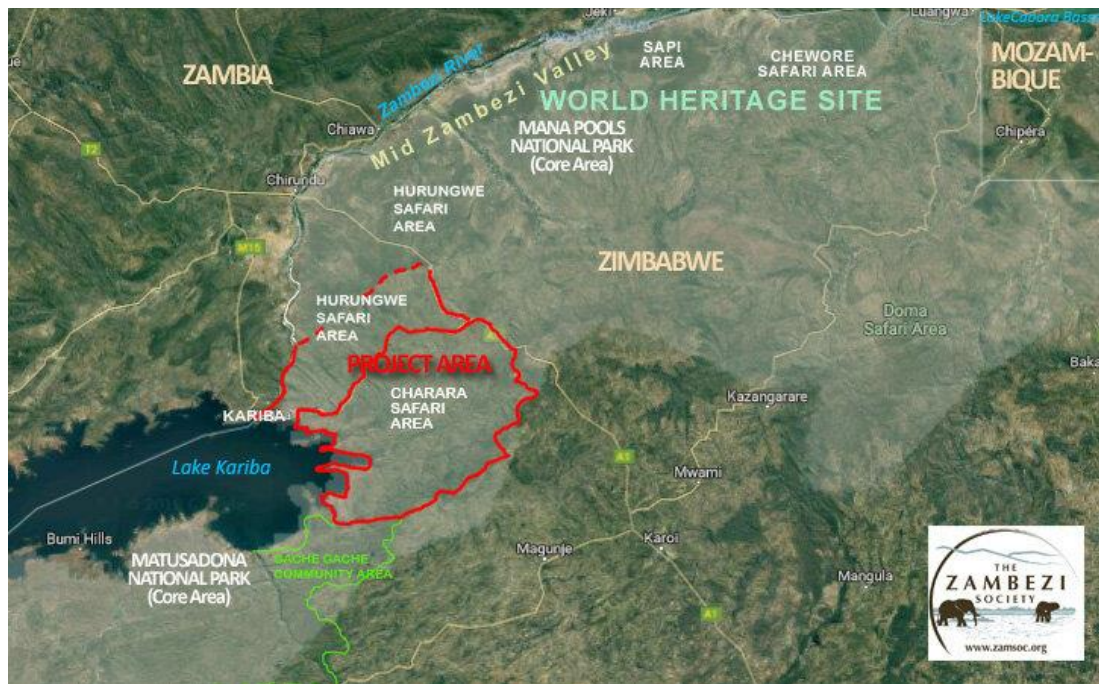


CHARARA WILDLIFE RECOVERY PROJECT – ZAMSOC MAKES INROADS

This is an update on the Zambezi Society's work to help strengthen law-enforcement, park management and community engagement in the hitherto neglected Gache-Gache, Charara, Hurungwe and Kariba Wildlife Areas, with funding from the World Conservation Network's [Lion Recovery Fund](#).



The location of the Charara Wildlife Recovery Project area in relation to Lake Kariba and the Zambezi Valley.

In December 2019, we reported on the first few months of this project.

Since then, the Zambezi Society team has been fortunate to be able to continue work on the ground despite the restrictions of Zimbabwe's COVID-19 Lockdown which started on 31 March 2020.

We have been putting in place management and on-the-ground anti-poaching support to provide meaningful protection of the Charara Safari Area. This is a vital "wildlife corridor" at the eastern end of Lake Kariba – bridging the Matusadona National Park south of Lake Kariba with the middle Zambezi Valley wildlife complex.

Our solid collaborative and communication partnership with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) has held us in good stead with this project, and we are also working closely with rangers in the Gache Gache Community Land.

NEW BASE-CAMP & REGULAR ANTI-POACHING DEPLOYMENTS

A new anti-poaching ranger base-camp has been established at the confluence of the Gache Gache and Sunde Rivers in the southern part of the area, with funding from the **Lion Recovery Fund**.



With the addition of a grant from the **Bancker-Williams Foundation**, we have been able to supply and equip it to accommodate 6-10 rangers, a Project Supervisor, and two additional Zambezi Society staff, with sleeping & dining quarters, toilets, showers, running water, solar lighting and charging facilities. Additional funding received this year from the **Elephant Crisis Fund** has enabled us to employ a dedicated driver to ensure the continuity of anti-poaching ranger deployments and to purchase a second Toyota Land-Cruiser which will concentrate efforts along the southern Charara boundary, where a significant level of the poaching threats come from.

The result is that 15-20 anti-poaching rangers are now patrolling in the Charara Safari Area on a daily basis for periods of up to 7 days. Camera traps are being deployed in strategic hotspot areas to monitor both wildlife and human activities, and poaching ambushes and roadblocks are regularly established at known access points.

BUSHMEAT POACHING

It appears that bushmeat poaching with the assistance of dogs is the main threat to wildlife populations in the Charara Safari Area. Evidence from deployments suggests that the bushmeat poachers emanate from a) communities on the southern-boundary - who are using the dry riverbeds for access into the protected area - and b) local fishing villages within the protected area. These bushmeat gangs are armed with dogs, long spears and knives, but significantly not with rifles. This is a problem for anti-poaching teams, who, under the law, cannot engage the poachers with legal force if they are not so armed. They are therefore very difficult to apprehend. So far this year 5 bushmeat poachers have been caught, one was released, two were fined and two jailed for 5 and 3 months respectively.



There has also been a considerable recent increase in snaring for bushmeat especially around Kariba Town itself, where the Zambezi Society is assisting the **Kariba Animal Welfare Trust Fund (KAWFT)** in snare removal. Significantly, in 2020 to date, the teams have removed more than 1000 wire snares - this is the worst they have seen since KAWFT's work began in 2010.

It should be noted that often groups of bushmeat poachers are the forward-parties for the influx of elephant poachers.

ELEPHANT POACHING

So far in 2020, 3 dead elephants have been found by the patrol teams in the Charara area. All had tusks intact (these were removed to safe keeping by ZimParks). The first was found along Kariba-Charara powerline road and died of unknown causes (it had not been shot or poisoned). The second, discovered near the Banana Farm, had bullet wounds. It is believed the elephant ran away and was not found by the poachers. Follow up teams subsequently arrested a Zimbabwe National Army soldier who was found in the area carrying a loaded assault weapon and the carcass of a bird that he had shot. Unfortunately no ballistics were done, so it is not clear if he was responsible for the poached elephant. He was charged with carrying a loaded assault weapon outside a designated area.



A third elephant carcass was discovered in early August 2020, after our anti-poaching teams found and followed a blood trail leading from the lake, near Nyaodza Fishing Camp, inland into the Charara area. The carcass appeared to be about 2 weeks old. We are still trying to assess if the animal was wounded by a poacher or in a fight with another elephant. Minelab have kindly donated a metal detector which we hope to receive soon. This will help to assess if the animal was wounded by a poacher or in a fight with another elephant.

To further assist with deployments we are waiting on the delivery of two real-time cameras which will create the opportunity for instant response to poaching incursions, rather than next day response.

We are also waiting on delivery of a specially-designed anti-poaching trailer which will enable temporary ranger “fly-camps” to be established on a mobile basis throughout the area in addition to the existing, established base-camp.

ROAD CLEARANCE FOR ANTI-POACHING ACCESS

In May 2020 The Zambezi Society’s TLB (purchased with ECF funds in 2015) was deployed into Charara Safari Area to fix roads essential for increased deployment and ranger uplift in focal areas.



Some of these roads had not been used for over ten years, and, as a result of their bad condition and the lack of an appropriate vehicle, large parts of the park had remained unpatrolled for a very long time. The TLB team concentrated on improving river and stream crossings for immediate access.



Road clearance and opening undertaken in Charara area May & August 2020
In addition to the above work, a group of 13 volunteers from the [4x4 Club of Zimbabwe](#), accompanied by a ZimParks ranger, spent 3 days in Charara in mid-August 2020, assisting The Zambezi Society by opening up a previously impassable 5km section of road between the Tororo and Nyaodza Rivers. They were forced to stop eventually at a point where the track had been too badly eroded for repair using the equipment they had to hand. The Zambezi Society would like to thank the members of the 4x4 Club of Zimbabwe for their commitment and incredible physical effort in achieving an extraordinarily difficult task.



4x4 Club of Zimbabwe road access clearing trip - August 2020

RIVER & WATER-POINT RECONNAISSANCE AND SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ELEPHANT MOVEMENT

As mentioned above, evidence from anti-poaching deployments has shown that bushmeat poachers are often accessing the area via the riverbeds. However, the rivers in Charara remain largely unpatrolled due to the lack of information about available water sources. Inland springs and pools are important water sources for wildlife (but also potentially prime target areas for bushmeat poachers). So, in late July 2020, a group of Zambezi Society management members undertook a recce on foot along the Tsororo River from the eastern boundary of the Charara Safari Area down to Lake Kariba, accompanied by Park rangers. They encountered two gangs of bushmeat poachers during the trip, but were frustrated in not being able to apprehend them, despite giving chase and engaging in a protracted physical struggle.



A further recce of inland water sources was undertaken in August 2020 after road clearing had allowed better access to previously unreachable areas.

In both cases, the teams noticed a lack of any substantial inland water sources and a conspicuous absence of elephants during these dry winter months. It seems that the elephants move to the shores of Lake Kariba as inland water dries up (May – December) and then move back inland during the rains (December – April) when the inland pans and other water sources are full. Some move into the communal lands where they raid summer crops.



This has been reinforced by recent sightings of large herds of 60-100 elephant which have been seen (and photographed) from the Zambezi Society's anti-poaching base, congregating at water sources in the riverbed. We assume that the large herd congregation is a safety precaution in the face of pressure from the bushmeat poachers and their dogs. We would like to explore this theory further, with the aim of creating seasonal anti-poaching management plans.

TRAINING

Firearms Refresher Course: In January 2020, The Zambezi Society facilitated a four-day firearms refresher course for nine carefully-selected ZimParks rangers chosen according to their participation and enthusiasm shown in the previous six months.



SMART technology training: In August 2020, with sponsorship from [Panthera](#), The Zambezi Society was able to conduct a 6-day training session to introduce the SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) technology to ZimParks management and rangers in Charara/Kariba. SMART measures, evaluates and improves the effectiveness of wildlife law-enforcement patrols and conservation activities. Due to the COVID-19 Lockdown, Panthera representatives were unable to cross the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe, so a small Zambezi Society team received comprehensive online briefing from them on the SMART technology, and conducted the training sessions themselves.

The ZimParks management team for Charara Safari Area were hugely receptive to the technology and its benefits to management planning, especially the potential increased efficiency of anti-poaching patrols. A total of four ZimParks managers, and 33 rangers received two days training in how to use the SMART data collection devices. Two of the rangers were selected as Data Managers responsible for importing and checking through all of the patrol data, and received a full 6 days training on using the SMART devices, and operating the associated software.

The technology will now be tested in the field. The Zambezi Society will be returning to Charara Safari Area in October to go through advanced training with the data managers and provide any refresher training necessary.



SMART technology training course held in Kariba/Charara, August 2020

NEW OPERATIONS ROOM FOR ZIMPARKS

With the introduction of the SMART technology, The Zambezi Society is now assisting ZimParks in Kariba/Charara with the construction of a dedicated building at the Nyanyana Parks Station, to provide a functional space which adds value to law enforcement efforts. The new Operations Room will be used for debriefing and briefing of ranger patrols and for storing equipment, maps etc.



ZimParks Operations Room under construction at Nyanyana Station, near Kariba
The Zambezi Society is looking for help to equip it with furniture, air-conditioning, shelves/bookcases and rainy-season ranger equipment - two- man tents, mozzie nets, water bottles, back-packs. if you can help, please get in touch, or make a donation via our DONATE page.

RANGER RATIONS SUPPORT

Thanks to funding via the Zambezi Elephant Fund, and LRF, the Zambezi Society has been able to provide ZPWMA rangers with basic food rations whilst out on extended/overnight deployments. These include mealie meal, instant porridge, rice, salt, sugar, cooking oil, tea bags, toilet paper, powdered milk, matches, usavi, cabbage, tomatoes, onions and rape as well as goat meat for those on deployment out of the Gache-Sunde camp. Family ration support has also been provided for Charara rangers, ensuring that their families are provided with roughly 10kg of roller meal a month.

THANK YOU

The Zambezi Society would like to thank the following for valuable contributions to this project:-

- **World Conservation Network (WCN) - Lion Recovery Fund** – for providing us with the opportunity and base funding to undertake this Charara Wildlife Recovery work and for assisting with the facilitation of the SMART training
- **Elephant Crisis Fund** for logistical support to help cover Charara boundary protections
- **Bancker-Williams Foundation** for providing funds for ranger equipment
- **Panthera** – for providing SMART training assistance for Zambezi Society staff and 35 Charara rangers
- **Zambezi Elephant Fund** for assistance with ration supplies for rangers and their families
- **Trac-King Zimbabwe** - aka **Cartrack** who donate satellite tracking for The Zambezi Society's operational, patrol and deployment vehicles as well as our road-repair TLB.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO HELP SUPPORT ANY OF THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY'S WORK FOR THE CHARARA WILDLIFE RECOVERY PROJECT, PLEASE CONSIDER MAKING A DONATION VIA OUR WEBSITE.

