

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

BULLETIN

APRIL 2002

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In recent years The Zambezi Society's interests have extended into several Zambezi Basin states, including notably Mozambique and Zambia. Nevertheless, we still undertake many activities focused on the Zimbabwean National Parks and communal lands located within the Zambezi Basin.

Political differences between Zimbabwe and traditional donor nations have brought a slowing - and in some cases a total halt - to donor assistance. But, while the rest of the world was preoccupied with Zimbabwe's election politics, Scout Mutsvagiwa Dzvaka, of the Zimbabwean Department of National Parks, was killed in a contact with armed elephant poachers in the Mana Pools National Park.

Scout Dzvaka's death did not raise so much as a media ripple. But he was typical of many, many people still out there in remote parts of Zimbabwe - Park and Rural Council game scouts, natural resources officers, NGO representatives - dedicated to their work; with no "soft options"; with one aim: to conserve the country's wealth of natural resources, and to benefit others. Why should they suffer, and their achievements be destroyed, because of political differences between countries?

And why should the resources themselves suffer? It is worth remembering that Zimbabwe still has some of the finest National Parks in Africa; some of the finest arrays of wildlife, forests, woodlands and scenery; and some of the most forward-looking conservation policies in the world.

I would remind donors - individuals as well as organisations - that it doesn't make sense to withdraw support for these resources. On the contrary, their survival should transcend political differences, and support for their conservation is even more essential at this time in Zimbabwean history. Our last Bulletin noted the quite extraordinarily huge donation raised by eleven-year-old girls at Chisipite Junior School in Harare to help Zimbabwe's black rhinos - simply because, with the unclouded vision of children, they cared enough to do so.

We hope the donor community and others will take note, and follow their example.

BLACK RHINOS

The situation on some private rhino conservancies, notably at Gourlay's Block, has received worldwide publicity. However - as with the death of Scout Dzvaka, noted above - events in the Parks estate have received scant attention.

Early in April, a poaching gang gained access to the bomas at Tashinga, where three young black rhinos are being handreared for future release into the Matusadona Intensive Protection Zone. They fed cabbages and biscuits laced with poison to two of these animals. One died, and its horn was removed. Another became seriously ill, but eventually recovered after veterinary treatment. The poachers went on to steal fuel from the Tashinga harbour, and to leave the area by boat.

There are many unanswered questions hanging over this event. Why, for example, were the bomas not manned during that particular night? And how did the poachers know they were unmanned, and that fuel could be found at the harbour?

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Recriminations are, as usual, likely to be fruitless. But recent developments in the rhino conservancies, coupled with this event, highlight several points, the first of which is the absolutely critical importance of the Intensive Protection Zones within the Zimbabwean Parks estate.

The 1990s saw a rush of donors to support private-land conservancies. This was fair enough in itself. Many such conservancies have done an excellent job. But it was often combined with the withdrawal of support from the Parks IPZs, thereby effectively removing all the eggs from one basket and putting them in another.

The Zambezi Society has continuously supported black rhino conservation in Parks areas within its sphere of interest since 1985. This policy stems from two fundamental beliefs. One is that national assets such as rhinos should survive on public lands, with facilities for citizen access and enjoyment, instead of being cloistered behind price barriers mostly surmountable only by foreign visitors. The second is that the protection of valuable species such as the rhinoceros should be a long-term undertaking, sheltered from market forces, and is a legitimate and in fact desirable State responsibility.

There have been, and continue to be, many shortcomings in the State protection of black rhinos. IPZ populations are, in our view, exceedingly vulnerable to a resumption of poaching catalysed by hunger and economic hardship - a view reinforced by the ease with which poachers not only gained access to the Tashinga bomas, but remained there for some considerable time, and have not yet been captured. However, we see this as being all the more reason why we should continue to work, patiently and supportively, with the Department of National Parks in an effort to help the Department to rebuild its own capacity to cope with the growing risk of severe rhino poaching and other management problems.

This is not proving easy. Traditionally, most support for rhino conservation came from the very countries and individuals that are now ignoring the ongoing efforts of people like Scout Dzvaka and prefer to perceive Zimbabwe as being in complete anarchy. We are, however, "hitting back" with a strong overseas fundraising campaign spearheaded by Zambezi Society (UK); and Adrian Wilson has just sent us the welcome news that ZSUK has received an initial donation of over £3000 - Z\$1,5million at realistic exchange rates - for black rhino conservation in the Matusadona IPZ.

Again, we hope that other donors will follow this example.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Last year the Society successfully applied for funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to work on a number of important but threatened biological sites in the Binga, Guruve and Muzarabani rural district council areas. These sites include valuable *Guibourtia* woodlands, dry forests, and riverine woodlands. The objective is to identify incentives that will enable communities living adjacent to the sites to conserve them. **Fanual Mugadza** reports -

"Work is progressing well in all three districts. We have had extensive meetings with the local District Councils and community leaders, and full-scale community meetings in Binga and Guruve. All the communities concerned welcome the project. We have challenged them to identify their own strategies for the management of these sites, and they have created committees to consult and discuss these strategies with all community members. One community, in Binga, has even created a "Mungonya Tree Campaign" in response to the project.

Our aim is to create a sense of project "ownership" among these communities, rather than to have the project perceived as an outside, Zambezi Society activity. We have made it clear that the Society's interest lies in conserving the biological diversity within these sites, and the purpose of our initial meetings has been to find out whether our interests coincide with those of the local communities. If not, then there is little we can do. If they do, then the Society has indicated that it is willing to help.

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The communities now have to identify the problems associated with conserving the sites, the reasons why they are being destroyed, and the mechanisms that would create incentives to conserve them. This is likely to involve the creation either of sustainable livelihoods from the sites themselves, or of alternatives that would reduce pressure on them. The Society has funds available to launch projects to create such incentives.

In our next round of community meetings we will begin discussing the ideas generated by the communities and their committees, and to map out the way forward. We still have to hold initial community meetings in Muzarabani, where it has been difficult to operate for some months. However, Muzarabani RDC has already created a structure within which we can operate, there is a sound body of previous work on which we can build, and several ideas for the conservation of sites such as the Rikonde Forest have already been identified.”

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Members may recall that last year we recorded an operating loss due largely to the Society’s transition from donor core funding to self-sufficiency. Draft - and so far unaudited - accounts for the 2001/2 financial year, which ended on March 31, show that this loss has now been recovered, and replaced by an operating surplus.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORT

We would like record special thanks to all our members who expressed their continued commitment and support of our work by renewing their membership subscriptions this year, and/or by making generous donations to The Society. We apologise for the somewhat erratic publication dates of The Bulletin over the past few months and express the hope that members continue to appreciate its brief and practical A4 format (if not its somewhat delayed arrival!).

PLEASE GIVE US YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS

With the escalating costs of postage, we find that distributing this Bulletin by e-mail is much easier, cheaper and quicker. If you are on e-mail and have not yet given us your address (or if you have recently changed e-mail addresses) please let us know, and we will gladly send you an electronic version.

New!

Zambezi Society Publications

CD-ROM ON ZAMBEZI BASIN WETLANDS

The Society is proud to announce the long-awaited publication of its first CD-ROM. *Biodiversity of the Zambezi Basin Wetlands*, edited by Jonathan Timberlake and produced by the Zamsoc/BFA partnership in July 2000 was originally only available as a vast two-volume, 1000-page tome. The new CD-ROM version is a lot lighter, and a lot cheaper! The DIY CD production process has been a steep learning curve for the Information Department, but we think the result is good, easy to use and will make the very valuable information contained in this document more easily accessible to a much wider audience.

HARD-COPY REPORTS

The Society’s Publications Department has been busy during the past few months. In addition to the new Wetlands CD-ROM, three new documents are now available for purchase from our Harare offices by interested members and/or individuals and organisations. They are:-

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BIODIVERSITY AND WILDERNESS AROUND LAKE CABORA BASSA

Biodiversity and wilderness around Lake Cabora Bassa, Mozambique (Joint Zamsoc/BFA publication, edited by Rob Cunliffe, April 2002. Summary document 43 pp; Whole document in two volumes 300 pp). Produced for the Mozambique authorities to allow land use planning decisions to be made taking biodiversity and wilderness factors into consideration.

ZAMBEZI DRY FORESTS AND THICKETS

Structure and condition of Zambezi Valley dry forests and thickets (Zambezi Society, January 2002, 40pp) This reports on research carried out by the Society on these habitat patches which are often used as refuges by elephants and have particular conservation significance in Southern Africa because they are examples of a vegetation type which is rare or threatened wherever it still occurs.

PROCEEDINGS OF TRANSBOUNDARY WORKSHOP

Elephants, land and people in Magoe, Guruve and Muzarabani Districts (Zambezi Society, December 2001, 32pp) Proceedings of a transboundary workshop held by The Zambezi Society in July 2001 to develop and plan a collaborative elephant and habitat management framework and strategy for three key Zambezi districts on the Zimbabwe/Mozambique border.

**Contact Sally Wynn or Evyline Sithole in our Harare office
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