

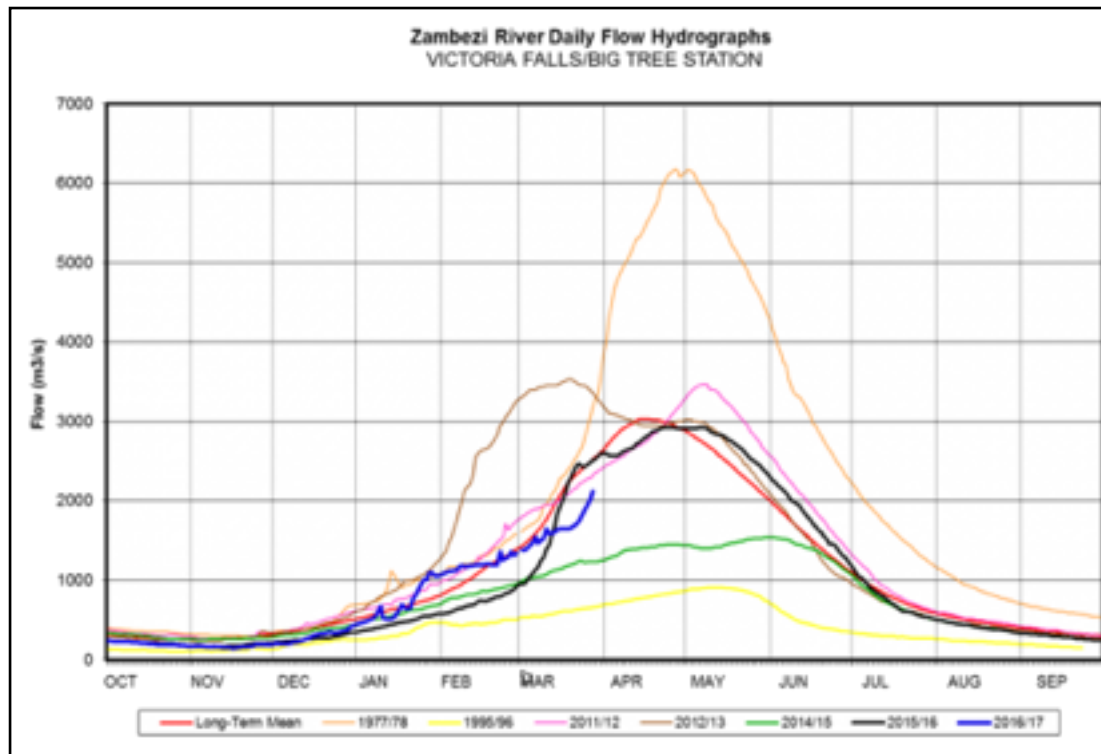


MARCH 2017

NEWSLETTER

The rains eased off and then stopped in mid-March, after over two months of constant soaking! By the end of March, I had recorded 580mm in Victoria Falls and 553 in the Chamabonda, though most parts of the country are way above this. The pans and dams in the Parks are looking good, and if we get a wet tail-wag in April to just top them up before the end of the rainy season, it would be great.

The Zambezi River is rising fast, and all indications are for an average/above average flood this year, which will be good for Kariba. The dam report for Zimbabwe issued by Zinwa at the end of March shows all the dams in the country full or nearly full (a situation not known for many long years), except for the big three - Kariba (which is rising fast), the new Tokwi-Mukorsi Dam, which will be the biggest inland water dam in Zimbabwe (nearly three times the volume of Mutirikwe) is at 68% and rising - it was originally anticipated it would take three years to fill - while Mutirikwe (Kyle) is struggling at 36% - it has a poor catchment and was extremely low at the start of the rainy season.



The rains and consequent restriction on moving around over the last two months gave the perfect opportunity to catch up on maintenance of vehicles, pumps, and equipment (and paperwork!!). Sinamatella workshop was very active with Stephen and crew sorting out long overdue vehicle maintenance, and now have all the vehicles running - a great start to the season. Thanks to Mark Bristow and Patrick Jacquemin for their invaluable contributions here

I attended the annual Rhino workshop in Harare, which was hosted by Parks, and included all stakeholders and relevant Parks officials involved in rhino conservation in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately there has been no progress on rhino policies over the last few years, but this meeting seemed more proactive and I do believe we might finally see some positive moves on rhino policies during 2017.

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

The rains and the traffic over the last couple of months have badly damaged the Zambezi River Drive - this always used to be closed during the rainy season, but now with permanent camps along the river it is required to stay open year round. There is going to be some serious maintenance work required on this road.

In the Chamabonda, the elephants have returned early from Botswana and are back in numbers, while a pride of lions has been fairly resident in the vleis over March. The grass is tall but drying out fast, and is being flattened by the buffalo and elephant. The roads have dried

out, and are still in relatively good shape despite the rains. The pans are looking good, but we are pumping to keep them topped up, as they are already coming under pressure.



Buffalo taking a dip in No 3

We managed to get one pump down and working at No 1 borehole (this borehole takes two small pumps as it has a blockage halfway down the bore past which we have to slide the two pumps) This is after the Zambians slashed the cables and the piping of the two pumps, and stole some solar panels! We are still short of three panels to replace those stolen, as these are specialised and proving difficult to find at a reasonable price, but we should have this sorted shortly - we need to keep the pan as full as possible at this time so need to get the second pump working asp..

KAZUMA PAN NATIONAL PARK

Kazuma had a management change with Wildlife Officer Nyathi being replaced by Wildlife Officer Bennie Mavhela - we wish W/O Nyathi well in his new post at Umtchibi, and welcome Bennie. We gave 200l of diesel to KPNP to do the roads, but we now need to source old tyres for the grader. KPNP have been promised an old tractor ex Robins so we will need to see what it will take to get on the road!

ROBINS

The roads in Robins are still mainly impassable with the rains, so we have been limited in our activities. However, we managed to instal 6 water meters at various pumps, which means all our installed pumps now have meters, so we can now monitor them. We were going to repair the damaged trough at Manzimbomvu, but found this is underwater as the pan is so full, so this operation has been delayed! The Deteema No 2 borehole was inundated with the floodwaters, and it looks like the borehole has taken in some silt, which has blocked the pump - we will need to flush this borehole out in April

Our plans to refurbish the museum have also been on hold due to the rains - hopefully we will get this completed this month.

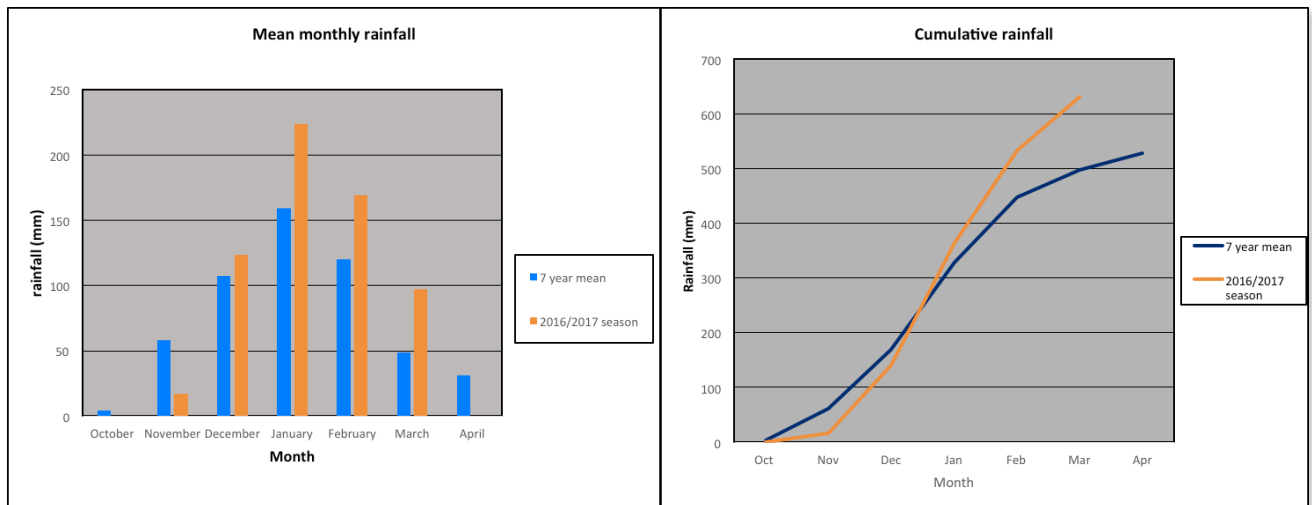
SINAMATELLA

Report by Stephen Long

Rainfall and game water

March started with plenty of rain – 95mm fell in the first week but then the rain went away and the month ended on 97mm. That gives us a total of 631mm for the season so far, just a few millimetres short of the highest seasonal total we have recorded. The long-term weather forecast suggests that we might still have a little rain in early April but I think we can assume the season is basically over – and a very good one it was too. We were very lucky that our rain was well spread out and rarely exceptionally heavy. After reading the February newsletter, John Davison sent us an e mail reminiscing about boating along flooded roads in the Park; we could perhaps have done that on one day this season but otherwise it was as benign as we could wish.

At the end of March, eight of our pumped pans and dams (Mashambo, Baobab, Masuma, Lukosi, Shumba, Sinamatella, Inyantue (Thor's Pan) and Gurangwenya) were full or very nearly full and Mandavu Dam, which is our biggest water resource but isn't pumped was also full. Only Inyantue, Tshompani and Mbala dams remained



disappointingly low. Grass and bush growth have been excellent and I think we can look forward to a relatively easy dry season, if fire and elephants don't spoil it for us. We have work to do on many of the pumps, not least renewing the "elephant-proof" trenches and there are pumps that need repairs so we won't be spending too much time sitting with our feet up and drinking tea. Game water work this month was mainly a matter of checking on the pumps and slashing the grass to keep things tidy. We also made and installed a low water sensor for Shumba Hide pump, made some changes to the water outlet at Lukosi, fixed a broken pipe at Gurangwenya and carried out some simple tests to try to get to the bottom of a long-standing problem at Tshompani. Nick and Tshuma struggled through to Bumboosie South and we have plans to get in there again soon and get that pump running.

Vehicles

During March we spent a great deal of time (again), working on our various vehicles. The gearbox is back in the "white rhino" so that is a runner once again and a number of other faults on various vehicles, some of them things that have worried us for months, were solved with new spares and a lot of work. For us the big vehicle news of the month was the return of the Land Cruiser, back in action, with new paintwork, for the first time since September 2015. I had forgotten quite how different (and occasionally difficult) it is to drive in comparison with the Land Rovers but it is great to have it moving again and it will take some of the pressure off the other cars. Our parking space is pretty crowded now with three Bhejane Trust Land Rovers, two personal cars (Land Rovers again) and the Cruiser. Whether the Cruiser is a rose amongst thorns or a thorn amongst roses is a matter of opinion. For me it's simply a valuable (and greatly valued) part of the team.

Nick and I gave the Cruiser its lengthiest test of the month with a trip out to Inyantue to check on the pumps. No-one has accessed Inyantue for some time and the

journey out there, via Tshakabika, was very slow due to trees across the road, the prospect of unexpected stumps or rocks in the long grass and a bit of overheating due to a radiator full of grass seeds. We cooled the radiator by pouring water over it from a handy stream and moved those that we could of the trees, finally reaching Inyantue after over three and a half hours at less than 20km/hr.



Cooling the Cruiser.

In our absence the pumps had worked away steadily, pumping over a million litres of water into Inyantue Dam and just under a million into Thor's Pan since mid January. All we needed to do was to slash the grass around the solar panels and read the meters then we headed home. The Cruiser passed the test easily though I must admit the day wore me out.

Wildlife and poaching.

We are still not seeing many mammals as we travel around the Park – the bush is still too thick. The animals are there however and amazingly, three elephants and a lion managed to get themselves killed by trains at various times during the month. The lion was feeding on the first of the elephant victims when it was hit but, as I have mentioned before in this newsletter, it's hard to believe that elephants can get hit by any train, especially one run by NRZ. Nevertheless it happens and, as three elephants represent an absolute mountain of meat, I hope not too many readers will be upset to

know that elephant in various guises was a frequent item on our (and most other Sinamatella residents') dinner table in March.

Some less acceptable elephant deaths also occurred during the month through poaching. A poacher has been operating outside the Park right on or beyond the boundary of the Deka Safari Area where he has killed one elephant on each of three known incursions. By taking just one elephant at a time and in an area where he is soon able to get out of places that rangers patrol, this poacher is taking few chances on getting caught and a lot of resources will have to be put into stopping him. I'm confident he will be caught eventually but it won't be easy. Two poachers were caught during March. They were seen crossing out of the Park and captured by rangers on patrol. They carried empty sacks, knives and axes and claimed to be searching for hornbill chicks to eat. Since they were very far from home and hadn't yet found any hornbill nests, that seemed a pretty thin excuse. Nick took them to the Police in Hwange but ZRP were unable to come up with much of a charge besides 'illegal entry'. I suspect the poachers' empty sacks had held snares that they had set somewhere in the Park but so far only a couple of snares have been found near where the poachers were intercepted.

To complete a busy month, a walking safari reported seeing human spoor near Matijoni and Tshuma took rangers out to investigate. They didn't find any poachers but follow-ups will continue in the area.

Another animal death to report, is a buffalo, killed by rangers near Tshompani. While rangers were on patrol, the leading member of the group was charged by a buffalo from very short range and one of his colleagues killed it, bringing it down just a few meters from its intended victim. It appears this particular buffalo was carrying an old injury and without the quick reactions of the ranger who shot it, I fear I would be reporting a human death rather than the loss of a buffalo.

On the lighter side, the annual influx of animals of various kinds to our house started a little earlier than usual this year. I have written before



about the Tree Mice (*Thallomys paedulus*) that try to join us every year for the dry season. This year I can include a photo. Meet 'Lazarus'

He (we think it's a male) first turned up on the veranda, helpless and with eyes still closed. We left him, hoping his mother would return but after a couple of hours he was still there and being attacked by ants so Nick brought him in. We had no real hope that we could raise him but we consulted my good friend Professor Google and found that he has an unexpectedly large amount of knowledge on how to raise baby mice. Much of it is American and begins with variations on "your local Pet Store will have.....". We don't have a local pet store so we took the piece of helpful advice that suggested feeding half-strength human baby formula via a very small paint brush. Incredibly it worked and Lazarus thrived, apart from apparently choking on milk and dying at one feed only to recover after being held up by the tail and gently shaken – hence the name. He's now weaned and growing well. A couple of weeks after Lazarus joined us we found

another baby mouse wandering weakly in the lounge, followed at intervals through the day by three more. We are guessing their mother was killed or abandoned them for some reason but we have not found the nest. However they got to us, we now have Lazarus and family.....



Lazarus is the tame

one investigating the camera in the hope, no doubt, that it has some food hidden away somewhere.

Along with the mice, our house has proved attractive to a range of other creatures this month



Baboon spider....



*One of a number of amphibians
– this one is a 'Raucoux Toad'*



*Cream-striped Owl
Moths.*

There was also a Schlieffen's Bat, that didn't photograph well as it fluttered around the bedroom, squirrels in the roof, dwarf mongoose in the kitchen and a Red-headed Weaver that has built a nest on the veranda. So long as they behave well they are all welcome and the resident geckos are of course very happy to meet the Owl Moths.

Miscellaneous

Along with all the uninvited visitors to the house in March, we also had a very welcome visit from Tim Scarrott, who I didn't think belonged under the 'wildlife' heading (above), in spite of being from Australia. Tim has visited every year since 2015 to help the rangers with First Aid training. Unfortunately there was a mix-up this year and he was unable to do any training as his visit had not been cleared with Head Office but we still very much enjoyed seeing him and hope he will try again next year.

Tim's visit coincided with a couple of the many days that we were without electricity in March. We had a five-day power cut early in the month and lost some of the food in the freezer then another three-day fault later as well as shorter cuts from time to time. It isn't a great problem as, thanks to Michel Buenerd, we have solar powered lights and Trevor has sent us a system that runs on solar and powers up the computer and satellite connection so we can stay in comms with the outside world. Cooking comes courtesy of illegal charcoal burners who were caught and arrested outside the Park by our rangers, leaving behind a mountain of charcoal. We feel a little guilty burning it, knowing the deforestation that went into producing it, but there's no point in just throwing it away. Unfortunately the second of the lengthy power failures affected the new ZINWA equipment that was installed in February and had given us a dependable water supply for a while. As I write, all three stages of the water supply system are down and we have had absolutely no water from the taps for two days. The good news is that the ZINWA engineers have arrived to sort it all out and I'm confident they will succeed. The bad news is that 'no water at Sinamatella' hardly belongs in this newsletter any longer as it is so common that it doesn't really rank as 'news'.

POACHING

Two poachers were arrested in a sting operation being in possession of a .303 rifle and 5 rounds of ammunition near the village of Dete. The poachers admitted they had hunted two elephant in Hwange National Park. A third poacher escaped and is still being sought, as are the persons who took the ivory to Bulawayo. They were sentenced to 4 years each - there is

an anomaly in the law where a poacher can get an automatic 9 years for possession of ivory, but only 4 years for killing an elephant! Steps are in progress to try and address this situation
This case was a result of good work by Parks investigations!

The Dete elephant poachers - sad to see young men lured into this illegal activity through desperation

Acting on a tip off, Forestry game scouts in Ngamo Forest found tracks of a group of 4 poachers who had entered the Forestry area from the Lupane area. They followed tracks until late in the evening they found the gang setting up for the night. Although they initiated contact at very close range, no poachers were hit, and they all managed to get away. However, a .375 rifle with 10 live and 5 spent cartridges was recovered, plus all their personal kit. The names of the poachers are known and follow ups are in place.



Recovered from Ngamo poachers

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.

Wildlife & Environmental Society of Zimbabwe (WEZ)

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

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.

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.

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

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:

Bank details :

Bhejane Trust,
FBC Bank,
Galleria Building, Parkway Victoria Falls
Zimbabwe
Branch Code : 8512
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