

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

BULLETIN

AUG/SEPT 2004

APOLOGY

We apologise for the infrequency of the Society's Bulletin during the past few months. The office has been working flat out on the Society's component of the "Four Corners" project, on the drafting of proposals for agencies such as the Global Environment Fund, and on the problems involved in managing a small NGO in a highly inflationary environment. Unfortunately the Bulletin fell through the cracks. To make up for this, in addition to this Bulletin, we will be sharing with our members some of the information we have sent out to 500 planners and other decision-makers in the Four Corners region, including the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the biodiversity reviews. These will be sent to you shortly in a separate e-mail.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE!

A REMINDER TO ALL MEMBERS THAT SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE FOR THE 2004/2005 MEMBERSHIP YEAR. IF YOU ARE A PAYING MEMBER, YOUR RENEWAL FORM WILL SHORTLY BE SENT TO YOU UNDER SEPARATE E-MAIL. WE VALUE YOUR SUPPORT. PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM AND FORWARD YOUR PAYMENT TO US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

HONORARY MEMBERS PLEASE IGNORE THIS.

LIFE MEMBERS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE A DONATION. THANK YOU.

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

We continue to receive queries from members concerning the status of wildlife in the Parks that fall within our area of interest. Typically, they say something like "we only spent a day in the Matusadona, but all we saw was one elephant and a couple of hippo. Has the Army (or poachers, or National Parks?) killed all the rest?"

During August I spent nine days, moving from bay to bay on the Matusadona shoreline. Were I to base my findings on the day I spent in the Bonde river, I would have to say that the Matusadona appeared to hold two impala, and nothing else. In the Kakongwe, one elephant; in the Kanjedza, half a dozen hippo. If I based them on the day I spent in the Nyamuni, I would report that the Matusadona is suffering from a serious overpopulation of elephant bulls, cows, calves, impala, and a sprinkling of kudu. Matusadona has changed, certainly, with high lake levels and the decline of grazing animals that depended on the vast torpedo-grass meadows that grew on the lake shore during the drought years; but overall my perception – reinforced by discussions with the Park warden and our black rhino project manager – is that the Park is in excellent shape, possibly barring the impacts of elephants and fire on woodlands. So, too, is Mana Pools and indeed the entire Zambezi Valley complex.

I have noted in a previous Bulletin the apparently political motivation lying behind overseas media exaggerations of the Zimbabwean wildlife scene, and it is sometimes difficult to escape the suspicion that something of this has rubbed off on the numerous doomsayers who pass through this office. There seems to be an inherent disposition among many of our members to need to hear bad news, and a wish to believe the worst of organizations such as "National Parks" (now more correctly the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority).

This negativity doesn't exactly help our staff to maintain their dedication, and it certainly doesn't help the Society to raise overseas funds for activities such as rhino conservation. That Zimbabwe has undergone a major social revolution in the past few years is undeniable; that its impacts have been catastrophic in all places and all spheres of life is simply untrue. In our corner of Zimbabwe the Parks estate is probably better managed now than it has been for over a decade. Joint operations between PWMA, the Army and the Air Force squashed an incipient poaching problem as soon as it reared its head. If these

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Parks are vulnerable – and they certainly are, as we emphasized in our December 2003 Bulletin – it is because of underfunding, politically-motivated donor withdrawals, and erroneous perceptions of their relevancy or otherwise.

But at least our questioners do ask. We can do our best to give an objective assessment. It is those who merely assume the worst, and then pass on their prejudices via Zimbabwe's thriving rumour-mill, who do the real damage.

The Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force

Recent media reports characterize the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force (ZCTF) as “bringing together independent wildlife conservationists and groups in the country.” We wish to place on record that the Zambezi Society has no connection with the Task Force or with its goals, which according to Zim Online include the relegation of the Zimbabwean elephant population to CITES Appendix One.

The last independent survey of the Zimbabwean elephant population was carried out by WWF in 2001, and estimated a national population of 88 123 with an 8% confidence interval: in other words, there could have been as many as 95 000 or as few as 81 000. The ZCTF believes there are “about 50 000 to 60 000” elephants in Zimbabwe today. The alternatives are either that WWF's figures were grossly in error, which we doubt, or that there are a minimum of 20 000 recent elephant carcasses lying around Zimbabwe.

This seems implausible, unless Zambezi Valley elephants have some form of special immunity. In September 2003 elephant surveys carried out by the Zambezi Society and AWF in the so-called Zambezi Heartland revealed a carcass ratio of 2.11% in the Zimbabwean portion of the Heartland, which consists of the Mana Pools National Park, the associated safari areas, and the Guruve communal lands. If 20% or more of the Valley population has been killed since last September, we would have expected PWMA officers like Norman Monks or Mike Jonasi to have noticed and commented.

The language and tactics are reminiscent of those used by certain international agencies in the 1980s, when the ivory trade first became a major issue – and who appear to be the “hidden hands” (and possibly financiers) behind the current disinformation campaigns. Sometimes the hand is not so hidden, like the one seen fiddling with a tape recorder concealed in a handbag at a recent Society AGM. Those wishing to record the proceedings of our next AGM are cordially invited to place their machines on the speaker's table, where the quality of the recording should be much improved.

NEW APPOINTMENTS

We have great pleasure in announcing the appointment of Duncan Purchase as Assistant Director (Bulawayo). Duncan has worked with the Society for several years, on activities such as the Matusadona black rhinoceros monitoring project. He is now assisting the Director with strategic and project development throughout the Zambezi Basin.

As the same time Dr Gianetta Purchase (who also happens to be married to Duncan) becomes Assistant Director (Research) on a part-time consultancy basis. Though she has often specialized in predator work, Netty brings a wealth of experience of Zambezi Basin ecosystems and research needs to the Society.

CHEETAH SURVEY & THE FFI PARTNERSHIP

Netty's first activity in her new position is to implement a survey of the current status of the cheetah population introduced into the Matusadona ten years ago by the Society and PWMA. Follow-up on projects of this kind is often conspicuous by its absence, let alone over a ten-year period, and we anticipate that the survey's findings, regardless of their outcome, will be of great interest and value to conservation in general and cheetah conservation in particular. The survey is being supported by Fauna and Flora International through its partnership with Rio Tinto plc. FFI, our leading international partner organization, also provided generous funding for the cheetah relocations in 1993 and 1994, and have since supported many other Society activities, including aircraft purchase, biodiversity conservation and strategic planning. We are currently formulating a portfolio of further collaborative projects with FFI's assistance.

TETE PROVINCE, MOZAMBIQUE & THE CABORA BASSA BASIN

It's always good to hear of research work being used and promoted, instead of gathering dust on institutional library shelves. Members may recall the joint Zambezi Society-BFA biodiversity and wilderness survey of the land around lake Cabora Bassa carried out in 1999-2001. This has now born fruit in the shape of proposals by the Mozambican authorities to

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designate the Cabora Bassa basin as a Biosphere Reserve, to create a “co-ordinated land use, development and servicing system” which “recognises the importance of existing natural resources and services and the threats and dangers to these resources and services through unplanned and unsustainable use.”

The original survey was funded by the Ford Foundation in response to a desire on the part of the Tete provincial authorities to initiate a process of land and developmental planning that acknowledged the critical importance of biodiversity, wilderness areas and natural resources. The findings of the survey catalysed the process that has led to the potential establishment of the Cahora Bassa Basin Biosphere Reserve. Assistant Director Duncan Purchase attended an initial seminar in Songo during September, during which a strategy for the Reserve’s establishment was formulated by a group of government and provincial representatives, NGOs and other stakeholders.

ZAMBEZI SOCIETY (UK)

We must acknowledge the quiet, sustained and effective support of The Zambezi Society (UK), led by Dr Adrian Wilson, since its inception in 1993 and continuing to the present day. The current media hype in the UK and Europe has made it particularly difficult to raise funds for Zimbabwean conservation. Zambezi Society (UK) is developing a range of fundraising activities including an exciting “Zambia Wilderness Challenge” which invites adventure seekers to canoe and trek on the Zambian section of the Zambezi River in 2005 (see the Zamsoc website soon, e-mail info@actionchallenge.com or telephone Michelle Brice at +44 (0)207 354 1465). Money is being raised for various projects including Mozambique’s Marromeu Buffalo Reserve. However, Zimbabwe continues to be a prime focus and the target for redoubled fundraising efforts.

As an example, the Society’s black rhino work is currently funded almost entirely by Zambezi Society (UK) and Chisipite Junior School in Zimbabwe. Approaches to major donors, on the other hand, have fallen on ears deafened by political fashion. Black rhinos may still be in danger, but Zimbabwean black rhinos are expendable, it seems.

BLACK RHINO AND THE MATUSADONA IPZ

The three trackers employed in the IPZ under the supervision of Duncan Purchase have now embarked on a second “round” of patrols designed to cover the entire area, with special emphasis on the difficult terrain south of the Matusadona mountains. This will enhance and refine our present picture of black rhino status and distribution within the IPZ, and thus contribute further to the effective management of the Matusadona black rhino population.

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT US BY RENEWING YOUR SUBSCRIPTION
AS SOON AS YOU RECEIVE YOUR RENEWAL NOTICE!!**

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