

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

BULLETIN

MARCH/APRIL 2005

WORLD WILDERNESS CONGRESS 2005

The American-based WILD Foundation has once again offered the Zambezi Society a very generous sponsorship to profile itself at the four-yearly World Wilderness Congress and to provide exposure for “a potential community wilderness area” in the Zambezi region by sponsoring two community leaders of our choice at the congress.

The 8th WWC and is to be held in Alaska in October this year. Visa formalities permitting, our new Assistant Director, Duncan Purchase will be representing us, and he will be accompanied by Mr Luis Namanha, now the Director of Tourism for Tete Province, Mozambique, an old friend of the Society, who, among other associations with us, gave a presentation at our 1996 members’ seminar at Maturi Camp near Kanyemba on the Zambezi River. The third member of the delegation will be the leader of the Tchumo Tchato community natural resource management project which is based at Bawa on the south-western shore of Lake Cabora Bassa.

We have chosen a “potential community wilderness area” from Mozambique for a number of reasons. Firstly, our wilderness training programme has so far focused almost exclusively on Zimbabwean communities in Muzarabani and Gurube and we would like to broaden and regionalise this.

Secondly, members may recall that in July 2001, the Society held a very successful trans-boundary meeting at Kanyemba, at which we brought together representatives from the Zimbabwean and Mozambican authorities to discuss some pertinent cross-border conservation issues. These included the management of a shared population of elephants and their dry forest habitat and the Society’s recommendations for zonation of the land around Lake Cabora Bassa in terms of its biodiversity and wilderness values. The meeting reacted enthusiastically to the suggestion of creating a new “wilderness area” stretching from the Zimbabwean border near Gonono northwards to the shores of Lake Cabora Bassa. A large part of this “potential wilderness area” is administered under a community project known as “Tchuma Tchato” (meaning “Our Wealth”) out of the town of Bawa, just across the border from the Zimbabwean town of Kanyemba. If successful, a wilderness area here would not only provide a major boost for trans-boundary collaborative elephant and habitat conservation, but would also provide a vital link with already designated and community managed areas like the Mavuradonha Wilderness in Zimbabwe.

However, funding constraints have so far prevented the Society from progressing this. The WILD Foundation’s sponsorship to WW8 may help by providing exposure and, hopefully funding to move the project forward.

WILDERNESS TRAINING

As a direct spin-off of the Society’s attendance with community representatives at the World Wilderness Congress later this year, the WILD Foundation is also assisting the Society with funding to host a two-week training course in Wilderness Awareness and Management in the Zambezi valley in 2005/2006. The Wilderness Action Group (on whose South-African courses the Society has already sent 9 Zimbabweans) will facilitate. The Society will select 20 – 25 attendees from managers, operators and community representatives who work within or around Zambezi wilderness areas in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mozambique. A major aim of

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this course will be to develop a home-grown, relevant Zambezi wilderness training programme which can be duplicated in the future.

CHEETAH

The follow-up research into the cheetah population introduced in the 1990s into the Matusadona National Park with Zambezi Society assistance has had a successful six months. The project, undertaken by Dr Gianetta Purchase and funded by Flora and Fauna International and Rio Tinto began in September last year. A number of sightings of cheetah have been recorded by tour operators and scouts, mostly in the east and central areas of the park. However, this concentration probably reflects visitor, rather than cheetah distribution patterns. Group sizes of cheetahs are small, as has been the case historically, with only one sighting of a group of six sub-adults. People in the wards surrounding Matusadona on the western and southern boundaries were interviewed last year by Godwin Vhurumuku, our research assistant. Interestingly very few reported seeing cheetah, and only lions were recorded as being problem animals. However, Godwin reported that quite a few people confused cheetah and leopard (a national problem it appears) so the results need further analysis. Before September this year we will carry out a spoor survey to estimate predator numbers and an aerial survey to estimate herbivore populations. Both activities need to be carried out in the dry season.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR VISITS UK

The Society's Assistant Director, Duncan Purchase, visited the UK in January/February this year and, with Zambezi Society UK Director Dr Adrian Wilson, met with various partner organizations.

Cathy Dean who is Director of Save The Rhino International indicated that SRI had earmarked £5000 towards the Society's activities in the Matusadona Intensive Protection Zone. Cathy also asked the Society to submit a proposal to benefit from a new fund raising campaign for rhino conservation being organized by the European Zoos, starting in September this year.

Various project options were discussed with the Society's partners Fauna and Flora International including a potentially very exciting long-term project based in the Zambezi Delta and focused on the Marromeu Buffalo Reserve. This would be supported by RioTinto Plc through FFI. Interest was also expressed in pursuing a regional carnivore research project. The Society has been invited to submit proposals for both projects.

A meeting was held at Whipsnade Zoo with Nick Lindsay who will sit on the committee of the previously-mentioned European Zoo Rhino Campaign. The Society outlined its support for rhino conservation in the Matusadona and discussion centered in some detail on "indirect" rhino monitoring methods. This involves monitoring signs of rhino presence without actually having to see the animals i.e. through recording data from spoor, middens and feeding stations. This method, currently being employed by Society-funded trackers together with the Parks & Wildlife Authority in Matusadona, has proved to be an effective alternative form of monitoring in circumstances where limited resources are available and where geography and habitat make regular sightings difficult. This will be the focus of the proposal being developed by Duncan Purchase for submission to the European Zoo Rhino Campaign.

DAILY TELEGRAPH ARTICLE

Several members have contacted us concerning the article on the Hwange National Park that appeared recently in the UK Daily Telegraph. The Zimbabwean Parks and Wild Life Management Authority are to issue a statement and we do not wish to pre-empt this. However, we have satisfied ourselves that the Telegraph item is grossly misleading. Members are advised to disregard it.

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