



SEPTEMBER 2016

NEWSLETTER

Apologies for the late newsletter but I have been in the Okavango Delta and the Buby Valley Conservancy - a tough life !!

Patrick Williamson, our Aussie volunteer, moved on this month after a five month stint in helping us. He did a great job in mapping some of the Parks, and was instrumental in revamping our web site - the site now has a new look but still needs fine tuning! Many thanks, Patrick, and look forward to seeing you back here.

We received funding for a drone this month from Le Pic Vert (Michel Buenerd) of France. This exciting new project is to purchase a drone, equip a vehicle and then use a specialised operator to operate this drone in the field of rhino monitoring and anti-poaching (especially Zambians crossing the Zambezi River).

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

The eyesore Econet tower (reported on in the last newsletter) which was erected unbeknown to anyone in the Chundu area is being relocated to a far more discreet site in the Park.

We have renovated the facilities at No 3 in the Park - this includes repairs to shelving, matepi wall, plumbing, plus repainting the toilet/shower room and general clean up.

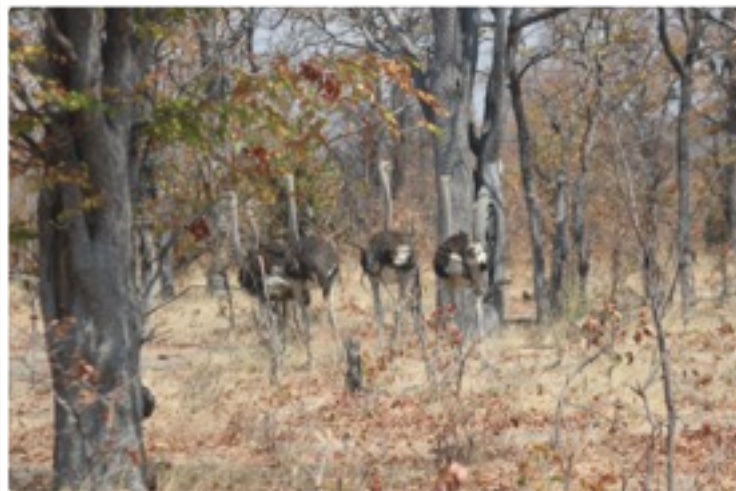
We started putting in a new game viewing hide at Timots (No 4), thanks to Ian Thomson and Ian Gloss, and John Kiggen of Kiggen Builders. This hide will be one of two to be erected in the Chamabonda, and will be a self contained viewing platform.



KAZUMA PAN

I undertook a field trip to Kazuma Pan National Park, and checked the Kazuma Corner Pan - it is doing well, with a lot of animals drinking at it. A sick elephant had died by the pan, from natural causes. I also checked on Roan Pan, which is still holding water, though the borehole is poor, and other than drilling a new borehole, not much can be done.

Patrick the Aussie marked all the old boreholes, some of which date back over 60 years, on a map, and we have drawn up a tentative plan for future water provisions for this area, as and when a management plan is produced. We also have done a survey of where to put future minimum development camps for the overland market, to encourage greater usage of KPNP in the future.



SINAMATELLA

Report from Stephen Long

Game water

We have no new installations to report on for either Sinamatella or Robins in September but that certainly doesn't mean we weren't busy – adjustments to existing infrastructure, routine maintenance and responding to breakdowns kept Nick, Tshuma, myself, or often all three of us busy with game water work almost every day of the month.

Our two wind pumps continued to give good service. At Sinamatella Pan the pump runs too quickly on a windy day for the yield of the borehole so we added an extra pipe into the hole to gain just a little extra water. With the pools and elephant-diggings in the Sinamatella river now dry the pan has been supplying a herd of over eighty impala, varying numbers of kudu and zebra, the occasional herd of buffalo, many birds and of course elephants – although for some reason elephant numbers have been very low.



Buffalo crossing the dry Sinamatella River to drink at the Pan.

The Tshompani wind pump averaged 15143 litres per day through September, helping to keep the dam at a higher level than we have known it for some years. Nick manufactured and installed some sections for the tower, finally replacing elephant damage from last year and he and Tshuma added a half-pipe to the above-ground part of the system to reduce pressure on the packing and stop the persistent leak that was the cause of the elephants 'attacking' the pump in the first place. So far it has been successful and there is no leakage.

Apart from regular cleaning of the solar panels, the only other adjustment to a pump we made during September was at Manzimbovu in Robins where we replaced the 50mm rising main with 40mm. The borehole at Manzimbovu is very low-yielding so we need to squeeze every drop of water we can out of it and we realised we were losing flow due to the pump having to lift an unnecessary amount of water through the 50mm pipe. Reducing the rising main size will help – probably not much but better than nothing. Now that almost all of our boreholes have poly-pipe rising main, we have made a set of 'lifters' so that the pipes can be taken out with shear-legs and rope-block rather than back-breaking hand-lifting. We tested the plan at Manzimbovu where the borehole is 100m deep and found that it works well – slower than hand-lifting perhaps but certainly a huge amount easier.

Most of our other game water work in September was repairs – some simply fixing leaks in old infrastructure, some thanks to the ever-destructive elephants. At Shumba, Masuma and Big Toms we replaced sections of old, leaking galvanised pipe; quite a simple job at Big Toms and Masuma but more difficult at Shumba where we had to leave the job unfinished one day for lack of parts and the elephants took a hand overnight and pulled up everything they could get their trunks on. Nick and Tshuma fixed it all properly the next day. At Tsamhole in Robins we replaced a faulty motor and got the pump running again after several weeks' breakdown.

Finally in this long list of work carried out are a couple that are yet to be completed. At Shumba the elephants have started destroying the outlet to the pan from the former wind-pump borehole. This will be difficult to repair given the huge number of animals using the water directly where it pours out at the pan. Worst of all was Bumbumutsa where elephants not only pulled up the 120m of pipe that joins the two boreholes but also broke all the above-ground infrastructure at the number two borehole, including the safety rope, so that the pump and pipe are currently lost in the hole waiting for us to 'fish' them out. That will be a challenge.

In spite of all this work carried out, all of our pumps have been running more or less non-stop through September and the over-all game water situation is good. Shumba and Masuma are under huge pressure from elephants and the levels of both are falling fast but none of the pumped water points is completely dry. One of the biggest successes is Mashambo Pan where a mains-electric powered submersible

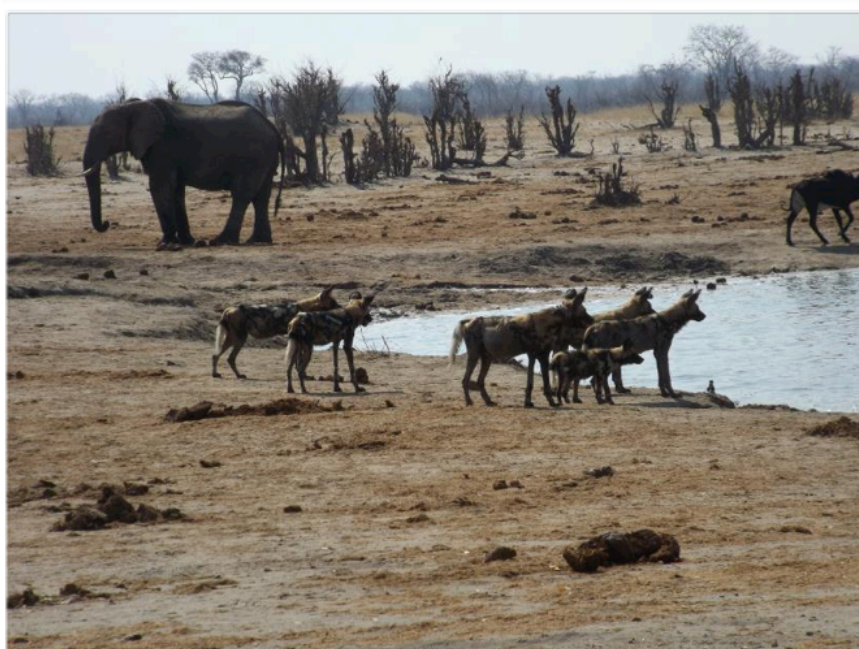
pump (sponsored by Wilderness Safaris) has kept the pan almost full, in spite of many animals using it. The pan has opened up a big area in and at the base of the Smiths Mine Hills for dry season use by everything from elephants to warthogs – exactly what we are aiming at with our game water efforts.



Elephants at Mashambo Pan.

Wildlife

Around Sinamatella itself animal numbers have been surprisingly low. Elephants have almost abandoned the area rather than increasing as we might expect. Elsewhere though, there are places where there are almost too many animals. Masuma, of course is busy throughout the day, Deteema is similar and the new pump at Dolilo has been a great success with plenty of animals using it. Shumba however is the real surprise. Mammal counts from Shumba were quite low until just a few years ago but now there is so much activity it is hard for visitors to know what to photograph first and the surrounding bush has been thinned out almost to vanishing point in places. Around 1400 elephants were counted in the 24 hours of the WEZ mammal census and whenever we pass through we see roan, zebra, sable, kudu, impala, warthogs and more.....



I wish I could put forward a convincing explanation for this change. It is not simply water availability as elephant numbers were very high last year as well, when the water supply was not good. Neither is it my imagination... comparing the WEZ data for 2012 and 2015, excluding predators, thirteen species show increased numbers and only one (impala) shows a decrease. Elephant and zebra numbers increased by very large factors. I will be interested to see the 2016 data and I'd be happy to hear of a good explanation for the change.

My photos above show, amongst others, Painted Dogs at Shumba where we have rarely seen them in the past. We have continued to work with Painted Dog Conservation at Sinamatella and are beginning to get a picture of what dogs are around though these Shumba dogs have been elusive. The Gurangwenya Pack raised at least six pups in the Smiths Mine Hills but sadly one of the adult dogs was lost to a snare close to the Hwange Colliery concession. A second dog was also snared nearby but it happened to be one with a radio collar and the PDC researchers found it and released it before it was badly hurt. A very lucky escape. Rangers based on the periphery of the Parks estate have been finding snares on a regular basis – no surprise given the economic difficulties of the communities around the Park.

Whilst snaring is not a surprise, what has been a surprise so far this year is the small scale of the cyanide-poaching. Four elephants were killed with cyanide in the Deka Safari Area in September but I had expected the problem to be a lot worse this year and it is only through the good work of Parks Investigations Branch and their colleagues in ZRP that this hasn't happened. Poisoning is potentially a huge problem and without doubt it will happen again but so far it is great credit to the Parks Authority that the problem has been relatively minor so far this year.

Amazingly, we have lost almost as many elephants this year to collision with trains as we have to poachers. Two elephants were killed in this manner early in September and I find it hard to understand how that can happen, especially given the very small number of trains running and their rather low speed. It is generally thought that the elephants are confused by the wall of shadow thrown either side of the tracks by the trains' powerful lights and are afraid to cross into it but even so, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, (for the first and probably the last time in Bhejane newsletter's history) "to get hit by a train may be regarded as a misfortune, to get hit by NRZ looks like carelessness".

Not much interesting news for birders this month. My favourite sighting was a single Avocet at Mandavu Dam where they are rarely seen and young Skimmers at the same place – showing successful breeding for the second year running. The vulture nest survey continues and we are finding more nests at the known colonies than we did last year. This might just be that we are getting better at it but I think it reflects a

real increase though, as with increased mammal numbers at Shumba, I would be hard-pressed to come up with an explanation.

The WEZ mammal census.

The annual Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe mammal census took place at the September full moon. Coverage was good though surprisingly a few teams didn't turn up and as a result some places such as Tshompani were not counted. The Bhejane team counted at Bumbumutsa, nominally in Robins sector but more easily administered from Sinamatella. We set ourselves up close to the number one borehole, aiming to be both discreet and safe, with the car parked next to a large Mopane tree on one side and the trench around the solar equipment on the other so that we could place a couple of chairs safely in the small gap between them. A couple of hours after sunset we were watching elephants at the pan when they suddenly ran, apparently in a panic, off into the bush. Seconds later the reason for the panic became clear when a lion hurtled through our 'safe' gap, narrowly missing the chairs and their startled occupants, and killed the reedbuck it was chasing just twenty meters behind us. A second lion joined it and they spent a noisy hour completely devouring their catch while we watched from the car. No harm was done (except to the reedbuck) and we had an exciting evening but it reinforces the fact that no matter how careful you are, there's no such thing as complete safety in the bush.

Other teams later reported (as usual) some close encounters with elephants but the count otherwise ran smoothly and we eagerly await the results. At Robins the teams got together after the count and raised money to buy 1.2km of 63mm poly-pipe for a new pipeline from the borehole to the pan at Deteema. The pipe has already been delivered so we now need to get a new trench dug and the pipe installed. It will make a big difference to the flow and is greatly appreciated.

Miscellaneous

Since this is a combined Robins/Sinamatella report I must mention football – with apologies to those who are not keen on the game - as Sinamatella travelled to Robins early in September for the latest match in the two stations' long rivalry. I was fascinated by the Sinamatella goalkeeper's pre-match warm up which came mostly from a brown bottle but was, he insisted, an essential part of his preparations. The coach didn't seem to be convinced and he kept that particular warm-up as brief as he could but even so the 'keeper was noticeably excitable when the match kicked off. Within ten minutes Sinamatella was two-nil down and the 'keeper had hardly seen the ball except as it flashed past him between the posts but Sinamatella settled down and everyone, goalkeeper included, played well from that point on so that we eventually travelled home warmed by the glow of a four-two victory. Many thanks to Robins for

their hospitality before and after the match - and for giving us a rare victory to celebrate.

A less happy combined Robins/Sinamatella activity occurred later in the month when Robins was hit by a huge fire that took several days and the combined work of Robins rangers, a team from Sinamatella and the fire brigade to bring under control. The Robins staff bore the brunt of the work but the fire was too big to control and in its course one of the lodges at Nantwich was destroyed and perhaps hundreds of square kilometres of bush was burnt. Fire can of course be beneficial sometimes but after such a hot fire over such a large area the bush will take a while to recover.

Finally, good news on transport. Parks now have the luxury of two working vehicles at Sinamatella with the return of the Mbada Diamonds Land Rover. That of course eases the pressure on our transport. We also find ourselves struggling a little less for diesel as we are received donations from Camp Hwange, SAVE Foundation, HHK and Nengasha on top of the usual Makomo donation which between them made life a lot easier in September. Many thanks to everyone for that help.

ROBINS

As has been reported by Stephen, the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Zimbabwe (WEZ) held there annual 24 hour game count at waterholes in Hwange National Park in September. It will be interesting to see the results! The teams that counted the Robins water points held an auction the night after he count to raise money for a new pipeline to Deteema Dam from the existing and the new borehole to the wall - a distance of 1,1km. The pipeline has since been purchased, and many thanks to Ricky Forster for this help here.

A report was made by visitors to the count of the very sorry state of the museum at Robins, including the photos and items donated by HG Robins when he bequeathed the land to the state in 1939. Bhejane Trust will look into this and see what we can do to assist in restoration of all the memorabilia to an acceptable state.

A young Victoria Falls building contractor, Dan Jones, visited Robins recently on holiday and came to see me when he got back. He stated the hides in Robins were in a serious state of disrepair and he volunteered to take in his building team and renovate some of them, provided Bhejane Trust could provide the materials. He then went back to Robins with a couple of workers and listed what was needed. AP Glendinning responded to an appeal for materials, Dan provided some from his stocks, and Bhejane Trust provided what was still outstanding.

This last weekend Dan went into Robins with his team and tackled Big Toms - a big task, starting with the water tank which the elephant had pulled over. The team was closely monitored by the thirteen resident lion! The hide is now very presentable, with all ablution facilities working (even a shower installed), Our thanks to Power Mapunga (Area Manager) and Kwashera Dzoro for their active support offered by Parks in this venture. Bhejane Trust was proud to support this initiative from a young entrepreneur.





POACHING

Four elephants, plus some small birds, were found dead at a waterhole on the Sinamatella park boundary, of suspected cyanide poisoning. Acting on a tip off, Parks rangers and ZRP details set up an ambush for the suspected ivory dealers involved in the poisoning - the four suspects fled the ambush in a vehicle after being challenged, and the ambush team of two rangers and two ZRP details gave chase - very unfortunately the one detail had an accidental discharge in the chase vehicle, and hit the other ZRP detail, who has subsequently died. The suspects obviously got away but follow up investigations continue. Bhejane Trust extends its deepest sympathies to the family of the deceased policeman, who died doing his duty.

Acting on a tip off, four suspected poachers were arrested in Tsholotsho, accused of illegally hunting elephant. They received two years jail plus \$ 400 fine - there appears to be an anomaly in the law here where hunting of elephant is 2 years and possession of ivory is 9 years!

Four elephants were also poisoned in Tsholotsho, and investigations are continuing.

GRATEFUL THANKS

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

Wildlife & Environmental Society of Zimbabwe (WEZ) and the Robins game counters for the funds raised for the Deteema pipeline, and to Ricky Forster for facilitating the pipeline purchase and delivery

Dan Jones and his team for renovating Big Toms Hide.

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 building a new hide in the Chamabonda

Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert for four donated solar pump units for Sinamatella, and the newly installed hybrid solar unit at Deteema. Michel has again risen to the fore and funded

the new borehole at Lukosi River drive, which has been drilled and which will be operational hopefully in October.

Thor Thorsson– an intrepid traveller

Glynn Burger of Johannesburg 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. We are now trying to consolidate the water points put in.

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

