

# THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

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# BULLETIN

MAY/JUNE 2001

## APOLOGIES

Please accept our apologies for the erratic issue of Society Bulletins this year. This has been due entirely to pressure of work. Your office has been busier this year than at any time in its history, with all staff members putting in extra hours to keep up.

We are certainly not complaining about this, when so many Zimbabwean concerns are on short time or collapsing altogether. Certainly some of the pressure has been caused by coping with galloping inflation, fixed exchange rates and the need to spend much time in sourcing the basic materials to survive. This, together with the general atmosphere of uncertainty, sometimes creates a tedious operating environment.

At the same time, however, we have drafted a successful Z\$15million project proposal for ecotourism in Guruve and Muzarabani districts (no, we don't get the cash, the RDCs do); successfully developed a US\$49 000 proposal to the GEF Small Grants Programme for biodiversity work in Binga, Guruve and Muzarabani; and progressed the Zambezi Basin Initiative with the US\$28 000 sourced by FFI.

In April we organised and implemented a two-week research visit, involving four biologists, to forests in Guruve, Magoe and Mana Pools; and we are now making final plans for a workshop, to be held in July, designed to turn the results of this research, and of our elephant research work, into concrete action. Meanwhile we are also organising a major black rhino earnotching and census exercise in the Matusadona Black Rhinoceros IPZ, to be carried out in August with funds raised by The Zambezi Society (UK).

Information Officer Sally Wynn has been turning her wilderness and ecotourism research into practical action through intensive meetings with senior government and industry officials, while producing a complex CD-ROM based on our wetlands biodiversity project, and Executive Officer Fanuel Mugadza has been organising "learning tours" to wildlife and ecotourism areas for our Mozambican colleagues and laying the groundwork for the implementation of the GEF-funded biodiversity project.

In the midst of all this, we have overhauled our aircraft engine and had a full Certificate of Airworthiness check carried out; maintained our regular elephant monitoring programme in Guruve, Muzarabani and Magoe; maintained regular deliveries of rhino feed and other items to Tashinga; and kept our financial heads more or less above water, thanks to the tremendous support we continue to receive from The Zambezi Society (UK) and the donor community.

But - our apologies again for the absence of Bulletins, Backgrounders and other membership publications. We will try to do better in future.

## DAM FOLLOW-UP

Shortly after our last Bulletin, in which we gave brief details of the conclusions of the World Commission on Dams (WCD), the Society was asked to participate on the IUCN Task Force on the WCD which will seek to progress the Commission's valuable work.

The Society has agreed, and will be represented by its Director, Dick Pitman. Jean-Yves Pirot, from IUCN Geneva, who leads the Task Force, visited us recently for a most interesting and useful discussion.

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Meanwhile, in a recent media release, the Society expressed its support for the WCD's findings, which propose that much more consideration should be given to the social and environmental implications of large dam projects.

## SITES OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

The GEF Small Grants Programme (GEFSGP) has agreed to provide the Society with US\$49 798 for a two-year project designed to conserve 24 sites and areas of high biodiversity importance in Binga, Guruve and Muzarabani districts.

This will enable the Society to progress the important work of community consultation and awareness creation initiated by Rob Cunliffe for these sites. Rob will continue to provide technical support, while Fanuel Mugadza, the Society's Executive Officer will undertake day-to-day project activities and close liaison with the RDCs and local communities.

The project focuses on identifying community mechanisms and opportunities to create sustainable livelihoods that will increase conservation incentives and reduce the erosion of these sites through conversion to agriculture and other activities.

The Society is liaising with Africa 2000 which is responsible for the disbursement of GEFSGP funds. This organisation is also very active in several rural districts, including Binga, and has considerable experience in rural community work.

## DRY FORESTS

A seven-member biological research team, led by Richard Hoare visited a selection of "dry forest" sites in the Zambezi Valley in mid-April.

The field research focused on the linkages between forest condition, biodiversity, and the impacts of human and elephant activity, using a sampling protocol developed prior to the fieldwork.

The team commenced its work in the Gonono forest areas on Zimbabwe's northern border, then spent a day at sites in Magoé district, Mozambique, close to the Manyame River, before moving to forest sites east of the Angwa river in Zimbabwe. This was followed by three days at Pedza Pasi, during which several sites west of the Angwa were sampled.

The Society also obtained permission to work within the Zimbabwean Parks Estate. The Dande Safari Area contains what is perhaps Zimbabwe's finest example of closed-canopy *Xylia* dry forest, and this site was sampled during the team's stay at Pedza Pasi. The team then moved to Nyamepi, in the Mana Pools National Park, and, in consultation with ecologist Norman Monks, worked for four days in the "jesse thickets" bisected by the main access road.

Transect sites were pinpointed using the Society's aircraft. These were then walked for a distance of 1000 paces (about 600m) each during which a range of features and indicators of tree condition, damage by humans and elephants etc. were identified and noted.

These data, when analysed, should provide an extremely effective comparison between the structure and condition of forests in differing areas and circumstances. From this it should be possible to derive simple methods that can be used by local authorities and rural communities to monitor forest trends and condition in their own areas. This will help them to formulate strategies for managing ecosystems in which the relationships between humans, elephants and forests are likely to have great conservation significance.

Several interesting issues have already emerged from the research. One is the apparent rarity of true, closed-canopy dry forest in the areas investigated by the researchers. Another is the high incidence of rotting logs, and of associated fungi because fire does not appear to impact heavily on these forest and thicket types.

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The results will be presented to our planned transboundary workshop in Kanyemba in July, but we now also hope to acquire funding for a broader dry forest conservation project encompassing other parts of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia.

This fieldwork was not easy from either a technical or a logistical viewpoint. Dry forests and thickets are often used as refuges by elephants, and visibility is a matter of a few metres. The work could not have been done without the assistance of John Kambuzuma in Guruve and Magoe districts and David Chipesi in Mana Pools, who provided both navigation and protection of a very high competence, and Jane Hunt, who coped admirably with the camp logistics.

## **BLACK RHINOS**

The Zambezi Society (UK) has raised approximately £10 000 for black rhino census and earnotching in the Matusadona Intensive Protection Zone.

This work is currently scheduled by the Department of National Parks for August this year. Two light aircraft, including the Society's Super Cub, will be used to locate individual animals, while earnotching will require a helicopter and a qualified veterinary surgeon.

The Society places great importance on this exercise. The number of black rhino within the IPZ - and therefore the IPZ's success or otherwise in redeveloping black rhino populations - is not fully known. Meanwhile earnotching provides both a ready means of identifying individual animals and a basis for ongoing population census by the so-called "mark and recapture" method. Briefly, if a known number of animals are earnotched, the overall population can subsequently be inferred by comparing sightings of earnotched and unnotched animals.

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