

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

INTERNATIONAL

BULLETIN

MARCH/APRIL 2003

BLACK RHINO CONSERVATION

The Society's black rhino tracking and monitoring programme in the Matusadona Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ) continues to progress under the able management of Duncan Purchase. The situation on the Matusadona lowlands is reasonably well known, so the trackers have been concentrating almost entirely on the escarpment and the high ground to the south of the Park. The Society programme has therefore now covered approximately 65% of the Park. The remainder should be visited by July or August.

The costs of this programme are met from funds raised by The Zambezi Society (UK) and Chisipite Junior School in Harare. Zambezi Society (UK) has been notably successful in continuing to raise funds in an extremely difficult environment, and thanks must go to the ZSUK team, headed by Dr Adrian Wilson, for their dedication and perseverance.

ZSUK also undertook an emergency fundraising programme to support PWMA field patrols within the Matusadona and neighbouring areas in a bid to combat a revived poaching onslaught in the Park. In addition to last year's poisoning of two young rhinos at Tashinga, one of which died and had his horn removed, a further animal was poached for horn in the Park in February.

In this regard, we applaud the rapid and strong response to the recent poaching by PWMA's Tashinga warden and staff, and by the Authority's Investigations Branch. The gang responsible has been eliminated, and this success has sent a strong signal to other would-be rhino horn poachers. The Zambezi Society provided financial support to PWMA to assist with this response, and is now working closely with the Authority in an effort to prevent a recurrence of the poaching.

VICTORIA FALLS

Following the withdrawal last year of Canadian funding from the long-awaited (and only partially completed) Victoria Falls Combination Master Plan, the Society was interested to hear a media report which highlighted CIDA's funding support for private developmental projects, including a biogas project in Matabeleland.

We have once again formally appealed to the Canadians to consider the global and international significance of this World Heritage Site, and have stressed that some solution MUST be found quickly to ensure that the excellent work carried out so far is not wasted, and that environmentally-sensitive planning processes based on the draft plan are formalised as quickly as possible. We have offered our assistance as an NGO to the Canadians, in the hope that a way may be found out of this political impasse. As things stand, the situation is simply undermining all the good work so far done to conserve ecological and aesthetic values at Victoria Falls.

Reports of development abuse in the tourism hot-spot continue to flood our offices from concerned members and Vic Falls residents. It seems that since the Master Plan process went on hold, unscrupulous developers are having a field day in the full knowledge that little relevant planning legislation exists to curb them. Among the reports that have reached us in the past year are:

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- A proposal to introduce “parasailing” on the Zambezi above the Falls (towing a parachute behind a motorboat)
- Development of a “dinner site” with associated structures and clearance of riverine vegetation near the jetties upstream of the Falls
- The introduction of “illuminated advertisements” on ZESA poles within Vic Falls town
- A proposed development on the old Council Caravan Park Site on the World Heritage Site boundary at the edge of the Zambezi above the Falls.

Draft legislation requires Environmental Impact Studies for any development in Victoria Falls which may impact on a “sensitive area”, the most obvious of which is the World Heritage Site. However, until this requirement becomes law, little serious attention is paid to it.

The Zambezi Society has written formally to the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (PWMA), Vic Falls Council and the Department of Physical Planning reminding them once again that as an NGO it should be involved as a major stakeholder in all future developments which may have impacts on ecological or aesthetic values of the Falls environment.

FOUR CORNERS PROJECT

Work on gathering and disseminating biodiversity information for the African Wildlife Foundation's Four Corners Transboundary Project is in full swing. BFA scientists are preparing their reviews of the different taxa to be found in the area, which roughly covers North-Western Zimbabwe, South-Western Zambia, Northern Botswana and the Namibian Caprivi Strip. The Zambezi Society has received encouraging responses to its "What do you know about biodiversity?" questionnaire sent to 100 planners and other stakeholders selected from our growing "target audience" database. The term appears to be better understood than the partners in this project had anticipated.

The first of three *Biodiversity Bulletins* has been produced and will be widely distributed to the target audiences next month. Copies of this are available to interested members from the Society's offices or by e-mail on request. A Background *Biodiversity Information Pack* is in preparation. This will outline how biodiversity information can be practically applied in planning, using the BFA/Zamsoc partnership's work around Lake Cabora Bassa in Tete Province, Mozambique, as an example.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

The Society's Executive Officer, Fanuel Mugadza, facilitated a strategic planning workshop with the Gutsa and Kapembere communities in Zimbabwe's Muzarabani District, at which they agreed that their forest wilderness areas are a legacy and committed themselves to preserving them. The boundaries of these wilderness areas will be marked out, with the assistance of the District AREX (formerly AGRITEX) extension officer.

A number of income generating projects which will help to provide the communities with benefits from these areas without impacting negatively on them are being identified and developed. Among these are the following:

- An eco-tourism project - discussions are underway with a tourism consultancy firm to set up an easy-to-implement low-impact community-based tourism package focusing on wilderness areas identified through the Society's conservation work.
- The building of an Education Resource Centre near some of these sites to interpret the natural and cultural values of the area for residents and visitors.

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- The processing and marketing of traditional foods made from Zambezi Valley products. The Zambezi Society is exploring a partnership with the University of Zimbabwe's Institute of Food and Technology to help train Zambezi communities in processing natural products from the Zambezi valley area and preparing and serving traditional foods professionally. The aim is to help people establish traditional restaurants where visitors to the valley can sample and purchase such products.

Although funding for the Society's community projects, received via the UN Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) Small Grants Programme, is coming to an end shortly, The Society intends to apply for a GEF Medium Grant to enable it to continue establishing the above income-generating projects. These are all designed to encourage communities to be aware of and conserve the natural values of their wild forest areas through the benefits they receive from them.

NEW SOCIETY P.R.O.

The Zambezi Society has taken on a new part-time Public Relations and Media Officer. Ms Fadzai Muchiya, an environmental student at the University of Zimbabwe, came to the Society originally on a short student attachment to assist with community conservation work. Her responsibilities will now include promoting the Society, liaising with the media and encouraging local and regional companies to be more socially and environmentally responsible. In this regard, the Society wishes to thank cable company Cafca which has recently donated Z\$50 000 for community project work.

UK FINANCIAL SYSTEMS ALIGNED

The visit to the UK in March by the Zambezi Society's Financial Administrator, Evelyne Sithole was both useful and successful. Financial systems between the two sister organisations are now aligned and hopefully more efficient. Funds for Evelyne's airfare and expenses during the trip, as well as her accommodation were most kindly provided by The Zambezi Society UK, for which, grateful thanks are due.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK MEMBERS

UK members are reminded that that they have five months in hand before renewing their membership subscriptions for 2003/2004. Previously renewals were due in April, but this year, as all membership administration is now being handled from Harare, UK members will not be required to renew their membership until September 2003, along with everyone else.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS

International members other than those who joined up in the UK are reminded that if they have not yet paid their 2002/2003 subscriptions (due last September), this will be the last Bulletin you will receive. If you received a renewal form last year, but have not yet paid, please do so immediately. If we do not hear from you before the end of May, we will assume you no longer wish to be a member and will remove your details from our mailing list. The above obviously does not apply to Life or Honorary Members or to UK Members (see above). If you are uncertain of your membership renewal status, please do not hesitate to e-mail us and we can easily check our records.

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Visit our website at: www.zamsoc.org

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