



OCTOBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

Apologies - this is a bit of a long winded newsletter but it has been a hectic month. We have had a month of unrelenting temperatures - in the 40's daily - and this has put great stress on the water points and on the animals - they have been suffering greatly. With the number of elephants, we are struggling to keep up with our pumping of water (our hybrid generator systems have helped a lot here) - even if the ele's only drink 100l they throw another 100l over themselves, and turn the pan into a mud bath!

I had a meeting with Mark Bristow and John Oosthuizen of HHK Safaris/Hunters and Guides who have the Deka Safari Area concession (adjoining Sinamatella). They are very keen to support our conservation efforts, especially in game water and rhino monitoring. They have come to the party with a very generous donation to fund a new game water point at Gurangwenya (on the road into Sinamatella) - this will be close to the road and will provide visitors on their way to Hwange with early sightings of wildlife. This new point will go in early next month. They are also sponsoring our program to complete and tidy up all current waterpoint installations, and we are restructuring our rhino monitoring unit with their assistance. Grateful thanks to Mark and John (facilitated by Gomez!!)

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK



Uncommon sights in the Chamabonda - a steenbuck and a grysbok.

The new hide going up at Timots Pan - thanks to John Kiggen of Kiggen Construction and Ian Thomson and Ian Gloss.





Elephant scenes at Thomson Pan in the Chamabonda - a large herd drinking, and then another very thirsty herd charging through the pan to get to the fresh water in the trough.





One morning driving past No 1 Pan I noticed an elephant lying in the drinking trough. Closer inspection showed it to be young bull, and it was still alive - the trunk would come out the water briefly to allow it to breathe and then drop back into the trough. It was bleeding under the tail where it had been attacked by hyena. We reported this to Parks and Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust (Roger Parry) reacted, but on checking the animal, it was beyond rescue and was euthanised. The cause of it's collapse was unknown (anthrax was ruled out) but the elephant was in poor condition and with the extreme temperatures, it could have been stress.



The Zambezi River road being graded - long overdue! A big thanks to John Gardner of Matetsi Unit 7 for his generous assistance in using his grader for sorting out roads in the ZNP,

On a Sunday afternoon, there was a small fire in the vlei at No 3. Parks reacted with a fire gang to put out the fire. I was very impressed to see Area Manager Edmore Ngosi in his overalls with a beater leading the team. A fine case of leading by example!!

When the elephant are breaking things, the hyena get in on the act! We had two cases of hyena chewing pipes and cables at the solar unit, causing a loss of valuable water until discovered!

ROBINS

The Robins area had a huge wildlife in late September, started by a lightning strike. Crews from Robins, Sinamatella and Zambezi battled it for days before getting it under control. Unfortunately, one of the abandoned lodges at Nantwich burned down, but the rest were saved. However, less than two weeks after the fire, the vleis have greened up, bringing out the grazers.



A word of caution to tourists - check out Little Toms hide carefully as the hide may already be occupied!!! Looks peaceful enough!



A closer look!!



a guest enters.... and another and another







peering out from the inside

The old man outside in the shade in peace and quiet!



Footnote : Sadly a big bush fire went through Robins and the roof on Little Toms hide caught fire and burnt down. We will rebuild it in the new year, with the assistance of Parks.

With the Area Manager, Mr Power Mapunga firmly on board, we are in the process of refurbishing the museum at Robins. This museum was created in memory of HG Robins, who originally cattle farmed in the area but then turned it over to wildlife - a great vision at the time. When he died in 1939 he bequeathed his estate to the nation. The WEZ game counters reported the museum in poor condition, and we offered to assist. I have collected all the old pictures of H.G Robins - the frames are broken, glass cracked etc - and Rob Stirling of Naakes in Bulawayo has agreed to refurbish them. We will move the museum to a downstairs room in the Robins Tower, which we will refurbish and paint, and then set it up again where it is more prominent and easily accessible to tourists. A big thanks to Stuart Johnston who has offered funding, and the "Friends of Robins" game counters

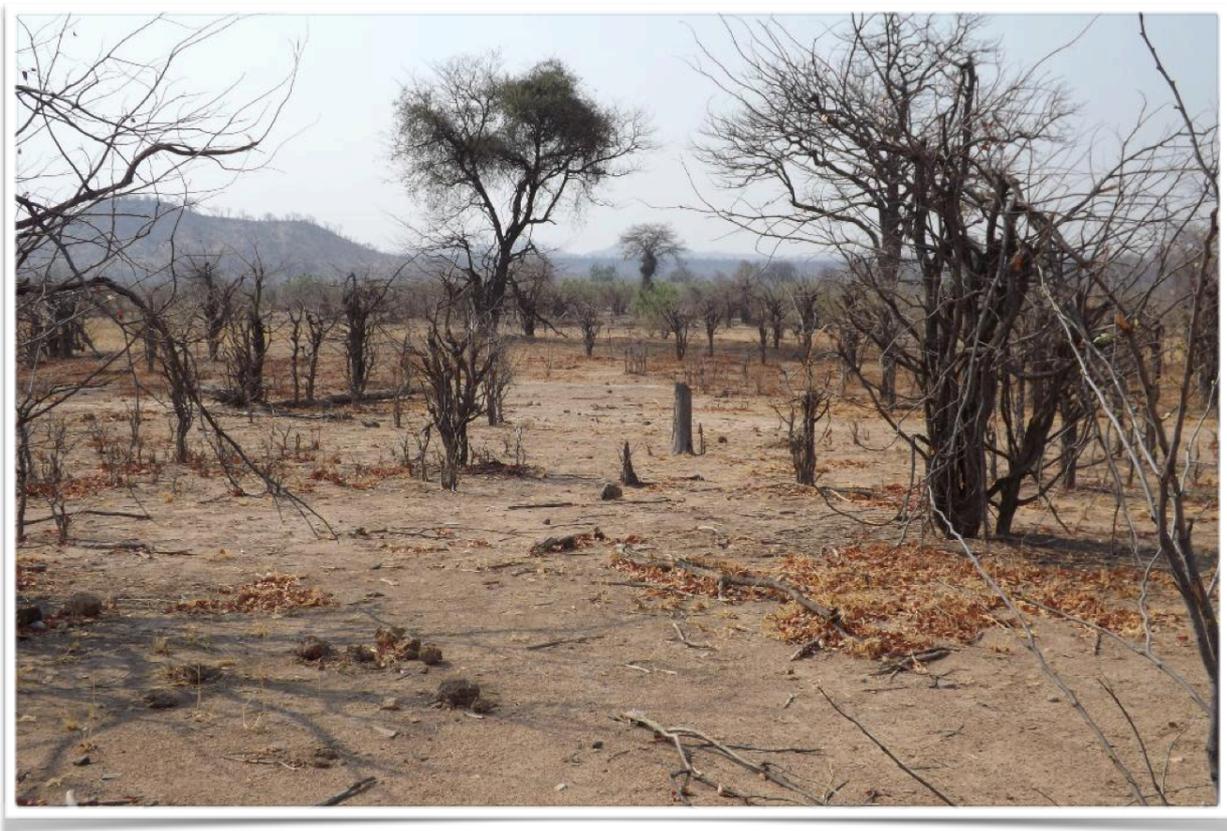
There are a couple of photos of the state of the museum below::



SINAMATELLA

Report from Stephen Long

October has certainly lived up to its reputation as being uncomfortably hot. As I write, the temperature in the house has not fallen below 33°C in 48 hours and I am only able to use the computer for twenty minutes at a time for fear of it overheating. That's uncomfortable for us but it is certainly a great deal worse for the animals out in the Park. Our resident dassies illustrate the desperation, even coming onto our veranda at breakfast time to look for scraps. We are still coping (just) with game water but food for the animals is the problem now. That's natural and we shouldn't panic about it but I must admit it is hard not to worry on their behalf when the bush looks like this.....



We have had no rain yet but it is still early and I'm sure there will be plenty to report next month.

Game water

We had another busy month and just listing the elephant damage we had to put right would take up a good part of this newsletter. Last rainy season we tried to make all

our water points as elephant-proof as we could and we started the dry season quietly confident that all would be well. We were wrong. Everything was OK until times became hard and then the elephants started breaking things. In a number of places they have torn up infrastructure that we had carefully covered and made leak-free so that there was nothing visible to attract them. Presumably there are some that remember where they found water in previous years and simply go back and do it again, regardless of how carefully we have hidden everything away. We will have to seriously consider electric fences for next year but the cost might be prohibitive.

Ignoring the small repairs and most of the elephant damage, the game water highlights for the month were...

Lukosi. The new pump was installed at Lukosi on the 4th. We weren't able to run it until eight days later because the ground in that area is so hard it took a great deal of time to dig a trench around the panels and to bury the pipe down to the pan. Before we started pumping, the pan looked like this.....



But five days later we were amazed to find that there was already a good pool of water



At that stage there was not much sign of animals using the pan (those in the photo didn't drink) but by the end of the month there were certainly elephant and impala drinking there and we hope this is going to become a big attraction for both wildlife and tourists.

Bumbumutsa. I mentioned in the September newsletter that elephants had broken the well head on the number two borehole at Bumbumutsa and we would somehow have to fish out the pipes, cable and pump. This was finally achieved by the last week of October but it took a great deal of work. Nick and Tshuma spent days making suitable fishing tools and hooking out all the equipment, as well as a whole brick and three half-bricks that had been dropped down by the elephants. Edmore from Kapula Camp provided some valuable assistance for which we are very grateful, I did nothing apart from carefully thought-out delegating. We will re-install the pump early in November.

Shumba. Shumba is not particularly far from Bumbumutsa. Perhaps the elephant that enjoyed making work for us at Bumbumutsa was also responsible for some destruction at Shumba where the well-head, cable and safety rope on Patrick's pump were broken and everything fell down the borehole. Nick and Tshuma successfully pulled all this out and replaced it in the course of a single day. Many thanks to Camp Hwange for providing connectors to replace the ones damaged by the elephant. The hard work at both Bumbumutsa and Shumba was done in very hot conditions and was

not at all easy. I often thank 'outsiders' who give us help but this month I think I should also thank Nick and Tshuks for their hard work and determination. It would have been easy to give up and say 'it can't be done' but they persevered and got the problems sorted out. Perhaps the elephants are grateful as well. If only they would show it!

The wind pumps. We had a breakdown and elephant damage at Tshompani wind pump in October but that isn't what I want to write about. Since we installed the wind pump at Sinamatella in July I have had a lot of opportunities to study how well or how badly it works (I only need to walk twenty paces from the veranda to look down on it). We had always been told that wind pumps are useless in October when there is no wind (I've often said it myself) but either the weather this year is atypical or perhaps modern wind pumps are better than the old ones because the Sinamatella Pan has grown in size through October in spite of great heat and evaporation and the Tshompani wind pump set a new record of 17041 litres per day in the week ending 21 October. That's not a huge amount but it supports a lot of animals and does it with simple, non-polluting technology. For some years I saw the Tshompani wind pump as a bit of a nuisance but now we have it running well I'm a convert.

Wildlife

Just as they dominate our game water work, elephants dominate this month's wildlife report. On the 4th of October we were at Tshompani and we noticed a baby elephant stuck in the mud. It was so covered in mud that we were there for some time before we saw it and when we did eventually notice it, it was only because it moved its trunk a little. The baby's mother was waiting at the edge of the dam so we knew that with only three of us, we would not be able to keep the mother away and rescue the baby. I radioed Camp Hwange and they agreed to help. Thanks to Julian from Camp Hwange, who has some experience of getting elephants out of mud, the rescue was not really all that difficult. I would have dithered, worrying about damaging the baby as it was hauled out of the mud, but Julian made sure we just got on with it and the baby was none the worse for being roughly dragged across the ground with a rope around its hind legs. It got to its feet and staggered off to mum, who would surely have given us a lot more trouble than she did without Julian's decisive action. Next time I'll know what to do.

In the last few years we have collected a number of samples from carcasses (mainly elephant) in the dry season and sent them to Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust Lab for anthrax testing. This year there have been very few unexplained carcasses reported but right at the end of October two dead elephants were found and we sent the samples to Vic Falls. We await the results but I suspect the deaths were due to the heat and poor food rather than anything else.

A third mention of elephants in this section of the newsletter relates to numbers. We have the results of the 2016 WEZ census and we were able to do a 24 hour count at Masuma over the October full moon so I have been looking at the results. The WEZ count recorded 721 elephant at Masuma in September, we recorded 1213 in October, an increase of around 68%. On occasions during our 24 hour count the dam was busy, to say the least.....



My guess is that most of these extra elephants have come from Shumba where over a thousand were recorded on the WEZ count but the water level has since dropped and perhaps elephant numbers have dropped with it. We have seen this before – large numbers of elephants at a pan one month followed by smaller numbers the next month. That might simply be regression to the mean but I suspect the elephants are clever enough to vote with their feet and leave an over-crowded water source. If that is indeed the case we must hope that in future when this happens, we will have provided a range of options for them and they will spread out rather than simply overcrowding somewhere else.

We had hoped that Bumbumutsa would be one of those options and would absorb some of the many elephants in the Shumba-Masuma area this year but so far that hasn't been the case, with only 65 recorded there on the WEZ count. The count at Mashambo however gives some hope that Bumbumutsa will be better next year. Mashambo, like Bumbumutsa, is relatively new as a reliable dry season water source. In 2015, 2016

elephants were recorded there but this year there were a massive 365 (more, rather surprisingly, than some of the well-known Main Camp pans such as Nyamandhlovu, Kennedy and Guvalala) – presumably as more animals get to know the place, the numbers rise. Let's hope they get to know Bumbumutsa soon.

Miscellaneous

In mid-October Sue and I spent a weekend at Victoria Falls with Thor Thorsson, who has been a supporter of the Trust for some years. As usual he had brought us a diverse selection of gifts from Sweden for which we are very grateful. He also introduced us to Charles Chiwara who was able to trace and repair a persistent oil leak on the Land Rover which had defeated and annoyed us up to that point. Many thanks Thor.

Sadly, the domestic water situation at Sinamatella was poor again at times during October. A lot of the ZNWA equipment is well beyond its normal working life and most of it has no back-up so there is no easy solution to the problem but Parks are making an effort to connect to a lime-free water source rather than the current one which constantly causes blockages and if that works it will help a lot.

Finally, many thanks to the Hwange Conservation Society (UK) who have kindly donated a sum to help with refurbishments at Shumba. We will start by improving and perhaps enlarging the hide overlooking the pan but work on that will only begin once the rains come and we have time. For now the battle with the elephants takes priority!

POACHING

Early on in the month there were one case of poisoning of three elephant in the Guvalala (Main Camp) area, plus one was shot near Nyamandhlovu and the tusks taken. In follow up operations one suspect was arrested, who confessed to the poisoning and named other accomplices, plus admitted the elephant shot was by Zambians operating with the locals. This suspect has previous poaching convictions, plus had served jail time for poaching. While they were arresting a further suspect, the first suspect escaped from the ZRP detail tasked with looking after him, and disappeared - he is still on the run. Follow up investigations are continuing.

The notorious Headman Sibanda who has previous convictions for poaching, who illegally hunted a lion at the same time as Cecil on the nearby Railway Farm, has been arrested for the illegal hunting of an elephant, sable, zebra, giraffe and a Roan Antelope on Railway Farm 31 (bordering Hwange National Park). Roan are classified as a specially protected species and is a mandatory 9 year sentence for the illegal killing of them.

Sibanda was charged with the illegal hunting of the animals, including the Roan, plus hunting without a licence (His PH licence was withdrawn after his previous poaching conviction) He had no permit to hunt, and no quota He appeared in Hwange court and was remanded, but after a weekend in jail, High Court granted him a \$100 bail - lets hope politics is not at play here and that the judge was misdirected in granting such a lenient bail sentence Politics and corruption have allowed him off the hook in previous cases, but lets hope justice prevails this time round! Good work by Parks Investigations Unit and the ZRP in apprehending this felon.

COMMENT

Hans and Ester van Meer of the Cheetah Conservation Project (Zimbabwe) have now left Zimbabwe, having done an incredible research project in analysing the cheetah population throughout the country, as well as recording the status of the other predators and small cats. They have produced a very comprehensive booklet on their findings. Unfortunately the project was cut short due to the short sightedness of the “Research Council” which refused to renew their research permit - this attitude does not bode well for wildlife research in Zimbabwe in the future.

Of interest, Buby Valley Conservancy has offered up to 200 wild lions free of charge to anyone - come and collect them! There has not been one expression of interest, despite all the hype about lions facing imminent extinction!

I spent 8 days in the Okavango Delta, at a couple of different locations (thanks to Piet and Anthea Erasmus). The delta is very beautiful with stunning scenery, but is a “soft” Africa compared to Hwange! However, there were a couple of things that struck me about the Delta. The first thing was that there are no mid sized palm trees - lots of mature ones, and lots of small bushes, but it seems the elephant are demolishing the young palms before maturity (elephant were scarce in days of old!). The other thing was the paucity of plains game - there were lots of lechwe, and some tsessebe, kudu, impala plus small groups of zebra and wildebeest. There were plenty elephant an buffalo though. I believe Mike Chase of Elephants without Borders has picked up this big decline in plains game in his aerial surveys, estimating the decline to be as high as over 70%. Certainly there was not the plains game there from what I remember years ago, and as a pure game viewing experience the areas I visited cannot compete with Hwange.

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 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.

Thor Thorsson— an intrepid traveller

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.

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.

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. 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 :

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