



DECEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

*Wishing Everyone all the Very Best
for the New Year.*

ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

Mr Power Mapungs has officially taken over as Area Manager of Zambezi National Park, and we look forward to fruitful working relationship. Power comes from Robins, where we already had established a relationship. Mr Edmore Ngosi has moved to Main Camp and we wish him well there, and thank him for all the great support he gave to us when stationed here - it was a prime example of how everyone can work together for the benefit of the Park, the area and the people.

Some Chamabonda scenes :





KAZUMA PAN NATIONAL PARK

I went to check on the Kazuma Pumps early in the month - could not get to Roan Pan as they had had a couple of big storms and the road was too muddy. Kazuma Corner Pan is holding water well, and we installed a water meter so as to monitor the pan.

The White Grass area and part of the Depression has been burnt from a lightning ignited fire and has greened up well. The burn was badly needed as these areas were fairly moribund.

ROBINS

The second solar unit at Deteema dam was commissioned, but we then discovered a problem in that the stronger No 1 pump was blocking the inflow from the No2 pump. We will be putting in a second pipeline in early 2017 to alleviate this problem and increase the inflow into Deteema. However, the dam has had a good natural inflow already this season



Deteema Dam

We will also start the refurbishment of the H G Robins Museum early in the new year.

SINAMATELLA

Report from Stephen Long

Rainfall in December was very patchy but it was a great improvement on November. At Sinamatella itself we had above average rain for the month, which made up for November's poor rain and brought us to very slightly below average for the season. Elsewhere around the Sinamatella area there were some heavy falls, notably 85mm recorded at Mbala gate on the 14th which turned the small dam from a tiny muddy puddle to an impressive sheet of water in just a few hours. The small solar pump at Mbala did a great job of keeping a little water available at the dam right through the dry season but it certainly can't compete with this.....



Mbala Dam

A couple of days after that heavy rain at Mbala, we received 38mm at Sinamatella and I was struck by the way the water lying on the surface showed up the extent of the bare ground in front of the Camp.....



Most of the shiny areas, from the flood plain right back into the Mopane woodland were more or less bare of grass at the end of the dry season. We would like to know if these bare areas are increasing or not and obviously, comparing with some old photos would help. We have recent photos (from around 2009 onwards) and also much older, showing the bare flood plain as it was after the over-grazing of the former Sinamatella ranch and the rehabilitation works that were carried out. It would be good to compare with photos from the late eighties and nineties - perhaps someone reading this can help?

Game water.

With rain falling at last there has been no pressure on our game water supplies. At the end of December Mashambo, Lukosi and Mbala were all full and Baobab was around 75%. The bigger dams and pans such as Masuma and Shumba look a great deal better than they did a few weeks ago but still have a very long way to go before they are as full as we would like. We connected the new solar pump at Masuma into the system to the dam and it is currently contributing around 10,000 litres per day. Right at the end of the month we made an adjustment which should improve that but we won't get a particularly high yield until the clear skies of the dry season come around.

The new pump at Gurangwenya also came on line in December after we had installed 600m of pipeline from the borehole to the pan. Wilderness Safaris kindly loaned us the use of their tractor for a morning and we used a ripper to cut out a line for the pipe. It worked better than I had expected and saved a lot of work so that we

were able to get the pipe installed and working in a little over a week.



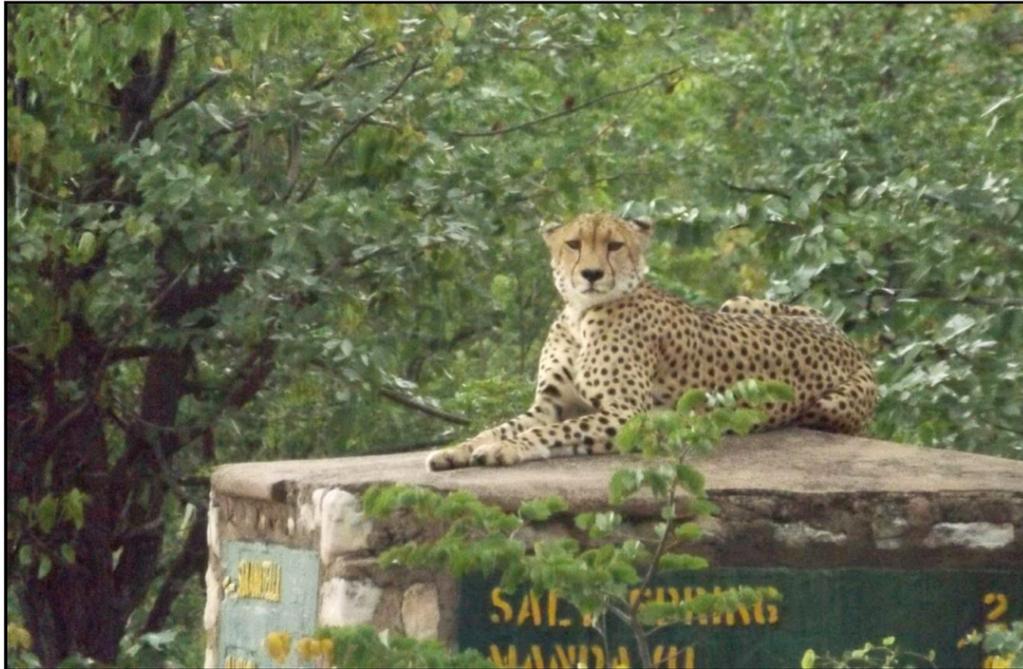
The yield from the pump is currently around 20,000 litres per day which is rapidly filling the little pan.

Wildlife

While Nick and the team were installing the pipeline at Gurangwenya, we had a few days with rain and the river began to flow. Within a day, barbel appeared at the old bridge trying to jump up and continue their journey to spawning grounds somewhere upstream. These fish must have already had an epic journey against the flood from wherever they had survived the dry season, presumably in pools on the Mbala or the Lukosi, and if they made it across the bridge they would have the tumbled rocks of the Gurangwenya gorge to deal with. I am amazed that fish can survive in our very arid environment - and these are not the only examples - we have in previous years found barbel right up in the Sinamatella River at Domboshuro and Zambezi Happys in the Salt Spring drainage, where they were eventually killed by the increasing salinity as their pool dried at the end of the rains.

Rainy season is usually a time with poor game viewing but a few of our visitors around Christmas got some memorable sightings, including lions, leopards and all the usual herbivores. My own wildlife memories for the month are mainly of the

enormous number of beetles coming to the lights of our house at night, getting into food, drink, hair and, most uncomfortably in the case of the bigger rhinoceros beetles, even into bed with us. We did see some more picturesque sights though, including this handsome cheetah that we found on his territorial marking post late one afternoon....



Birding was a little disappointing. Once again the rains came too late for the Black Coucals to visit any of our vleis and in fact very few migrants were in evidence most of the time. An Emerald Cuckoo turned up and called determinedly from within the Camp but he only stayed for a morning - long enough for his call remain exotic rather than become boring. Diederik and Black cuckoos are also around but I have missed the much nicer call of the Red-chested cuckoo, which we have heard only once or twice. The Skimmers have returned to Mandavu where they will (I hope) nest for a third year running.

I'm not certain that the next item really belongs under the heading 'Wildlife' but, a word is due here about Baobab trees. In December I spent quite a bit of time (for a variety of reasons) out in the bush fairly close to Mashambo Pan. Mashambo has only been filled through the dry season for a few years and there is no other reliable water close to it so the bush in the area hadn't been badly affected by elephants up to now. With good dry-season water now available, Mashambo has been attracting a lot of elephants and the amount of damage to the vegetation within a kilometre or so of the water is enormous. Luckily most of it is Mopane which will adapt and survive but

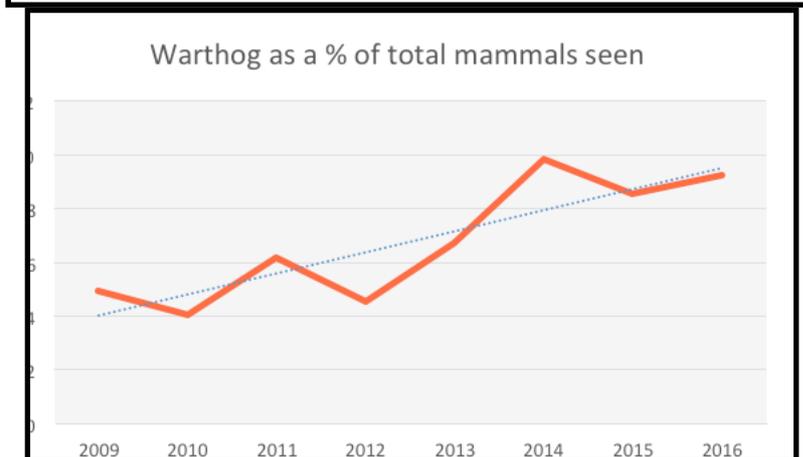
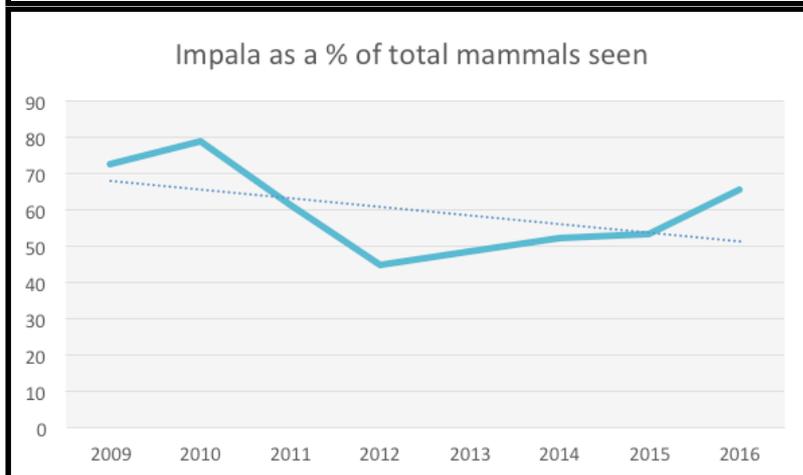
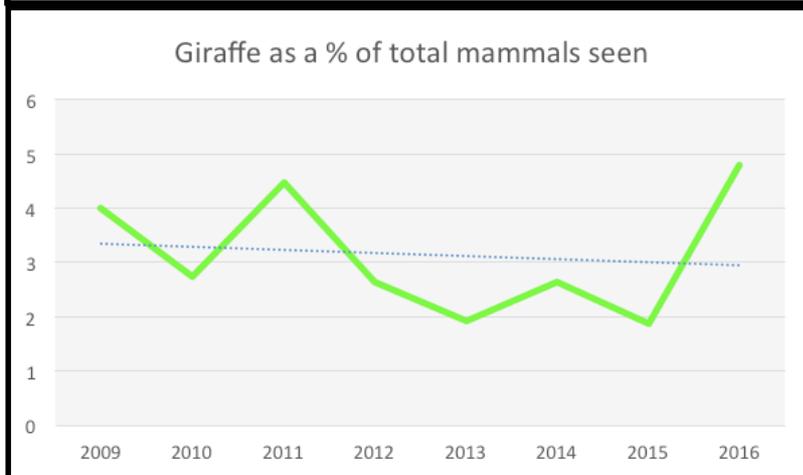
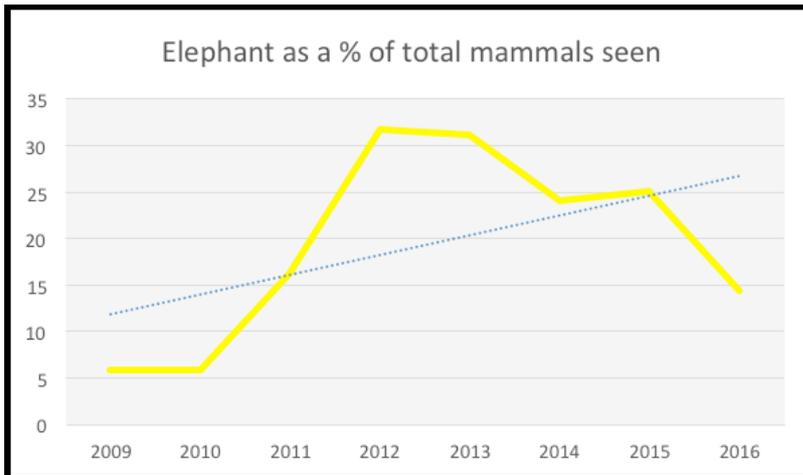
there used to be a number of Baobabs close by - at least two of them supporting vulture nests - and these do not recover once they have been eaten down.....

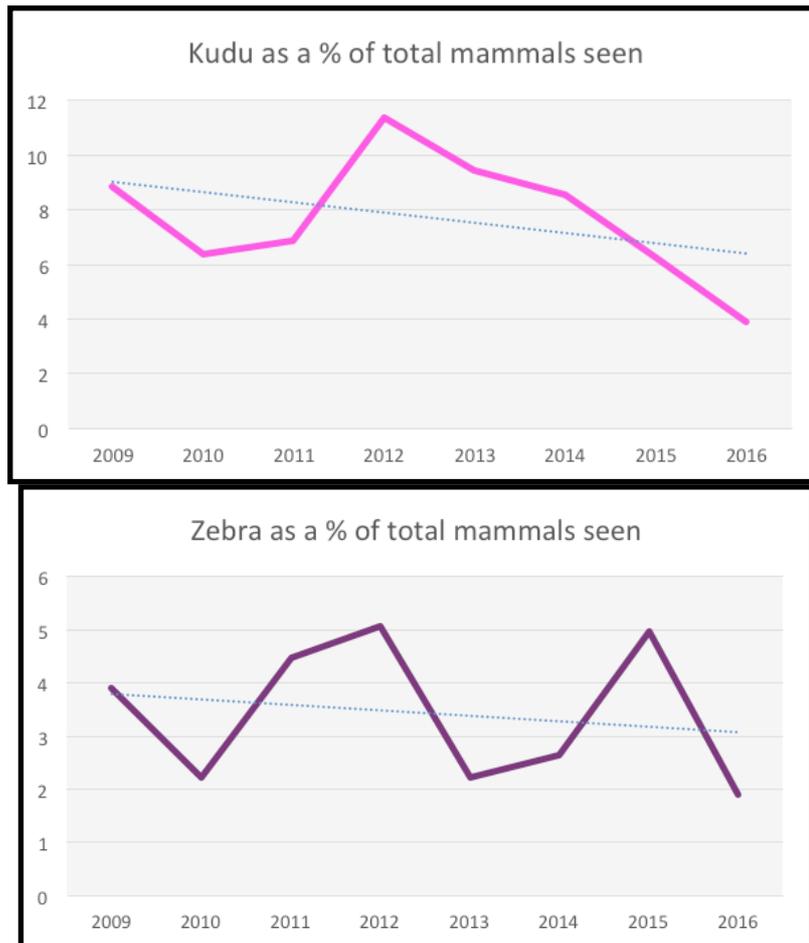


Baobab stumps near Mashambo Pan.

It has been said that we can have Baobabs or we can have Elephants but we can't have both together and unfortunately that seems to be true within a certain distance of permanent water. Luckily Baobabs survive in the dryer areas where they are not molested but all this damage around Mashambo is a valuable reminder that whatever we do in the Park is likely to have consequences that we might not like and we must think carefully before we make changes.

During the past eight dry seasons we have been conducting regular road transect counts around Sinamatella. Our longest and most frequent count has been the Kashawe Loop and Lukosi River drive for which we now have over sixty sets of data. I spent some time in December working on a very basic analysis of this data and some of the results are shown below.....





Two features are obvious. Firstly only elephants and warthogs are showing an increasing trend but secondly, and more interestingly, even elephant numbers have been declining on our transect route since 2013, though the trendline continues upwards. Could this be evidence of some success for the strategy of providing water at as many, widely spread places as possible in order to spread out the animals (especially the elephants) and the damage they do? A great deal more research would be needed to prove that but it's an interesting result anyway.

Miscellaneous

One of the old perennial subjects for my part of this newsletter is Sinamatella's domestic water situation. It is something we are very often reminded of when we wake in the morning and turn on a tap only to have nothing but air coming out. In early December an effort was made to solve a part of the problem by re-opening the number 5 borehole which is around 5km from Camp. Details are unnecessary - the simple fact is, it didn't work and took up a great deal of time and effort. That left, as usual, just the one borehole running and inevitably with Christmas approaching, that broke down on several occasions. To add to the troubles, the switchgear for the booster pump melted down

(spectacular but irreparable) and the motor for the same pump burnt out. We all worked together to keep the water flowing and we coped, but only just and there were a few occasions when irate tourists besieged the Tourist Office to complain about a temporary lack of water. I'm so grateful that most of my game water customers don't behave like that.

Unfortunately that other old favourite - transport problems, also returned in December. Once again, the Parks Land Rover and the Dong Feng lorry were out of action, leaving our vehicles and drivers as the only suitable ones on station for much of the work over Christmas. Diesel supplies have been adequate, helped by an extra donation from the SAVE African Rhino Foundation, and the vehicles have had a bit of an overhaul so we had no crises but even so we look forward to the Parks vehicles returning to action.

In November and early December an advanced ranger training scheme was run at Sinamatella, culminating in a pass-out parade for the new trainees. Almost as much effort went into that as into curing the domestic water situation - but with greater success. It was a very well run occasion, enjoyed by all, and I hope the training was as good as the parade. If it was, any poachers unlucky enough to meet one of the trainees in the bush are going to be in a lot of trouble!

POACHING

One poacher was arrested with 4kg ivory and 3 kg cyanide by National Parks Investigations on a Sunday and was sentenced to nine years jail on the Monday in Hwange Magistrates Court! Well done to Parks and the magistrate - swift justice!! The poachers accomplices fled and are still being sought, plus the supplier of the cyanide.

National Parks Investigations arrested three suspects in possession of 145 pangolin scales. The three accused are from Binga where they found the pangolin. They kept it for three weeks trying to find a buyer (they stated they had previously sold one to a prominent businessman in Bulawayo, who refused to buy this one) before the pangolin died. They then went to Hwange where they tried to sell the scales for \$7 each. They were arrested and appeared in the magistrates court in Hwange. As two of the accused pleaded not guilty, they were all remanded in custody until the 3rd January, 2017. They face a mandatory nine years if found guilty.



The three pangolin 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. This has enabled us to complete all required for the end of the season, put in the Guarangwenya pump, and set up for the revival of the rhino monitoring unit

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 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 seven 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 and equipping 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.

Basil Vrettos for a donation

Larry Cumming for loan of a ripper to open the new pipeline trenches at Gurangwenya and Deteema

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

Robins Museum - an appeal locally was responded to with Sara Norton supplying 40lt of paint (ceiling and wall), Duncan Cumming providing fans and ceiling lights and Bernie Veldsman providing curtains, with Kevin Fry providing mesh for the window at Big Toms hide - a big thanks to all.

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.

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

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