

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

BULLETIN

NOV/DEC 2003

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR WISHES

*The Zambezi Society wishes its valued members and friends
within the Zambezi Basin and all over the world
a very happy Christmas and a peaceful and fulfilling New Year*

POSITIVE THINKING

It is a sad truth that Zimbabwe's current political and economic situation has given the international media free rein to focus on mainly negative aspects of life in the Zambezi region. Even conservation issues, when they do rarely make an appearance, can be reported in depressing terms. And, as the Society's Director has pointed out in a previous Bulletin, in many cases, stories appear for their sensationalism, often embracing a good deal of distortion, exaggeration and even sheer invention. It is important for readers to remember that Zimbabwe is only one of the eight countries through which this magnificent river passes on its 2700 kilometre journey to the Indian Ocean. It is a sad reality that positive stories about conservation progress in the Zambezi Basin seldom, if ever, make the headlines. Here are some of them:

- Two classes of Grade Six (eleven-year-old) girls from Chisipite Junior School in Harare, Zimbabwe have raised Z\$5½ million to support the Society's black rhino conservation project in the Matusadona National Park. This is an extraordinary feat, given the economic climate in this country. What is even more extraordinary, is that this is the 17th year running that this school has donated the proceeds of its annual educational fund-raising exercise, carried out entirely by the schoolgirls under the supervision of two committed teachers.
- The Mozambican government has lent its support to an application to have the Zambezi Delta declared an International Wetland Site under the Ramsar Convention. This has been achieved through tireless advocacy on the part of Mozambique's conservationists and American Hydrologist Richard Beilfuss (who, when he was with the International Crane Foundation, contributed to the Society's biodiversity survey work in the delta in 1999). Ramsar designation will boost funding support for the delta and focus international attention on its conservation needs. For some years now the Society has maintained close links with this process and is poised to participate in a coordinated management plan.
- Following a visit to Zimbabwe in November by Save the Rhino International, whose funding assistance enabled the Society to provide emergency fuel supplies to the Matusadona Black Rhino Intensive Protection Zone for anti-poaching activities during 2003, the organization is to provide the Zambezi Society UK with further funds for fuel supplies and vehicle tyres in the new year. This is part of a wider support which will be split among various rhino conservation initiatives being undertaken within Zimbabwe.

SOCIETY'S EXECUTIVE OFFICER GRADUATES

The Zambezi Society congratulates Fanuel Mugadza, its Executive Officer on attaining his MSc in Strategic Management from the University of Derby. His thesis was entitled "The Meaning and Values of Wilderness in the Zambezi Valley"

DIRECTOR'S END OF YEAR MESSAGE

"It's nice to have had a twentieth birthday celebration and accompanying publicity. We all need a little self-congratulation now and then; and The Zambezi Society can point to a wide range of projects and activities which have been successful, in that they have achieved the limited objectives for which they were established. But what do anniversaries really mean, except maybe that the managers of an organisation have a certain talent for survival? What of the broader picture?"

The *protected areas* within the Zambezi basin - the National Parks and other gazetted conservation areas - may often appear to be in good health but are in fact highly vulnerable, for several reasons:

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- Such areas are perceived as irrelevant by the broader populations of the countries in which they are located. Largely as a result -
- Protected areas are seriously underfunded as governments have higher developmental priorities.

Part of the problem is that the true values of a well-planned National Park system have neither been fully appreciated by policymakers, or promoted to their electorates. *The real value of such a system lies in its ability to conserve so-called biological diversity.* It represents a “bank”, if you like, of species and biological processes which may one day prove invaluable to mankind; and an unmodified “baseline” against which the ecological impacts of development elsewhere can be measured. Instead, National Parks are perceived primarily as providing recreational opportunities for an elite of local and international visitors. Efforts to justify their continued existence tend to focus solely on immediate economic benefits, most of which in fact accrue to governments and safari operators.

This perception is likely to be reinforced by such moves as making Parks departments independent of government funding, as has happened recently in Zimbabwe. This means, in effect, that Parks have to become viable businesses in order to survive, which in turn puts them at the mercy of the market place. And the market place is notoriously fickle. When tourism was booming in the early 1990s and Thatcherite economics and Structural Adjustment Programmes were the order of the day, this all seemed like a good idea. But times changed during the ten years it took for the idea to be turned into reality.

The perception of Parks as playgrounds for the rich was reinforced by ever-rising entry costs, and by the huge tariffs charged by most local tourism facilities. Here, as elsewhere, trickle-down defied gravity and flooded up instead; little employment was generated except for a few locally-recruited and often low-paid waiters and bedroom hands. And as ever, the promised bonanza signally failed to arrive.

And then Zimbabwean tourism slumped. Having once adopted the market-place as the prime *raison d’etre* for National Parks, it is now very difficult to suddenly begin promoting the *real* reasons why a country needs a healthy Parks estate. Nevertheless, it has to be done - indeed, *must* be done - if the Parks are to survive on anything but temporary sufferance. The income from tourism and hunting is important, but it is a useful side-benefit and (or would be, if distributed fairly) a conservation tool, not the ultimate goal.

All of which leads to two key questions: Who really owns Parks and who should pay for them? The answer to the first is - or should be - obvious: they are owned co-operatively by every citizen of the country in which they are situated, and this should also mean that every citizen has the right to visit his or her own National Parks, at an affordable cost. Again, exactly the opposite is happening: entry costs are going up rapidly, and nobody - least of all management authorities - is interested in providing truly low-cost, affordable facilities for local citizens.

All this would be solved at a stroke if the second question - who should be paying? - were to be properly answered. And to find the answer, we should ask who makes the biggest noise whenever an African species is threatened by poaching, whenever African governments ask to trade in products such as ivory or rhino horn, and who are always quick to criticise whenever a National Park is “invaded” by settlers. That’s right: it’s the developed world. Right now, there’s a lot of shock and horror overseas about the reputed decline of African lion populations to “only” 20 000 or so. This figure may not be entirely true, but that’s not the point. What developed country is going to put up with even 20 000 large, dangerous and free-roaming animals, unless they - and the citizens threatened by these animals - are paid handsomely and given adequate protection? And that’s just lions. In the Zambezi basin, Zimbabwe alone has over 80 000 elephants, many of which wander freely through areas inhabited by humans, trampling crops and injuring humans as they go.

If the developed world wants elephants and lions, the developed world should pay for their upkeep and compensate local people for tolerating them. Furthermore, this should *not* be done through fickle tourism, or by way of three-year donor-aid “projects” but - as Kay Lareche, a noted local scientist, points out - through proper, long-term agreements in genuine payment for services rendered. The Zambezi Basin park systems provide the rest of the world with the “ecological services” rendered by forests and wetlands, “recreational services” through tourism, and “biodiversity value” - when they have destroyed most of their own diversity. Maybe above all, though, it is the “existence values” - the value of simply knowing that spectacular wildlife exists - that spur outrage in these countries when African parks are lost and species go extinct. It wouldn’t be donor aid; it would be a simple business arrangement: the developed world pays for the “goods and services”

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they receive, and stops paying if they are lost. Nor is it payment in advance. It's merely payment for *what is*, and on invoice for goods *already being received*, without the baggage of future goals and donor reports. Contributions to a UN-supervised fund might be assessed on a number of criteria including biodiversity indices, areas under protection, and national *per capita* income.

Meanwhile, the issue of biodiversity and natural resource conservation outside protected areas - in, for instance, Zimbabwe's communal lands - has generated a multitude of projects but relatively little success. Growing human demands, together with competing and often more profitable land use, have effectively swamped many worthy projects. Others may have had some success in a limited context, but are, in the broader picture, unable to turn the tide of degradation and poverty that lead to resource destruction.

The conservation movement now needs to look beyond its own interests and skills, to the bigger scenario of rural development in general. By and large, natural resource management alone cannot - and should not - be relied on to lift these areas out of poverty. The answer lies in a genuine, multisectoral, business-based approach to rural development, together with positive incentives for industry and commerce to invest in these areas. The so-called Muzarabani Growth Point, for example, lies close to Zimbabwe's capital city; has plentiful reserves of often skilled labour which, at present, has to migrate or commute to Harare to find employment. So far as I know only one industry - The Cotton Company - has seen fit to invest in this growth point. Is there any reason why this should not form the focal point for the entire range of downstream textile industries, enjoying the benefits of rural surroundings, tax breaks and other incentives, and the competitive edge resulting from lower rentals and other costs? Wealth creation tends to be self-catalysing once the pump has been primed; but it needs farsighted industrialists to take the first steps. It would be refreshing if captains of industry would take the lead in forming a rural development forum to explore the opportunities present in these areas.

Conservation has the potential to become extremely successful, *given these preconditions*. A just global system of recompense for goods and services would relieve protected-area management authorities of the necessity to distort their objectives in order to earn money to survive. Intensive and meaningful development in rural districts will reduce land pressures and increase *per capita* incomes, and in turn enable land planning to accommodate biodiversity and other resources.

But unless these conditions - or something like them - are met, conservation will continue to win minor battles, but lose the bigger war. And so we come back to our original question: should we be patting ourselves on the back for twenty years of conservation progress? Quite possibly not. We may have helped stem the tide a little, but under present circumstances of population growth and increasing pressure on resources, we are likely to see deforestation, wildlife and habitat loss, soil erosion and many other environmental ills on a massive scale, accompanied by unequaled human misery. Leopards do not change their spots, especially old ones: the writer, an old-fashioned species-and-wilderness-conservationist, can see only too clearly what is needed; but actually doing it requires a whole new set of skills, not normally associated with conservation of this kind. Luckily, there is a thrusting new constellation of bright, broadly educated and well-qualified rising stars in the region. One of our successes, maybe, is that we have inspired some of them to adopt the conservation cause; but now it is up to them to break out of the mould and explore innovative, broad-based ways of reconciling human need with the demands of functioning ecosystems."

**A REMINDER TO ALL PAYING MEMBERS WHO HAVE NOT YET PAID THEIR
2003/2004 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS – PLEASE PAY BEFORE THE END OF
DECEMBER OR YOUR CONTACT DETAILS WILL BE REMOVED FROM
THIS MAILING LIST. (N.B. THIS DOES NOT APPLY TO LIFE AND HONORARY MEMBERS)**

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