

PLEASE NOTE NEW ADDRESS DETAILS - mikebromtaxidermy@gatorzw.co.uk

DAGABOYS NEWS DECEMBER '05

At the onset let me apologise for my not getting the normal "mid-year" newsletter out. There were a number of reasons for this, working on one or two other urgent personal projects that took more time than anticipated and lastly sorting, collecting and scanning photographs for the website, more about that later.

Barring one or two recent updates much of the personal news is now unfortunately way out of date and will therefore be ignored unless it relates to topics of "national importance" or other such pertinent matters!

On conservation, 2005 has not been the easiest of years what with the drought coupled with the related adverse publicity concerning the state of Hwange's game water and the alarming increase in poaching. So yes, I guess most are relieved the year is drawing to a close and are desperately hoping that 2006 proves to be a great deal better!

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Dagaboys news

1. South Africa

Tony and Sandy Ferrar

Sandy's thoughts on the Ferrar's move to Barberton are not those of the average run of the mill folks. They are different and interesting to such an extent I believe they should be shared, some interesting philosophy, with today's hustle and bustle we often tend to ignore core values!

"I have been very like a hermit-crab these past two years. Scuttling about and shuffling around to make the new shell of house and hometown comfortable and familiar. There is such a vast difference

between being in a new country for a spell of action and making a new home. As a visitor all one's senses are out on stalks; knowing time is short intensifies the need to absorb as much as possible as fast as possible. Often one's experiences are superficial if not just plain shallow, but occasionally one observes a deep truth hidden to habitués, and that's a rare privilege. Perhaps one becomes more fond of the visited country since all the flaws are simply passing irritations, not life-chaffing aggravations.

Philosophers say that we should treat all of life as if we're just passing through, and in truth we are all just travellers in time. But the view with one's head in the clouds is very different to the view with ones' feet on the ground.

I found that settling here in Barberton demands an unexpected amount of time from us. No more surface skating, this is where you have to dig in. These are your neighbours, your associates, your future dear friends. Here a problem needs to be weighed up carefully and handled one way or another. As much as one invests money in a home, one needs to invest oneself in the community. Perhaps today that's an old-fashioned idea, but Tony (Science) and I chose a small town for that very reason: because we could make a difference. It's turned out to be a full-time job."

Tony Conway

Tony writes –“ Still with formal nature conservation, now for 34 years. I work for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (formerly Natal Parks Board). I am currently based at Lake St Lucia and hold the post of Conservation Manager for the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, a 300 000ha World Heritage Site comprising areas of Kosi Bay, Coastal Forest Reserves and Lake Sibaya, Sodwana State Forest, uMkhuze Game Reserve, False Bay Park, Lake St Lucia & Estuary, Cape Vidal Forest Reserve and all the stuff in between.

It's a challenging Park in its development stages with game introductions, including elephant, an ongoing programme. Well stocked with black and white rhino which is great as they are my favourites. I still serve and have for 13 years on the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group."

Bruce Couper

I don't think 2005 has been the easiest of years for Bruce. Suffering, as most know, from chronic Emphysema Bruce's breathing problems have of late deteriorated. Hospitalised recently for a few days he's now back home - In Bruce's words, following some pretty heavy dosages of cortisone, "Breathing is a lot easier and can cope with passive exercise "

By the time this letter "is either dispersed or disappears into the ether " the Coupers will be out of their suburban townhouse complex and hopefully comfortably ensconced in their "lake side villa" – the move is scheduled for the 21st!

Bruce has asked me to pass on both his and Paula's Christmas and Seasonal greetings to all. I am sure all Dagaboys echo my sentiments and join me in wishing the Coupers "a Blessed and Peaceful Christmas, we will be rooting for you Bruce.

Those wishing to contact Bruce can do so by either email - PCouper@bader-leather.co.za

Or by **SMS** on Bruce's cell phone - + 27 (0)72 183 5869.

Jean Junor

Jean is back in South Africa following her trip to the UK where she evidently "had a ball"

Jeremy Anderson

Jeremy is rapidly becoming a regular contributor to the Dagaboys newsletter submitting for December's dispatch an interesting passage that appears further down under "Conservation Issues." It is entitled "Human-Wildlife conflict in Mozambique" It's a very much a today issue, at this point of time I would query, for curiosity sake, whether we, at the end of the war, experience anything similar – Apart from myself I believe there are many of our colleagues, now scattered across the globe, who would be interested to your receive reminiscences and comments.

2. New Zealand

Rob and Ann Murray

On the 23rd November under the banner "Breaking News" the Murray's announced "We are legally New Zealander. Our residencies came through this week and we have them in our passport."

As they noted the next step is to get their citizenship but there's no urgency regarding that. I am sure you will all join me in wishing the Murrays well in their newly adopted county.

3. Australia

Bob and Jenny Thomson

Excerpts from Bob and Jenny's September email entitled "Oz Rangers Life" reads as follows:

"Though I would send you these extracts from other correspondence of two recent incidents in the life of an OZ Ranger, and his wife". As Bob notes "It really is no different to how it was over there for problems, just different sorts of wildlife!"

"A few weeks ago things were a little hectic to say the least. Jenny went down with the flu even though she had had her jab this year. She went to bed on Sunday and did not get out again until Thursday. On Monday afternoon Bob came home from work only to find Jen really 'crook' and he had to take her at short notice to see her GP and get started on some stronger muti. The normal orange juice, honey and lemon, cold and flu tablets having no impression over the weekend.

Tuesday afternoon Bob gets home to make sure Jenny is still in the land of the living, meanwhile still arranging on their radio network with his field staff, about getting an injured colleague down to a local clinic, about 100 kms inland from here. His staff were out back of a place called Mt Perry on controlled fire burns. One of his lady rangers had injured her back badly and the decision was made to casavac by helicopter. So off he went down to the local hospital to await arrival of the patient and assess the situation. Prompt attention by paramedics and helicopter casavac crew was fantastic. It turned out to be a muscular rather than skeletal strain but they took no chances. What a fantastic service we have with our local rescue chopper. You think the weeks problems were finished, don't be too sure....."

On Wednesday night he got home to make sure Jenny was O.K. and on the mend, only to dash out again this time west of Mt Perry where two of his other rangers who were on the same fire as the earlier injury, and travelling back to their base at Agnes Water (130 kms north of here) after being overnight on the fire, had rolled their vehicle. This time a recovery vehicle had to be organised. The staff were O.K. but he had to get them and their kit back to Agnes Water. Left home at 5 pm and got back 356 kms later. The next day was all the paperwork with the above. Although this sort of a week is not the norm we do have our moments?

We are both well still beavering away as yet another turtle season approaches. All the display panels at Mon Repos Turtle Rookery have just been totally updated and the presentation modernized. Done on computers these days. Cost over A\$350,000 but it looks really good and will be much used and appreciated by the nearly 30,000 visitors again this season.

We had a dead Dugong washed up on the tourist beach at the top of our road on Sunday past. Always a Sunday hey, and we have the Marine Stranding hotline phone to our house! The dugong had been attacked by shark/s. Being a popular swimming beach it had to be moved off and not left to go back with the tide to feed more marine creatures. So after due processing, measured, photos, scale and fin samples a huge council front-end loader had to cart it away for burial. No sooner was he home from this and another 'marine stranding' hot line call for a green turtle that had been injured by a boat strike in the river mouth just to our south. So out again and many willing hands to lift it into the back of his Ute (pick-up) and transporting to the rookery. It had an awful gouge on the top of its carapace, which it was impossible to repair, so by Monday and if it is still just alive, the vet was to be called in for euthanasia. Never a dull life being a game ranger's wife. I field the phone calls and at weekend in my Parks volunteer capacity become his chief assistant!

We are both well, Bob has been taken off work cover for his knee operation, after about 8 weeks of physiotherapy treatment his GP says its back on his bike for his exercise to maintain the improvement in muscle loss in his thigh above the knee. All is going well so far and in time he will be

back to normal with it. He had keyhole micro surgery on a torn ligament in his left knee in May this year”

Kate Middleton-Stokes

Kate is getting on a little now but still writes with verve and tells an excellent story. This little adventure in it's own way makes me wonder just how much we've lost in the way of tails and anecdotes over the years as a result of procrastination and to a certain extent idleness!

Of the "Australian Outback – The Kimberlys" Kate writes:

"I flew direct to Perth – a flight of 7 hours and spent one night there with my sister and her family before flying to Broome - a fascinating town – a large part of it being Chinatown which is not surprising with the history of the place. I visited the pearl fishing museum where I saw a couple of the old luggers with pearl fishing gear on board, had a most interesting talk by a chap who had done some pearl diving (but only when flippers and wet suits became available.) He told us a lot about the old time diving and we were able to handle all the suits, lead boots, helmets etc – must have been ghastly to be decked out in all that gear then dropped overboard for 12 hours at a time. I also visited a modern demonstration pearl farm – the main operation being out in the open sea. It really was very interesting and we were able to handle the oysters and learn how the beads were inserted into them for making the pearls. After Broome the coach load of us – 37 in all – left for our first night under canvas at Windjana Gorge where we all tramped through Tunnel Creek – about 45 minutes in pitch dark and cold water up to our knees in places. Pretty rough going and all we could see in the feeble light of the torches was the bright wee eyes of freshwater crocs who kept well out of the way of such a noisy bunch of tourists – they are pretty harmless anyway – the crocs that is! Then along the Gibb River Road – red dirt and very corrugated – to the Kimberley Gorges which are just beautiful – mostly reddish rocks with strata going every which way, waterfalls, blackish where there is a lot of iron ore etc. Another bush camp at Manning Gorge – a beautiful pool next to the camp with lots of birds and wee crocs. That night we had 25 mm rain!! Seldom that much in the area and never in June, but rain it did. The next morning we baled out the puddles in the tents with dust pans, put up a huge awning over the dining tables/kitchen area and were then given condoms for our tents! These were lightweight silvery flies which helped to waterproof our sleeping quarters. There we were, out in the wops, red dirt, still raining, long drops and condoms on the tents! Having got the camp more or less sorted we began a long, steep climb to the top of the gorge, hard going over large and loose boulders but worth it in the end because the rain began to clear and the view from the top reminded me of Marongora looking across the escarpment, over the Zambezi towards Zambia. Made me quite homesick. Then we had a very slippery scramble down again. We had to spend an extra day there because the side road to the Gorge from the Gibb River Road was just red mud and the 'bridge' had been washed out. The following day it was decided to try and get out so having packed up the camp, off we went, slipping and sliding for about 4 kms before coming to the bridge which was in process of being remade with the help of a couple of chaps and a small front end loader. Past experience of African bush roads made me very skeptical of our chances of crossing what looked like a couple of galvanized drums covered with a few boulders and a layer of red dirt. My tent mate was a Masters of Mechanical Engineering and her comments were basic and not complimentary! It was decided to unhitch the kitchen trailer and take that over first – a good idea but it didn't go far before being totally bogged down in the middle of the so called bridge. We gathered some wood, brewed up the billy, had a cuppa while some of the younger folk tried to help with bridge repairs, but all in vain, so we had to unload everything from the trailer, pot, pans, food, also our bedding, tents, bags – everything – and carry all this through about 50 m of thick red, rutted mud, where we dropped everything on the side of the road ready to be shuttled by a couple of 4 x 4 vehicles to the nearest Road House. This was bloody hard work I might add!! In dribs and drabs we eventually arrived at the Road House and set up camp – in the dry this time. There were a couple of washing machines which we were allowed to use and use them we did - everything was wet and covered in red mud. The camp was a sight to be seen – all the barbed wire fences surrounding the place were decorated with a variety of knickers, jocks, bras, socks, towels, bedding etc. – a bit like Soweto at its best! Even the few cattle on the other side of the fence, looked a bit wide eyed at the spectacle. We looked a scruffy lot ourselves, but at least we were able to shower. Eventually the chaps managed to get the kitchen to our new camp, and the following day the coach

arrived, now a beautiful shade of red ochre. We gave it a bit of a hose down and the driver checked it over before we continued on our way the next day. I think the Road House must have been jolly glad to see the back of us – we had eaten them out of house and home – the freezers were absolutely empty and roads permitting, they were not expecting more stores for another 3 or 4 days. As a result of all this, we had to miss out a couple of places on our scheduled trip, a shame, but we had had a lot of fun in spite of all the effort involved. Kununurra next – a nice town servicing the large Argyle diamond mine and large agricultural operations – something I didn't expect in such an arid area, but having put a dam on the Ord River, Lake Argyle was formed – and the area now has an unlimited water supply for irrigation. Then Katherine – spectacular, towering rock formations – and we had to disembark half way, scramble across some rocks and embark again at a slightly higher level. Delightful way to spend a day. On to Kakadu National Park and a 4.30 am wake up call for a chilly cruise on the Yellow Water Billabong the home to an amazing variety of birds, salt water crocs, wild horses etc. It was a brilliant morning, mist rising from the water and an enormous red sun gradually making its appearance and encouraging the water birds, eagles etc. to begin their daily search for food. Last stop Darwin – and an hotel!! How strange to be in a bed after 2 weeks sleeping on the ground – hair driers and make up! I felt like a new woman. I dumped my walking shoes as they were totally rotten from all the mud and I couldn't stand the stink any longer. A couple of days touring around there, visiting Litchfield National Park, swimming at Wangi Falls, visiting the markets on the Sunday night which are right on the beach front where we could see the sun go down over the sea. It was a real adventure and I just loved every minute of it – would have been quite happy to start all over again.

The tour over, I spent a couple of days with my son Andrew, and his family (for anyone who is interested, he is the spit image of Lofty at that age even to the hairstyle! – only Andrew is just 6 ft – not the 6 ft 6ins of his father – and also very much a hunting fishing chap). The flight home was a continuation of my adventure because the flight from Darwin which was due to depart at midnight did not leave until 2.30 a.m. due to a delayed flight from Brisbane caused by rotten weather there. As we neared Brisbane passengers were told the airport was closed by fog so we were just nipping down to Sydney to refuel the plane and get some breakfast on board for us! Having done that we returned to Brisbane, landing at the same time as my flight to Auckland was leaving from International, so I had to track down my baggage which had been booked through from Darwin to Auckland, before I could be allocated a ticket on another flight. That achieved, I eventually left Brisbane a few hours later, arriving in Auckland at 6 p.m. Glad to be home and find everything and everyone OK – but on the other hand sorry my latest adventure was all over."

3. Botswana

Steve and Kim Johnson

I received a short note from Steve in the early half of the year advising me as follows –
"Great to get the news on all the old Dagaboy's!"

As you can see from my email signature I am the CBNRM (Senior Community Services Officer) adviser to the DWNP in Botswana after a long and winding journey from RSA Bop Parks/NW Parks ending up there as Chief Director in 1995, but being once again found to be 'on the wrong side of the political fence' once Bophuthatswana became defunct in 1994.

I spent the next six years as the SADC Regional Natural Resources Adviser, employed by IUCN ROSA and seconded to SADC, After a three year stint in Lilongwe (1996-1999), we moved to Harare IUCN ROSA office to simply the logistics of travel. We moved down her in 2002, and I have been with the DWNP for nearly 18 months".

4. United Arab Emirates

I, for one frequently think of the Middle East as being a sandy, barren and desolate area, simply put desert with of course green belts around some of the cities, towns and villages. Hear as one does of desalination projects, agricultural and irrigation schemes little could have prepared me for the photographs Tim Paulet showed me of the Arab Emirates or Graham Childs' write up of the same area, it's quite surreal! "Dune Dust" Graham's write up follows, it's a little long but well worth the read.

"I thought I would usurp Di's role as the family communicator in chief and drop you all a line to tell you about our comings and goings and what we are up to in this neck of the woods, as the hot months set in and every one becomes torpid. The Inuits have to live out the cold dark winter and the Bedouin the hot sunny dry summer. Both require a certain amount of adaptation, but I seem to have little difficulty adjusting to the laziness of hot summers!

Let me tell you something of the organization to which I am attached. The Endangered Wildlife Breeding and Conservation Centre is an animal breeding station which belongs to the President of UAE who is also head of Abu Dhabi, the largest and richest of the seven Emirates comprising the Federation. The Centre is responsible for managing wildlife in four localities at which there are some 50 000 head of big game from about 50 species. These are augmented by small mammal and bird populations, including breeding flocks of ostrich, rhea and emu.

Our aim is to increase the number of animals in our collections as rapidly as possible, using the best scientific information available, acknowledging that not all the species are endangered and some are included because the President happens to like them.

The latest responsibility added to our chores has been the management of the herds on Sir Bani Yas Island. These animals were originally introduced to the island about 14 years ago by the late Sheik Zayed, who ruled the UAE for many years, with a view of providing people with a spectacle to enjoy. The Sheik loved his animals and trees and wanted others to share this enjoyment, so he provided a free amenity where people can spend one to several days seeing animals. The island is very hot (around 50 degrees C) and humid (approaching 95 degrees relative humidity) in summer when it is closed to the public, mainly

Because very few people would brave the weather to go there. Traditionally, before petrodollars and air conditioning, most locals shut shop along the coast where fishing and pearling were the main occupations, and headed inland to the oases, including Al Ain where we are based.

Sir Bani Yas Island is a salt dome on the Qatar side of the Gulf with a low range of central hills. These hills are sandstone with well-weathered red and black basalt intrusions. I found it difficult to decide whether the volcanic activity had taken place before or after the seabed was lifted above sea level by the salt dome, but suspect it was before. The island has been vegetated with some three million trees besides the quarter of a million fruit trees in the palace orchard, mostly pomegranates, mangoes, guavas and dates, but with a sprinkling of apples and the like in air conditioned greenhouses. Besides fruit and vegetables the island also produces chickens and quail mainly for the royal table and to feed its tourists, with the surplus being sold on the open market. Water comes from the main pipeline fed by the desalination plant(s) in Abu Dhabi.

The chickens are interesting as they are derived from native stock – real village hookoes a la Arabia. They are between the size of a bantam and an ordinary village bird, and their main claim to fame is that they tolerate the hot local summers. This circumvents one of the problems with raising chickens that the early Rhodesian commercial chicken producing pioneers in the 1960s/1970s ran into in Saudi. Before they got around to raising their birds in air conditioned hockies they took them up to about 10 000 to 12 000 feet in the Asir and Hijaz Mountains, overlooking the Red Sea.

But lets get back to the island's attributes. Many of the roads are tarred highways that would do our trunk roads proud. There is a royal palace and two or more plush guesthouses besides the accommodation for tourist, which last year housed 15000 visitors, and two junior staff villages. Most species are in paddocks enclosed by 6 to 7 foot diamond mesh with shades, feeding and watering facilities. The island has been enlarged by dredging up the seabed which makes me fear for the fringing corals. The latest addition is a four storey, 120 bed hotel under construction on the shore. Visitors reach the island by speedboat and are then transported in small busses. There is also a full sized runway complete with fire service on the island. We went there by chopper and had classy royal chocolates to eat all the way there and back, but were not allowed to leave the Al Ain airport on our return by a black soldier who we had woke up and who had not seen our arrival in the chopper. Even three sergeants could not make such a weighty decision as let us go on our legitimate way – that took higher authority in the form of a lieutenant who had to be summoned from his office in an adjacent building. Locals prefer to work for Government than in the private sector as they find the former more "comfortable" with a capital 'C'. With the slight exception of Dubai, which is a bit more enlightened than the other

Sheikdoms, this country is choking on bureaucratic ineptitude. One shudders to think how much unnecessary transaction costs must cost the country every year – but I suppose one can ignore them when you have someone else pumping out your oil and paying you handsomely to do so – especially if like Abu Dhabi you produce 75% of the nation's oil and have something like 125 years of proven reserves. There is simply no incentive to be either effective or efficient.

Back to the Island. The animal populations include 5500 oryx (mainly scimitar horned and Arabian but also Besia and Gemsbok), 10 adax, over 2000 sheep (mostly urials with a few Barbery sheep), 500 deer (of which axis is the most numerous species), 17000 gazelles (16000 rheem or sand gazelle and 600 dumani or mountain gazelle, what we called idmi in Saudi), a dozen llama, 3500 Indian black buck, 600 eland, a few defassa waterbuck and 29 giraffe from the northern extremity of the species' range. There are also 800 emu, 400 ostrich and 100 rhea, good populations of cape hare (which is a yellow beast with very long conspicuous ears and looks less like our Cape hare than our scrub hare does), Cape dassies and numerous species of birds from spurwing and crested cranes (wild passage migrants I am told) to thousands of pigeons (look like the domestic sort but of course originally came from Arabia). Zayed simply put the animals on the island and encouraged them to breed by giving them plenty of food but with the need to sort out his estate the administration has come apart at the seams as his 19 sons "debate" how to carve up their inheritance and the animals have been short of food at times, and we have been faced with yet more crisis management. One of our two German animal keepers is holding the fort on the island but has to rush home to marry his wife so he can bring her to UAE and his absence from Al Ain is making us a bit short staffed here.

One thing the bureaucrats do well here is to look after peoples' matrimonial morals, but only on paper according to the local press. Before I could sponsor Di to join me, I had to have our marriage certificate authenticated legally by Zimbabwe's Foreign Affairs. In the absence of a UAE Embassy in Zim., I had to get the Kuwaiti Embassy to authenticate the Zim, authentication. I then had to submit it to the Kuwait Embassy here in UAE for it to authenticate their Consular signature in Harare, but the local officials did not know the Harare

official's signature so I had to send the document to Kuwait for authentication of their official by their Foreign Affairs Department. But I was still not finished as I still had to have the Kuwaiti Foreign Affairs Authentication verified by the local Kuwaiti Embassy before the UAE Foreign Affairs were satisfied that Di and I are well and truly married after 45 years and would issue Di with a spouse's residence visa. The exercise took only six weeks which was about four weeks faster than usual, but then unlike most foreigners here I am a bit pushy and outspoken and know when to throw my toys out of my cot. The trouble is one has only so many toys to throw and I have run out of ammunition before getting myself a driving licence. I have a Southern Rhodesian licence, a Saudi Arabian licence and an international licence, but none qualify for different reasons. UAE does not recognize Rhodesian or Zimbabwe licenses, will accept Saudi licenses only if one has a Saudi passport and insists on an international licence if you are a visitor (for up to six months at a time), but will not accept one if you have a resident's permit and there one hits a bureaucratic wall, even when armed with a letter from

the head of one's own ministry. Instead I shall continue to make use of a driver, paid for out of the President's own pocket, who is at my beck and call 24 hours a day, mainly so he can take Di and I shopping in Al Ain a couple of times a week. I shall save the ammo. I have left in case I have problems getting a licence to purchase liquor. After six months of illegal purchases and depending on friends to buy my beer and Di's wine, I at last have a letter to say I can have a licence, but I have to go to Abu Dhabi on a Sunday, armed with considerable documentation and passport photographs to get it! Why make life easy?

The second area where we manage the game animals is also an island (about 60 by 40 Km in extent) this time with the present President's palace on it. It is a piece of flat almost featureless sand desert but also has paved roads complete with road signs and two roads fifty yards apart and parallel to each other leading from the ferry to the palace and settlement areas. One is for the president and the other for the rest of society. The island produces tilapia and 3 kg broilers for the presidential table, with birds that are bigger, smaller or surplus no longer being wasted but being given to an orphanage and the security forces. We grow large grassy patches and scrub to feed the animals which also have the best food available from South Africa, Europe or the US, in ad

lib quantities. Our interests are being managed very well by a young South African couple who look after the animals and clean up all the rubbish washed up on the beaches from passing ships. The latter involves three special Spanish beach cleaner machines and a fleet of some six tractors and trailers working full time for our five-day week from Saturday to Wednesday.

The animals are mostly in very good condition, so much so that we have had people mistake over plump males for pregnant females. They comprise a group of about 35 gernuk, 300 Arabian oryx, 30 sable from Zimbabwe (caught by Tim Paulet and exported illegally by a Chef), 240 Isfahan sheep, 6000 rheem and 3000 dumani (with the populations of gazelles likely to almost double every year).

Thirty km away down the truck road (a broad two lane highway, where trucks travel at 80 kph, as opposed to the six to eight lane highway for cars, where the speed limit has recently been raised to 160 kph!) to Abu Dhabi, at Radar palace, we have some 900 head from 30 species, of which about 20 are African and include bongo, bushbuck, nyala, blue duiker, dikdik, springbok, blesbok, bontebok, impala (black faced and normal), sable, roan, klipspringer etc etc. These are in small to medium sized pens. We also have about 9000 rheem and 1200 dumani, 75 Arabian oryx and 100 ibex in larger enclosures. Here at the foot of Jebel Hafeet (the highest and almost only mountain in the main body of the UAE) in Al Ain, we have a variety of Caprinids (wild sheep and goats from various parts of the world), but are not fully functional as we can get only 1.25 million gallons of water a day but need about five times that amount to maintain all our green pastures and planned savanna areas.

Before oil, dates used to be the staple diet of the country and many of these were grown in and around Al Ain which is an ancient city on the Arabian trade routes. The old Sheik planted many more date trees so any one who wanted them can pick them in the streets. The result is plenty of dates and we are approaching the ripening season – in fact I was given a few of this year's first dates to taste a few days ago. Like wine, dates have connoisseurs who understand the differences among the 64 odd varieties that were recognized when we were in Saudi. Some are sweet some less sweet and some only good for stock food. All I know about them is that I like dates. People are also flat out harvesting hay at this time of year to feed their livestock and our animals!

I look from my air conditioned office at Jebel Hafeet which is a couple of thousand meters high and rises from the surrounding desert plains and dune seas which are only some 600 meters above seal level. The mountain is lovely and clear at the moment after having been shrouded in a dust haze for several days. Both the hotel and one of Sheik Kalifa's palaces at the crest are clearly visible. There is also a large car park up there where the young bloods can give their vehicles a spin and an international beacon between UAE and Oman. The crest is 13 Km from here up a well engineered, fully lit two-lane highway.

The Israelis are famous for greening the desert, but I doubt they can now compete with the Arabs. When we were in Saudi the country was the fourth major wheat producer in the world, growing it in huge center pivot irrigation schemes with mainly fossil water, some from a kilometer underground, which had to be desalinated and cooled before use. The only trouble was that it cost about four times world prices to produce and Australia objected to its being subsidized, but went along with subsidizing the sheep it exported to Saudi at about \$7 each landed in Jeddah!! It is over 10 years since we were in Saudi and 20 since I worked in Oman, but this place probably outdoes both for the quality of its urban gardens and trees. The gardens in Dubai and, to a slightly lesser extent, those in Abu Dhabi, which are probably more extensive, are really magnificent and even those in Al Ain were pretty good before the hot months set in. Add to that the thousands of ha of planted savanna along most highways and one has to take ones hat off to the Arabs for really making the desert bloom and look attractive. It is almost difficult to find a stretch of genuine sand dune without planted vegetation to photograph from the road. Di leaves for Zim. in a couple of weeks and I must confess I am not looking forward to her absence. Our big guesthouse to myself is not my idea of home! On that note I will close hoping that I have not bored you to tears.

5. Middle East

Chris Pakenham and Kevin Thomas

Both are "some where" in the Babylon of old – neither has requested anonymity about their actual whereabouts but who knows who reads what!

6. United Kingdom

Jon Hutton

Received from Jon in October.

"Dear Friends and Colleagues (and probably a few people who can't remember who I am, but find themselves on the list courtesy of Microsoft...)

After 14 years as a Director of ResourceAfrica, and 4 years as Director of FFI's Africa Programme, I am moving on.

Having failed miserably to secure a job at the University of Cape Town at half my salary, I was nudged in the opposite direction and will be joining the UN from 1st November as Director of the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). (Talk about sublime to the ridiculous!) Fortunately, the centre is based in Cambridge so this will not cause too much of an upheaval for the family.

However, from the end of the month you will no longer be able to reach me at the FFI email, and I suggest you use jon_hutton@hotmail.co.uk

or...

hutton@resourceafrica.org (since I will become a Trustee of RA instead of an employee).

Should it be relevant to you, I hope to maintain the Chair of the SUSG and to continue with the JCBC, CULRC etc."

George and Lea Begg

From their email of the 13th December -

We recently got back from a 2 month long camping trip around Europe - 12 000km through 7 different countries and enjoyed every minute. Our trip included visits to the WW1 battlefields in Belgium; the Dachau concentration camp in Germany; the burial sites of our relatives killed in both WW1 and WW2; travelling through the Alps in Austria and enjoying the beer swilling / song-filled festivities associated with the coming of autumn; travelling the Rhine; attending a concert in Vienna; travelling through the Dolomite Mts.; getting lost in the gradually subsiding, narrow streets of Venice; visiting the area where my Dad grew up outside Florence and spreading some of his ashes at his boyhood home; driving the tortuous roads of Amalfi and, whilst in Naples, visiting Pompeii and climbing Vesuvius; catching a glimpse of the Pope whilst in Rome; visiting the leaning tower of Pisa; driving through the snow-capped Alps of Switzerland (using the old route through the St Bernard Pass); visiting the sites frequented by all the yuppies on the French Riviera (San Remo, Monaco ...); travelling through and up the Pyrenees mountains to the border of Spain; visiting Lourdes where millions of sick and disabled people gather each year to seek spiritual benefit and healing; visiting the troglodyte villages and prehistoric paintings in the limestone caves of the Dordogne valley; visiting the many quaint little fishing villages of Brittany and the D-Day beaches on the coast Normandy. All in all a most interesting, stimulating time and conducted just before the northern hemisphere winter sets in.

George has also asked for some help in a slightly earlier note:

"George suggested I check with you in case you know the whereabouts of Ros Williams? She was the wife of the late Russell Williams who worked at the LKFRI. He was killed in action leaving two young children. Do you have any contact details for her?"

We have two paintings of Kariba given to us by our friends when we left LKFRI and they were painted by Ros and Russell— now we are keen to know whether the children would like to have them before we leave the UK in February".

Can any one help with contact details for Ros – if so please email George on geolea@ramsdenfamily.vispa.com or get back to me on my normal address.

Ian Broderick (1977 – 79)

Ian, whose last station was Chizarira writes from London – "Currently I am part of the Information Technology management team operating within a medium sized investment/stock broking firm here in the City of London. Married, my English wife, two children and I live in the rural County of Surrey,

south of London where I am fortunately able to practice falconry and run a local survey on indigenous, wild European Sparrow hawks.

Every year as a rule I make a trip to Kariba, Zimbabwe to take in the invigorating sights, sounds and smells of the bush and make solitary, sometimes challenging and always immensely rewarding forays into the Zambezi Valley, Kiburi Wilderness, Matusadona and Chizarira.

6. Zimbabwe:

Charles Mackie:

Charles is now back in Zimbabwe, the follow extracts are from his May's newsletter:

"Its been a while since we did one of these things and somehow communications are breaking down because the satellite internet facility which we had installed here, has been intermittent and recently right out of commission. We have to drive 30 km to the nearest facility, which is not a public one and this all makes for cumbersome communications.

Well it is near the end of my contract here and by mid August we will have been here 3 years! The time has gone remarkably fast and a lot of water has passed under the bridge..and out of our skin! I think I can say this has been the most difficult of jobs that I have taken on, but I knew it would be before I started, by the amount of money at stake. That is, the amount of money given to the project (Dutch funding) was sufficiently to attract a lot of attention and tension! Ghana is a hot climate and we are both beginning to feel the heat now and we still don't have air-conditioned offices but we do have more or less continuous power and water now (since mid 2004). That is not to say power solves all problems; only some, and creates others! West Africa is renowned for power surges and fluctuations that cannot be produced elsewhere! It is not uncommon to buy an electrical device with a proviso 'not for use in West Africa'. Anyway my post was only intended as a three-year position so I had expected to terminate in August but I have been provisionally offered an extension until the end of the project, which is July 2006. Personally I'm undecided about this but Jane thinks it is time to move on. The project needs me (or someone like me) rather than the reverse, to see it to the end. Not unexpectedly the project is a long way from achieving what was expected. It is a long time to work in this sort of environment and we are out of contact and step with the rest of our family and to an extent, with the world outside and mainstream conservation. Quite a number of people including my Dad passed away during 2004, so maybe its time to go back to Zimbabwe to see what's up there. On the other hand we know it's a disaster there so there seems little point going back now, when we have the choice of relocating to South Africa where my two sisters and mother live, and where we can pursue some of our interests.

I will probably continue what I have been doing from there. In the meantime we will go back to Zimbabwe in August to claim our duty free allowance of a car.

There is a good chance I will probably end up working here part time until the end of the project. One of my interests and afflictions of Ghana, has been golf! I had never played golf and had not intended to, when an outgoing consultant offered me a set of clubs.... and I've enjoyed teaching myself and I play once a month or so in Kumasi when I travel to Accra.

Otherwise I beat plastic balls in the morning or real ones on the football pitch. It has helped to keep me sane and ease the pangs of 'Land Rover back'. Jane has enjoyed trying to keep tabs on the project finances (5.4 million Euro) for me (unpaid) and generally helping shift the paper work necessary in this kind of work. Naturally I have become quite good at this myself but it is not what conservation used to be.

We still have our house in Harare but we will probably move into something smaller until we decide where to go and what to do. We will collect up some of our Pointers, which are spread far and wide, get on the hill and have some passion and exercise. Then soon get a pup and train it up as in the meantime the ones we have are not so young anymore!

So then, we will be interested to hear from those with whom we have lost contact, and of course from those of you who we have regular contact and look forward to comments, suggestions and news from you all?"

Mark & Jenny Brightman

From "M & J" - *"We have now (August!) completed our move to the Ume Crocodile Farm, Lake Kariba, amid much chaos! Landline numbers are Kariba (061) 3044 or 2598. Postal address is c/o P.O. Box 55, Kariba. No cell phone as yet.*

Re-adjusting to the Kariba October heat is taking some time to get used to! All well here, and slowly getting to grips with the methodology of croc growing! The locality is fantastic, with the stunning backdrop of the Matusadona Mountains unbeatable

This e-mail address is that of the farm's, so we will be reachable through this until we are up and running with our own address, hopefully in the not too distant future. Please do not send any large attachments - the line is linked through radiophone across the Lake.*

** Mark and Jenny's new email address is detailed further on under the heading " New email addresses"*

Rob and Paddy Francis:

No newsletter would be complete without input from Rob and Paddy. Although I received an update from them today I need to go back a few months and include an extract from their August letter without which current news will be a little meaningless .

August: *"He is so much happier at work now, too, because SWA (Shearwater) have at last actually taken over management of the Nakavango Estate, and Rob now has plenty to do, plans to work on, etc. I can't describe his horror to discover that there were no maps of the estate on file! Just a scruffy sketch on a piece of paper! He sourced an aerial photo of the area which had been taken about 20 years ago, and last weekend we had some fun checking out roads, boundary fences, dam sites etc. and marking them on the photo. Now he is going to make a big relief map of the estate, working on a 1.2 X 1.5m sheet of plywood. He had done the same thing for previous Parks stations to great effect. The estate is almost 6000 acres and covers quite a diverse ecosystem. We have no new census of the animals on the property, so this will be one of my first tasks once I get a vehicle to go into the thick sand areas. We have a wild herd of about 40 elephant (which we have to reduce to 8, because of the damage to the big trees). The waterbuck and kudu also have to be reduced because of their large numbers. Then we have buffalo, eland, zebra, giraffe, wildebeest, tsessebe bushbuck, duiker, warthog, impala, leopard, hyena and a lot of the smaller animals. Birdlife is also very good We have, of course, our resident herd of 11 domesticated elephant, and we were to receive a pride of 5 domesticated lions today. (I don't know if they have arrived yet). We are also making a bid to get white and black rhino. We will know if we are successful in a few months time. To manage this lot is going to be a very interesting operation.*

Picking up on this background is today's update (21st December) -

"I am really into the management of our Game Park now. We had a capture team come in from Harare, and after MUCH hassles, caught and removed 40 buffalo and 21 waterbuck. For those of you who don't know, a large area (boma) of up to 2 acres is enclosed with 8ft black plastic. On the upwind side, 2 wings of plastic are put out to create a 'funnel'. At the downwind side, the boma is narrowed down to form a passage, at the end of which is a ramp and a closed in truck. Steel cable is pulled across the base of the funnel, and a number are put in the passage. A curtain of plastic is pulled up on one side. A helicopter is used to herd the animals slowly towards the funnel. When they pass the curtain, a signal is given, and the crew hiding at the curtain run like hell to close the gap. The curtain is then secured to the bottom cable. People then go into the boma and chase the animals into the passage, where the various curtains are closed to restrict them even further. The last operation is to hassle them to climb the ramp into the truck. They are not touched by humans. Its all great fun, and can be VERY exiting, especially when dealing with the buffalo who, by this stage, are rather pissed off, and would LOVE to give someone a horn injection. These animals were sent to our Lowveld area, about 1000kms away, a journey of 18hrs and we didn't loose a single animal. This was remarkable, considering the temperatures at the time (42deg C or about 115deg F)

We are definitely getting 4 black rhino from Bulawayo. I have been to see them and they are being fattened up so they can survive the trauma of translocation. We will be getting 1 bull and 3 cows. I am in the process of cutting teak poles in the game park and building holding bomas for when they arrive at the end of January. They will be kept in the bomas to tame down for about 3 months, before we release them in the game reserve. I have my whole complement of 12 game scouts in the process of being trained by National Parks (4 weeks) to look after them. As they are 'royal game'

they belong to the State, and will be watched 24hrs a day. Poachers will be shot. This is a very exciting venture and we all can't wait for their arrival. (It is clearly evident that Rob is really chuffed with his job, in spite of the many frustrations – and believe me there are many of those!!) I did an aerial count of the Game Reserve a few months ago to find out exactly how many wild elephant we had. I was shocked to find we had 28 mature bulls, and 2 small herds of 10 and 11 cows and calves, a total of 49 wild elephant PLUS our domestic herd of 11. (We had been told by the staff that there were about 25 wild jumbo in the park!!) The 6000 acres can only support about 8 so I am desperately trying to find someone to capture and remove the excess animals. To date, unsuccessfully. (Most likely because, with the government land grab policy, people are very wary of investing anything into a property they may lose the very next day!!). One bull had to be shot because he was paying too much attention to one of our domestic cows that must have been in oestrus. He kept chasing all the herders away from the domestic herd and despite numerous shots around his feet, would not push off. On the whole our entire animal population survived the long dry season very well - we didn't lose any from malnutrition. This is a great result. We do regular day game counts nearly every Sunday – if the vehicle is OK – and so far have done 3 night drives. We always drive the same route, and record every animal we see; hopefully in time we will have a better understanding of where particular groups hang out, the utilisation of specific vegetation types, game movements, etc. Also we can keep some record of births and deaths, especially in the introduced species. Our most recent night drive was really fantastic as we saw a young female leopard, (we were told that there was 'a leopard' on the property but seeing is believing! So this was really exciting) an armadillo, (again, seeing is believing. I am sure this is the first time I have seen one in the bush) a Black Footed wildcat, (again, quite exciting as these medium sized cats are very shy and seldom seen) and two young jackal cubs, playing in the moonlight – it was full moon, bright as it can only be in the African night sky! – We also saw the usual gathering of buffalo, impala, genet, waterbuck, kudu, jumbo, etc. I have been given permission to employ a chap to be my 2 I/C. A rancher from the Lowveld, Mac Gloss (and his wife Maude,) has accepted the post, and will be joining us on the 22 December. Paddy and I have known Mac and Maude for about 15yrs and eagerly await their arrival. They will live in the Game Reserve, (in a prefab house that is being enlarged and renovated. I think it will be really comfortable) and amongst other things, Mac will be in charge of all the 'domestic animals' i.e. elephants, lions and rhino. As I mentioned in our previous letter, the lion cubs, when they eventually arrived, were somewhat larger than we had expected and, just as we anticipated, the largest 2 were very soon too large (and looking lean and hungry, Oh Cassius) to go out with clients, so they were returned from whence they had come and were replaced by 5 much smaller, still spotty, cubs. I understand the lion walks are proving very popular, although the jumbo walks remain our top activity. From Paddy – "The job I mentioned before has been very slow to materialise, but I finally went for the initial meeting only today. It will be very interesting, and certainly challenging, but I think I will enjoy it a lot. Since I last did bookwork in Zim things have changed a lot, with much more red tape to complicate the most minor activities, and all the new taxes and regulations are daunting. The computer for me to work on at home has not yet appeared, so I will be working on simple spreadsheets for the present, as I have refused to load more software on to my laptop. I have a second job, shredding archive paper by the huge crate full. I managed to find a buyer for the shreds, too!! It sounds boring but actually it's a super job because I can do it at home, at night or whenever, while watching TV. I get paid a small sum, too, which all helps. I think my other bookwork job will fold at year-end, as Zen is leaving to start up her own business. Our pepper vine eventually produced about 2kgs of dried peppercorns. After much trial and error trying to sundry them in our yard with very little sun, I put them in the Webber with top and bottom vents open. The sunlight on the black paint created enough heat to dry them perfectly. We gave away about 1kg. to assorted chosen friends. Bought peppercorns are all wrinkled and ours are round and plump. I can only assume that, due to the long maturity time (9mts), commercially grown black pepper crops are harvested before they are mature, and only white pepper is harvested at maturity. Our pepper is very hot and very tasty, and we are rather chuffed with it. Can you believe we are 40 years married this month! THAT can make you think!

Tim Braybrooke

Still in the Falls and greying a little like us all– from Tim - *“wishing you, and all the Dagaboys, a fine Xmas and New Year. All the very best to you and them.”*

Judy Dunjey

Judy was up to a few months back working for Wilderness Safaris in Mana, from there she moved to what I believe was a temporary position in the Okavango. A few hours before leaving Mana in July Judy wrote - *“I don't know what my plans are - but am putting off going back to the uk as long as possible - hopefully, may be able to stay in Africa, if not Zim.*
On a funny note - I was nearly squashed by an ele on my last day - when I came back via Ruckomechi, had been collecting ilala pods and was getting further and further away from the camp - without realising - then I was collecting HER pods and suddenly I was being charged by a mom with her baby. I managed to run behind the palm and she kept coming too (round the palm) - anyway I got away, with a few scrape marks from the tree - and much beating of the heart!!”

Mike Bunce:

“Gerry” - Mike's wife of over thirty years, passed away in South Africa two or three months ago. On behalf of all the Dagaboys I would like to offer Mike our deepest sympathies and condolences at his tragic loss. Mike's email address is mbunce@netconnect.co.zw

Brian & Rowena Marshall

1971 – 1985 - Lake Kariba Fisheries Research Institute, Officer-in-Charge
 Brian who for some reason or another has inadvertently been left out in the dark now joins our happy little band and writes – *“I don't see a lot of parks people these days even though I live in walking distance of John Stevens, Russell Taylor and Vernon Booth, and John White at one time. Am currently a Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at UZ (one of two ageing white professors!) and still work on fish and freshwater biology. My wife teaches maths at Arundel School and I have a son and daughter, both presently at Rhodes University.”*

The Bulawayo Get Together (Saturday 4th June)

Some fifteen Dagaboys together with spouses attended the get together at Drew Connybeare's Kumalo residence. All in all, including the late arrivals, I guess some twenty four or five, excluding “lumberjack” Trevor Lane ex Forestry Commission who was given “honorary Dagaboy” status for the day, managed to make the do. It was basically a bring and braai with Drew providing the “Sadza” – certainly a very sociable occasion which, as the afternoon progressed into evening, got a little more raucous by the hour, I believe the “diehards, who will remain anonymous, finally departed close to eleven that night! Photos have been taken and are being posted on the website.
 In attendance:

Name	Now living in	Dates of service	Last Station
Alan Sparrow	Victoria Falls	1970 – 72	Wankie
Roger Parry	Victoria Falls	1979 – 86	Chizarira
Rob & Paddy Francis	Victoria Falls	1960 – 80	Main Camp
Steve Edwards	Victoria Falls	1972 – 90	Bulawayo
Richard & Liz Aylward	Esigodini	1968 – 86	Robins
Drew Connybeare	Bulawayo	1968 – 93	Head Office
Mike Bromwich	Bulawayo	1966 - 83	Main Camp
John & Jill Osborne	Bulawayo	1966 – 70	Chipinda Pools
John Minshull	Bulawayo	1970 – 79	Kyle Fisheries
Richard Peek	Marula	1966 – 78	Gonarezhou Research Unit
Mark Butcher	Bulawayo	1979 – 82	Main Camp
Ducks & Mrs	Bulawayo	1980 – 83	Sinamtella

Donaldson			
Tony & Cynthia Osborne	Bulawayo	1964 – 79	McIlwaine
"Pebbles" Williamson	Bulawayo		
Blondie & Katrina Leatham	Mazunga	1980 – 87	Mana Pools
Derek Lenton	Bulawayo	1981 – 87	Management Unit
Paddy "Bloodnut" Curtis	Bulawayo		Chizarira
Mike Fynn	Bulawayo	1969 – 82	Mabalauta

New Email Addresses

Norman Monks	nmonks@healthnet.zw
Graham Hall	molley@mweb.co.zw
Ian Broderick	ian_broderick@swissre.com
Mark Brightman	pfumbe@zol.co.zw
Nigel Saunders	nesaunders@zol.co.zw
Brian Marshall	marshalls@zol.co.zw
Pete Fick	petefick@gatorzw.co.uk
Doug Hensburg	cathcow@mweb.co.za
Chris Worden	chris@zambezi.com
	chris@zambezi.co.uk

New Books on the Shelf

As the year draws to a close it is once again my pleasure to introduce two new books.

John Osborne needs no introduction – "A Ranging Son" is a follow up to "A Guiding Son" John's first book and humorous account of his professional hunting days. I have both books and would comment – Although I have not had time to read "A Ranging Son" I have paged through it. I am sure those who appreciate John's fairly unique style in recalling events and retelling tales will enjoy his new book.

Dick Nash – Dick joined the Department in 1964 and resigned in '69 to take a position with our sister organization in South Africa, The Natal Parks Board. Dick is now retired and busies himself doing amongst other things cine and video editing, as a paying hobby.

"A Ranging Son" – John Osborne's second book

From the back cover the dissertation reads:

"The amusing and entertaining story of a man filled with a zest for life which drove him to face all challenges with the same aggression, determination and humour that motivated him to become Scrambles Champion in the early days of Rhodesian motorcycle racing.

Coaxed by a boyhood dream to be involved with wildlife, he followed his heart and the trail set before him by joining the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. Stationed at Chipinda Pools in the State Land of the Gona-re-Zhou and employed to assist with Tsetse Operations which required him to shoot elephant and buffalo, he quickly recognised the potential and jewel-like quality of the area.

Thus begins his battle with poachers, vagabonds and interlopers, and like strewn pieces of a large jigsaw puzzle, a picture took shape. Assisted by the elephants, he was instrumental in creating Rhodesia's second biggest Game Reserve, the Gona-re-Zhou. (Place of the Elephants)

John Osborne tells his story with wit and appreciation having been in the right place at the right time”.

“I Remember When” – Dick Nash

I found the short review on the back page intriguing moving as it does through a period when conservation and wildlife management really took off in Southern Africa:

I REMEMBER WHEN

A LIFETIME WITH A GAME RANGER AND HIS FAMILY IN THE WILDS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

After a lifetime in the bush, Game Ranger Dick Nash puts pen to paper to tell us of the life that he and his family experienced in the wildernesses and game reserves of Southern Africa. Beginning with the rigorous adventures of his early years as a younging ranger in the wilds of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), “I Remember When...” follows his young family’s migration south to where they began their journey with the wonderful organisation, the Natal Parks Board (now KZN Wildlife) - a journey that was to last thirty golden years.

This collection of tales presents the reader with a glimpse of the glorious adventures that unfolded in their everyday lives, in places where humans did not necessarily have the right of way. With enormous contributions from cherished colleagues, this narrative will, for some, be collection of heart-warming memories. Others will find it a valuable source of information and still others will find that it offers the reader an insight into the guardians who watched over the wild places that we are free to roam in today.

From the serenity of sunrise canoe trips to the excitement of anti-poaching campaigns, from the heart-wrenching tragedies of animal attacks to the often comical exploits of the rangers, life as a game ranger in its entirety lies on these pages against the scenery of an African setting.

(As a footnote to the above Dick notes “To those of you who contributed in any way, you will see yourselves on these pages, you will see old friends and recognise fellow conservationists.”)

To order:

Cost from me: R 130.00c (+ R 25.00c packaging and postage, if required,) to colleagues past and present, members of the Game Rangers Association and the Dagabovs. Sadly, postage outside the country is very expensive (R 180) and I encourage anyone who lives outside South Africa to think of a way to get it to you exclusive of those charges.

To order, please advise me with your postal address and my postal and banking details are as follows: skinti@sai.co.za or 14 Copson Close, Chase Valley, Pietermaritzburg. 3201. RSA. Tel.: 027 033 347 2810. Cell: 082 3 77 208.

R.P. NASH Smart a/c 620 8904 6231 Branch code 220 825 Please quote your name as reference.

We will post it immediately we have your postal address and notification that the money is in the bank.

Gonarezhou - A Place For Elephants – Dr Colin Saunders

This book has been a long time coming but saying that who better is there to tell this remarkable story than Dr Colin Saunders past Chairman of the “National Parks Board” (Zimbabwe/Rhodesia) Many will remember Dr Saunders, an avid naturalist and pragmatic conservationist, from Triangle Hospital where he was always available to assist and treat staff and their families.

Colin’s association with the Gonarezhou dates back many, many years. He has doubtlessly many interesting tales to tell as his story weaves through the area’s early history of some eight decades past to that of recent times and months.

Having been privileged to spend two periods of service totalling the best part of five years at Mabalauta I became captivated by the area as a whole and the wildlife that just seem to thrive in this unique, rugged and harsh environment; I cannot wait to read “Gonarezhou – A place For Elephants” the “introduction” of which follows:

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of one of the last great unspoilt wildernesses in southern Africa. Gonarezhou. The stronghold of the elephants. This is the story of one of the last great unspoilt wildernesses in southern Africa. Gonarezhou. The stronghold of the elephants. A refuge for wild creatures increasingly hemmed in by encircling development and human population pressure.

Unspoilt? Yes, largely so. Remarkably so too, for few wild areas could have withstood the combination of neglect, abuse, intrigue, and exploitation through which the natural integrity of the Gonarezhou has been assaulted during the last eighty years.

I have compiled this narrative from a personal perspective. I am just one of many people who have been captivated by the enthralling wilderness qualities of this remote southeast corner of present-day Zimbabwe. I am fortunate to have spent many idyllic days and nights out in the Gonarezhou bush. Like many people who have been similarly privileged, I have grown to love this place. I have been bewitched by it.

I have also been closely involved in its promotion and protection, and I have been appalled by the callous neglect and greedy exploitation by people who should have known better.

As a large uninhabited area in a supposedly land-hungry continent, at the mercy of successive waves of uninformed politicians, ignorant civil servants, and greedy people, it is remarkable that the Gonarezhou has, thus far, survived at all, and relatively unscathed at that.

This has been less due to its status as a gazetted State area with statutory protection, than to the vision and determination of a handful of rugged individuals. They have fought to conserve the Gonarezhou's wild heritage for the people of this country. The nation owes them a debt for their unwavering commitment. Their methods might at times have been unorthodox, even questionable, but the results speak for themselves. They have bequeathed to us a magnificent wild area, bruised but intact, just waiting to take its place as one of the principal jewels in the crown of our National Parks system.

Come with me as I take you on a journey through the Gonarezhou, meeting some of the remarkable people who have walked its broad stage and fought the good fight. I have patched together their stories, recounted beside many camp-fires, beneath many shady trees, and in Land Rovers bumping down wild trails. Because I believe that their contributions have been exceptional, and also because I have enjoyed the privilege of knowing them (and their stories) better than most, I have concentrated significantly on recording the battles waged by selected individuals. Together they make up a remarkable band, each going their own way, but all of them striving for the same goal.

In the Mwenezi region in the south, doughty District Commissioner Allan Wright; Hostes Nicolle, his feisty boss in the Ministry of Home Affairs; and energetic wildlife Wardens Tim Braybrooke, Ron Thomson, Tommy Orford, Mike Bromwich, Rob Murray, and Gordon Putterill.

In the northern Save'-Runde area, Denis Townley, nomadic naturalist extraordinary; Jhn Osborne, intrepid and single-minded game ranger; Wardens Ron Thomson (again), Rob Francis, and Dave Scammell; and Ecologist Gary Sharp.

And overall, Archie Fraser, the country's first Game Officer, eventually Deputy Secretary for Lands, impeccable civil servant, drafter of visionary legislation, and man of wisdom and great feeling for the natural world.

Truly, all of these men performed mightily for the governments that employed them to foster and succour the Gonarezhou.

Of course there were others, and committed and influential members of the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management spring immediately to mind: Director Graham Child and Deputy Director Phil Evans; Provincial Wardens Bruce Austen and Douglas Newmarch; and a succession of competent Wardens and Rangers. The contributions of many of them are acknowledged in this narrative, and there are doubtless others who warrant recognition.

Inspired and diligent as many of them were, they could have achieved nothing without the loyal and often hazardous service of generations of Game Scouts in Parks uniform. These men were the eyes and ears of the National Parks system at grass-roots level, patrolling and protecting the vast and far-flung boundaries.

While their men-folk toiled away doing the things they loved, the wives at their side not only kept the home fires burning and endured the lonely life they led in the harsh and remote places where they lived; the partnership and support which they provided was an absolutely indispensable ingredient for the success of the Wardens, Rangers, and Scouts.

In addition to National Parks officers, there were yet others who threw their weight behind the long drawn out campaign to secure the future of the Gonarezhou as a prime wildlife area: members of the Lowveld Natural History Society, the Wild Life Society, The Malilangwe Trust, and the 1968 Commission of Inquiry, and many public-spirited citizens, have put their shoulders to the wheel. If I have omitted naming others who have contributed equally, or even more so, I apologise for the oversight. Blame an increasingly rusty memory, or the absence of relevant notes in my vast accumulation of historic paper.

In addition to introducing fascinating individuals whom it has been my privilege to know, I have attempted to sketch some of the magical qualities of the spectacular landscapes, hidden corners, and wild creatures which make the Gonarezhou so rich a heritage.

I have also endeavoured to weave through the fabric of my narrative a thread of the history that has kept me spell-bound during my days of researching this story. This is an area rich in myth and legend. We are left only with tantalising fragments concerning ancient cultures, sturdy adventurers, and extraordinary characters who trod this land in days gone by.

Because the ghosts of man's efforts to rid the region of the persistent tsetse fly loom large over any story of the southeast lowveld, I have included an appendix which deals more fully with the contorted and oft-changing story of attempts to control "The Fly". These successive attempts have come with enormous costs in destruction of nature's capital - costs that might haunt us again in the future.

Alongside the Gonarezhou, across the great Save River, a remarkable partnership between National Parks and their communal neighbours evolved in times of great challenges to all the players. This is a story that took place ahead of its time in conservation circles, so I have included a detailed record of the ground-breaking Mahenye scheme.

The Gonarezhou saga is largely about elephants - the last surviving population of elephants still roaming the eastern half of the country, an area once rich in these enchanting grey giants. They are, paradoxically, the Gonarezhou's greatest asset, and at the same time its most taxing problem, for how should we deal with their increasing numbers in the future?

What is the future? Is the Gonarezhou now safe? We thought so, until the advent of the unchecked and unsustainable invasions fostered by some of our leaders, during the chaotic land grab in contravention of law and logic, which has besmirched the new millennium.

Perhaps the greatest guarantee of the future of the Gonarezhou is its intended inclusion in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, the visionary creation of one of Africa's greatest wild areas by the governments of South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

Many of us are holding our breath.

Colin Saunders

The Vumba, Zimbabwe, December 2005

The Website

Not being an IT wizard of any note but merely a "basher of keys" and someone who can, with a push and a shove, manage to find his way round Excel, MS Word and one or two simple programs I had no idea of what was involved, so happily said yes when a website for the Dagaboys was suggested. I am not sure of all the correct terminology related to websites and how they are developed, Odette Lind is the boffin in this regard and must be complimented for her work so far. The site

www.lind.org.zw/dagaboys is up, a little bare but running. Photographs and other bits and pieces are presently being loaded and just may not be completed by the time this newsletter goes out. If this is the case please wait a week to ten days before accessing the site again.

From my side badgering people for photos has probably been the easiest of chores - scanning, labelling and categorizing is, although interesting, very time consuming! Richard Peek has been doing an excellent job of not only scanning slides but doing the much needed "touch ups for most photos in this format have deteriorated to some degree or the other, it's amazing to see the result of his "restoration" work!

To those who have taken time to browse through albums and scratch through boxes of slides the likes of whom are - Margaret Peech (Haslam) Dave Rushworth, Bob Thomson (I will be collecting Bob's contribution in February when next I visit Johannesburg) Ed Ostrosky, Pete Thomson for the PMB get together pictures, Kate Middleton-Stokes, Rob Francis whose photos I still have to label, Steve Edwards, Richard Aylward, Peter Fick, Vernon Booth - I messed up on the original labelling

so these will be included in the next batch to be forwarded to Odette, Drew Connybeare, Jeremy Anderson, George Begg, Hans Grobler, Cliff Freeman, Richard Peek, Mike Bunce, Graham Hall, Bruce Couper and Chris Pullen, sorry I am still practising my techniques to cut from multi album shots – I will get both your contributions through soonest and lastly Bryan Orford who brought in a pile of Tommy's pictures – thank you, we have some really good stuff going forward some of which dates back to the late fifties, just by the by those supplying the photographs are being credited with their name appearing on the bottom right corner of the picture.

As promised, photos will be returned– those to Harare early in the new-year.

We will all always need more; most of us carried cameras which varied from the "happy snapper" jobs to the fancy SLR models complete with telescopic lenses so I cannot believe there is any shortage of material out there.

So once again - lets have some photographs:

Yes, digital preferably but slides or prints are fine - Please mail the latter to my Johannesburg address - PO Box 747349 Sandton 2146 South Africa if you are sending from outside Zimbabwe or internally - please drop off Photographs at Taxidermy Enterprises offices in Bulawayo (15 Falcon Street Belmont, Bulawayo) or in Harare at 16 Walterhill Ave, Eastlea -telephone 04 706 129 - please mark for my attention. Slides and Prints will be returned

PLEASE DO NOT SEND ANY MAIL UNDER REGISTERED COVER OR BY PARCEL POST TO MY SA ADDRESS - I CAN'T CLEAR MY MAIL SO WHAT EVER IS SENT BY THIS METHOD WILL BE RETURNED!!

- Pictures required
Of stations

Wankie Main (Provincial and Tourist offices / Waterbucks
Head - Old and new plus rest camp) -Nyamandlovu /
Shumba
Sinamatella (Office and views from Chalets)
Robins camp
Management Unit - Shapi and Mtshibi

McIlwaine (South and North bank plus lake)
Inyanga (Mare dam and chalets / Rhodes dam / chalets,
Inyangombie river, Pungwe camp, Fisheries centre etc)
Vumba
Euanrigg
Dawendale (Lake and ?)
Chimanimani (Mountain Chalet and views) Melsetter senior
ranger base
Marongora (Office and views from top of escarpment plus
any of the old hunting camps - Nyamumba)
Copper Queen (Tsetse Ops)
Sinoia (Prov Offices / Caves)
Matsusadona
Kariba
Mana (Fort, Long Pool etc)
Chewore (Field camps and what ever else is
available)

Matopos (Maleme dam and camp, Togwana dam, game
park, Whitewaters etc)
Tuli (offices / Shashi river/ Pioneer fort)
Lake Cunningham (Mayfair dam)
West Nicholson (anti-poaching)

	Victoria Falls(Original Camp in Town, present Entry gate / Tourist Offices etc) Mat.North Provincial office Matetsi Sengwa research centre / Chirisa Chizarira (Offices/houses prior and after terrorist attack / Fort / Mucheni Gorge / Access road up escarpment etc) Chete (Various - staff houses / alltent offices / views etc Kyle (Provincial Offices, Chalets and lake / wall) Birchenough Bridge Field station Zimbabwe Ruins (Offices and rest camp / gardens - prior to hand over to Historical Monuments) Mushandike (Original offices / rest camp / Recce school / Entrance gate / Dam Gonarezhou - Chipinda (old and new offices / Cliffs and Lundi River - anything on the original field/tsetse Mabalauta - Swimuwini re st camp, "Buffalo bend" section of Nuanetsi river) Mwatombo etc Head Office - what ever is available plus any of the 470 NP Landrovers, Trucks (Management), Pumas, Leopards, Moon buggies etc
Vehicles	
Aircraft	What have we of the Wankie Supercub, Graham Hall's "fat tackie" Cub on the sand of the Lundi river. Anything else
Game Water supplies	Something from Wankie is probably the best bet
Anti poaching	what ever (general, rhino etc)
Staff	of yourself in uniform Others Game scouts (wearing the old "Kepis" if possible and others) Trackers
Game capture	What ever - old and new capture equipment - cross bows, dart guns and darts, Nets, Bomas etc etc Anything else including that which I have forgotten to ask for!!!

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HAVE A LOOK AT WHAT'S BEEN DONE SO FAR – WE NEED TO DEVELOP THE SITE AND DO MORE - **IT CAN'T BE DONE WITHOUT YOUR HELP.**

Conservation Issues

1. Human-Wildlife conflict in Mozambique (ex Jeremy Anderson)

Many of us think of Mozambique with little wildlife left and no significant management issues. What is steadily becoming apparent is that we don't know much about the distribution and numbers of game in the country and as people spread out and start new Machambas the incidents of human-

wildlife conflict have escalated. So much so, that when people in some districts have been asked for their taxes they have suggested that these are paid by the elephants.

Some idea of the scale of the problem is that over a period of 18 months, between 2001 and 2002, lions killed 70 people in Cabo Delgado province. Last year, it was only 15. Most of these were people out at night protecting their crops from elephant.

In terms of overall numbers, crocs are responsible for most deaths. Many croc deaths are not reported, simply because of the logistics involved for many people in getting to a government office. A rough estimate would be around 300 people a year nationwide. Last year, in Mutarara district on the north bank of the Zambezi, 30 people were taken. Probably a similar number were taken on the south bank.

Elephant damage has not been quantified and there are no good figures for elephant numbers. What is evident is that there are resident elephant populations more than 100 km from the nearest protected area. The densities are low, but the area that they occupy is vast and at conservative guess is that there are at least 25,000 in the country.

Although there are only about 150 elephant in the Limpopo National Park, there are already problems outside the park on the east bank of the Limpopo. The river is no barrier and irrigated maize in August is irresistible.

What is interesting is the size distribution of tusks of elephant shot on problem animal control. During the last year there were a number over 40 lbs a side and a couple over 70 lbs a side. This could be interpreted that the illegal hunting that has taken place has not been so heavy that it has depressed the average tusk weight. (A bull taken by a safari client in August this year had a single tusk weighing 115 lbs)

Buffalo present possibly the biggest threat to the economy of the country. There is no fence between the Limpopo National Park and the communal areas and although there are very few buffalo in the park at present there are already serious problems. This year 228 head of cattle have died from Theileriosis in the communal lands. The buffalo in Kruger have a high rate of Bovine tuberculosis infection and it may just be a question of time before the cattle bordering the park become infected. So far there has been no outbreak of Foot & Mouth, but if Mozambique want to export unprocessed agricultural crops they will have to develop a buffalo policy similar to that in SA, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

It is very clear that the idea of not fencing the park will have to be reviewed if the park is to keep a positive relationship with the neighbouring communities.

What the next steps for the government will be are develop that land use plans that include the sustainable utilization of wildlife where this makes economic sense and to increase the value of wildlife to communities. In addition to this they will improve their capacity to manage wildlife conflict issues.

Also very encouraging was that during the assignment, I came across a couple of people who were adamant that they had found evidence of black rhino. One involved a sighting of a cow and calf, the others were of spoor of single animals. It is hoped that some day the funds can be found to check these out and if they turn out to be fact, then to locate the animals into a secure area.

2. Zimbabwe

The negatives out way the positives! It's basically the norm these days to focus attention on disasters, crime, wars and other doom and gloom subjects. I have looked hard at the mail and news items received relating to wildlife and conservation issues in Zimbabwe and can honestly say, coining words from a western movie, that with a few exceptions, the good this year has been outweighed by the bad and the ugly.

Is all lost? No far from it but what it means is that we are facing tough new challenges, folks with conservation backgrounds need to make their voices heard. If some thing is wrong oppose it; If hunting quotas have been overstated for the financial gain of councils or who ever contest it, fight to have the numbers reduced to realistic levels, you are cutting your own throat if you don't for we all are aware that no area can sustain unrealistic take offs. Yes of course these are idealist thoughts but if we continue to sacrifice principles for the sake of the mighty "green back" or appeasement we will have no one but ourselves to blame when the wildlife industry as we know it in this country collapses, the "golden goose" is slowly dying.

So then, since last I wrote, making "Headlines"

a. Hwange National Park:

“Hwange – A park in peril” this is heading taken from an article that appeared in one of the more recent issues of “Getaway” magazine! It’s from November’s publication I think.

Well what do you think is there cause for alarm or is this just some journalistic sensational overstatement? There are two possible ways one can interpret this heading. Is it a statement of fact or is it merely just asking a question?

We all know of the dependency of game, even in the most normal of seasons, on the park’s water supplies. Is it any surprise, under the severe drought conditions we experienced this year, coupled with the gross mismanagement of the game water supplies to suspect anything else than this was nothing but a recipe for disaster! So yes, in my opinion, there was substantial truth in the heading.

Extracts from Viv Wilson’s comprehensive Hwange National Park survey and report of 6th – 12th June – dealing with the water crisis I have by design, only extracted Viv’s comments applicable to the situation at the time.

Puff adder Pan: Now completely dry – no borehole or pump.

6/6/05: 2 bull elephants (one with both tusks broken in half).

Dom Pan: Pump working very well, lots of clean water in concrete trough,

Total of 319 elephants seen in 6 days. Not necessarily all different animals as the same animals may have been seen on two different days.

Nyamandhlovu Pan: Pump not working on three days but pumping on other days. Lots of water in pan. Not as many elephants at Nyamandhlovu compared to Dom Pan. This is most unusual as under normal circumstances more elephants are seen at Nyamandhlovu than anywhere else in the Park. It was noticed that the very clean water being pumped into the trough at Dom Pan certainly attracted the elephants to it. We visited the pan every day and stayed a few hours each time during which time the following herds of elephants were seen:

Total 139 elephants.

All of the herds of cows and calves had very young babies with them.

Gualala Pan: Pan about ¼ full of water; pump not working on two days. Otherwise working all the time. Water quality in the pan was poor. No large herds of elephants were seen at Gualala in spite of water being present.

Total 45 elephants.

White Hills Pan: No borehole or pump. Pan almost dry on 6th June 2005 and completely dry on 12th. However lots of wet mud still occurred in the pan on 12th, which attracted several species of wildlife. Elephants were one of the species that visited the drying up pan and were in fact directly responsible for trampling the mud and causing the pan to dry up a lot quicker than would normally have taken place.

In addition because of the lack of water the elephants had become extremely aggressive and at no time would they allow any other species to drink. As a result of this behaviour many other species, such as kudu, sable, roan, etc. would have to leave the pan without drinking.

A total of 81 elephants were seen.

By 12th June there was no longer any surface water in the pan and most species, including elephants, that visited the pan had to leave without drinking.

Ngwenya Pan: Completely dry, no pump and borehole. We only visited Ngwenya Pan on one occasion (1st June 2005) and 4 bull elephants were seen standing in the centre of the pan.

Balla Balla Pan: Still ¼ full of water, no borehole and pump. We visited the pan on three occasions and in spite of the fact that a good supply of water existed no elephants or any other animals were seen.

Shapi Pan: Pan completely dry. Good borehole but no pump. In order to get from Giraffe Springs to other parts of the Park we always had to pass Giraffe Springs. This pan, when full of water, is an exceptionally good place to see elephants and other species. During our 7 days in the area no elephants were seen at the pan.

Danga Pan: Completely dry, normally a very deep pan, no borehole or pump at pan. When I visited Danga in October 2004 at the very end of the dry season Danga Pan still had a considerable amount of water in it. That clearly indicated that the pan held water all through the dry season of 2004.

On our recent visit to the pan (9th June 2005) it was already completely dry indicating that it had dried up some weeks or months ago.

No elephants or other game seen.

Roan Pan: (Close to the road near Shumba). Very dry, no borehole or pump. Another very deep pan. This pan is a favourite pan for elephants and as a result of it being very deep elephants are able to swim and completely submerge when the pan is full of water. No elephants or other game seen during our visit.

Dwarf Goose Pan: Completely dry, no borehole or pump. During the rains an exceptionally beautiful pan always covered with aquatic vegetation. This shallow depression very quickly fills with water and the water lilies and other aquatic vegetation always attracted flocks of Dwarf Geese and other waterfowl.

On 10th June 2005 when we visited the pan, which was dry, 5 elephant bulls were seen.

Shumba Pan: (Near Picnic Site). Two borehole pumps, pan ¼ full but sufficient water. The entire area between Guvalala Pan and Shumba Pan, a distance of over 55 kms, was completely dry and no water was found in any of the pans or depressions anywhere. As a result of the lack of water for such a large distance large concentrations of elephants and other wildlife occurred in the Nyamandhlovu/Dom Pan area and then again at Shumba Pan.

When we arrived at Shumba Pan at 8:30am on Thursday 9th June 2005 there were already 81 elephants at the pan. It was difficult to say for certain how many herds this represented. There were many cows and calves, some newly born babies and lots of bulls.

Between 8:30am and 10:30am another 245 elephants visited the pan. The 9th June was a very hot day with no wind and in addition to the elephants several other species visited the pan to drink.

The 245 elephants that we saw visiting the pan were made up of the following herds or single bulls: 49 cows and calves; 22 cows and calves; 9 bulls; 7 bulls; 1 bull; 1 bull; 1 bull; 14 cows and calves; 6 bulls; 32 cows and calves; 12 cows and calves; 18 cows and calves; 7 cows (no calves??); 19 cows and calves; 9 bulls and 26 cows and calves.

This represented the greatest concentration of elephants that I had seen in the Park for some time. The herds kept on coming and going and at no time over a period of two hours were there less than 35 elephants at the pan. A wonderful sight indeed.

Masuma Dam: Plenty of water, pump working. In spite of all the water not many elephants were seen. I believe most of the elephants in the area were concentrated around Shumba Pan where the quality of the water was much better. Six hippo (one baby) occurred in Masuma dam and quite a lot of mud was found in places at the edge of the pan. Only 31 elephants were seen during our visits, made up as follows: 1 bull; 2 bulls; 6 bulls; 15 cows and calves and 7 bulls.

Mandavu Dam: Large amounts of water in the dam. Only two herds of elephants were seen in the Mopane woodland below the dam wall. One herd was of 11 cows and calves and the other 9 cows and calves.

The destruction of the vegetation below the dam wall was unbelievably severe and most of the area was dry and desolate. Most trees had been severely damaged by elephants and the area looked devastated by continued destruction by elephants. Without some management of the elephants in the area there will be very little vegetation left in the near future.

Giraffe Springs: Very dry pan but very small quantities of water trickled into a concrete trough. The engine and pump were provided by Wilderness Safaris, who have a concession in the area and own Giraffe Springs camp where we stayed for the week. Throughout the day and night large bull elephants visited the pan in an effort to get water. Some of the bulls would often stand in the dry concrete troughs for hours at a time desperately trying to suck up a few drops of water. Perhaps as many as 12 to 14 bulls visited the pan and on one occasion a small herd of 11 cows and calves. However, no animal could have obtained even a small bucket full of water to drink.

As a result of the lack of water the thirsty elephants spent many hours at night in the camp and amongst the tents digging holes in the septic tanks searching for water. On three occasions one bull elephant even dug up the water pipes supplying the camp with water.

The borehole at Shapi is believed to be a very good one with lots of water but during our visit no pump and engine was present. One of the ways to solve the water problem in the area would be to fit a pump and engine to the borehole at Shapi and this would provide water for the animals in the area. If water is pumped into Shapi Pan it will be the only water between Shumba and Guvalala Pans.

Shallow Grave Pan: Very dry, good borehole, but no pump and engine. No elephants or other animals seen in the area.

Conclusion: Lots of water at Nyamandhlovu, Dom, Guvalala and Shumba Pans and in the Masuma and Mandavu Dams. Most other pans between Guvalala and Shumba were dry. Large numbers of elephants everywhere where water was present.

From some of the emails received –

8th August: We have received an urgent notice that there is no water being pumped by the Parks pumps after Makwa. There is no water at Dom, Nyamandlovu, Guvalala or Tshebe Tshsebe. This puts increasing pressure on those pans that are being pumped.

This is not good for the tourists in the Park. If Parks want to make a game management decision on this please can you make a formal statement so that explanation can be given to the tourists and members of the public who are concerned.

9th August: We are being inundated with desperate appeals for help because there is NO water in Sinamatella. We are informed that National Parks has run out of diesel to run the pumps and all the water holes have been reduced to pools of mud.

People who have just returned from Sinamatella have reported seeing about 200 zebra and a number of antelope standing around a dry water hole, staring into it as if willing the water to appear. The animals look extremely forlorn, thirsty and dehydrated. They know there is no water anywhere else in the vicinity and in their dehydrated state, they don't have the energy to walk any great distance in search of water, so they wait. There is no doubt that they will all die of thirst if something is not done urgently.

Fuel is very scarce in Zimbabwe but we have managed to find some. The problem now is that we have to pay for it. National Parks have no funds, either to buy fuel for the pumps or to pay their employees' wages. We were told this morning that the employees in Sinamatella have all absconded because they haven't been paid.

In order to get the situation under control, we need at least 5 000 litres of diesel. We have found the diesel and we are now appealing to anyone who can help us pay for it. It costs US\$ 1.00 or ZWD 55 000.00 per litre so we are attempting to raise US\$ 5 000 or ZWD 275,000,000 (two hundred and seventy five million).

29th August: We have received a report that the National Parks attendants at the waterhole pumps have been removed from their posts due to financial problems.

If this is the case we are very concerned, since we are now going through the hottest and driest time of the year. Wildlife is accustomed to obtaining water at these points and we feel it is important that they are supplied.

We would like to make suggestions that the Matabeleland Branch of the Wildlife Society be contacted to assist, and also that we circulate our members for assistance in this matter. Perhaps a "Friends of Hwange Park" could be set up to help in situations such as this in the future.

30 August (Confirmation of above) There are no pump attendants in the Park at the moment for the whole of Main Camp area. This is 100% fact. They say they have no food to give them. We are having to run back and forward daily to ensure our engines at K1 and 2 (Kennedy) are running, nuts not loose, belt fallen off, check oil etc. A few engines near and around Main Camp are still running, as the Parks guys are doing the same as us, but the majority in the distant pans are not running, a disaster as it is a really dry year, and even most of the springs are dry.

I hope they sort it out ASAP, or I hate to know how crowded the few pumped pans will be, and the destruction to vegetation around them.

That then was the situation through until the end of "spring" and the beginning of the hot dry months of September, October and November when the situation basically started to deteriorate on a daily basis.

In November there was little if any surface water – Nyamandhlovu was reduced to muddy quagmire that afforded resident hippo and crocodiles no cover. Others became insidious death traps to all species of game. I have misplaced or lost mail that detailed the deaths reported, maybe this is just as well as it makes horrific reading.

Due no doubt to theft of engines, pumps and fuel over the last year or so and apparent inaptitude to bring those responsible to book donor aid to the park was probably at it's lowest for many years and this was despite the unfolding crisis!

The Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force which, has in the past, been criticized for "alarmist and unsubstantiated" reporting showed their mettle and willingness to assist by putting words onto action. It's unfortunate I cannot reproduce their November the 21st update in it's entirety, there are a bundle of pictures which will not down load onto some of the computers so, for simplicity we will remain with extracts of the text.

Thanks to those of you who assisted with funds, especially the SAVE Foundation of Australia, I was able to go to South Africa and purchase 2 new engines for the pumps in Hwange National Park as well as enough spare parts to repair another 20 engines. Thanks to Expeditors for clearing the goods so quickly and efficiently at the border.

In view of the critical situation up in Hwange, I went straight from South Africa to Hwange to try and get some water pumping as soon as possible. I delivered half the spares and one engine to Sinamatella and the balance to Robins Camp.

Joanne Buckley Lamb, a ZCTF team member has been based in Sinamatella for the past month. She has been monitoring the distribution of the fuel we delivered and she has been doing a wonderful job motivating the workshop staff to try and make up working engines out of the engines that aren't working. By doing this, she managed to get some water pumping at a few of the dry pans before I arrived but she has had some heartbreaking experiences during the past month.

In the small number of pans with water, the water levels are so low that the animals are having to wade into deep mud before being able to reach the water. In some places, the mud is more than 3 feet deep and in their desperation for water, the animals are inadvertently walking into a death trap because once they are stuck in the mud, they can't get out and many have died in the mud. National Parks staff are working against great odds to try and rescue these animals. In the case of the larger animals, like elephants this involves pulling them out using chains or rope and a tractor and sometimes the stress of this operation kills the animal anyway.

In the case of smaller animals, National Parks staff are wading, sometimes chest deep into the mud and rescuing them by pulling them out of the mud manually.

These dedicated National Parks staff are doing the best they can with very limited resources. Most of them are devoted to the welfare of the wildlife but they are short of chains and ropes and very few of their vehicles are mobile because they have no tyres. I saw numerous National Parks vehicles up on stands with no tyres.

A very big thank you to Nets and Ropes who have donated 47kg of rope, Columbus McKinnon who are very kindly donating chains, AAT who have donated some tyres and Hivos who donated 2 500 litres of diesel. I will be taking all of this up to Hwange later this week.

Our first task, after delivering the spares to Sinamatella was to install a new engine at Inyantuiie and get the water pumping into the pan there.

From there, we moved on to Shumba, still in the Sinamatella area where we did some minor repairs to the engine and fired it up. An engine which was supposed to be pumping water for drinking and toilet facilities at one of the National Parks safari camps was out of order so we repaired that as well.

We then went to Robins camp, delivered the rest of the spare parts and installed the second new engine at Little Tom. It was music to our ears to hear the engine start up because Little Tom hasn't had water for quite some time.

Our final stop in the Robins Camp area was Detema Pan where the engine wasn't pumping because it needed oil so we filled it with oil and fired it up.

We then made our way through Hwange National Park towards the Main Camp area. Whilst traveling from pan to pan, we saw a number of carcasses of animals that had succumbed to either dehydration or the "black leg" disease which was a terrible thing to see especially in the case of the elephants. It is not yet known for sure what causes this disease but it is thought that it may be due to not enough water being consumed or the fact that the animals are standing in contaminated mud for long periods of time. The feet start rotting, similar to gangrene and eventually the bones rot and break. There is no cure for this disease and the kindest thing to do is to put the animal down. We are racing against time in our fight to save the animals in Hwange but we are slowly making progress thanks to the overwhelming support many of you are giving us. We still have a lot to do -

many of the engines in the Main Camp area are out of order and most of the pans there are dry so we are now working on supplying another load of engines and spares to that area.

From Liz Reece who emailed me the passage from Getaway –
“Getaway in conjunction with Flame Lily and Touch the Wild, has initiated a rescue project to provide the park with water and maintain the public presence to deter poachers. A trust is being formed with the support of Caltex South Africa and Mitsubishi Fusho (a division of Daimler-Chrysler) which will provide fuel for water pumps and anti-poaching patrols, as well as a tough 4 x 4. Flam Lily will deliver the fuel and maintain the pumps as an integral component of the 4 x 4 expeditions it regularly leads into the park from Botswana. In the rainy season the vehicle and fuel will be used to support the park's anti-poaching patrols.
If you're interested in being part of the Save Hwange Campaign, doing the 4 x 4 waterpoint trip or donating to the trust, contact South Africa 0861 31 2312.”

Winding up this lengthy saga I can only say that something is drastically wrong with the Parks Authority's management policy and decision-making. Billions of dollars were made available to purchase a fleet of luxury double cab 4 x 4's for the executive and senior staff members yet there's no money to maintain Hwange's game water supplies! I am aware we are talking about capital expenditure as apposed to general budget items, mandatory management funds if you prefer it. The very poor rainy season in itself was sufficient warning for revised budgeting and the programming of action to be taken; facts indicate this was not done! There is just no excuse for this immense botch up.

b. “Chefs rake in millions from illegal hunting deals” – (Herald – 21st Oct'05)

Extracts from Augustine Mukoro's piece – “Top Zanu PF politicians are raking in millions of dollars from illegally sub-leasing hunting concessions, camps and safari lodges on farms grabbed under the land reform programme.

Highly placed sources in the safari business said Zanu PF bigwigs who were allocated safari farms with lodges and camps, proceeded to obtain hunting concessions and are now raking in millions of dollars from renting out infrastructure to established operators.

The safari business brings in huge sums of money, mostly hard currency, paid by professional hunters and tourists.”

A minister and another of the party hierarchy “were reported to have descended on Chikwenya Camp and Fothergill Island claiming to be the new owners. Speculation is rife that the two, “who already have other properties through the land reform programme targeted the camps for no other reason than leasing them out. Camp operators are in the process of filing papers in the High Court seeking an interdict against the take over. The court papers cite the Minister as first respondent”
The article notes amongst the usual denials claims of civil action by one against another!

c. Parks Authority needs 120 vehicles – Undated News article (John Whites comments are in parenthesis)

“Tsitsi Matope recently at Gonarezhou National Park writes:

Parks and Wildlife Management Authority urgently needs 120 four wheel drive vehicles to effectively combat rampant poaching in it's wildlife sanctuaries.* (previously denied)

In an interview at Gonarezhou National Park this week, parks director general Dr Morris Mtsambiwa* (Fisheries background) said the authority needs up to 120 vehicles worth over \$20 billion to effectively conduct fieldwork in various swathes of wildlife sanctuaries and for anti-poaching. He said game wardens and rangers needed to react fast to poaching activities* (past experience contradicts this!)

Lack of financial resources* (hunting resources?) is our major setback but with our limited recourses we have managed to procure 35 vehicles that are soon going to be distributed in our parks, Dr Mtsambiwa said.

He said with enough anti-poaching resources such as equipment needed to enhance the trekking of poachers*(?) immense benefit would be realised from the country's natural resources.* (tripe)
Dr Mtsambiwa admitted that all had not been well since the authority transformed from being a Government department to a parastatal.* (Another contradiction)

*There was an urgent need to improve on what there was owing to the new thrust of generating more money from our natural resources. Every month we are also obliged to pay over \$300 million to more than 200 workers and this has hit hard on our financial base Dr Mtsambiwa said. Not only is the authority confronted with the pressure to generate money for the smooth running of recreational parks, botanic reserves and safari areas but it needs to improve on rangers' working conditions.**(HQ top heavy)

*The authority this year embarked on a massive recruitment of 327 game rangers with the intention of enhancing anti-poaching.**(this statement is contradictory to that on the 200 workers above)

*Although the game rangers are the backbone of the parks authority not enough is being done to ensure their work is made easy.**(Hooray)

*They have to endure long walks for more than a week in the bush with no proper shoes and storage for their food and water.**(what an embarrassing admittance)

Dr Mtsambiwa admitted the plight of rangers needed to be looked into to ensure they are motivated to discharge their duties professionally.

Now we are an authority we are seriously considering offering attractive rewards to those who do the bulk of the groundwork.

**(John notes – all signs of a department out of control!!)*

d. Poaching

I doubt whether anyone knows the level of poaching taking place across the country not only within the wildlife estate but also on conservancies, council lands such as the Omay and the commercial farms, little remains on the latter! If it had to be rated on a scale from 1 to 10 I guess it would be pretty darn high. I just can't say what rating would be warranted but would note that unless checked poaching in Zimbabwe could rapidly reach epidemic proportions.

From the few passages that follow, you make an assessment –

i. Ivory

From a ZIANA news report that was "squashed" - except it leaked and is now pasted all over the Internet!

"The Chinese, Chiyangwa & illegal ivory" - By Tererai Karimakwenda 30 August 2005

Some officials in The Zimbabwe National Army and some local politicians have been implicated in illegal ivory trade deals that involve Chinese investors and other unnamed partners in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Sources working within the National Parks have revealed information that shows how some of these horns are flown out of Zimbabwe or shipped across Lake Kariba and couriered through Zambia to Mbuji-Mayi in the DRC. The only two officials named in this scandal so far are a Captain Bhebhe and the former ZANU-PF chairman for Mashonaland West, Phillip Chiyangwa.

The investigation by Oscar Nkala, a Zimbabwean journalist based in South Africa, was initiated by a series of ivory shipments recently discovered in Zimbabwe. Nkala says about two months ago, seventy two pieces of ivory were found during a raid in Harare. Two Chinese nationals and three Zimbabweans were arrested at the time. The Chinese went on to implicate an unnamed ZANU-PF former member of parliament.

Then in the last two weeks, more pieces of ivory were discovered, fourteen at a roadblock in Harare and eleven during a raid in Gokwe. This led to a search for information from national parks guards who eventually exposed the whole scandal, and for their safety, remain anonymous.

It is alleged that Captain Bhebhe uses helicopters to transport the ivory with the help of army personnel who are supposed to be on anti-poaching patrols. Much of this activity is allegedly taking place at Chizarira National Park just south of Lake Kariba. The cargo is then shipped across the Lake to Zambia, onwards to the DRC and eventually winds up in the hands of buyers in China, Israel and The Netherlands. Entebbe Airport in Uganda and the Burundian capital Bujumbura are reported to be key places along this illegal trade route.

As for the businessman and former ZANU-PF chef Phillip Chiyangwa, he is allegedly involved with some Chinese investors who frequent a plant located somewhere in Harare's industrial parks. It is at this plant that elephant's feet are "cured". Nkala has tried in vain to get in touch with Chiyangwa.

Local Press

22ND AUGUST -- 14 IVORY TUSKS RECOVERED IN GOKWE ... Fourteen ivory tusks worth over \$60 million, along with a Lee Enfield rifle and a double barrel shotgun have been recovered in Gokwe following a raid by the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority.

From the Daily Mirror 16th August – Under the heading 3 arrested over \$164m Ivory Three Chinese Nationals were arrested at the Harare International Airport last week while allegedly trying to smuggle ivory worth \$ 4,6million to their home country. Allegations are that on the 5th of August at Harare Airport the trio, en route to China allegedly did not declare the 41 pieces of ivory products in their possession. The products comprised of 3 bangles, 20 chopsticks, 2 rhino carvings, 2 elephant carvings, 11 plain stamps and 3 decorated stamps. The three were ordered back to court on the 28th of August.

Don't be fooled by the fact that I have only included two or three articles relating to the poaching of elephant and illicit ivory – it's very wide spread. As I may have mentioned before Mark Butcher believes that as many as one in five elephant in the bottom end of Hwange are carrying injuries sustained from snares, how many have been killed? Earlier this year I was advised by Steve Edwards of five elephant, all in close proximity to one another, that had poached in the Mapangola Hills south of Bumi and another two within Chizarira.

ii. Rhino

From the Conservancies

Midlands - We have had 12 rhino poached and their horns removed since August 2004. These cases are being investigated by National Parks and Police, however to date no breakthrough has been made.

In October this year we had a two week old calf killed in a fight with two other males.

Gourlays – From the Herald (05.10.05)

“Poachers have killed several black rhino at Gourlays Farm in Matabeleland North”

You may not recall that rhino were moved onto these properties as they were deemed to be safe areas, following Mr Pascal's removal a game scout force was stationed on the farm to protect the rhino: From an impeccable source I have learnt that two of the rhino poached on the Pascal property were shot within a two kilometre radius of the scout camp, their horns were removed! By extrapolation it was believed there should now be close to forty rhino on the farm, if my memory serves me correctly I think twenty six were found and moved. A number of the translocated animals had snare injuries or were “carrying wi re.” One adult cow lost a foot and despite treatment bled to death in a crate.

Lowveld – At least one rhino has been poached in the lowveld conservancy. More may have been lost. The rugged terrain in which these animals live may be their saving factor; it certainly makes monitoring very difficult.

Also taken from the 5th of Octobers article in the Herald – “..the Bubi River Conservancy, where we believe the animals will be safe before we move them to the Gonarezhou National Park”. (I would query the merit of this idea remembering that during a relatively short period in the early/mid eighties all the rhino in the park were poached. With Parks' current record there are certainly no assurances that this will not occur again and every reason to be believe it will. In my opinion the rhino should be left on the conservancies where there are the resources, man power, interest and desire to ensure their survival.)

iii. Fish Poaching

From the Herald – 09.10.05 under the banner “Poaching Upsets ecological Balance” Nelson Chenga writes:

After pulling the plug of the life line of tens of thousands of fish at a dam in Shamva last week poachers literally got away with murder.

For draining a water reservoir dry to catch fish in the dam more than 20 fish poachers were given the option of paying a \$150000.00 admission of guilt fine or going to court.

Ironically, the fine is worth just about a kilogram of fish of fish which could easily be poached from yet another dam or stream.

It seems the paltry fine was the best option they all took and now are on the prowl again ready to cause more ecological damage.

While the problem of poaching has been highlighted over and over again, the Shamva case crudely exposed how casually crimes against the environment are sometimes treated to a point where penalties never really deter the practice.

There are many other incidents related to fish poaching and illegal netting that could be documented however rather than do this and bore you in the process let me briefly relate what's happening in the Chete area where, as most of you are aware Mike Fynn, Blondie Leatham and I visit in either late October or early November each year to while away the time and do a little fishing. Every bay we visited, and believe me, we boated in and out of many both in and around the Rusi River and elsewhere evidence of illegal netting abounded. I don't doubt it is the Zambians who are responsible and they are obviously doing their damnest to denude the southern shores of fish just like they have of their own!

To sum up – The Parks Authority spokesman and, on occasions, the Director General himself together with the Minister of Environment Francis Nhema have, over the last few months, all publicly acknowledged and stated that poaching is rampant within the parks and wildlife estate!

They note:

- *"The authority needs 120 four wheel drive vehicles to effectively combat poaching."*
- *They (presumably rangers/scouts) have to endure long walks for more than a week with no proper shoes and storage for food and water."*
- *More farmers should consider breeding wild animals such as rhinoceros in order to curb poaching in the estate (Minister Nhema statement as reported in the Herald) continuing he notes – "We are encouraging farmers to take some of the animals so that poaching levels are contained. If Farmers took possession of some of the animals poaching levels would be reduced."*

Hiding behind excuse after excuse they would like us to believe **it's just not their fault**. Well whose fault is it then that every thing is coming apart at the seams and imploding inwards!

Any amount of 4 x 4's are not going to stop poaching, nor are any other of the lame explanations which are conjured up to hoodwink the public. I have heard it said it is a massive con scheme to get donations!

Clearly there is a huge problem across the board that encompasses more than just the poaching issue – leadership, direction, discipline, corruption, accountability and motivation are all core issues that need to be addressed.

Just a thought, what is that negates the authority re-introducing the honorary officer concept again?

e. Anthrax

It was reported on the 11th of October that twenty-one buffalo had died at "Makolokolo" pan in Hwange in a suspected anthrax outbreak. This is highly possible as outbreaks continued in Chobe once again this year.

I have received no further information on the anthrax report

f. Disastrous Chirundu Project Halted

From the Zimbabwean 22-28 July

"The proposed Chirundu Project, highlighted in the Zimbabwean two weeks ago, has been "stopped". The project is described by a spokesman for the Zimbabwe Conservation Development Foundation (ZCDF) to involve a structured group of farmers, business persons, companies and other independent stakeholders, who have moved comprehensively towards launching Stage 1 of a 120,000 hectare agricultural development in the proclaimed Urungwe, Chewore and Sapi Safari Areas and the Mana Pools National Park bordering the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe.

According to the ZCDF, the proposed development, which was due to be launched on November 1, 2005, has been stopped. 'What is not clear is whether this decision has been taken for economic reasons, or because of the exposure the project received as a result of our objection. It is however

known that the term "hot potato" was used by the developers to describe the prominence surrounding the proposed development,' says a statement issued this month.

The level of prudence that needs to be applied though, given the added decision by the developers to consign the matter to a senior government executive for attention, is that to protect the interests of the project, the "stop" decision is intended as a smoke screen, or it could have been moved into "suspension" mode rather than a complete stoppage, if at all. Given this, the ZCDF will continue to closely collaborate with information sources to secure insight to any further motives or decisions that may be taken by the developer,' said the spokesman.

The full extent of the project, it is understood, encompasses not only the pristine Urungwe Safari Area, but a vast tract of land from Urungwe's western boundary, across Mana Pools National Park, the Sapi Safari Area, to the Chewore Safari Areas' eastern boundary – an area measuring plus 100 kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide, with the Zambezi river as its northern boundary.

The ZCDF is determined to prevent developments such as the Chirundu Project, which pose a major threat to the environment and contributes to the multifaceted and escalating annihilation of wild and natural assets in Zimbabwe. The organization subscribes to the need for intense vigilance, research, evaluation and preventative action across all applicable frontiers in its endeavours. The adversaries in this daunting task are lawlessness, greed, bribery, corruption and unsustainably discreditable covenants of conservation and natural resources management.

As the ZCDF assiduously crusades for the protection, propagation and progressive development of the country's feral resources for benefit to all, bar none, the organization accepts this cannot be achieved alone. We therefore welcome input from and through partnerships with those in a pool of resources of excellent experience, qualification and compatible philosophy.

'A major hurdle at this time is the perilous state of wild and natural resource affairs being exacerbated by intensifying complexities that underscore the applicable emergency factors. It could be argued, that resolutions no longer exist in doing things right, but moreover in doing the right things. In the context of this, the ZCDF in close alliance with willing partners will stand firm in actively preventing the Chirundu Project, or any such likened proposal,' says the statement."

g. Parks embarks on electrification project

From the Herald (Undated!)

"The Parks and wildlife management authority has embarked on a multi-billion dollar electrification project covering four of its major parks in the country.

The project which is proceeding at a slow pace owing to financial constraints, seeks to have electricity installed at Kazuma Pan in the Hwange National Park (??) Chizarira and Chirisa in Binga and two stations at Chipinda Pools in the Gonarezhou National Park(??)

Parks public relations manager retired major Edward Mbewe said there was a need to install electricity to improve facilities in the parks

Just how far are parks are prepared to go with regards the electrification programme in the wilderness areas of the Gonarezhou, Kazuma and Chizarira is the question I would like to ask. I recently visited Mabalauta and discovered that the introduction of electricity is not only being confined to the headquarters, Malapati and Swimuwini rest-camp, I suppose the latter is just possibly acceptable but to include the viewing points at Mwatombo pools, Samalema Gorge, Makokwani and possibly Rossi pools into this exercise destroying, as it does, the complete experience of visiting these remote points is way beyond comprehension.

h. On the Matopos – Bryan Orford (Son of the late Tom Orford) – 9th May

I have been in and out of the Matopos over the last 7 years or so doing black and white rhino walks. I thought it may be of some interest to those who were in parks how the park is doing. Zim doesn't have much good news. Some good is happening in this park which I hope will cheer some of the old timers. We went through a period where the resident wardens were of a poor standard. It was rumoured one of them burnt a house down to cover up his theft of gate takings. We also had some rabid anti white racists. Then there was the warden caught doing her own logging business at Wankie - and then transferred to Maleme. Most of these were totally useless and wasted parks and Govt assets. A bit of bad news was the retirement recently of all the old game scouts to make way for new. This was a great loss of valuable experience and will cost parks dearly in some parts of the country. On the good side we have a new warden who seems to be doing a great job. Fences which

had fallen down often are now being repaired. The rhinos were getting out frequently, with some in surrounding farms and even as far as Plumtree. Recently some turned up at the Matopos research where they made themselves very unwelcome. Parks received a phone call asking them to please come and collect their elephants which were eating the cabbages. Sadly parks caught rhino for Wankie and Mazoe and some died in the process. The roads are being graded in areas where they haven't been touched for years. Firebreaks are being sorted out. I have never seen controlled burns and baling of grass here before and this shows some thought. The game population is doing great. Both black and white rhino are increasing in number, while zebra, wildebeest, impala and giraffe are noticeably increasing every year. The tsessebe seem to have left the game park for farms but are still in reasonable numbers near the arboretum. Ant poaching patrols are definitely better than they were. I notice when near rhino the shadowy presence of game scouts nearby. We never used to see them as they spent more time fishing and taking it easy. The croc population has increased. One 10 footer who was still happily sunning himself a few days ago, grabbed hold of an English tourist recently. The Englishman and his friends had a few too many drinks and went swimming in Mpopoma dam. The croc caught him in shallow water and he was pulled under. He fought back, putting his hand down its throat. It let go, but was soon back. The second time he got some relief by poking it in the eyes. His 3 friends by this time were in the water with anything their hands could get hold of to beat the croc up. They eventually grabbed it and were going to pull it up on the bank with rope. They were reluctant to let go as they were afraid to get the teeth coming their way. The end result was a frustrated croc and two guys off to hospital. Some of the picnic sites still need repairs. There is a nice new lodge at Maleme which is on the same standard as Fish eagle and Black eagle lodges. I think it is called Ingwe. The Nanke cave walk has been fixed up with new arrows painted. Research on duiker and leopards is going on. The park is probably better to visit now than years ago. There are no tourists on most days and few Zimbabweans visit it (fuel). This means you can have the park to yourself. In a few years time when things come right we will go back to traffic jams and off road junkies.

i. Large Ivory

A pair of tusks weighing in excess of a 100 pounds a side were recovered in August I believe from a bull that appears to have died of natural causes at Tshebe Tshebe (48 kgs was the weight advised) Eighty pounders are occasionally taken on the Tsholotsho boundary and every once in a while something slightly heavier. Does anyone know if this the first "hundred pounder" to come out of the park?

I sincerely hope the tusks are not sold but kept for posterity and exhibited in the Park.

Snippets

From BBC News, 15 September

"Zimbabwe and China in tiger deal"

Zimbabwe is about to import four endangered Siberian tigers from China for captive breeding, officials say. Zimbabwe Tourism Minister Francis Nhema told the Herald newspaper China had received zebras, elephants and impala as part of an "exchange programme". Correspondents say the move shows President Mugabe is wooing China. He is trying to strengthen ties with the Asian giant as his country is increasingly isolated in the world because of a poor human rights record. "We do not have the tiger in this country and we would like to benefit from the exchange programme with China," Mr Nhema was quoted by the state-controlled Herald as saying. "We are happy that three experts found out animal habitats friendly to the requirements that are compulsory for tiger breeding and we expect the animals would be here as soon as possible." The tigers are intended for captive breeding in the Hwange National Park, 500km (320 miles) west of the capital Harare. A biologist working for the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo, Peter Mundy, told AP news agency the plan was "a complete load of garbage", adding that the country even lacked the resources to look after its own wildlife. "It would be cruel," Mr Mundy said, adding that the park's seasons, climate and vegetation were not suitable for those animals, whose native region is seasonally covered in snow. But Dick Pitman, head of a conservationist organisation, the Zambezi

Society, said he approved of the plan provided it was run by tiger experts with adequate foreign funding, and the animals were not allowed to leave the park".

18 JULY -- *LAND INVASIONS WILL NOT AFFECT GLTP: MINISTER.... Marthinus van Schalkwyk, the environment minister, says land invasions in Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park will not affect its overall integrity as part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP).*

28 JULY -- *RECORD BAIL FOR CHINESE.... Two Chinese nationals, believed to be part of an illegal ivory dealing syndicate involving former Bikita East Member of Parliament Walter Mutsauri, were yesterday granted a record \$250 million bail each.*

4 AUGUST - *COUNCILS POLLUTE MANYAME RIVER.... Businesses operating on the banks of Manyame River are on the verge of collapse owing to the continual discharge of raw sewage by the Harare and Chitungwiza city councils into the river.*

12 AUGUST-- *NIGERIA PRAISES ZIMBABWE'S WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT.... Zimbabwe is among the best countries in Africa in the management of wildlife and conservation of natural resources, a visiting Nigerian official has said.*

Stop Press

Heavy rains save dying animals in Zim Park - The Mercury (SA), 27 December

Life-giving rains have brought temporary relief to the thirst-crazed animals of Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe after a fierce drought which left the park littered with shrunken, rotting corpses.

Pinetown conservationist John Davison(see note below), who has just returned from the park, said many dams and water pans were full to the brim again after nearly 230 mm of rain fell in less than a month. Davison is part of the Save Hwange Trust which was formed earlier this year to avert a water-supply crisis in the cash-strapped wildlife park. Just over a month ago, he said, long lines of weak and thirsty animals were congregating around the few remaining drinking holes because diesel-driven water pumps had broken down or run out of fuel. At one of the watering holes in the south of the park, mature elephant bulls were monopolising the little remaining water to such an extent that safari operators had to drive them away to allow other animals to drink. Davison said smaller species, including sable antelope, had waited for days because the biggest elephants were sucking up water as fast as it could be pumped - leaving nothing for the weaker elephants and smaller species.*

He left Pinetown earlier this month as part of a volunteer mission to supply fuel and to transport pump service teams within Hwange. On arrival, though, he had witnessed a "spectacular recovery". "In the northern Robins Camp and Sinamatella region, dams and pans are brimming over with water deep enough for the hippo to submerge. The recovery of the trees and shrubs, as well as the sudden flowering of bulbs and tuber plants and the sprouting of ground cover and creepers is nothing short of nature's miracle." However, the corpses of several elephants were still visible next to derelict bore hole engines and pumps which might have saved them from starvation had they been in working order. Davison warned, however, that while the rains had brought respite from suffering, the park's problems were not over. "The Save Hwange Trust, park management and many other concerned organisations have been given a period of relief in which to plan and put in place remedial measures. The huge backlog of maintenance and repairs to the water supply infrastructure before the next drought arrives is a daunting task which needs resources and support," he said.

** John Davison is the son of Ted Davison Wankie's first Warden.*

Conclusion:

Not much remains to be said other than to wish you all the very best for 2006.

Mike Bromwich

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