



From mid October through to the end of the month, we experienced a heat wave in Matabeleland, leading to more stress on waterpoints, which are struggling to cope under the number of elephants.

We also had our first storm in Victoria Falls, of 15mm on 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, but no sign of rain after that!

*Tsessebe in Kazuma Pan National Park*



## Zambezi National Park

Some great news – Piet and Anthea Erasmus from Cape Town have volunteered to fund the fifth borehole, which will be on the Chamabonda River section, towards the gate. This will be in memory of Andre Malan, Anthea's father, whom many Bulawayo types will remember from days of old (S M Lurie). We will be getting a drilling rig up next month and will then put down the borehole, set up a solar pump and put in the pipeline and trough. We will put up an appropriate sign honouring Andre. This last borehole will also give a nice spread of water all the way along the entire Chamabonda system

The generosity of Piet and Anthea's donation will also allow for us to drill a second borehole at No 3 – this pan is suffering from the amount of elephant drinking there – they drain the 25000l trough dry some nights! We would like to run a pipeline from the second borehole directly into the pan to keep it topped up, even when the trough is drained. The pan went right down this month to three little puddles, but one problem was that someone had fiddled with the pipeline valve and half closed it, restricting the water flow by over half!



*The sorry state of No 3 after someone had fiddled with the water control valve!*

A couple of stats on the waterpoints for the month of October :

Timots – averaged 55,000l per day – up from 18,000l p/d after fitting 4 new panels to boost amperage ( power) to the new pump

No 1 – averaged 32,000l per day – up from 21,000l p/d after installing second pump in same borehole, and a second pipeline to carry increased flow

Thomsons - averaged 65,000l per day – up from 30,000l p/d after new pipeline put in, combined with new pump

No 3 – steady at 32,000l per day – had dropped to 10,000l p/d after someone half closed a valve!



We graded all the roads on the Chamabonda vlei that needed grading, and have put in new roads (graded) towards the gate to where Andre's borehole is going to be sited. The road network is now much improved from the gate to No 3, with several loop roads to increase the game viewing experience.

*Chamabonda scenes – hyena den      Jackal pup*





A morning in the Chamabonda!!





## Kazuma Pan National Park

As previously reported, Mats Berglund from Sweden had donated money for a solar pump, though The Transboundary Conservation Foundation. With the help of Forster Irrigation in Bulawayo, we managed to stretch this donation into two pumps! I spent some time in Kazuma checking existing boreholes, nearby pans etc, for placement of the second borehole, as the first had already been decided on at Kazuma (Corner) Pan

Ricky Forster came up from Bulawayo, and we went out to Kazuma. With the assistance of the Parks staff we set up the solar panel frame, put on the panels, put down the pumps and connected it all up. We then switched on the pump and got water – it had a lot of fine sand in it, which we had anticipated as the borehole had not been pumped for years, and thus we had not put the pump all the way down where it could have got jammed in the sand. We left the pump for a week to pump out the fine sand, and then I went back and lowered the pump another 5 meters down the hole – the water came out clear of sand and the borehole had deepened by nearly 3 meters from the sand pumped out. The final stage is now to change the existing pump for a bigger one, now the hole is cleaned out. The pan has filled up and we recorded tsessebe, reedbuck, giraffe, elephant and oribi at the pan in the first few days.



*Kazuma Pan – wiring up the solar panels*

We returned to the pan again later in the month and turned up the pump speed. There were herds of tsessebe and wildebeest around, plus reedbuck and ostrich. Also recorded drinking here ( according to the rangers stationed there) are oribi, roan, eland, elephant, lion and giraffe. The intention is to build an elevated hide here which will overlook the pan and the depression, and hopefully this will increase the overland traffic to Kazuma – access through Panda Matenga border and then loop through to Robins.



*Kazuma Pan –*

*Above – putting down the pump*

*left – water!*

*Below – the first water pumped  
into the trough in years*





*Kazuma Pan*

*Left – the full trough looking towards the pan*

*Below – the pan filling up after 3 days of pumping*

*Bottom – after ten days*





Ricky Forster came back with the second solar pump, and we went to Roan Pan ( named after the first animal sited), which is on the edge of what we call the “Badlands” – a vast expanse of open grass lands. The elephant can be seen roaming through these grasslands at most times. The borehole we are using was probably drilled in the 1950’s, when the area was used for cattle rearing – there are two old dip tanks by the borehole. We had dug a trench and laid a pipeline to a nearby natural pan. We put up the solar unit, put down the pump and turned it on. The first water looked like oil – the hole had not been pumped for probably 65 years! The water soon cleared up though. Flow was initially very limited and we are going to have to gradually pump the silt out – the flow will increase over time.



*Roan Pan – before we start pumping it*







*Top – putting the pump in at Roan Pan*



*Middle – dirty water – soon cleaned up*

*Bottom – wildebeest on the Depression*





# Sinamatella

## Report from Stephen Long

October was a particularly difficult month. Quite apart from the very high temperatures, we were plagued by logistical problems and were sometimes simply unable to do things that we wanted, and needed, to do. Our Land Cruiser was out of action for the whole month and our other two vehicles were often needed for work concerned with the elephant poisonings, leaving me stranded for transport. We also faced a number of problems with the domestic water supply at Camp. This shouldn't directly involve me but repairs to the domestic water equipment use the same tools and staff as repairs to game water so game water work has to stop until the Camp's water is running.

### Game water

Most of the time, October felt like a battle between us and the elephants; most of the time it also felt like the elephants were winning. In spite of the logistical problems I mentioned above, we managed to attend to game water problems on fifteen days during the month and ten of those were to clear up elephant damage of various kinds.....

At Inyantue the outlet pipes from the pump at 'Thor's Pan' (Inyantue Vlei) were pulled up and had to be replaced.

At Tshompani we were unable to stop the constant 'attacks' on the wind pump and we eventually had to turn it off to avoid it being damaged beyond repair. The solar pump was out of action on two occasions due to damage to the cables (once, to make a change, it appeared to be due to Hyenas) and was not running at month end so Tshompani was totally dry.

At Shumba the outlet from the wind pump was damaged on two occasions and we made a special effort to make it fully elephant proof. We failed and they broke it again. The elephants' finest hour was at Shumba. Towards month end they pushed down the windmill completely, leaving just the solar pump working. Luckily, in spite of everything, Shumba has been our best pan throughout the season. It doesn't look nice, being mostly mud, but there is enough water to stop any animals dying of thirst and the unusually windy weather in October was in our favour with the wind pump working exceptionally well. Now that it has been wrecked we have installed an experimental solar system – more on that next month.

Bumbumutsa is back in action after, first repairs to elephant damage and then replacing the pump unit. It has taken a lot of elephant pressure off both Shumba and Masuma and has therefore been of great importance to our game water plans.

At Baobab the borehole is running out of water and the pump hardly runs in the middle of the day. On two occasions it stopped pumping altogether due to broken pipes and the pan became almost dry. By month end we had had it running well for a couple of weeks and there was very good water in the pan but the elephants seemed to have given up on it and it was hardly being used. Strange, given the large numbers jostling for water elsewhere.

The little pump at Mbala, which has run so well, was keeping a decent pool of water in the corner of the dam but elephants pulled up the pipes and we lost several days pumping before we could get to it and it has not yet really recovered though it is running now as well as ever.

Masuma was our big headache. This is our most important pump, for both animals and tourists but it was simply failing to cope with the demand from hundreds of elephants and the dam became almost dry. I contacted a number of people to try to get a bigger pump unit but before anything came of that, a group of



American tourists travelling with Wilderness Safaris donated the money to get a BH50 sent up from Bulawayo. We installed it the day after it arrived and the difference was amazing. By month end the dam was enormously improved and, provided there are no breakdowns, we are now sure Masuma will be good until the rains. Just after we had received the BH50 unit, we were also given a new pump by Pumping Legs/WEZ. Many thanks. It is in my store room ready for use here or elsewhere in the Park when needed. Thanks also to Camp Hwange who provided diesel for Masuma (and Bumbumutsa) throughout the month. Without their help, no matter how big a pump we installed, there would be no water at Masuma.



*Zebra at Shumba – mostly mud but better than nothing*



*The new pump going in at Masuma*





*And the reason why it was necessary*

### Poaching

Last month I rashly suggested that we might be on the verge of another poaching ‘war’ - I wish I was as successful with predicting the lottery numbers because the big feature of October was, of course, poisoning of elephants. There have been a number of stories in the newspapers and on line suggesting that Parks staff have been directly involved in the poisoning. As far as I am aware no Parks staff or contract workers at Sinamatella have been accused, charged, implicated or even suspected of being involved in the poisoning and in fact most have shown their usual dedication in working hard to catch the real culprits. My faith in journalists (never especially high) has slipped greatly in recent weeks.

There were three separate poisonings in the month. In each case the poachers put cyanide into small pools of water in river beds at night. Elephants drinking at these ‘springs’ were killed more or less instantly and the poachers then took two or three tusks from the biggest animals and fled. The ‘good’ news of this technique for us is that as each subsequent elephant drinks, it takes away a good percentage of the cyanide so that by the time seven or eight elephants have drunk, there is little poison left, especially as fresh water runs in continuously, further diluting it. As a result very few other animals and birds are affected (as far as I know, just one Impala, two vultures and a White-browed Sparrow-weaver). The elephant carcasses are also nowhere near as deadly as expected. We are told that the meat is perfectly safe to eat and only the internal organs are potentially dangerous for a few days.

Perhaps the biggest problem caused by the poaching has been the tremendous amount of very scarce resources used in dealing with it. Each incident took around five days to clear up, including decontamination, investigation, tracking of the poachers etc. During those days very little else was possible as vehicles were in constant demand and the poisonings took priority. It would be difficult to estimate the cost to Parks, ZRP, EMA (and Bhejane Trust) of the three incidents but it certainly runs into many thousands of dollars even before the value of the elephants is taken into account. For the moment the elephant losses are sustainable, being just a tiny percentage of a huge population, but the financial loss isn't so the cyanide problem ultimately threatens not just elephants but potentially the whole Park and every effort must be made to stop it.

### Wildlife

With the very high temperatures and poor food supply for the herbivores, October must have been hard for many of the animals. Buffalo look exhausted at the best of times but this month their bones really started to stick out and they hardly moved out of the shade throughout the day. We noticed the Impala looking thin as well but as usual the zebra look great.

One species that was noticeably affected during the month was Cape Turtle Doves. We received reports from Masuma and Shumba of very weak doves being killed by baboons or Yellow-billed kites and I saw several instances myself. I saw one dove repeatedly hit by kites and taking shelter amongst the elephants at the water. Another, in similar circumstances, took refuge under our car and I thought for a while that the kites were the cause of the problem. In fact it appears that they are simply taking advantage of the weak doves and the cause is probably just poor condition due to lack of food. The situation with doves raised our awareness of other bird numbers and we noticed that Meve's Starlings (usually one of our commonest species) seem to have declined quite dramatically. This is something we will keep a close watch on in the coming months.



*A precarious refuge for a dove*

While the herbivores are suffering, the predators are of course enjoying a relatively easy life. We saw the Gurangwenya pack of Painted Dogs with this year's crop of pups and were delighted to see they have raised ten. Lions have also been much in evidence with big groups of lionesses regularly seen around Masuma and Mandavu





### *The Gurangwenya pups*

#### Miscellaneous

Amongst the game water and poaching dramas, life went on very much as usual. I spent two full days plus numerous hours here and there, working on vehicles to keep them moving. The cruiser's gearbox is still waiting for spares but the two Land Rovers and the Hilux I have borrowed in the past week all soldier on.

Sinamatella's domestic water supply is another perennial problem. In October we were treated to a collapsed bearing on the booster pump and an electrical meltdown. The electrics were relatively simple to sort out but replacing the booster pump took a very long day (continuing well after sunset) plus a very early start next morning before the water was running again. I can claim very little credit for any of that – the work was mostly done by Parks staff and the ZNWA rep Mr Nyathi, with me as an interested observer offering occasional advice.

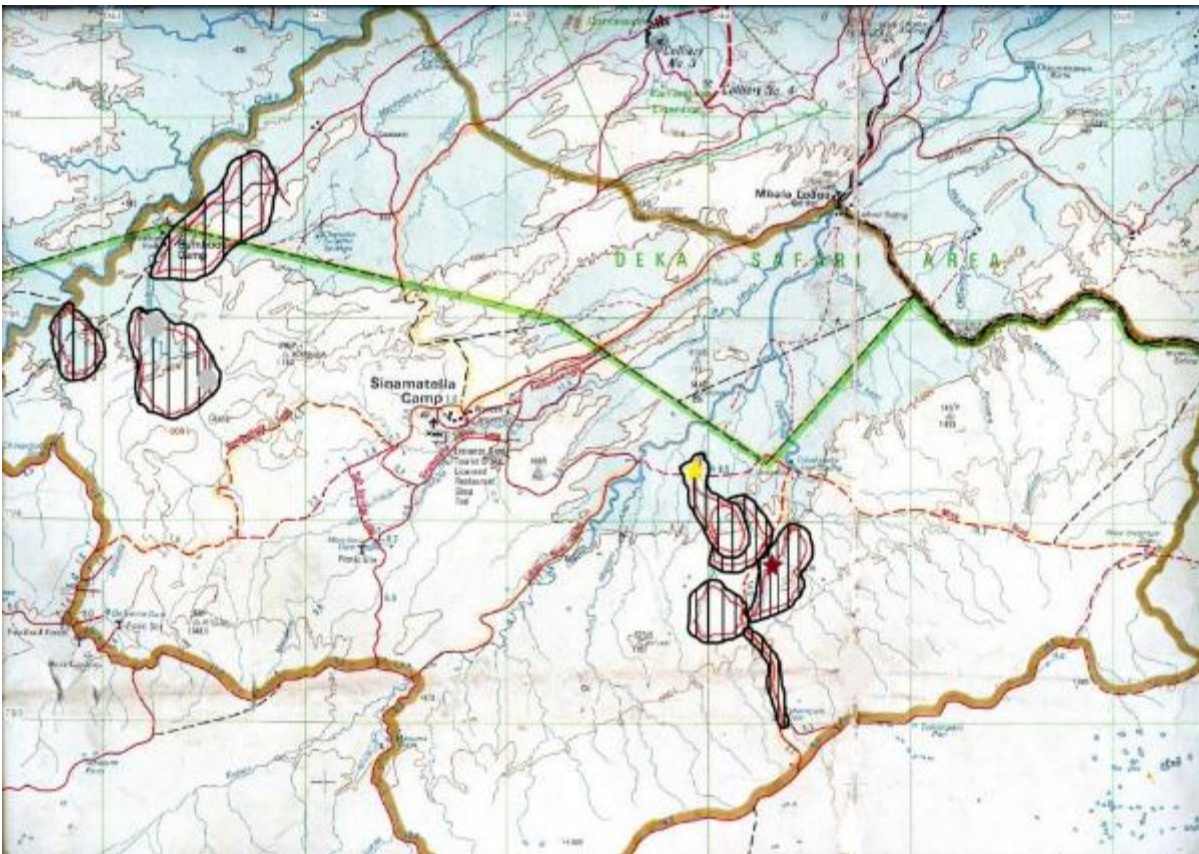
In mid-month we had fires to deal with. A lightning strike (no rain sadly) started the problem but the many dead Mopane trees felled by elephants that then caught fire smouldered undetected for days on end and the fire kept flaring up and having to be fought all over again. Luckily all this took place close to Sinamatella. Had it been further afield, the damage would have been much greater.



Finally, at the end of September, I was flattered to receive the Ted Hyson Wildlife Trophy from WEZ. There are some illustrious names on the trophy and I'm honoured to join them. I would like however to give some credit to others, without whom I could do very little. Firstly to Sue, who will claim that she does nothing but is in fact an essential part of the team, secondly to Sinamatella's Area Manager Mr Moses Gomwe whose support and encouragement have been vital and thirdly to Trevor Lane. This newsletter stands as testimony to his role and I surely need say no more except thanks.

### **Rhino Monitoring Report by Nick Long**

This has not been a very good month for me as I did not manage to join very many patrols conducted as we had 3 very sad incidents of elephant poaching using poison that kept me busy with other tasks. The few patrols that we did get did not yield much in the way of rhino activity although we did track a single animal once but unfortunately had to abandon tracking as we were too far from the vehicle. Other members of the team deployed at different areas did however manage to see two separate animals, a young clean bull who we assume is the older calf of the mother 179, they also saw 251 who is the dominant bull in the IPZ. Also the helicopter which was doing aerial surveys after the first poisoning incident saw the mother and calf during one of their flights.



*Map showing the months patrols that I took part in.*

During last month's patrols we set a camera trap at a well used dung scrape and got some photos of 4 animals comprising of the mother and calf, the clean animal and 251. We changed the camera because we hoped to get better quality photos from a different make of camera, we put in 2 cameras at different angles and got more photos but the mother and calf did not seem to pass through the area. We think she has moved because of the disturbance after the poisoning of the elephants .





*Above – mother with calf*

*Below – the clean bull*







*251 the dominant bull*

The poisoning of the elephants in the IPZ was a very sad incident and I was on hand at both Tshakabika incidents to assist logistically. I was very much impressed by the reaction from ZNPWMA rangers and the ZRP to try and capture the culprit of this massacre. The poachers which are from a neighbouring village used cyanide which they put in holes the elephants dig along a river, in total they killed 32 elephants but only took 7 tusks.

Also during one of our patrols we came across a male lion which had a wire snare around his neck, his condition showed that he had had this snare on him for some time and I can't even begin to think of the amount of pain and suffering an animal like this goes through.





# Poaching

Early on in the month, we had a case of cyanide poisoning of elephant Tshakabika Springs at Sinamatella. In all nine elephants were poisoned, but the patrol in the area that discovered the carcasses obviously disturbed the poachers, as only two sets of tusks were removed. The patrol immediately radioed a report to base, and Bhejane Trust (Stephen) reacted as Parks had no vehicle in camp. The follow up did not produce any results unfortunately. EMA moved in and de-contaminated the area. We have offered a reward for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of the poisoners!

At the same time as the poisoned elephants were found at Sinamatella, there was another report from Limpande area down in Dzivanini Area ( the bottom south east corner of Hwange) of a further 17 elephants poisoned there. This made a total of 40 elephants poisoned in a couple of days.

Then 22 more elephants were poisoned, again at Tshakabika Springs in Sinamatella, in the middle of the month. There has been a development from the last poisoning, when the reward money offered by Bhejane Trust brought in some significant information. It has now been established that 10kg's of cyanide was sold to a middleman from a mine in Filabusi near Bulawayo - there is a CID follow up on the mine incident. The middleman sold the cyanide in two 5kg batches for \$50 per batch, to locals at Shangano (his home area) near Sinamatella, and in Hwange town. The middleman fled just before he could be arrested and is now on the run.

On 30<sup>th</sup> October, I posted the following on our face book page.

I have just read a news article blaming the National Parks rangers for poisoning the elephants at Sinamatella due to a pay dispute - it is a very sensational and very damning report! However, I take exception at what I think is totally unsubstantiated and sensationalistic reporting. To the best of my knowledge there is nothing at all to suggest the Sinamatella rangers were involved in the poisoning - the facts points against it :

1) Tshakabika Springs is a remote part of Sinamatella and difficult of access from Sinamatella base ( but one of the closest points to the communal area) - there are much easier and better places for rangers to have done such a dirty deed from if so inclined. 2) Who ever did the poisoning was disturbed by a Sinamatella ranger patrol, and fled with only a few tusks - if this was the rangers doing the poisoning they would know the location of the fellow rangers and avoid them. 3) On the second poisoning - again found by a patrol, and again before the tusks could all be pulled - three tracks of nondescript footwear was found departing the scene towards the communal area 4) all the evidence we have collected to date does not suggest the rangers

I could be proven wrong, but I think that such a damning report has no factual basis at the moment and is based on rumours. Until proof of any sort of who did the poisoning emerges, I think this report is crass reporting of the first degree, which we do not need in these difficult times, especially as people tend to take what they see in the media as gospel. I am confident it will all come out soon as to who was responsible.

The Area Manager of Sinamatella has been suspended, but I believe this cannot be interpreted in the wrong light

The Area Manager of Main Camp has also been suspended - I have limited knowledge of what has been happening in the Main Camp area

Another point is that since 2012 we have lost about 200 elephants to cyanide poisoning in Hwange - although this is a horrific crime, it equates to 200 out of probably 50,000 i.e. about 0.4% of the population. The population is not threatened at the moment, except from natural causes!

I stand by what I said – to date there has been no proof of any ranger involvement, nor is there even an implication. I think it is irresponsible to print such unsubstantiated reports in newspapers, without checking the facts.

Subsequent to the above, we have heard that the Sinamatella Area Manager Moses Gomwe has been transferred to Osbourne Dam. We at Bhejane Trust would like to wish him all the best in his new posting, and thank him for all the help and cooperation he showed us at Sinamatella.

We also believe the Area Manager Main Camp has been transferred to Bvumba.

3 elephants were found dead in the Hwange Communal area near Jambezi ( Victoria Falls area) It appears they had been shot, and as police approached, three suspects ran off and failed to respond to Police calls to stop. Police opened fire and one poacher was injured – he is in Mpilo hospital now. He is believed to be a Zambian and it now might be the Zambians have changed their tactics in avoiding the Parks.

Three elephant carcasses were found in the Zambezi National Park, still with the tusks in. There was an initial reaction thinking of poaching, but it subsequently appears as if they died from ingestion of plastic from the Municipal rubbish dump – this plastic had blocked their digestive systems. We have had other elephant die of this before, and the elephant going to the dump and picking up plastic is a serious problem – the results can be seen all over the Park in their dung. Efforts are being made to secure funds to fence off the rubbish dump in the future.

Well Done to Stuart Shaw and the CID team of Victoria Falls after a sting operation early one morning where they travelled from Victoria Falls to recover a poached pangolin for sale in the Binga area. 4 People were arrested in connection with this, The pangolin was recovered and has subsequently been released in the Zambezi National Park. Well done to everyone involved. Coincidentally, another pangolin was handed in to Parks in Victoria Falls, and this was also released in the Park.





## 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 – a staunch supporter.

RAM Petroleum

Eco Energy Fuels

Patrick Jacquemin – for continued, invaluable support, including rangers rations. Patrick has now pledged funds towards another water point.

Forster Irrigation – from Bulawayo – for generous assistance with Solar pumping Units

Mats Berglund of Sweden for his generous donation towards establishing water in Kazuma Pan

Prof Willem van der Riet of the Transboundary Conservation Foundation for his assistance in Kazuma Pan

Alan Sparrow of the Kazuma Foundation for his assistance

Makomo Mine – donation of diesel

Ian & Sue Thomson – more assistance forthcoming, with upgraded pumps, and financial help.

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

Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert for four donated solar pump units for Sinamatella

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

Piet and Anthea Erasmus, from Cape Town.

Dave Carson and Camp Hwange for helping fund our Sinamatella Rhino Monitoring Unit

Gomez Adams for supporting rhino campaign

Chris Lampard – continuing invaluable support in the field

Piet and Anthea Erasmus - for their generous donation towards water in the Chamabonda

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 staff for their continuing support and the spirit of co-operation!

## Donations

Bhejane Trust relies on donations to continue its operations. At Bhejane Trust, ALL donated funds go towards wildlife projects – we have no administration costs, and my time is purely voluntary.

Two projects we are concentrating on at the moment (a suggestion from a reader was that we advise on what we are currently fund raising for, so potential donors can support a specific project):

- 1) a) Robins Camp – waterpoints – The Robins area is neglected compared to Main Camp and Sinamatella and is in dire need of assistance in maintaining water supplies for the wildlife – the area is noted for its big buffalo herds, lions, roan, reedbuck and of course, elephant. The staff there are trying desperately to maintain the waterpoints, with old engines and diesel supply shortages, and we need to replace all the old diesels with solar pumps with a small generator back when required. The cost of a solar unit is running at \$ 6000 per unit.
- 2) Drone – we are looking to acquire a drone for two purposes :  
To monitor the Zambezi River for Zambian poaching ( both fish and elephant poachers). A drone would detect the mekoro's transporting the poachers and would allow a reaction unit to then position themselves to intercept the intruders.  
For rhino monitoring at Sinamatella – when the monitors feel they are close to a rhino, the drone could be deployed ahead to detect the rhino without disturbing it. It could take photo's for positive id.. The cost of a drone is running at around \$ 6000.

Anyone wishing to help us save our wildlife heritage, donations to any amount would be gratefully accepted:

Bank details :  
Bhejane Trust,  
FBC Bank,  
Galleria Building, Parkway  
Victoria Falls  
Zimbabwe  
Branch Code : 8512  
Swift Code : FBCPZWHAXXX  
Account No : 6145093780178

Bhejane Trust office address : 231 Sopers Crescent, Victoria Falls  
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