



FEBRUARY 2017

NEWSLETTER

Still more rain! It has rained almost daily during February, making two months of constant rain. We are now sitting at just over 500mm (20 inches) in the Falls but Robins has far surpassed this. Bulawayo was hit with the effect of Tropical Storm Dineo and some places had up to 175mm in a few hours! Great for the dams and underground water, but not the roads!

We welcome Jerry Gatora to our Board, which we are still formulating. Jerry has a long history in wildlife conservation, has served on the Parked Board previously and has been a supporter of Bhejane Trust for many years. He brings a wealth of experience and will be a great asset to the Trust.

I attended a meeting at Hwange Main Camp called by members of the Parks Board to interact between Parks and all the safari companies and NGO's working in and around Hwange. All parties had a chance to stand up and summarise what they are doing in the area - the amount of work and support being put out in by all these parties into the Park and the surrounding

communities was impressive! Parks outlined their dire financial situation and appealed for further help from everyone. However, most operations are already committed to existing programs and budgets, and have little room to manoeuvre, but this did emphasise the urgent need for Parks to restructure and streamline their operations - they already have a massive financial saving from work done in the Park on their behalf by NGO's, which should free up more funds for other requirements.

Our drone for the Rhino Monitoring Unit has finally arrived - many thanks to Piet and Anthea Erasmus and to Michel Buenerd and Le Pic Vert. It is a state of the art DJI Mavic drone, and has some amazing capabilities - the main one is to come home on it's own! It is extremely small and compact. We are sorting out the monitoring vehicle and requirements, and then we will need to get the team of rangers together to form the unit. Hopefully we will be up and running by the end of March. This unit will also play a vital role in anti-poaching operations, especially along the Zambezi River frontage.



ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

While undertaking a routine patrol through the Chamabonda Vlei, I came across an unfortunate sight at No 1 Borehole - the Zambians have been busy and seven solar panels have been stolen, and the pumps vandalised. The way the rising mains were hacked with an axe bears hallmarks of a well known Zambian gang (normally elephant poachers) which operates from a village across the Zambezi River. On the one set of panels we had replaced a broken panel a while back and not tack-welded the end stop back in place, while on the other frame they had forced the pop rivets. We will be taking corrective measures on all out frames now, to curtail the shopping activities of our northern neighbours!



KAZUMA PAN NATIONAL PARK

I had not been to Kazuma for a couple of months, so I thought I better pay a visit, so went off with Mark Hiley from National Parks Rescue along for the ride. We stopped at the Parks base, dropped off some rations, caught up the situation with the Wildlife Office in charge, and then proceeded around the Katsechete loop to the Kazuma Corner Pan - the roads are muddy, overgrown and we had grass seeds deluxe and a boiling radiator. Kazuma Corner Pan was full and the pump working well. With the hassle of tall grass and waterlogged roads we decided to take the longer but gravelled all-weather border road back to the Falls. We crossed the Kazuma Depression which was surprisingly dry, and proceeded down the border road through the "badlands" - the road got wetter and wetter, with big elephant footprints in it. We were committed but then the inevitable - we got stuck on the gravel road which was now under water and part of a shallow lake. There was nothing to attach the winch to, the jack



disappeared into the mud, and eventually late in the afternoon, we had no option - we decided to walk to the Kasane/Francistown road in Botswana which was 2,5km away - this took over 2 hours through 6 inches of water and soft black mud!! We caught a lift to Panda Matenga, reported to the Police as "illegal immigrants to Botswana" (the state of us meant the Police did not need convincing of our story) and ended up in the local bar, covered in mud (which no one in Panda seemed to notice!) Thanks to Paul and Holly King for their hospitality. The next day we caught a lift to Kazungula, had to talk our way through two borders as we had no passports, and eventually got back to the Falls! I then went back to Kazuma a day later with

a rescue team - this vehicle also got stuck but eventually we got it out, towed the cruiser out the mud (backwards for nearly 2 kms) and, battered and weary, made our way back to the Falls. The moral of the story : be wary of the all-weather gravel road in the rainy season!!



Crossing the “badlands” to the Kasane road - 2 hours for 2 kilometres. Carrying shoes as they became mud clogs!





The rescue Landrover also got stuck for a while

It was also very apparent the Kazuma Pan is not a feasible option during the rainy season for any form of tourism.

Of interest, there was very little water in the Kazuma Depression itself, while the adjoining “badlands” were sodden! One would expect the Depression to be holding the water.

ROBINS

I spent a night at Robins Camp with Colin Gillies, Stuart and Michelle Johnson and Adele Edwards of WEZ Matabeleland Branch. They had been bringing up material for the refurbishment of the Robins Museum, when they had an argument with a pothole on the Victoria Falls road and broke the trailer axle, which upset all the plans (we have since collected all the materials and are waiting for the rains to end before we can proceed). We had a great evening discussing current situations within the Parks, requirements, etc and future cooperation.

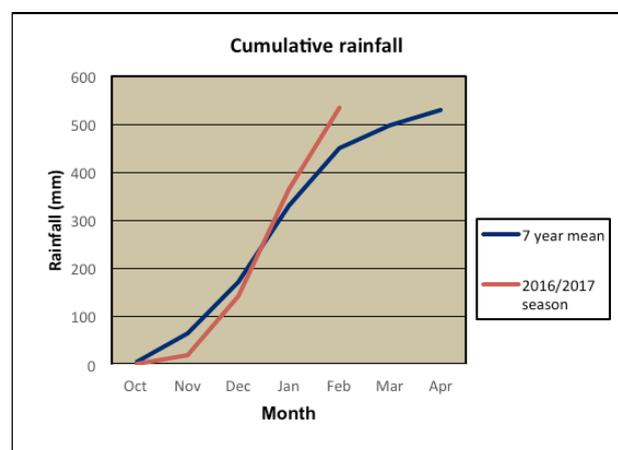
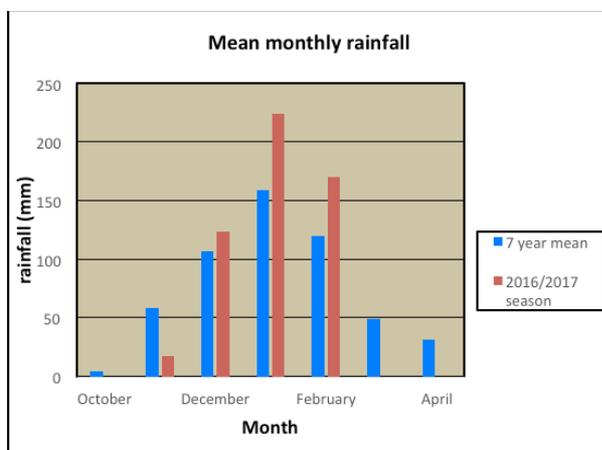
WEZ has bought roofing materials for the museum, which will now be refurbished They have also paid for the labour to lay the new (second) pipeline at Deteema Dam (some of which was raised at a “Friends of Robins” fund raiser at the game count). This assistance from WEZ is much appreciated!

We also have been putting in water meters onto the pumps in Robins, having done Big Toms, Little Toms, Dolilo, Manzimbomvu, Tsamhole and Dandari. Thanks to Mark Bristow for these meters.

SINAMATELLA

Report by Stephen Long

The rain was good to us here at Sinamatella in February. Unlike some parts of Zimbabwe, we had heavy, but not excessive rains for a total of 169.5 mm for the month and 534mm for the season so far.



There was no dramatic change in the water situation from January. The pans are still mostly full and the dams are filling but not yet spilling. We have temporarily stopped the pumps at Baobab, Lukosi, Shumba, Sinamatella and Mashambo, all of which are full. The dam at Mbala which breached in January was repaired and has started to re-fill. Mandavu is very close to spilling and, importantly, the causeway out to the island is well flooded so the Skimmers and other birds should be able to take advantage and breed again this year. Over-all a very satisfactory situation. We did some game water work during the month, rebuilding the well-head at Lukosi, replacing the low water probe at Shumba, re-installing the Mashambo pump which had been in store, repairing the dam at Mbala and a variety of other small jobs. A looming problem is that many of our 'elephant-proof' trenches have collapsed with the continual rain and will need re-building as soon as they dry out otherwise the dry season months will see this newsletter filled with reports of elephant damage - something I would be happy not to write about and probably most people would prefer not to read about. We always assume that elephants damage the infrastructure in a desperate attempt to get water but we had proof in February that that isn't always the case. Back in December, Parks laid out a pipeline to the number five borehole in an attempt to get a reliable source of domestic water. The pipe wasn't buried, didn't work and hasn't all been collected yet but we all thought that elephants wouldn't bother it during the rains. Not so. Elephant numbers are unusually high for the time of year and some amongst them must be particularly playful/destructive as they have pulled up and destroyed several parts of the pipeline. They certainly weren't looking for water but they have carried some pieces for hundreds of meters. Why? Who knows!

Apart from elephants, we haven't been seeing a lot of other animals recently. The bush is so thick it is easy for even quite big mammals to hide and I don't remember when I last saw a kudu or a zebra around Sinamatella. The impala though are very much in evidence and their babies from the end of last year have grown amazingly fast with all the good food that is available. Warthogs too seem to have done well - they prefer the more open areas so we see them with their babies fairly often. On the permanently wet roads we often see the spoor of lions, leopards, wild dogs and hyena but the animals themselves are never to be seen. A brief glimpse of a cheetah on the road to Mandavu was our best predator sighting of the month.

With all the rain, the view from the camp, always beautiful, has had an extra dimension and it's hard to say which is more interesting, the cloudscape.....



The landscape.....



or maybe both.....



Sue and I spent part of February in Bulawayo, resting and buying spares, tyres etc. The journey down was a little slower than expected as a wheel bearing on the Land Rover broke just before Bembesi River. Sue flagged down a Bulawayo-bound Kombi so she could return next day with spares, I stayed overnight in the car. We should be prepared for this kind of thing but we weren't of course so I had nothing to drink except the Bembesi River itself until Colin Gillies and party, passing by the next morning, kindly shared their coffee with me. When Sue eventually returned I could not remove the hub-nut without cutting it but when the new bearing was in place the damaged nut screwed on surprisingly well though I predicted it would hold for 500m at the most. Luckily I was wrong and it lasted all the way to Bulawayo and of course I never felt unsafe as the car had been checked numerous times on the journey and I had my warning triangles, fire extinguisher, jack, reflectors and, most importantly, number plate light, all in excellent order.

Unfortunately the wheel bearing was not the only tale of vehicle woe in February. Our station wagon Land Rover, known as "the white rhino" was out of action for the month with gearbox and clutch trouble, yet to be solved so, with me and the Tdi in Bulawayo, we hoped the Parks vehicles would be running on deployments day. They weren't which left Tshuks and Nick to do the whole thing with the SAVE Land Rover, sharing the driving over two very tiring and muddy days. Some parts of the Park such as Inyantue have been inaccessible to vehicles for the past few weeks and others such as Tshompani and Tshakabika are difficult, to say the least but rangers have been

getting in to these important places on foot where necessary and patrol coverage has not been affected by breakdowns and muddy roads. For tourists however, the roads are more of a problem and we are reaching the stage where Sinamatella will be inaccessible to all but 4 x 4 during the rainy season - and in many places, during the dry season as well.

Better news for tourists (and for those of us that live here) is that the domestic water situation is enormously improved after ZINWA finally came and renewed a lot of their obsolete equipment. So far their repairs have been completely successful and we have water 24 hours a day - a luxury we haven't had for some months.

The rebuilding of the hide at Shumba, which we started as long ago as last December was finally finished this month. As soon as the last of the materials was available Nick and Tshuma went out and stayed at Shumba until the job was done. I've no doubt an experienced builder would have had everything completed in half the time it took us but I'm very happy with the result and it is a great improvement on the old hide. Shumba has become one of Sinamatella's game-viewing 'hot spots' in the last few years so I hope the new hide will get plenty of use in the coming season. Many thanks to Hwange Conservation Society (UK) for funding the project.



refurbished hide inside.....and outside.

POACHING

Has generally been a quiet month. With the thick bush and abundant water, subsistence poaching is non-existent. However, the elephant poachers do favour these conditions and I would not be surprised if some Zambian groups are operating deep into Botswana and Zimbabwe.

One Zambian was arrested near Main Camp with an illegal .375 rifle, and is currently awaiting sentence. He was stopped before he could get up to any poaching.

GRATEFUL THANKS

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

HHK Safaris/Hunters and Guides - Mark Bristow, John Oosthuizen and Gavin Hume for their support, and generous donation.

Frank Zindell from Switzerland for his ongoing support and generous donation.

Wildlife & Environmental Society of Zimbabwe (WEZ) and the Robins game counters for the funds raised for the Deteema pipeline, and for the materials for the Robins Museum. Thanks to Colin Gillies and Stuart Johnson for their support.

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

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, and their assistance in securing the drone for our rhino monitoring program.

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 five donated solar pump units for Sinamatella/Robins. Here has also brought funding for our drone project.

Ian Gloss and Liquorama for the donation of a solar powered electric fence unit

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

Bernie Veldsman for her assistance with the newsletter.

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” or direct to our bank account:

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