

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

BULLETIN

AUG/SEPT 2001

KANYEMBA TRANSBOUNDARY MEETING

For the past four years, as members are aware, the Society has been working on a variety of projects in northern Zimbabwe and in the Magoé district of Mozambique. These projects have included: -

- Research into elephant movement within and between the three districts;
- Research into the status and biodiversity of selected habitats, notably “dry forests”;
- Conservation of sites of high biological interest.

These projects have generated several important findings. The three districts share an elephant population of around 3000 animals, which move freely across international boundaries. The area contains a high proportion of all known *Xylia* dry forest (*jesse bush*) patches, an uncommon forest type of importance to local and global biodiversity. Many of these forest areas straddle local and international boundaries. Above all, the “landscape” consisting of these three districts requires collaborative, transboundary management if these biological features - and the income they generate for local people - are to survive.

The Royal Netherlands Government provided generous funding both for much of the Society’s research work in these districts, and - most critically - for the translation of the research results into practical conservation action. The first step along this road was the convening by the Society of a meeting of the relevant authorities in Kanyemba in July.

The meeting was held at the Kanyemba Zambezi Lodge from July 10-13 and was attended by over 40 delegates. These included six from each of the Guruve and Muzarabani Rural District Councils, and 14 delegates from the Tete provincial headquarters. The meeting was also attended by local MPs from Guruve, and by the Zimbabwean Deputy Minister of Environment, who delivered a keynote address.

The meeting commenced with presentations of research results by Dr Richard Hoare on behalf of the Zambezi Society, and by Mr Guy Parker, of the Mid-Zambezi Elephant Project, who are working on the reduction of human-wildlife conflict in the area in collaboration with the Society. These were followed by presentations by each of the local authorities concerned, and by working sessions facilitated by Dr Russell Taylor of WWF Harare.

The final result was a unanimous mandate for the Society to facilitate the implementation of practical, on-the-ground measures designed to initiate a process of transborder collaboration between the three districts concerned. Such measures include the harmonisation of land planning processes to maintain habitats and wildlife populations; the development of standardised wildlife and habitat monitoring systems; improved collaboration between law enforcement agencies; the development of innovative agricultural and non-agricultural land use options; and further research to fill remaining gaps in biological knowledge.

Transboundary management is of course the “flavour of the decade.” There are several large and ambitious projects already operating in the region, including the Gonarezhou-Kruger-Gaza initiative and the “Four Corners” project centred on the Victoria Falls region. The Guruve-Muzarabani-Magoé project is much smaller than these initiatives, and this may be its strength: it is closely focused on a selected range of transboundary resources, and on practical conservation measures that do not require either huge funding or protracted political negotiations for their implementation.

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Some funding is nevertheless required, and the Society is currently seeking support from a range of donor agencies, some of which have already expressed interest. Meanwhile, the proceedings of the meeting are currently being produced and will be available to members shortly.

MATUSADONA RHINO EAR-NOTCHING AND CENSUS

This exercise, which was scheduled for early August, was postponed at the last minute for a number of reasons. Firstly, Doug Hensburg, who was scheduled to fly the helicopter for the exercise, was attacked and injured by a lion two days before it was due to commence. Doug has become very much part of the Society team on such work, and we felt very hesitant about operating in the difficult terrain of the Matusadona escarpment area with an unknown replacement.

However, Doug's unforeseen injuries (from which he has recovered well) gave us an opportunity to rethink the entire Matusadona exercise. There had been little "leaf drop" within the IPZ, making aerial spotting difficult, and the ground teams deployed by Tashinga in advance of the operation had been faced with tall grass and exceptionally difficult terrain. As a result, very few black rhino had been positively located in advance of the scheduled date for the operation.

As The Zambezi Society (UK) had painstakingly raised some US\$20 000 for this exercise, in a hostile donor environment, it therefore seemed advisable not to risk this money on an exercise that might have produced little in the way of concrete results. We have therefore suggested that, instead of this kind of one-off, grand slam approach, the Department of National Parks should consider adopting a more phased process of ground and aerial location of black rhinos in the escarpment terrain, followed by a series, if necessary, of limited earnotching and collaring operations as good information becomes available.

We have indicated that we are prepared to finance this longer-term process, within reasonable limits, and we have in fact already begun to do so. We have made fuel available to Tashinga, if required, for patrol deployment, and have provided the station with 12 sets of binoculars on loan and GPS batteries and other supplies worth some Z\$20 000. This should enable the station to deploy its patrol force in an extensive ground effort throughout September, backed by a preliminary aerial reconnaissance later in the month and then, if results are encouraging, an initial earnotching operation in early October.

SITES OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

Our GEF-funded project to conserve important biodiversity sites in Binga, Guruve and Muzarabani districts got off to a good start during August, when Fanuel Mugadza and Rob Cunliffe spent several days in each district to introduce the project and to work out a suitable *modus operandi* with the RDCs and communities concerned.

To remind members: our major concern in Binga is the survival of the *Guibourtia conjugata* woodlands near Manjolo, followed by the no less important, but less threatened, gully woodlands in the communal lands along the Chizarira escarpment.

In Guruve and Muzarabani districts, the focus is largely on *Xylia* "dry forest" sites, including the Gonono Sand Ridge and the Rikonde Forest, but also on areas such as the riverine woodlands on the Mukumbura river, widely regarded as some of the best examples of such woodland in the Zambezi Valley but threatened by uncontrolled settlement and agriculture.

WILDERNESS WORK

Our research into the value of Zambezi wilderness and the impacts of tourism on wild areas has attracted some international interest, notably from the US-based WILD Foundation. The latter has offered to sponsor us to present our findings at the Seventh World Wilderness Congress in Port Elizabeth in November. It has also asked us to nominate a suitable candidate to undertake a fully-sponsored pre-

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Congress training course in Wilderness Management. In consultation with the Director of National Parks, we have offered this opportunity to a Parks professional in a position to influence policy and planning for wilderness areas. The Society hopes to benefit from exposure at the Congress by attracting the funding it needs to hold a series of workshops to develop guidelines for wilderness management and wilderness-sensitive tourism practice.

ZAMBEZI BASIN INITIATIVE

Development work continues on the Zambezi Basin Initiative (ZBI), using funds sourced by Fauna & Flora International. Chris Huxley of FFI and Rob Cunliffe, our consultant, have put in a great deal of work on the programme and we now have a very real chance of gaining significant funding from several sources. Meanwhile, as good interpretive mapping of biodiversity lies at the core of the programme, we have acquired both hardware and software, dedicated to ZBI work, for the production of mapping of this kind. Base maps for the ZBI pilot area and for the Zambezi Basin as a whole are in preparation. The ZBI has become our “umbrella” biodiversity programme and a new publication, summarising the programme’s goals and achievements to date, will be ready shortly. Members who wish to know more about the ZBI are invited to request this publication from the Society’s offices.

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