



# NOVEMBER 2016

## NEWSLETTER

Early in the month there were some scattered thunderstorms, especially in the Robins area, and it looked like the rains had come, but the storms thinned out and the heat was back, and the pressure still on the water. However, many of the elephants left for the back end of Chobe in Botswana once it had rained there, and this relieved the pressure on the waterholes. Towards the end of the month the rains returned and settled in, with more frequent storms and reduced temperatures. The bush is greening quickly and the animals dispersing.

Bhejane Trust is now pumping out of 30 boreholes, with 27 solar units, 2 windmills and one on mains (ZESA) electricity. There is one more solar pump to come on line. We estimate we are pumping over 1,000,000 litres of water a day, and, going on the WEZ Wildlife count in Hwange and our own figures, we are supplying water to approximately 16,000 animals, of which 6,000 are elephants.

National Parks are moving the Area Managers around - Midwell Kapesa from Main Camp is going to Mana Pools, While Edmore Ngosi from Zambezi is going to Main Camp, and Power Mapunga from Robins is moving to Zambezi Camp. We wish them all the best in their new postings, and a big and appreciative thank you for all the assistance they have given us while in their old positions.

We welcomed our old friend and staunch supporter Michel Buenerd from France who came to stay for a couple of weeks and give a hand. He was able to check on his latest funded project - the solar unit and new pan - The Lukosi pan



*Michel Buenerd of Le Pic Vert at Deteema where he funded a pump.*

Bhejane Trust has now also moved into the Deka Safari Area (DSA), in assisting Parks and HHK Safaris in the management of this area. We have just installed a solar unit at Gurangwenya, and are currently putting in the pipeline to the pan, which is by the access road to Sinamatella, and will offer a game viewing introduction to the Park on the way in. There are three more boreholes we would like to equip over time in the DSA, an area which is a buffer zone to the Park, and our new Monitoring Unit will be operating into this area next year on both rhino monitoring and anti-poaching.

## ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

The wildlife populations in the Chamabonda over the last few years have been building up all the time, responding to the water and the mowing/burning program, plus the protection. It is very rewarding to note these results, as can be noted from some of the reports coming in:

Charles Brightman of Discover Safaris sent me a message after doing an afternoon drive in the Chamabonda - “saw wild dogs, bat eared Foxes, black backed jackal, spotted hyena, elephants (plenty), zebra (lots), sable, waterbuck, kudu and the highlight of the day - a herd of more than 50 eland” - not bad for a game drive!

Another report I felt I had to include to show how the Chamabonda has progressed - credit to Craig Black (an old resident who returned for a holiday):

“I know this is a very long post and some people might lose interest but there is a story to tell here. We had a fantastic evening on Monday night at Chamabonda Platform in Zambezi NP. We drove in at about 4.00pm and made our way along the vlei to the platform which took about 40 minutes from Vic Falls. We saw a couple of bull elephant, a very dark coloured giraffe and a pair of huge Kori Bustards. Then we saw two herds of buffalo (60 plus and 80 plus head) with zebra in amongst them. On arrival at the platform, which has a pumped pan 40 metres in front of it, we saw a huge herd of buffalo heading down to the pan. Off to one side were 30 plus sable antelope and to the other more than 60 zebra and a couple of eland and three big bull elephants as well. As the sun set the buffalo were streaming past and there were literally buffalo as far as we could see. We estimated the herd to be at least 500 and probably closer to 600 head, which is an incredibly impressive sight. Some drank but most just kept heading east up the vlei and once about half the buffalo had passed us a herd of cow and calf elephant came down to drink. It was too dark for photography but we could see them clearly in the dusk and counted about 60 including some very young calves. They were only 40 metres away and we had supper (delicious sadza, nyama and choumoulier) listening to them trumpeting and splashing in the water. Apart from an evil looking Parabuthis scorpion which put in an appearance after supper the night was peaceful until the baboons went a bit nuts in the small hours, no idea why. We woke in the half-light to mozzies and the buffalo returning. If anything there were more than the previous evening, possibly the two smaller herds had amalgamated with the bigger one. They flowed past the pan in a continuous stream of black for about 30 minutes, raising a small cloud of dust and grunting and mooing as they went. Trailing behind the main herd were a couple of small straggler groups and as we sat having morning muffins we heard one group start running. They were being chased by a pack of Painted Dogs which had singled out a calf and broke it away from the group and pushed west past us. The little group of buffalo carried on and the dogs turned the calf back towards us, harrying and nipping at it. There were 6 dogs, three adults and three sub-adults and they pushed the buffalo calf right towards us before it broke away towards 2 buffalo bulls following the main herd. The bulls chased the dogs away and the dogs stopped for a quick drink and splash in the pan, they were so confident. As soon as the bulls started to move off with the calf the dogs pursued and again they got it off on its own into a small depression where they took turns to harry and bite it, turning and turning it and slowly exhausting it. At that point we thought that the calf was done for but should have known better than to underestimate the indomitable buffalo will to survive, even in a calf. It broke out of the circle of dogs and ran back towards the pan and us. As it got to the pan another group of stragglers arrived, an old cow with two calves and a yearling. The calf attached itself to the group and the cow tried to see off the dogs which took another drink break and played in the water in

front of us while the little group of stragglers just stood and watched them, knackered. The dogs played for ages and appeared to be losing interest, they had obviously fed in the night, had blood on their muzzles and full stomachs and maybe were using the calf as a training exercise for the youngsters. After gathering their strength the little group of calves and the old cow headed off and as soon as they started to move the dogs were off again after them, the chase response was just too strong but as soon as the group entered the gusu they broke off and the cow and calves were last seen heading for the rest of the herd while the dogs seemed headed for somewhere to sit out the heat of the day. What a fantastic sighting all no further than 50 or 60 yards away and in clear view all the time, about 35 minutes. Just to round it off as we left we saw a male ostrich out on the vlei, the first any of us have ever seen one there. Thank you Charles Brightman and Discover Safaris (<http://discovervictoriafalls.com>) for a wonderful overnight stay.”

The new hide at Timots No 4 is progressing and should be finished in December.



## KAZUMA PAN NATIONAL PARK

I received a message from Parks in Kazuma that the elephant had broken the cable at Kazuma Corner Pan and the pump was not working. I went out only to find they had trashed the whole



pump and dropped in down the borehole complete with cable and safety rope! I had to go back and regroup, and came out with Chris Lampard - we managed to fish the pump out, put on new rising main, reconnect cables and safety ropes and repair the broken pipe to the pan, getting water going just in time. waiting at the pan were Roan, reedbuck, tsessebe and elephant.



While at Kazuma fixing the pump we found a 4 meter python which had just eaten something ( later proved to be a springhare). It was quite exposed, under a small bush. When I went back 2 days later I was disappointed to see it had been killed and partially eaten, by what I have no idea.



There was a fire from a lightning strike at the end of the month in the Kazuma Depression, which burnt out the White Grass area and part of the Depression, and was eventually put out by rain. This burn was most welcome, as it was a cold burn, and has cleaned up a lot of moribund grass, and accumulated detritus, and the area has greened up almost straight away.

## ROBINS

With having put in ten water points into Robins this year, some of the touching up work such as the trenches, cleaning and tidying around some of the boreholes had not been finished, so we sent in a vehicle and gang to go to each water point to check it out and complete any outstanding requirements. We now only need to clean the Manzimbomvu borehole ( the borehole has silted up and is not producing as it should do) and to put in the Deteema pipeline ( a bigger pipeline then the existing).

The solar unit was installed at Deteema 2 thanks to Forster Irrigation, and with the help of Camp Hwange, the second solar unit at Deteema was linked into the pipeline from the first unit, so we have a much increased flow into the dam now. We are planning a supplementary pipeline to the existing one to overcome pipe resistance and further increase the flow.

We put out a local appeal for a bit of help with the Robins Museum - thanks to Sara Norton for the paint, Duncan Cummin for the lights and fans, and Bernie Veldsman for the curtains. Rob Stirling has cleaned up most of the pictures with just the badly damaged frames to be repaired still. Hopefully we will get this museum up and running again in December.



*Storm over Robins*



*Hooded Vulture - Robins*

## SINAMATELLA

### Report from Stephen Long

The most obvious feature of November was what a very uncomfortable month it was and I could write an introduction to this newsletter simply by taking last month's, where I started with much the same words, and substituting the word 'November' for 'October'. We were subjected to some extreme weather conditions from the start of the month right to the end - principally high temperatures but also severe winds and perhaps most importantly, very little rain. Once again temperatures were in the high thirties on most days, rarely dropping below thirty in the house even overnight. By day, outside in the full sun, it was of course much higher. On the 2nd, Sue and I saw a strange smudge in sky away towards Gubombili and thought it must have been rain but slowly the smudge grew and we realised it was a dust storm, approaching fast. When it hit us it was the most violent wind storm I have ever experienced - or ever want to experience. Sue tried to take photos but the air was so full of dust and it was so difficult to stand still against the force of the storm that they came out blurred. The birds had all very sensibly gone to ground but suddenly flocks of Meves Starlings appeared, seeming to be trying to make it up to their normal roosts on top of the hill. They were simply whisked away overhead like fallen leaves, to land presumably far away behind us. We were certain that the Sinamatella wind pump would be blown down and it was invisible through the storm for many



minutes, finally emerging from the murk, undamaged and spinning at a tremendous rate - much to my relief. The wind raged for around thirty minutes but apart from knocking out the electricity, it did surprisingly little damage.

The most damaging aspect of the weather in November was the lack of rain. Normal rainfall for the month has averaged 58mm over the past seven years. This year Sinamatella only received 17mm. Some parts of the area received a good fall at one time or another and have their trees in full leaf and grass beginning to show. For many places however, the bush looked as dry at the end of the month as it did back in October.



*End of November near Sinamatella.*

It is still much too early in the season to begin to worry and start to use that ugly word, drought. I'm sure there is rain to come and I look forward to seeing it - so far whenever and wherever there has been rain, I have been elsewhere and I haven't seen a drop! The smaller animals in the area, those that are too small to move to where rain has fallen, must be really suffering. As usual they have water but food is almost non-existent. Every day there are up to a hundred impala out on the flood plain feeding and every day their food must be less and less palatable and nutritious. One good storm will save them - I hope it comes soon.

Game water.



As in October, I'm sure no-one wants to read the list of all the things the elephants broke while they waited for rain. In fact it was nowhere near as bad as it might have been and we were able to keep all our pumps running with very little down time. In the middle of the running repairs to existing infrastructure, we were able to install two new pumps, one at Masuma to help reduce the number of diesel hours needed on the original pump and one at Gurangwenya where it will supply an otherwise dry area and, we hope, provide some interesting animal sightings for tourists on their way to and from Sinamatella. We also managed to repair the number 2 pump at Bumbumutsa and re-connect the line between the two pumps.

By the end of the month the elephants had mostly left us and all the water-points were recovering well but even at the lowest point when there seemed to be a thirsty elephant around every corner and we were really struggling to supply them, nowhere was completely dry. As usual there were places that were far from pretty - notably Masuma, Shumba, Tshompani and Inyantue but our main aim is not aesthetic, it is to keep the animals from dying of thirst and in that we were successful. Given the large and increasing elephant population that is all we can hope for.



*Masuma, early November, elephants competing for clean water at the trough.*

My reports on game water usually concentrate on elephants but from time to time I try to highlight some of the other animals that we supply with water. Naturally elephants are

the most noticeable but they are far from being alone at the water points. Here are some of our other customers from November.....

*Spotted  
hyena,*



*Baboons  
sheltering  
from the sun,  
Masuma*





*Meyers  
parrots at  
the bird  
bath,  
Masuma.*



### Wildlife

It is normal for there to be an increase in the number of unexplained animal deaths at the end of the dry season and this year was no exception. Almost up to mid-November there were few reported deaths but then suddenly there seemed to be reports of elephants dying almost every day. Many of these were young males. After a lot of thought and discussion as to why young males should be the most vulnerable of the elephants we can only suggest that they are newly independent from their mother's herd and do not yet have the skills to find sufficient food and water out on their own. That, coupled with the stress of being alone might be what kills them but if anyone has a better theory I'd love to hear it. Whatever the reason for young elephants dying at this time of year, it all came to a halt as soon as the rain arrived. We saw lightning far away several times around mid month, when Sinamatella was still totally dry, and presumably the elephants saw it too because within a few days they were all gone. Unless the rains fail completely, we won't see them again until February/March next year.

With plenty of elephant carcasses around the vultures had a good November. Unfortunately, one member of a large flock on an elephant that died near Mashambo Pan managed to fly into the overhead power lines one evening, causing the wires to touch and melt and leaving Sinamatella without electricity for a day and a half. We eventually found the vulture, apparently undamaged (apart from being dead that is) next to the broken line but can only guess at why it had been flying in the dark. As usual, most of the vultures on

the carcasses were White-backed or Hooded but on the 13th we were very excited to find an Egyptian Vulture on a carcass at Shumba. As it strolled around on the ground close to the Pan there was at one moment a chance to get a photo of an Egyptian Vulture joining a group of Egyptian Geese. I was too slow but in any case, the Nile Crocodile that would have really completed the photo, was just out of shot.



### *The Egyptian Vulture*

Lions were also happy with November's difficult conditions. A group of around thirteen of them took up residence for a few days in front of Sinamatella Camp on the floodplain. With the Sinamatella Pan (supplied by the wind pump) holding the only water in the area, they simply had to wait patiently for their food to come to them. We watched small herds of buffalo trying to muscle their way through a cordon of lions to get to the Pan. So long as they kept their discipline and stayed together they were safe but as soon as they panicked and ran, the lions were always going to be able to pick off the slowest of the tired, thirsty and weak bunch. Over two especially bad days, the lions killed five buffalo and a zebra and it was only the arrival of distant rains that allowed the buffalo to move elsewhere and brought an end to the killing spree.





*And a White-backed at Tshakabika hot spring that perhaps sums up the whole month*

Finally, another of the losers in the battle to survive the late dry season was hippo. The thriving herds from Shumba and Masuma had to vacate their drying homes and move somewhere with more water. I'm sure most moved to Mandavu but during the month we became used to seeing hippo spoor on the roads far from any water and occasionally we saw the hippo themselves. One, presumably young male, tried to make a home for himself in the mud at the very top end of Mandavu where he was not likely to be molested by the luckier males with territories in the deeper water. Other hippo turned up at Sinamatella Pan, Mbala and at Mashambo. Sinamatella Pan and Mbala Dam are too shallow to be long-term refuges but Mashambo is a lot deeper, however the hippo only stayed a couple of days then moved on.

#### Miscellaneous

We were delighted to host Michel Buenerd from France for ten days in mid month. Michel might be regarded as the founder of the modern solar-pumped water point in Hwange, having organised the Bumboosie South pump for us back in 2010 - the success

of which led to all the other pumps installed in the past few years. Michel arrived at a busy time and spent many very hot days travelling around with us to various small breakdowns, repairs and installations. We were able to make plans for new equipment which Michel hopes to organise for next year and also to visit most of the sites that have already benefitted from his hard work on our behalf. We both particularly enjoyed a visit to the new Lukosi pump where we watched two adult elephants with two tiny babies drinking at the new pan and were able to share that fantastic "that makes it all worthwhile" feeling. Not so good perhaps was the fact that Sue was away so I did all the cooking - but Michel was too polite to comment.

Other visitors were few and far between in November but in spite of their low numbers, some of them managed to get into unexpected difficulties. One couple, out for the day from Main Camp, used the Sinamatella River Drive and hit a rock in the river bed where the bridge is down, knocking out their automatic transmission in the process. They had little water with them and spent more than 24 hours in their car before dehydration overcame their fear of the wildlife and they walked out to Mandavu where Nick found them. We towed the car out and luckily a spare part was available in Hwange. Two families out from Hwange in a Kombi for a day's fishing at Mandavu had a similar experience. They were the last vehicle to leave the dam and they hit a rock on the road, breaking the sump and leaving them stranded overnight. It must have been a very hot, crowded and uncomfortable night, especially as they kept all the fish they had caught and, certainly by the time I saw them the next morning, the fish were well past their 'best before' date. I suspect the passengers felt pretty much the same - but there were times at the end of another long hot November day when we all felt like that!

## POACHING

There was an unfortunate incident on an island in the Zambezi on a Matetsi Unit where the Zambians shot an elephant opposite a safari camp. The camp reacted and collected a nearby stick of Parks rangers. The safari camp employee ferried the Parks unit over to the island, but when they landed they were ambushed by the Zambians, who were using a heavy rifle and an AK. The safari employee was hit and seriously injured, while the Parks rangers escaped unscathed. This appears to be a deliberate attempt to kill the Zimbabwean rangers, and the culprits are liable for attempted murder. But as per normal, we can expect no cooperation from the Zambians, although the culprits could be found very easily!

There has been a lot of snaring and meat poaching, as can be expected under the dire economic situation faced by most rural folks, but I do not think this is out of hand, and

Parks patrols are keeping the situation in check, certainly around Zambezi, Sinamatella and Robins.

## 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

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 and equipping 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 equipped. Michel has also been instrumental in funding our drone project, which is due to be launched soon.

HHK Safaris/Hunters and Guides - Mark Bristow, John Oosthuizen and Gavin Hume for their support, and generous donation. This has enabled us to complete all required for the end of the season, put in the Guarangwenya pump, and set up for the revival of the rhino monitoring unit

Basil Vrettos for a donation

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.

Belinda Cook for cleaning materials for No 3 Chamabonda.

Robins Museum - an appeal locally was responded to with Sara Norton supplying 40lt of paint ( ceiling and wall), Duncan Cumming providing fans and ceiling lights and Bernie Veldsman providing curtains, with Kevin Fry providing mesh for the window at Big Toms hide - a big thanks to all.

Wilderness Safaris for assistance at Sinamatella

John Karasellos of Victoria Falls for his continual assistance

The Area Managers and staff of Zambezi, Kazuma, Sinamatella and Robins, for all their support and assistance.

A big thanks also to my wife Liz for her continual support in all my comings and goings!!

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!

Apologies if we have inadvertently left anyone out!! Your help is much appreciated



## 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](http://bhejanetrust.org)" or direct to our bank account:

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