

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

BULLETIN

SEPT/OCT 2003

SOCIETY'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

This year, the Zambezi Society celebrates 20 years of conservation activity focused on the Zambezi River. From small beginnings we have come a long way.

The Zambezi Society in 2003 is still a small organisation, but our influence as an international NGO working in the region extends to the entire Zambezi basin. We believe that our conservation ideals are forward-looking and goal-directed, our research-base scientifically sound and our outputs professionally respected.

Much of the Society's day-to-day work during these 20 years has been at a practical, and somewhat unglamorous field level. We have provided consistent support in cash and in kind for Zambezi Valley protected areas, especially the Matusadona and Mana Pools National Parks, the Mavuradonha Wilderness Area and Campfire areas in Guruve and Muzarabani Districts of northern Zimbabwe. We have channeled millions of dollars-worth of funding into black rhino conservation and several other single species projects. We have also spent many patient years making slow but steady progress in developing relationships with rural communities in the Zambezi valley and encouraging them to develop their own ways of conserving valuable sites of biological interest and managing their natural resources.

Our more high-profile activities have included:

- Contributing to the successful designation of Mana as a World Heritage Site
- Insisting that Mobil adhere to strict environmental conditions during its exploration for oil in the Zambezi valley
- Spearheading the worldwide Save the Rhino Campaign
- Helping to reintroduce wild cheetah rescued from farmlands in the Lowveld into the Matusadona National Park
- Evaluating the biodiversity of several important wetlands in the Zambezi Basin, including the Barotseland Floodplains in Zambia and the Zambezi Delta in Mozambique
- Assisting communities in the settled border areas between Zimbabwe and Mozambique to formulate elephant management strategies, by tracking and monitoring the movements of shared elephant populations over a period of several years, using radio collars
- Developing, with partners, the Zambezi Basin Biodiversity Conservation Initiative (ZBI) an ambitious basin-wide programme which identifies, records, prioritises and helps to conserve the biodiversity of the Zambezi river basin at ecosystem and landscape level.
- Advising land planning and development authorities in Mozambique on how to zone the land around Lake Cabora Bassa in terms of its biodiversity and wilderness values
- Assessing the meaning and value of wilderness to visitors to the Zambezi valley and providing wilderness awareness and management training opportunities for land managers and tourism practitioners
- Advocating for better planning in Victoria Falls so that the natural and aesthetic values identified as being important to the tourism experience in the resort town are taken into account in all development decisions
- Providing basic information about biodiversity to development planners and policy-makers in the biodiversity-rich Four Corners transboundary area of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana and Namibia.

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Partnerships and links established over the past twenty years include respected worldwide organisations like Fauna and Flora International, WWF (The World Wide Fund for Nature), the International Crane Foundation, The African Wildlife Foundation, Save the Rhino International and IUCN (The World Conservation Union) as well as important local players in the field of conservation and sustainable development such as Campfire, the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, the Zambezi River Authority, the Wilderness Action Group and the Dirreccao Provincial de Agricultura e Pecuaria (DPAP) in Tete Province, Mozambique.

PRIORITIES FOR BASIN CONSERVATION

Experience gained over the past 20 years has placed the Society in a position where its knowledge and overview of the Zambezi basin as a whole is valued by other organisations.

For the past few months Society director Dick Pitman has been working with WWF's Harare office to identify major conservation issues and priorities within the Zambezi Basin, with a view to collaboration with WWF International's Miombo Ecoregion and Integrated River Basin Management programmes.

From an ecosystem perspective, the Zambezi can be conveniently divided into two broad sections. The upper catchment, extending upstream of the Victoria Falls, is much "older" than the lower section, and is part of an ancient system that formerly flowed through the Makgadigadi area of modern Botswana. The lower section is a much "younger" river, which became joined with the upper section in a process of river capture caused by geological uplifting in what is now Botswana - and, in the process, created the Batoka Gorge and the Victoria Falls.

Through accidents of recent developmental history, the upper Zambezi catchments are also much less modified by human impact and - with some exceptions - are relatively intact. One such exception is the environmental degradation said to be occurring in the region of the river's source at Kalene Hill, in NW Zambia. In general, however, the underlying hydrology of this part of the Zambezi basin is critical to the miombo and other ecosystems of the area.

The lower Zambezi and its tributary catchments are, in contrast, heavily modified by human activity. There has been major industrial development on several important tributaries, such as the Kafue and Manyame, and much of the surrounding land has been converted for agriculture. However, as far as the main river and its ecosystems are concerned, it is the hydroelectric developments at Kariba and Cabora Bassa that have had the greatest impact.

Provisional recommendations coming out of this collaborative work include, in broad terms, a focus on *maintaining* the ecological integrity of the Upper Zambezi, and on *restoring* ecosystem processes on the lower river. The nature of possible interventions has yet to be decided, but there are numerous options including a focus on wetlands and dambos; on maintaining woodland and forest cover; and on energy generation options.

Whatever the detailed outcome may be, adopting an integrated, basinwide approach is essential. In this respect, the long-awaited Zambezi Basin Commission (ZAMCOM) is now being established in Lusaka, and - if properly funded and supported - will exert a great and positive influence on future events within the river basin. The Director currently represents the Society on ZAMCOM's Zimbabwean National Steering Committee, and has suggested that the provision of biological and other support to ZAMCOM would be highly beneficial in conservation terms.

BLACK RHINO EMERGENCY FUND PROVIDES FUEL

Following a number of worrying incidents which indicated that Zimbabwe's black rhino population living within the country's Protected Areas might be under renewed threat from poaching, the Zambezi Society UK launched

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an emergency fundraising programme earlier this year to support the Matusadona and Hwange Black Rhino Intensive Protection Zones. As a result of the donations received, including a major contribution from Save the Rhino International and the UK Rhino Group, the Society has been able to purchase fuel, which is currently in short supply in Zimbabwe. A steady supply of fuel is now reaching both Matusadona and Hwange, so that the Zimbabwean Parks and Wildlife Authority are able to deploy anti-poaching patrols into remote areas of the parks to help combat any threat of rhino (or other) poaching.

In September Zambezi Society UK Director Adrian Wilson visited the Matusadona Intensive Protection Zone with Duncan Purchase, who manages the black rhino project for the Society, and met with Warden Alexon Ndhlovu and field staff. As a result of this meeting, the Zambezi Society UK will shortly be supplying field kit including two man hiking tents, to enable anti-poaching sticks to remain out in the field for ten days or more at a time during the period of high vulnerability within the forthcoming rains.

FOUR CORNERS INFORMATION AVAILABLE

As part of its information dissemination requirements for the African Wildlife Foundation's Four Corners project, the Society has produced an attractive, illustrated package of *"Introductory Biodiversity Information"* relating to this 290 000 km² area centred roughly on the Victoria Falls and encompassing part of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana and Namibia.

Copies of this 23-page document distributed to government planning authorities, NGOs, consultants, academics, donors and regional media are available to interested members in several formats as follows:-

- A fully-illustrated electronic version in PDF format, (2.02MB in size) transmittable by e-mail (slow download). FREE on e-mail request.
- A text only electronic version in MS Word format (123 KB in size) transmittable by e-mail (quicker download). FREE on e-mail request.
- A fully-illustrated hard copy folder containing loose-leaf printed pages. For sale at US\$6 (or equivalent) from our Harare office.

Please contact us if you would like a copy.

The Biodiversity Foundation for Africa have almost completed their detailed reviews of Four Corners plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibia, fish, butterflies, soil fauna and aquatic invertebrates. These will be compiled by the Zambezi Society's information department into a large reference document together with reviews on animal movements, vegetation/woodland types, landscape evolution, ecological processes and elephant impacts and movement. A synthesis of this document will be prepared by the Society in a more accessible format for use by planners and policy-makers in the region, and will also be made available to interested members.

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