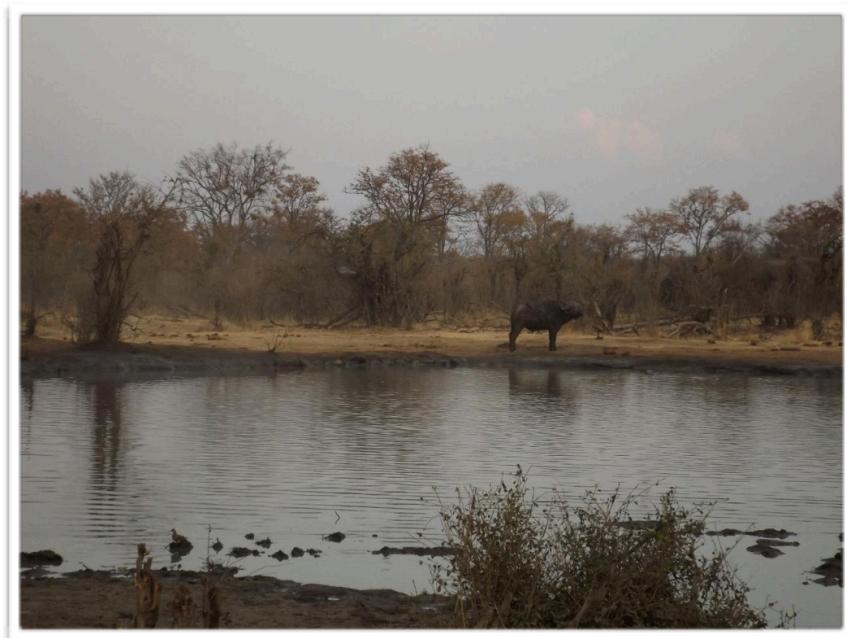
At Masuma we lost a few days pumping because an elephant pulled up and destroyed around forty meters of the pipe between the borehole and the dam. We had no suitably sized pipe in stock here at Sinamatella but luckily there was some at Vic Falls and Trevor brought it down so that we could get the water flowing again.

At Baobab the elephant problem is sheer weight of numbers. The Lukosi River, where elephants dig for water in the sand for much of the dry season, has dried completely and large numbers of elephants have fallen back on Baobab for supply. The borehole is not high yielding and we can not increase the pumping rate and as things stand the number of elephants is overwhelming, the trough rarely gets a chance to overflow and the pan is rapidly drying up. We have a plan to convert the pump to hybrid – solar by day and diesel by night but diesel supply then becomes a problem. More news on that next month I hope.

At Mashambo the pump runs 24 hours a day and the pan is looking good. Late one afternoon we were watching elephants there.....



As we watched, a single buffalo approached from behind the elephants. They shifted around nervously and the buffalo steadily plodded along towards them as if it hadn't noticed they were there. We wondered who would give way but experience should have told us what would happen – and here's the winner (the elephants are the hint of dust in the background as they ran off).



Amazing what cowards elephants can sometimes be!

An interesting development in August was the drilling of two new boreholes. Friends of Hwange sponsored a new borehole at Masuma to back up the existing hole and also allow us to reduce the number of hours of pumping with diesel. Michel Buenerd, who has been involved with many Sinamatella water projects organised funding for a borehole at the Lukosi River. Both boreholes were divined by Trevor and by Shelton from the drilling company “Drill Boy”. I was fascinated that they both independently found the same places, using forked sticks. I have since been told of diviners using Coke bottles full of water or two cell-phones and Shelton also uses two brass wires. My rational self says this is all nonsense but the results suggest otherwise – both holes have water in spite of having no obvious above-ground clues that the diviners might have used. I can’t explain it but I have to believe it. How I hate to admit that!!

Miscellaneous

First under the ‘miscellaneous’ heading, some vehicle news. We continue to be the major provider of transport for operations at Sinamatella so we were very grateful for help from Richard at Camp Hwange with servicing the vehicles. Our Land Cruiser, which has been down for nearly a year is also finally coming back to life under Richard’s guidance. The Hilux has left us so the Cruiser might feel a bit out of place amongst all the Land Rovers but I for one will be very glad to get it back and I’m delighted that the constant worry over servicing is reduced for a while.

August is of course a great month for wildlife viewing and we have had some memorable sightings this year. The Mandavu buffalo herd has grown to huge size and has been shuttling back and forth between Mandavu Dam for water and Mandavu Gusu for grazing – a magnificent sight as they cross the main Sinamatella-Masuma road. There are smaller buffalo herds at Shumba and Masuma but otherwise almost every buffalo in the Sinamatella area seems to have joined the Mandavu herd. A herd of a hundred and fifty or so that occasionally visits Sinamatella flood plain has been troubled by lions. We watched one afternoon, fourteen lions versus the buffalo. At one point, after bravely keeping the lions at bay for some time, the buffalo panicked as they crossed the river and they ran. The lions got right in amongst them and we were sure they would get themselves a meal but when the dust finally cleared, all the buffalo were still alive and the lions had given up and retired to drink at a tiny pool in the river. If I had that much trouble getting an evening meal I would become a vegetarian.

In recent years Sue and I have done a lot of bird atlassing. This year though has been so busy we’ve hardly had time for any atlassing trips so one day this month we made an effort to combine some atlassing and vulture nest monitoring with journeys

out to check on the borehole drilling at Masuma and Deteema. The atlassing wasn't spectacular, with only thirty six species recorded in the two hours we spent in Baobab pentad and thirty four for Deteema but there were one or two of those good moments that only a birder would understand, like seeing enormous numbers of grey-headed sparrows at Deteema or hearing Green Pigeons in a shady Trichilea at the Lukosi River. We also had the satisfaction of finding ten new vulture nests along the Lukosi, also ten that were being re-used from last year and only seven of last year's nests missing. All of them are White-backed.

Finally, Eve and Bertille from The Sinamatella School support Association left us in August after two hard-working months at Sinamatella. They achieved a great deal this year, as usual the children loved having them here and also as usual, we were sad to see them go. Many thanks to them and their supporters for all their work.

ROBINS

We welcome the new Area Manager to Robins, Power Mapunga and look forward to a fruitful relationship. A mention of Wildlife Officer Kwasherai Dzoro, who was acting Area Manager for a while and did an admirable job, and we thank him for his assistance.



Thanks to help from our sister NGO Friends of Hwange under Dave Dell, and the McKenzie Foundation (Jane Paumgarten) we were able to drill two more boreholes at Deteema Dam - this waterhole is under tremendous pressure from the amount of game, especially elephant and buffalo, drinking there. Our hybrid solar unit is struggling to pump enough water to meet demand so we decided on a second borehole needed. We drilled a borehole near the dam - unfortunately not a high yield, but we want to connect it to a windmill and use it for domestic supply, with the overflow into the dam via a bird bath in front of the hide. We drilled a second hole and came up with good water - this is near the first borehole and we will link into the current



Big Toms

pipeline to double the flow.

We have an ongoing maintenance program on the Robins boreholes and water points over the next month, which is really fine tuning and adjusting the existing pumps, repairing any damaged infrastructure and undertaking a survey of the remains boreholes and waterpoints, to come up with an overall water point plan.

We also have an offer from a young Victoria Falls builder, Dan Jones, to renovate the hides at Robins - it will be his labour and transport, if Bhejane Trust can source the materials required. As you can see from the state of Big Toms hide, and of Little Toms, this is urgently required and a great initiative.

Little Toms



A few pictures of Robins - note the solar water pumps were supplied through the Conservation and Wildlife Fund Trust

August 2016

by Trevor Lane



Manzimbomvu (above)



Big Toms (above)

Little Toms (below)



Dolilo (below)



August 2016

by Trevor Lane



Deteema Dam (above)



Lion at Big Toms

POACHING

Contact in the Panda Masuie Forest Area (bordering Zambezi National Park) between two Forestry rangers and a police detail, and 5 Zambian poachers. The poachers got away and later crossed the Zambezi back into Zambia ahead of the pursuing Parks rangers, but they dropped 8 tusks which were recovered. At least they had no reward for their excursion! The blankets wrapped around the tusks were shoulder pads.



Parks Investigations arrested a deputy headmaster and an accomplice in Tsholotsho Communal Area in possession of ivory. The headmaster has been under surveillance for a while, and it turns out he has been a middleman in ivory for over 14 years. He supplies unemployed villagers with cyanide and then buys the ivory off them for a pittance. He has bought two houses in Bulawayo, plus a commuter bus on the proceeds of his ivory dealings. More arrests are expected in the follow up. Great work by Investigations!

A new initiative has been launched by Panthera and Wilderness Trust to form an anti-poaching unit to cover hange National Park and surrounding areas, working with both Parks, Forestry and surrounding communities. This initiative will involve safari operators, NGO's, Authorities, and all those involved in wildlife. It is still in its infancy, but is a step in the right direction!

COMMENT

Sable on the decline.

One of our most threatened species in Zimbabwe is the Sable Antelope, which has undergone a dramatic population decline over the last few years. The Kalahari Forest areas and the Matetsi region of north-western Matabeleland were in days of old noted for their magnificent sable bulls and the sable herds, which was in many cases the most common species in the areas, but over the years the sable numbers have decreased greatly, though the hardier Roan Antelopes (which is protected by law) have increased!

I think there are several reasons for the decline of the sable:

- 1) Over-hunting - many of the herd bulls being shot out with quotas way too high, and unethical safari operators “quota transferring” to further aggravate the situation. The continual shooting of herd bulls has to be disruptive, and the overshooting is apparent in the decline of trophy quality - the magnificent Matetsi bulls of old are no more!
- 2) Predation - the increase in lion populations would have some effect on the sable herds, with the lions predating on the sable. The continual shooting of the herd bulls also takes away the protection of the herd, leaving them vulnerable not only to lions, but also hyena. It is noticeable in the Zambezi National Park that the survival rate of youngsters is way higher in herds with a herd bull, then in herds without a bull.
- 3) Habitat change - sable are sensitive grazers, and their habitat is being altered by two different factors :
 - a) the forests and vldi's are being over protected from fire, so the post fire green bite on the vlei's are in short supply, and many of the vlei's become moribund and the grasses unpalatable.

b) the increase in buffalo numbers - the buffalo herds have grown and expanded into areas where they were not found previously, such as Ngamo-Sikumi and parts of Matetsi - these coarse grazers flatten and trample the vlei's, rendering them unsuitable to the sable

3) Poaching - young sable very vulnerable to dogs, and also herds are very susceptible to snare lines around water points

4) Reduction of habitat due to land invasions.

What can be done to stop this decline? Much of the decline is beyond any means of practical control. However, I think sable should be taken off quota in most areas, especially Matetsi, with very reduced quotas elsewhere. Also a controlled burning programs of the Kalahari vlei's could help to revive the populations by recreating a suitable habitat for them. Of course, protection from poaching goes without saying! If no positive action is taken, the sable will be gone long before lions or any other species.

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 McKenzie Foundation and Jane Paumgarten of South Africa for their generous support.

Conservation & Wildlife Fund Trust - for the funding got the borehole pumps in the Robins area

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

Mark Unwin and the Clarkson Jersey Charitable Trust. Many thanks and much appreciated, Mark.

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.

Dave Dell and Friends of Hwange for their tremendous support in the drilling of new boreholes in the Sinamatella and Robins regions

Piet and Anthea Erasmus - for yet another their generous donation.

Ricky Forster and Forster Irrigation of Bulawayo - their support is great and much appreciated - they always rise to the occasion when requested

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

Micky West for a generous donation.

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

Wilderness Safaris for assistance at Sinamatella

John Karasellos of Victoria Falls for his continual assistance

Malcolm Pringle-Wood for his donation

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.

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,
FBC Bank,
Galleria Building, Parkway Victoria Falls
Zimbabwe
Branch Code : 8512
Swift Code : FBCPZWHA
Account No : 6145093780178

Bhejane Trust office address:

231 Sopers Crescent,
P.O.Box 210
Victoria Falls
Zimbabwe

CONTACT DETAILS

Trevor Lane -	trevor@bhejanetrust.org	+263 777 057 024
Stephen Long -	stephen@bhejanetrust.org	

August 2016

by Trevor Lane

