



JANUARY 2017 NEWSLETTER

Rain, rain and more rain!! It has rained almost every day this month. The bush is green, the rivers are flowing (if not flooding), the pans and dams are (generally) full. What a change from last year this time when we were panicking about a pending drought! The wildlife is well dispersed and fattening up, and we are taking the opportunity to take stock!!

Bhejane Trust has now formed a Board as the Trust has grown to the extent to warrant such a development, and we held our first board meeting in January to set policy and plans for the coming year. The board consists of Trevor Lane, Stephen Long, David Carson, Ian Gloss, Dan Jones and we have co-opted the chairman of the Matabeleland branch of the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Zimbabwe (WEZ) - currently Stuart Johnson. We still hope to recruit a couple more Board members in the near future, to round the board off.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

The Chamabonda is lush green and the grass has grown quickly. We recorded 295mm of rain in January, bringing the season total at the end of January to 386mm

Unfortunately the Zambezi River drive has taken a beating, and much repair work will be required when the rains are over

KAZUMA PAN NATIONAL PARK

With this amount of rain, I did not even attempt to go to Kazuma this month!

ROBINS

We welcomed the new Area Manager for Robins, Hardwork Chikumba, plus the new Wildlife Officer, Exeverino Chinoitzvi, and wish them all the best in their new station. We look forward to a fruitful relationship.



Digging the new pipeline at Deteema Dam

Our new employee, Onias Nkomo, was tasked with camping at Deteema Dam and digging a trench of 1.23km and laying a second pipeline to the dam. This is because the existing pipeline cannot carry the flow from the second solar pump we put in, and we found one pump was inhibiting the other. Funding for the new pipeline came from “Friends of Robins” - a loose grouping under WEZ (Wildlife and Environmental Society of Zimbabwe) who held an auction during the WEZ annual game count last year to raise funds for this project. However, looking at Deteema now, it might be a while before we need to use the new pipeline!



The Deka River has flooded a couple of times, and all the little rivers are flowing, but one word of advice - do not try and drive around Robins at the moment!

SINAMATELLA

Report from Stephen Long

Rainfall for January was excellent and by the end of the month we had received 224mm , leaving us above average for the month and for the season so far. Having had so little rain

back in November, this has been a relatively short growing season but the bush has responded amazingly well with grass and flowers in great abundance so Sue has been busy with the camera.....



Flame lily



Commelina sp



Nymphaea caerulea

Water levels are good in most of the pans, including Shumba, which was almost full by month end. The dams on the other hand, are still disappointing with Masuma, Tshompani and Inyantue only around 50%. Mandavu is an exception to that, being about 90% full. The rapid rise of the water at Mandavu has been great for fish breeding and we've seen some enormous barbel spawning in the shallow, flooded grass. Unfortunately, Mbala dam which I mentioned in the December newsletter has breached and we lost a lot of the water from it. Some of it poured out of the breach and filled another, very small dam just downstream but most of the superb aquatic vegetation of the main dam, which is a great attractant for birds later in the season, is high and dry until we can repair the wall and more rain falls. Further rain damage took place at the new Gurangwenya pump when the river came down in flood and swept away part of the new pipeline. The pan is full at the moment so we will wait and make a repair when there is less chance of the same thing happening again.

Wildlife.

Will there ever be a newsletter in which I don't mention elephants? Probably not – and certainly not this month. Normally once the rains come and the elephants go away, we only see a few older bulls until February or even March when the herds return. This year we started seeing quite big numbers of elephant early in January. One of my first encounters of the season was on the way to Tshakabika on the 7th. We came across a herd quietly feeding in the Mopane forest and were just admiring them when one of them decided she had already seen enough people for the season and she charged us. I've been

charged by elephants enough times to know a real charge from a mock charge and this one was very real. I'm usually known as one of Zimbabwe's slowest drivers - but not on this occasion and we hurried away as she thundered down the road after us before stopping and trumpeting in frustration when she realised that we would get away. Since then we have seen plenty more elephants, all immaculately behaved, and it seems that for whatever reason, they are back with us on a permanent basis.

Our other interesting wildlife sightings for the month were all a lot more gentle. Returning from Masuma dam one afternoon, Sue spotted this albino squirrel on a Mopane trunk.....



It stayed, clinging to the dark tree trunk for a minute or so and I'm amazed that it has survived for so long. Some years ago I saw an albino grysbok which looked like a little white lamb but that (like all grysbok I suppose) was very shy and unlike the squirrel, it didn't wait to be photographed.

January is water bird counting month. Last year many of the places where we count were dry but this year there was plenty to be seen – and a lot more to be heard splashing about in the flooded grass around the pans but impossible to see. We didn't see anything out of the ordinary in the way of water birds but we enjoyed some lovely sights along the way. Once again, Sue was busy with the camera



Red-billed Francolin



Carmine Bee-eaters.

This zebra looked particularly good, standing in a mass of grass and flowers near Shumba....



And just across the road was a flock of white storks.....



Unfortunately we couldn't identify the flowers. Maybe someone can help.....

Projects

Thanks to funding from Hwange Conservation Society (UK), we were able to spend a lot of time in January working on refurbishing and enlarging the hide at Shumba. The old hide was badly damaged by termites and was quite small so we have more or less started from scratch. We made a new floor which we had to winch into place with a complicated series of ropes and lifting equipment....



Then it was a 'simple' matter of demolishing most of the old hide, laying new floor boards and re-building. I suppose in some places it really would be a 'simple' matter but here in Zimbabwe nothing is ever simple and by month end we were still waiting to receive some of the materials and the job was not finished. Lovers of photos of construction work (if any) can look forward to some photos of the job being done and of the finished article in next month's newsletter – I hope.

Miscellaneous

Along with elephants, the other perennial topic for this newsletter is Sinamatella's chronic domestic water problems. I won't go into details – enough to say that in January there were several days with no water at all and on one very special day there were no less than four major problems with the system at one go. ZINWA fixed one, the Camp's electrician fixed another, one is still pending and the other was finally sorted after two days of 'fishing' in the borehole to extract broken pipes and rods that had fallen in. We are all thoroughly fed up with it.

If we don't always have water, we do now have reliable lighting at our house, thanks to Michel Buenerd who sent us a small but very efficient solar LED lighting system. On the day it arrived the mains power went out. Perfect timing! Many thanks Michel.

And finally, as usual, vehicles. Parks' Dong Feng lorry was back in action some of the time in January but the Land Rover was not so once again Bhejane was the main transport supplier for 'operations'. The heavy rain we experienced sometimes made driving a little more interesting than I would like but our little fleet of Land Rovers took it all well and we were never stuck – well not for long anyway and I'm certainly not going to complain about rain. Another couple of months of it will be fine with me.

POACHING

Elephant poaching increases in the rainy season as the poachers have lots of cover, rain can wash out tracks, rifle shots are deadened by the thick bush, and water is readily available. The Zambians are thus able to penetrate deep into Botswana and Zimbabwe on trips that can last up to a month depending on success rates. Of concern though, is the increasing number of Zimbabweans involved in the elephant poaching, though admittedly generally operating for well known gangs

Incidents that occurred in January:

Parks rangers from Main Camp shot and killed two poachers in the Main Camp area, and recovered a rifle, some tusks and personal items. The poachers had shot two elephants. They proved to be Zimbabweans, though one had no identity. Hats off to the rangers operating under these extremely tough conditions where it is raining every day, and the bush is thick.

Parks rangers from Marangora in the Lower Zambezi Valley had a contact with three Zambians in the Hurungwe Safari Area and managed to kill one and recover a .458 rifle with 15 rounds, plus various kit. The other two poachers escaped back to Zambia.

Forestry Commission game scouts and a Zimbabwe Republic Police detail had a contact with a Zambian poaching gang in Panda Masuie Forest (in the Matetsi area near Victoria Falls). The gang had apparently just shot an elephant when engaged by the patrol, resulting in the death of one Zambian poacher and the recovery of a .375 rifle - the rest of the gang fled. Well done to this patrol in carrying out their duty under difficult and dangerous circumstances!

Parks have openly named Dumisani Moyo as a kingpin in the rhino poaching in Zimbabwe. He is believed to be in Zambia, although there is an Interpol warrant out for his arrest. Hopefully enough pressure can be brought to bear to ensure his arrest and conviction.

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,.

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.

Basil Vrettos for a donation

Malcolm Pringle-Wood for donation

Gail van Jaarsveld for repairing chairs from Chamabonda No 3

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 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. 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

