



APRIL 2016

NEWSLETTER

I have just done 4000km through Botswana and Namibia, and only two road blocks - one leaving Zimbabwe and one re-entering!! One can appreciate the frustration and apprehension of tourists coming to Zimbabwe and faced with harassing Police stops.

I visited Etosha National Park, which was a great experience, but was also interesting to compare to our Parks. The first point we noted was the price - less than \$20 for two days for two persons and a vehicle. The lodges were packed with tourists, and there was a lot of traffic, including big buses - not so great aesthetically but good for business. Much of the traffic was the self drive market. The roads in the Park were good, and we saw heavy equipment working on the roads. However, Namibian Parks could learn a lot from our Park when it came to facilities - the picnic sites were abominable, being filthy with toilets not usable, which when considering the distances you need to drive, is not acceptable. The pumped water points were also very basic, with just a trough and no spill over pan - no attempt to make them look natural or to cater for wallowing animals. They could also do with erecting some hides like the one at Nyamandhlovu at some of the water points, which

would relieve the pressure of all the vehicle jostling to get a better view, and would benefit the serious game viewers and photographers. All in all still a fantastic Park to visit!

We were pleased to host Patrick and Sandrine Jacquemin who were out visiting from France. Patrick has been a long time supporter and it was great to see him out here.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

Apart from hyena chewing the wiring to the pump at Andre's Pan (twice!!), all was well in the Chamabonda. We are now pumping about 180,000l of water a day from 6 boreholes for the wildlife. However, the elephant and buffalo pressure is huge, with several hundred elephant and buffalo drinking daily.



Part of over 100 strong herd drinking and swimming in Thomson Pan

Parks have mowed the roads, which is a great help - no more grass seeds! The grass in the vleis has recovered extremely well in two months, from being very stunted in January.

KAZUMA PAN

I visited Kazuma Pan to check on the pumps, and to repair the water supply pipeline to the Rangers headquarters, which was in poor shape. There was still plenty surface water around, and some roads were still not passable. Roan Pan and Kazuma Corner Pan were full, and the pumps working. Unfortunately my camera failed, so no pictures. The vegetation is still thick, with the grass tall - the radiator soon filled with seeds despite the screen!

I will go back in May to check again on the pans, and put more rising main on Kazuma Corner Pan - and get photo's!!s

SINAMATELLA

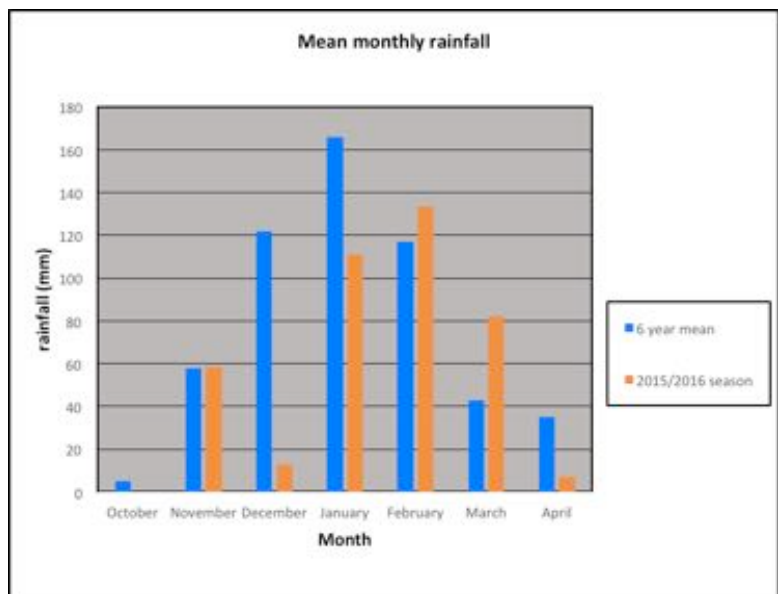
Report from Stephen Long

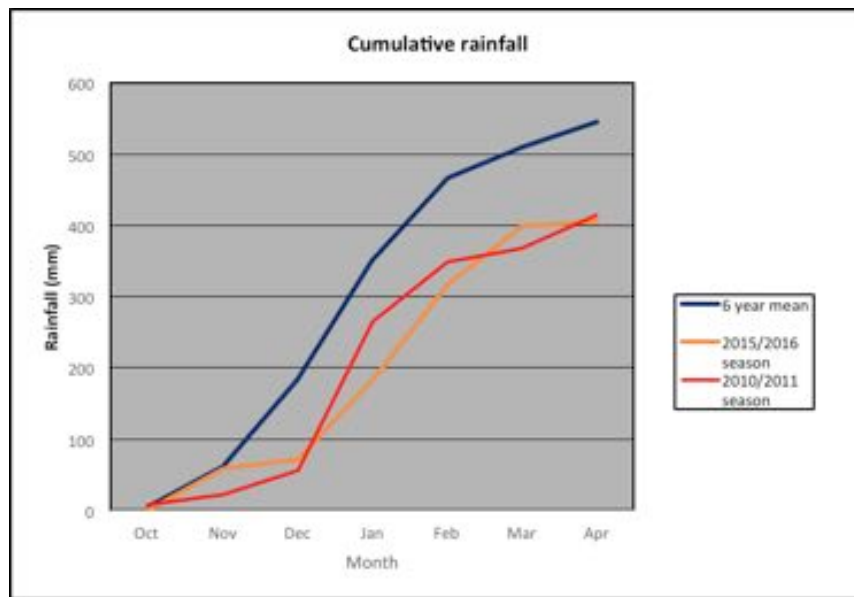
I'm happy to report that we were able to get back to work in April, although Rhino monitoring is still not possible so Nick has spent the month working on Game Water projects, both here and at Robins.

Rainfall and Game water

April's rainfall was very poor, just 7mm, and the season ended like this.....

The final total (405mm) was, by a small margin, the worst since we have lived at Sinamatella – 9mm short of the previous worst in 2010/2011.....





I can see two bright spots. Firstly, as I wrote last month, we had excellent grass and bush growth in March so there should be food for the animals, secondly, as the first graph shows, the peak of the rainy season was later than usual and as a result we still have natural water around the area and the elephants have not yet started gathering at our pumped pans. Time will tell just how bright those bright spots are!

As we start the dry season, the situation at our pumped pans and dams is as follows....

Mashambo Pan

Sadly, the pump has gone wrong, as it did last year, and the Pan was only around 20% full at month end. Wilderness Safaris' Kashawe Camp, who help maintain the pump, have sent the pump away for replacement.

Baobab Pan

The pan is still almost full and the pump is producing around 14,000 litres per day

Bumboosie South.

The pump is switched off as the borehole is running dry.

Inyantue Dam.

The dam did not fill this year and as usual the level is falling fast. At month end it was around 30% full but the pump was running well.

Inyantue Vlei

The pump is running well. Nick and team went out and prepared the area for the season. They tidied the whole pump area, re-directed the outlet pipe so that it is better protected, re-dug parts of the protective trench and made a small dam to try to hold water in 'Thor's Pan' rather than losing it down the vlei. Elephants are already using the pan in good numbers.



Elephants at Thor's Pan, Inyantue Vlei. 20 April 2016.

Masuma Dam.

The dam is still almost full and we are not yet running the pump.

Mbala Dam

Nick and I cured (we hope) a long-standing fault with a connection at one of the solar panels and Nick took a team down to cover over (yet again) the pipe that elephants had exposed. The dam has held large numbers of water-fowl but the level is dropping fast as it always does. It is currently around 40% full.

Shumba Hide.

The whole pump area has been tidied and the pump is running very well. There was a small problem in mid-month when the cable for the low water level probe was damaged and the pump stopped but we quickly located the fault and cured it. The pan is full.

Shumba

Making an early start to their annual attacks on the outlet for this pump, the elephants pulled up and broke a length of steel pipe where the water poured out into the pan. We had been expecting this to happen eventually but we were waiting for the water level to drop so that we could build a new outlet as far down as possible. Under the circumstance we had no choice but to do the job now.

We have tried plans B through to at least plan G in previous years without success so we have moved onto plan H and Nick, Tshuma and team spent two days working on building a completely new design which we hope will thwart the elephants for a few months at least.

Tshompani wind pump

We have often had problems with the wind pump pipes being damaged by the pressure surge on each upstroke of the pump when the wind is strong. Trevor came up with the idea of a pressure tank to solve the problem, I thought of using an old fire-extinguisher, Nick did most of the work. It works extremely well (so far) and the pump is running nicely but if the elephants ever get near it I may not be so happy. The dam at Tshompani is high for the time of year at around 50%.



If only it will still be this neat in November.....

Tshompani Solar Pump.

The pump is still turned off due to low water yield in the borehole.

Away from our pumped water, Mandavu Dam is still around 80% full, the pans between Tshompani and Inyantue all hold at least some water and the rivers all still have water under the sand and in pools.

Visitors

We had some very welcome visitors in April. First came Tim Scarrott of the SAVE African Rhino Foundation, here to give First Aid courses as he did last year. His travels around the Country's Parks were disrupted by the temporary halt in volunteer activity and at Sinamatella there was a further disruption as his visit coincided with our scheduled anti-poaching deployments. Nonetheless, a select band of trainees attended and enjoyed the introductory course. Tim brought with him a football to donate to the Sinamatella team and shortly afterwards, Basil Vrettos, who was visiting Camp Hwange donated a further two balls.



We are very grateful and I will include a photo of the team in the newsletter after their next victory. Hope it won't be too long.

Other important visitors were our very generous supporter Patrick Jacquemin (aka "Justin Peucon" – French speakers and aficionados of French politics can follow his exploits on You Tube) and his wife Sandrine.

We enjoyed their company for an all-too-short five days before they moved on to Main Camp. Patrick's support for Sinamatella cannot be underestimated and we are very grateful to him – his support over many years really has made a difference.

Wildlife

Shortly after Patrick and Sandrine arrived we took a trip down to Mashambo Pan. As soon as we got there I could see that the water level was down so I went over to the water outlet to see if it was flowing. A few meters from the car, as I was concentrating on the hoped-for water flow, Sandrine calmly pointed out that I had just walked past a dead Impala, then Patrick saw the huge Python partly coiled around it. I had seen neither! The Python had part of the Impala's head in its mouth but it was as surprised as we were and quickly let go. We quietly left it to its feeding and returned a few hours later when we found it had half swallowed its enormous meal.....

As it was quite late in the day and close to the pan, which is the only water in the area, I didn't think the snake would finish before dark when it would become very vulnerable to hyenas coming down to drink.



We left it alone and returned next morning. All that was visible were some bones and skin of the Impala, no sign of the Python so I assume it gave up and the scavengers got an easy meal.

Other interesting sightings in April were a lot less dramatic. We often see dwarf Mongoose passing along the top of the hill by our house and there are Dassies to be seen there every day. This year both species have had a very successful breeding season. Last time I saw the Mongooses I counted twenty-two of them which is an unusually large group (Estes' "The Safari Companion" gives an average pack size of 8.4 in the Serengeti and my good friend Professor Google suggests pack sizes of "fifteen or less" or "two to twenty") and the Dassies' numbers are also higher than ever with plenty of youngsters, so clearly not everything has suffered this season. We have seen the same with some of the bird species. There are plenty of harassed adult Red-billed Hornbills around trying to satisfy their very annoying, loudly-begging youngsters and we've also been seeing young Meve's Starlings, Swainson's Francolins, White-browed Sparrow Weavers (almost as annoying as the young hornbills), thousands of Red-billed Quelea and young waterfowl of various species. From a very selfish point of view, I'm pleased to report that the mosquitos and the stink-bugs that normally plague us at this time of year don't seem to have had a good year and so far we haven't seen (or felt) too many of them. Yes, I know every species has its place in the ecology of the Park and we should try to appreciate them all but..... mosquitos?

ROBINS

By Stephen Long

Robins Camp, April 2016

Thanks to the generosity of the Conservation and Wildlife Fund together with the Elephant Group, we were able to start installing some more solar pumps in Robins Camp sector in April. We will eventually install eight, to add to the one already running at Deteema and the first phase of this was four pumps at Big Toms, Little Toms, Tsamhole and Mazimbomvu.

Some of the Robins boreholes are deeper and lower-yielding than we are used to. Number lovers may be interested in the statistics for the four holes.....

	<u>Depth</u>	<u>Equilibrium Water Depth</u>	<u>Measured Yield</u>	<u>Pump Rate Set at...</u>
Big Toms	42m	14m	6000l/hr	5000l/hr
Little Toms	111m	54m	2400l/hr	2000l/hr
Manzimbomvu	95m	76m	1250l/hr	1000l/hr
Tsamhole	58m	46m	3200l/hr	2600l/hr

All of them have been set to pump a little less than their measured yield and we may be able to increase the rates later.



Nick went down to Robins for the installation of the first two pumps, meeting up with the team from Forster Irrigation and Patrick Williamson from Australia who is helping the Trust for a few months. They very quickly got Little Toms up and running then moved on to Big Toms. Siting the solar panel array is often difficult. It must be in full sun of course but it must also be unobtrusive if possible so we try to keep the panel frame low and then surround it with a trench to keep elephants away – even so the panels are usually impossible to hide completely but that's still better than the noisy diesel engines they have replaced.

Little Toms.

Nick returned to Sinamatella to help with anti-poaching deployments before Big Toms was finished then Sue and I went down to Robins for the next two pumps.

We were made very welcome by the friendly and efficient office staff at Robins and we pitched our tent in the camp-site. Only one other group of visitors was there but they more-than made up for their small numbers with their enormous "canvas Johannesburg" made up of trailers, tents, vehicles (with alarms that go off unexpectedly in the early morning) and more equipment than we have even in our house. Yes, you're right, I am jealous!

In the middle of the first night I was woken by a lion roaring, apparently a few meters from our little tent. Anyone who has experienced that sound at close quarters will know what I mean when I say the whole tent seemed to vibrate. After the last grunts had died away I could hear the lion breathing and I lay very still for a very long time, marvelling at Sue's incredible bravery – she seemed to have fallen asleep again almost as soon as the noise stopped while I lay there imagining all sorts of horrible possibilities. Just as I was starting to relax, the lion roared again and I suffered for another twenty minutes before it gave a final roar, noisily jumped the fence and went away. In the morning I complimented Sue on her fearlessness but she spoilt it by admitting to have been wide awake the whole time, not daring to move or make a sound and thinking I was the one who was bravely asleep. It was easy to laugh at ourselves in the light of day but I have to admit we were both pleased not to have lions visiting on any of the other nights we were there.

Two pumps were installed over the next few days. The first, at Tsamhole is on the edge of Gusu woodland and pumps into a big, shallow pan that still had a little water from the rains. It would need an enormous flow from the pump to keep the pan full and there was every sign that it is a popular place with elephants so I don't think Tsamhole is going to be pretty later in the dry season but it will have water and that is the aim of the exercise.

Close to Tsamhole Pan there is an old fire tower – I couldn't resist climbing up to the top, in spite of it having no floor. With no hills to get in the way I could see an enormous distance.....

Looking west towards Tsamhole Pan from the fire tower.



Tremendous as the view might be, it obviously gets dull after a while as the walls of the tower are covered in graffiti, some of which I photographed.....



As soon as the water started flowing at Tsamhole, we moved on to Manzimbomvu, which turned out to be more of a problem. The pan is beautiful and again sits on the edge of Gusu woodland but the borehole obviously hasn't been used for many years and we soon found out why – it is very deep (95m) with a good layer of pump-blocking dead leaves and other rubbish at the bottom, the water only starts 68m down and the yield is poor. It was also virtually impossible to site the panels unobtrusively without having them in the trees. It took two fairly frustrating days to get everything to work at Manzimbomvu but the one consolation is that it is a beautiful place to work.....

After Manzimbomvu, we gave ourselves an afternoon off at Robins then headed back home the next day, bird-atlasing Salt Pan and Deteema Dam on the way. We really look forward to returning for the next four pumps.

Manzimbomvu Sunset



POACHING

A pangolin was recovered from one Moses Masuku in Dete, who had got it in the Binga area. The pangolin was recovered and was released by Roger Parry of Victoria Wildlife Trust at Thomson Pan in the Zambezi National Park. Masuku was arrested on 20th April and was convicted and sentenced on the 24th April to nine years jail - congratulations to Parks and law enforcement agencies for a job well done. Masuku is also being investigated in relation to ivory. Bhejane Trust with the SAVE The African Rhino Foundation paid out a reward for this operation.

Early in April, there was the unfortunate incident of the shooting of Ntombi, a well known 8 year old rhino cow from Matopos, which had a calf of a eighteen months with her. Ntombi was injured only, and ran off, and Parks launched a search for her, but unfortunately she had to be euthanised as her injuries were too severe. The calf was adopted by another rhino with a calf - an unusual incident in itself. We have offered a \$2000 reward for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of whoever shot Ntombi.

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 Conservation and Wildlife Fund, plus the Elephant Group, for donated boreholes for Robins

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

Mark Unwin and the Clarkson Jersey Charitable Trust

Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert and Le Pal Nature Foundation for another pump this time for Deteema dam in the Robins area, which was installed this month.

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.

Bud and Guy Cockcroft – donation of a solar unit in memory of their beloved Jane (RIP)

Chris Lampard – continuing invaluable support in the field

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

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

Thor Thorsson– an intrepid traveller

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

James Wessels for helping get our Landcruiser gearbox repaired

The Director General of Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Edson Chidzia, for his support

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 it's 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.

Once we have finalised our Robins program with the survey of old water points, and the installation of new pumps, we will be able to reassess how many boreholes still require to be kitted out with new pumps. We will also be assessing Kazuma Pan National Park to assess the requirements there, and will come up with a comprehensive project requirements list for 2016.

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 : FBCPZWHAXXX
Account No : 6145093780178

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