

It's basically only three months since the last newsletter went out, yes it was extremely late but as I explained it was held back pending the "publication" of the final chapter relating to the rebuilding of the wildlife in Zimbabwe. In hindsight may be I should have withheld the whole report and included it this newsletter but what is done is done!

Let me then quickly look at 2006 as it rapidly draws to a close. It's been a year that many of us will not be sorry to see end – reports on conservation practices in Zimbabwe has been thwarted by negative actions and carryings on, this is but one aspect that darkened 2006.

At the forefront and playing heavily on most of our minds is the fact we have had to say our final farewells to some our dearest friends and colleagues – Hazel de Beer, Cathy La Grange, Ian Nyschens and last and by no means least Clem Coetsee – peer without equal in most if not all fields of management, sad times indeed.

On the aspect of our history – most if not all are aware I have started an archive file, input has been a little slow but some quality information has been received, more about that later and in a similar vein news on the website, the collection of photographs and other relevant matters.

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Condolences:

Within the last two weeks I have, once again, been the bearer of sad news notifying friends and colleagues of the passing of Mike La Grange's beloved wife Cathy and the death of Ian Nyschens, in his prime, an elephant hunter of note, ranger in the "old Game Department" and author.

Words do little to express my heartfelt grief as I, on behalf of us all, offer Mike and his very close family our deepest sympathies; our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Close on seventy people attended Cathy's memorial service which was held at Gateway School on the 23rd of December – representing the Dagaboys were Dave and Meg Cummings, Russell Taylor, Tim Paulet, John White, Andy Hunter and Vernon Booth. In memory of Cathy a tree was planted in the Gateway grounds and Cathy's casket interred with the sapling – a moving a wonderful tribute to such a caring person.

Ian I never met, those who knew him say he wasn't the easiest of fellows to get on with, he died in his 83rd year. Irrespective of his personal whims, likes and dislikes Ian's love of the bush and particularly the "Valley" was undeniable – he has bequeathed his estate to the Zambezi Conservation Trust, this in itself says it all! On the memorial service and Ian's farewell held at the Lind's, Odette writes – "*The memorial went off well - Charlie Hailey said a few words and Don heath spoke - there was a good turn out - well over 30 people - some parks some not - sorry I could take no photos as my camera has gone on the blink! However it was a good send off and the braai afterwards went on well into the evening.*"

The London Times (23rd Sept'06) - Tribute to Clem

On the 23rd September The Times paid the following tribute to Clem. The article appeared on the obituaries page and was accompanied by a photograph of Clem and his team working with an immobilized elephant. I have the press cutting kind favour of Judy Wilson.

Andries 'Clem' Coetsee

Game warden who pioneered methods for relocating elephants and rhinos to safe reserves across Southern Africa

CLEM COETSEE was one of Africa's most respected game conservationists.

Although in the early stages of his career as a gamekeeper he had to cull about 15,000 elephants, he hated doing it and killed them as quickly and humanely as possible. Their numbers in the national parks of what was then Rhodesia were threatening to grow uncontrollably, after which they would eat and smash their habitat before starving to death.

It was a personal triumph for Coetsee, therefore, when he developed a technique of drug, darting, crating and transporting full-grown elephants, and later whole families, as an alternative to culling them. He also rescued many thousands of other animals, from tiny klipspringer antelope to rhinoceros and buffalo that he captured from overstocked or poacher-threatened environments and moved to more secure homes.

Although asthmatic, Coetsee chased his quarry himself, and often on foot. He used scrap metal and simple Rhodesian farmer technology to build ingenious machines to contain the largest and most violent beasts. He had an extraordinary affinity for animals. He used to face charging bull elephants until they stopped, five metres from him, turned round and walked away, and he would soothe panic-stricken buffalo in the capture pens by talking quietly to them. He once kept an adult hyena as a pet - it ate garden furniture and bit chunks out of car bodies - and an African lungfish in a bath.

Andries Marthinus Coetsee, known to all as Clem, was born into a poor Afrikaner family on a smallholding outside the central Rhodesian town of Gwelo (now Gweru), and grew up holding a rifle. He completed his apprenticeship as a

diesel mechanic but after four years joined the Southern Rhodesia National Parks Department in 1965.

The Government was clearing uninhabited, tsetse fly infested areas in the remote north of the country to resettle black Rhodesians. Biologists then believed that every wildlife species was host to the tsetse fly, and that slaughtering all game was the only way to eradicate it. Coetsee's job was simply to kill all the game he could find.

By 1973, when he became a senior ranger in charge of a park on the shores of Lake Kariba, the policy had shifted from carnage to capture. It was an epiphany for Coetsee, who pioneered a way of rolling a drugged two-ton black rhino on to a heavy rubber mat and winching it into a truck. He also was the first to learn how to catch buffalo calves without darting them. Under the eyes of their deadly mothers, he dazzled them in a boma (stockade) at night with the headlights of a Land Rover, jumped out of the vehicle to snatch their hind legs from under them and tossed them into the back of the vehicle.

*In 1972 Coetsee was involved in a helicopter crash. He was awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal for Valour for rescuing the badly burnt pilot**

In 1979 he was put in charge of National Parks game management, including elephant culling. He operated mostly in Wankie (now Hwange) national park, which was being reduced to a dustbowl by its 20,000 elephants. Coetsee perfected the technique of eliminating an entire herd, except for its infants, in one fusillade, to avoid the psychological trauma that elephants experience after witnessing the violent death of their peers. Helicopters would drive a herd of elephants toward a trio of Parks marksmen, standing in arrow formation. When they were close enough the hunters would open fire and, usually, in about 12 seconds a herd of up to 50 elephants would be dead, each killed with a single bullet.

Coetsee also ran the recovery of the ivory, hides, feet, ears and tails and the distribution of meat to local people, and he spent hours with the orphans in the bomas, talking to them as he hosed them and rubbed them down.

He was relieved to be able to spend more time rescuing animals with the National Parks capture unit. Soon after independence in 1980 an onslaught of poachers in the Zambezi Valley ravaged its 2,000 black rhino, Africa's last sustainable population of the endangered species. Coetsee's team snatched the 300 survivors to guarded conservancies.

In 1985 he was awarded a citation by the WWF for his expertise in both capture and culling, in which it said: "He has few, if any, superiors anywhere in Africa." Such skills came at a price: on different occasions a rhino gored him, smashing his ribs; he was pulled out of his sleeping bag by a hungry hyena; he was knocked down by an elephant bull, kicked by a giraffe and had a narrow escape from a rogue lion.

In 1988 he left National Parks and set up his own wildlife management company in the southeastern Lowveld. In 1992 the worst drought in a century impelled him to do what wildlife experts thought was impossible: to relocate adult elephants. He was already experienced at moving juveniles to areas still with water supplies and vegetation, and he realized that the adults, wasted by starvation, had been reduced to a manageable size. For the first time, individual adult elephants were loaded on to cattle trucks and taken hundreds of miles to private conservancies.

After individuals, he tried families. By now he had also refined the use of drugs. From a helicopter, Coetsee would dart a group of a dozen elephants with massive doses of immobilize, winch them one at a time into a reinforced 40-foot container, inject them with a tranquilizer and an antidote to the immobilizing drug. The elephants woke in

the containers and rose to their feet as the knockout drug wore off, but were too drowsy with the tranquillizer to cause any trouble. Since they were standing their rib cages did not collapse under their own body weight - Coetsee also learnt that they suffocated if they fell on their trunks, and it required desperate scrambling around to shift them when they did. He moved 270 that year.

He continued in 1993, and became so efficient that he could move three families in a day. Even when they had recovered from the drought and were at full weight, up to five tones, he took only 90 minutes for each operation. He moved 670 that year, 200 of them delivered to a South African game reserve, a two-day journey over 1,200km, with no casualties. Coetsee was in demand all over Africa, and in 1994 gave demonstrations in South Africa, Kenya and Uganda.

The enterprise was killed by political infighting between ruling party supporters in national parks. Coetsee faced the absurd accusation that he had "clandestinely" taken 300 elephants across the border to South Africa.

President Mugabe's land grab in 2000 pushed squatters on to his ranch in Chiredzi in the Lowveld. Under constant harassment, Coetsee gave up the ranch three years ago and kept only the homestead.

Last December a local ruling party grandee smashed his gate, parked a caravan immediately in front of the house and dumped furniture on his verandah. His battles with belligerent officialdom were a sad end to his life of service to Africa.

Andries "Clem" Coetsee, wildlife expert, was born on May 13, 1939 He died from a heart attack on September 4, 2006, Age: 67."

*The Meritorious Conduct Medal

Senior Ranger Andries Marthinus Coetsee

"For brave and gallant conduct over and above the call of duty in that on 2 May 1972, while a crashed helicopter from which he had escaped was on fire, one of its petrol tanks exploded and he returned to the blazing wreckage and released the pilot who was trapped inside by his safety harness. During this action, the second petrol tank exploded, and, although Senior Ranger Coetsee would have known of the probability of this occurring, he continued his efforts to rescue the pilot and carry him to safety."

Dagaboys Fund:

Regrettably no progress has been made to "legalise" the fund. Paddy Francis's lawyer contact in the Falls who intimated he was willing to assist as has now reneged, or more politely put declined to help. In essence then, from an administrative point of view, we are no further down the line than we were nine months ago. So where to from here?

The emergency experienced a few weeks back when monies were urgently required to help the late Ian Nyschens confirms the need for us to grow the fund. Here, I would pause to thank those who contributed and donated to this special appeal.

At this point in time the funds remain invested with Tetrad Asset Management in my number "2" account (Both Paddy and Debbie Francis, who incidentally is one of the Investment managers, are fully aware of both this and my concerns at the investment being in my name!) Sorry chaps until such time as we can get matters formalized you are just going to have to trust me.

For record purposes interest rates have fluctuated, massive swings from exceeding 300% over 60 / 90 days to less than 100% for short / medium term investments. The money has been invested to best advantage and currently the balance with Tetrad stands at \$ 109623.68. As those resident in Zimbabwe are fully aware this buys nothing, possibly a couple of dozen meat pies or hamburgers!!

With that bit of enlightening but worthless piece of information I would appeal for donations to grow this fund to well in excess of a million dollars (in real money that's about US\$ 500 or R3500 at the "black market" rate of exchange) It is certainly not a vast sum of money by any means but something that might make the world of difference in case of a medical emergency. I would ask, until such time as alternative arrangements are made, that cheques be made out to Tetrad Asset Management – and deposited into the Tetrad Asset Management account at Standard bank Karigamombe Centre Branch, account number 010022045700. **PLEASE FAX A COPY OF THE DEPOSIT FOR ATTENTION DEBBIE FRANCIS ON 04 798 617 AND NOTE IN THE FAX THAT THE FUNDS ARE TO BE INVESTED IN MC BROMWICH NO 2 A/C (DAGABOYS)** – The importance of this cannot be over emphasised hence the use of bold large case text. Debbie and Paddy I am sure will keep me apprised as to what's been deposited. Those in and around Bulawayo know where I work and can drop off a cheque or what ever with me. I will then do the necessary.

Trish Tebbit has kindly offered to hold money in South Africa on a "temporary basis" for the benevolent fund. Here, I would note, that where as the monetary value of our local currency continues to plunge the rate of exchange, Zimbabwe dollars to all hard international currencies, continues to firm. To avoid the whims of devaluation we should keep whatever funds we can outside Zimbabwe and only repatriate what's required as and when necessary. For those who dwell elsewhere wishing to contribute to the fund please either email Trish on trish@parsonsaviation.co.za or phone her on + 27 13 741 3882 (office) or on + 27 82 904 7047 (Mobile) – Trish will advise you as to the procedures. (Please note Trish will be away until probably the 3rd week in January but is maintaining comms by email)

Dagaboys News

1. USA

John Herbert

John is hankering to get back to Africa and writes "*Am getting bored living and working here in Ohio and am looking for employment back in Africa. "Any help you might be able to provide would be appreciated. Merry Christmas to al"* I'm sure "Big John" would enjoy hearing from you – his address is dherbert360@sbcglobal.net

Roger Parry

At the time of writing Roger is also in the States and returns to Zimbabwe towards the end of January.

2. UK

Jon Hutton

From Jon to Mark Butcher and myself – "*I'm alive and well and still in Pom... However, I have changed jobs now work for the UN as Director of the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Center which is based in Cambridge. Sounds very grand, but anyone who has had a brush with the UN will know the score..... Website is www.unep-wcmc.org I haven't been back to Zim for 5 years or so, but spend quite a bit of time in the Cape.*

It would be good to hear what others are up to. I see Brian Child from time to time, he is a lecturer at the University of Florida but manages to spend much of his time playing in Zambia. His wife (and Department) thinks he is working. My work email is jon.hutton@fauna-flora.org Best wishes to all"

3. **NEW ZEALAND**

Rob and Ann Murray

Rob and Ann keep in touch on a regular basis, extracts from their November letter reads – *“As I sit here today I am all wrapped up in warm winter clothing, snow has again fallen on our mountains here behind the house and it is wet everywhere. We really do need the sun to shine hot and brightly on us now, as we are fast growing webbed, mould feet. We have had the most awful spring this year; the wettest in over a decade and our long-term summer forecast is not too cheerful either. Last week Westport from close to being flooded as the Buller River was only 12 cm from breaking over the wharf and bank, and the town itself is lower than these. Apparently extra ties had to be secured on the ships that were in port to save them from being washed out to sea, and no I do not mean boats, I mean ships. This is when we feel really homesick for sunny Zims**

We have just spent a wonderful week with folks we knew in Park - Dave and Erica Scammell. We went to collect them in Greymouth Saturday (10 days ago) and they had three nights with us then, before they headed up to Blenheim, Picton and Nelson areas for a couple of days. They then came back here for a day and I took them down to Greymouth last Friday so that they could continue with their trip of South Island. We had not seen each other for 23 years and so we had a lot of catching up to do, and a lot of reminiscing was done, and generally a great time had by all. Mike, Erica says you need to speak to Bookie to get some stories.

Since last writing Rob has only had one day out fishing and that was when Dave was able to join him. We had a lovely feed up that night, thanks to Rob and Dave.

(Zimbabwe is dry and sweltering hot at the moment with the mercury of late having soared way above 40° in lowveld, Beitbridge and West Nicholson areas. Kariba and the “Valley” have, I understand, been equally as hot!)

Hans and Val van der Heiden

The “old boy” network system still appears to work – *“I sent Terry and Pam Fenn a short email recently in the hope that they were still at that address. Fortunately they were. I am hoping that the Dagaboys are still keeping in touch, and also need to give you my current address outside Zim. It is hansval@xtra.co.nz, - we are on a work contract in New Zealand for two years after just on 4 years in Malawi, and have been here for 18 months now. Our Kariba business, Kushinga Lodge, is still operating (battling) and is being looked after by my daughter and her husband, Sally & Willem. The safaris are no longer operating with the drop in tourism. Please let me know how you chaps are doing?*

This is also to wish you and your family, and all the Dagaboys you have contact with, a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

4. **BOTSWANA**

Barney O’Hara

Having the ability to competently précis the various goings on in his life Barney’s notes are short, succinct and pretty much to the point – *“Hasn’t been a good year for*

the dagga boys has it. Was very sorry that I couldn't get to Clem's funeral and will probably regret it forever!!

Still based in Botswana still trying to make a living from wildlife flying with my own helicopter. Putting conservation and aviation together in the same basket and expecting to make some bucks out of it seems to be a big ask. Have done some interesting work

This year though. Helped move 70 odd elephants between two parks in Malawi in July. Very interesting and couldn't help thinking the whole time although the equipment has gotten a whole lot better the basic plan was still Clem's..... and always will be. Have also been working with CERU (Conservation Ecology Research Unit) from the university of Pretoria in doing elephant population dynamics. Very interesting in how technology involving pixels and other funny things are being used in population assessments. Interesting but I managed to stay out of the firefight with all our well-known scientists that are all involved. Was rather similar to walking in the Vic Falls minefield on occasions Especially having come from and grown up in the culling era!! Family is well with the wife's NGO Cheetah Conservation Botswana moving ahead in leaps and bounds having gained some pretty worthwhile foreign support. Results of their work are starting to be seen. Education in the rural areas being high on their priority list".

A day or so back I clandestinely received a photograph of Barney accompanied by a short note; it would appear that certain things don't change!

5. SOUTH AFRICA

Jimmy Thomson (Tourist Officer Kyle)

I am sure many, if not most, who worked in the Victoria Province during the '70's will remember Jimmy with his fairly broad accent.

Ron writes of his father - For those of you who know him Jimmie is still alive – at 92! He now lives in an old age facility at Howick.

Ron Thomson

Ron and Maggie's Christmas letter is fairly lengthy I have therefore taken the liberty to précis sections for the newsletter:

"Life goes on and we have to work harder and harder to keep the wolf from the door. Neither of us has a pension so we cannot relax and just exist on what our life's labours brought to us in the past. Happily we both still enjoy reasonably good health so we can keep on going.

Our home at Hartbeespoort remains a joy to us both. We have, together, over the last 10 years, planned and developed the garden as a sanctuary for birds. It has an 85 sq. metre pond which stretches from the high front wall right up to the edge of the veranda. It is a wonderland full of life and it sports varied patterns of foliage and colour in the aquatic vegetation. The weavers have 30,40,50 nests at a time, and when the males demolish their nests the dabchicks pick up the fallen grass to build their own nest on the water below. Swallows breed in the waterfall/cave we have created on the rockery we built next to the pond".

Maggie now has two shops – "The Gift Barn" and "Maggie's" It is so gratifying to hear so many people come to the market and tell us that "Maggie's" and the "The Gift Barn" are the two "best" shops in the market." Who would have thought one would have ever see Ron busying himself behind a shop counter. Well, he's there with Maggie and the other staff most weekends!

Ron's writing progresses. Apart from writing magazine articles on a regular basis he now has his sixth book - "Managing Our Wildlife Heritage" in-press. This latest work is a highly condensed and updated version of three of Ron's previous books - which are all still much in demand."

6. ZIMBABWE

Norman Monks

Still in the Department and writing from Mana Norman's note covers quite a number of topics including those relating to his "military training" experiences at Mushandike!

"We are still at Mana Pools. My wife Nyasha and I enjoy the isolation and relative simplicity of life here. Nyash, a doctor, does the odd locum in Harare - or further. She is doctoring in the Sudan at present for a few weeks. We make a great team with the lion research and give thanks for every day that we are privileged to be here. This is my 29th year in Parks. The station has a staff

complement of 50 including two wardens, two senior rangers and sitting precariously at the top is myself - senior warden. Remove a few ranks like the noughts of our currency and we have what you will remember as one warden, two senior rangers and two senior scouts. The work is still rewarding and É.challenging. I have a good staff of dedicated people and of course, just like "when we", there are some who do not pull their weigh and have to be pushed and shoved into place.

Last year saw us all (from the DG downwards) having to undergo basic military training. It came as a shock and of course one thought of all the options one could put forward to refuse. One of them being: "At my age (57) I am far too old to run 6 kms a day, be drilled all day and have to face communal cold showers in winter in the mid-veld!" The second option was my wife's suggestion: As a doctor she would give me a sick note. (I did have flu and my right shoulder had not recovered from the unexpected meeting I had had with a buffalo with a bad attitude a year back). Armed with these really good excuses to politely refuse the compulsory training, I packed jockey shorts and veldskoens and duly arrived at Mushandike with a sad contingent of recruits. We arrived late and some of our intake were already there looking as if they were awaiting the gas chamber without the traditional offer of a last meal.

The first day at 0530hrs saw us all at the flagpole in various stages of fitness and stomach sizes. First we had to circle the pole, crouch down, grab the hips of the person in front of us and then on command do bunny hops. The man behind me was carrying some serious extra weight and looked upon me as a free ride. I enjoyed Neil Diamond's song and the hopeful injunction "He ain't heavy - he's my brother", but thoughts of self-preservation overtook me (together with his weight) and I fell over with some theatrics and spent a happy time being abused for this - while dutifully hopping along - alone.

The 6 km run was duly completed each day - a bit like an old Land Rover that needs frequent stops to let the engine cool down, the tyres kicked and the body work checked, but which nevertheless proudly completes the journey belching out choking fumes and back-firing for good measure.

Drill was after breakfast which came after the dreaded 6 kms and cold shower, so from 0900 hrs to 1700 hrs we marched around the soccer field, watched by giggling children, vainly trying to remember what we had been taught all those years ago. Somehow, in the intervening years I had lost some coordination and whatever

marching skill I had so that my instructors constantly reminded me how bad my marching was. I lost nearly 2 kg being a recruit again.

The whole training was - enjoyable. There was good camaraderie, much hysterical laughter when one had the breath for such frivolities, and at the end of the training we could go back to our stations and now enforce the discipline to which we had all been subjected to without fear of culture, tribe race or any other encumbrance. It has helped to create a more disciplined staff. I see it on my station and elsewhere but of course it depends on who the head of station is and the level of commitment. Basically the same as "when we".

Mana has shown a number of faces these last two years. Last year it was drought and a significant number of wildlife deaths. At least 6% of the elephant population succumbed. Buffalo died in large numbers - to the extent that we thought that there may be an anthrax outbreak. Samples were sent in but we only found one fresh carcass to sample and that was negative to anthrax. The hippo population had very few mortalities which is surprising as there are an average of 33 hippo/kilometer of river and the floodplain and Mopane fringes had no grass (the hippo were eating albida pods, dry leaves and water hyacinth). The predator population did well and in one lion pride the survival rate of cubs born in December last year to date is 71% (5 out of 7).

The first rains came on the 23rd November that season- the night after we had burned a large area of Vetiverier grass with the help of pyromaniac tour operators. From then on it was rain and dark clouds until April this year. By the end of the season we had had over 800mm rain. Mana looked like what I imagine an English garden looks like - green grass nicely shorn and bushes and trees pruned to an eland/kudu height or more discreetly to an impala's height.

Then the other face - grass fast disappearing and being taken over by various legumes: Indigofera, Senna, Cassia etc. And then, as they dried out, back to the bare ground and occasional dust storm - like today - winds that break branches and pushes over trees leaving a trail of debris.

The elephant family groups have a large number of calves now and the mortalities appear to have had no significant effect on overall numbers. As I write, a lot of impala have dropped their young, but there are still some grossly distended females who do not believe that two showers of rain constitute the beginning of a rainy season so they are grimly holding back.

The coucals are back, crash-landing and looking embarrassed. Their gurgling bottle-pouring call is, to me, synonymous with the Valley rain.

Willem de Beer's Get Together

Adrian and Odette Lind are to be complimented for arranging the get together for Willem out at Ruwa. Put together with relatively little notice the do, held on a Sunday (12th November) was, according to all reports, a great success. I don't think Willie has seen so many "parks' faces" and had so many friends around him for years.

All in all about thirty folk attended – These included, The Worsleys, Graham Hall and Mollie, Di represented the Hull Family (Alistair was away in the Valley), Steve Edwards and Rob Francis from the Falls (well done you two) – Paddy was ill so Debbie accompanied Rob and took a batch of photos for me: Rowan Martin, Charlie Mackie, Andy Hunter, Mark Brightman. The organizers – Tokkie and Odette Lind, Roger Parry plus Carol and Alistair Williams (Willem's daughter and son on law) I apologize if anyone's been left anyone out, it's certainly not intentional, I'm using

Debbie's pictures for reference purposes and may well have messed up! (Steve Edwards was another of the "official team photographers" - hopefully I'll receive his contribution shortly)
It has been muted the "Ruwa experience" should be repeated on a fairly regular basis, I believe every six months was suggested! I couldn't agree more so let's start thinking about another braai some time in June'07!

Dagaboy in and around the Falls

Stats and facts on the "Falls" community ex Alan Sparrow & Steve Edward -
There is something about the Victoria Falls and the Zambezi River that attracts ex-Parks people, ex-Foresters and Professional Hunters and Guides. Here is an initial list of Dagaboy living within a 30km radius of Victoria Falls and a note on what it is they are currently doing.

<i>Drew Conybeare</i>	-	<i>Wildlife ecologist (Consulting)</i>
<i>Steve Edwards</i>	-	<i>Lodge owner and safari lodge manager</i>
<i>Tim Braybrooke</i>	-	<i>Licensed guide</i>
<i>Roger Parry</i>	-	<i>Bush Awareness courses and training</i>
<i>Dave Boaler</i>	-	<i>Based in Victoria Falls and working abroad</i>
<i>Alan Sparrow</i>	-	<i>Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Park project</i>
<i>Rob Francis</i>	-	<i>Shearwater Safaris</i>
<i>Doug Evans</i>	-	<i>Chundukwa Lodge near Livingstone</i>
<i>Gavin Best</i>	-	<i>Wild Horizons</i>
<i>Glen Tatham</i>	-	<i>Livingstone Air Safaris (Pilot)</i>

Other Dagaboy on the Zambezi:

*Mark Butcher owns Gorges Lodge near Victoria Falls although he lives in Bulawayo.
Howard Shackleton owns and runs a sport fishing camp at Mwandu about 130 km upstream from the Victoria Falls*

Children of former National Parks members living in the Falls are:

*Brent Williamson (Safari Par Excellence)
Leslie Elton (Daughter of Scratch Tebbit)*

Rumour has it that Mike Bunce will soon move to the Victoria Falls area.

Wannabee

*The "almost" Dagaboy living in the Falls area is:
Trevor Lane is a former Lumberjack (ex-Forestry Commission) and affiliate Dagaboy. Trevor owns and runs Dabula Safaris in Victoria Falls.*

New Email Address Details

Hans & Val van der Heiden	hansval@xtra.co.nz
Phil & Betty Evans	pevans.6@mweb.co.za
John Herbert	dherbert360@sbcglobal.net
Rob Clifford	rob@robinpopesafaris.net
Adrian & Liz Reed	senanga@telkomsa.net
Scratch & Sheila Tebbit	sheila@parsonsaviation.co.za

Terry & Pam Fenn	fennterry@yahoo.com
Jon Hutton	jon_hutton@hotmail.co.uk
Kevin & Fay Dunham	faykevin@zol.co.zw
Judy Dunjey	jgdsabistar@yahoo.com
Howard & Sherie Shackleton	sherieshack@hotmail.com
Arthur & Joy Wood	Dindlemindle@aol.com
Gary and Carol Charsley	garycharslev@btinternet

The Website

Yes, still up and running but with the exception of the last newsletter and possibly some obituary notices and tributes the picture gallery remains unchanged.

Looking back and in hindsight – picture quality amongst other things was sacrificed in my haste to get a few photographs onto the site. The work was certainly not to the standard required so in time it's going to have to be removed and replaced with high quality material.

All slides, prints and scanned photographs received since the beginning of the year have been touched up. In the case of really badly faded or aged colour pictures these are being converted into a "black and white" format, which retains detail but obviously not colour.

Richard Peek has done a sterling job and can only be commended for his efforts in doing the "upgrades" – in many instances it's not only time consuming but pretty laborious work restoring photographs to their original state, in some instances the end result may even be a superior quality picture from that emanating from the Kodak labs or pharmacy; the results obtained from "tweaking" the light, contrast etc and erasing scratches is amazing, I make it sound all very easy but there is a lot more to the restoration work than that.

Since April I have referenced and notated close to three hundred photographs and have still another bunch to work through. I had hoped to do quite a number this month but for various reasons this just hasn't happened, January may be better. Just by the bye and to set minds at rest credits are given, the names of those who took the pictures or who made them available from collections are detailed on the right hand side below the text, the reference number appears on the left.

Without going into too much detail the previous filing system, if I can call it that, was totally inadequate – It was impossible to keep tabs on completed work, that outstanding and anything else for that matter, it had to be scrapped! I have categorized the collection into files under several major headings such Parks, Management, Policing etc which are then subdivided as necessary: The referencing of photographs is being kept manageable and simple.

The pictures will be sent through to Odette within a couple of months., she too is to be applauded for the work she puts in for it's also time consuming and exacting .

Hopefully Odette will take the original stuff off and use the file formats from here, I think every one will be amazed at what we've managed to do and I feel sure the photographs will rekindle many memories.

The Parks Archives

To be brief and to the point – unless we make a really concerted effort to gather records, information and personal accounts everything we worked for will be a thing of the past and forgotten within the next ten years. That is not being dramatic, whether you like it or not it's merely a statement of fact!

Over the past couple of years I have managed to gather bits and pieces, it's itsy bitsy stuff, lacking core material. Looking back in time to the mid sixties many of our parks were in their infancy – Take Matusadona, Chizarira or the Gonarezhou as examples. What were they before the likes of Rob Francis, the Thomson brothers (Ron and Bob) Tim Braybrooke and John Osborne continued with the pioneering work started by Lofty Stokes/ Paul and Clem Coetsee on the lakeshore, others in escarpment above Binga, Boyd Reese together with a handful rangers (Game Department) at Chipinda Pools - nothing more than vast tracts of wilderness. Kyle is yet another case in point as is the Matetsi story. The RECCE scheme – Dave Rushworth the guiding light in pioneering a unique strategy in conservation education – a school in the bush, this story needs to be told.

But what of the work our research lads put in, many of us really didn't appreciate what they were doing or where they were coming from and saw our scientists as bumbling degreed "know alls." Their role in our management strategies cannot be overlooked and I would appeal here for some input from our old bush boffins.

Ultimately I hope we can put a little publication together but that depends entirely on what's received. That's the general idea anyway but in any event we need to collect information, photographs and records as quickly as possible – if we don't they will be lost for all time, ultimately someone will make use of them.

Having dished out a couple of swipes which hopefully will stimulate a few to put pen to paper, it's time to laud and thank the handful who made the effort to jot down some of their memories:

- Tim Braybrooke, with the help of Paddy Francis who took and typed out notes, has been looking back at Wankie in the late 50's – did any of you know there was a bushman village at Main Camp?
- Steve Edwards has written up a very interesting account on his anti-poaching efforts in the valley in the mid 80's.
- Bob Thomson on the demise of Chizarira. A poignant account relating to the terrorist attack on Chizarira and wanton destruction that culminated in the burning of all the staff houses and the admin / research office complex.
- Tom Fynn – Anecdotes from his Wankie days.
- Trish Parsons (Tebbit) has been an absolute star providing me as she has with a little insight into her father. Her reminiscences of Wankie seen as they were through the eyes of a four or five year old have been written with a great deal of alacrity and fervor – from here descriptive style one can picture the events being described! How many of us who joined in the early and mid sixties ever knew or saw "JC" as being anything other than a competent administrator, a stickler for dress and discipline as was his want as the then Regional Warden Matabeleland and later as the Department's first Chief Warden. Well, there's a great deal more to our "Uncle" John, he never talked of his days in the field or the patrols he undertook but believe me when I quote a modern idiom and note - "He's been there, done it"

Richard Aylward and Tom Fynn have done some writing on a more personal vein for Kevin Thomas who has already published a number of articles. Hopefully Kevin will allow us to share these stories.

Op Noah – Rupert the Rhino

A photograph circulated by memoriesofrhodesia.com of a young boy reading in an easy chair with Rupert the rhino lying almost at his feet. The youngster has been

identified as being Mike Condy, son of the late Dr John Condy, who now lives in Johannesburg.

Off hand I don't know how many enquiries were received. John reared the rhino so it wasn't too difficult to establish that the picture was taken in his house. At the time the answer came out we were trying to locate John's daughter whom I believe still lives in Harare. We can now put this issue to bed!

Conservation Issues

a. Wants, Needs or "Pipe Dreams"

From the Harare Herald – 17th Nov'

The Parks and Wildlife Management Authority requires about \$10 billion to complete the erection and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure in Great Limpopo Transfrontier National Park (GLTP).

The funds would be used to renovate and construct lodges, roads and electrify some of the structures.

Projects included the opening of a road to link Chilojo Cliffs to Chipinda Pools, electrification of newly constructed lodges, and renovating chalets that are to be turned into lodges.

Appraising players in the tourism sector on the progress made in improving infrastructure in the park, the regional manager (southern region), Mr Stanley Ruswa, said the authority was also looking at the construction of a reception at Chipinda Pools and internal fittings of staff houses.

"A total of \$10 billion is needed to finish infrastructure development in Gonarezhou, although some adjustments will be made as we move on.

"We are going to have staff in those areas and they also need accommodation. We also want to put up conference facilities at Mabhalauta Rest Camp, water reticulation at Chipinda Pools and a water tank at Mtombeni Camp," he said.*

The country is in the process of upgrading its tourist facilities in line with regional efforts to capitalise on the upcoming 2010 World Cup extravaganza to be hosted by South Africa.

South Africa and Mozambique are the other members of the Transfrontier Park. South Africa has already completed a number of developmental projects while Mozambique has contracted SA companies to carry out the rehabilitation exercise.

Once completed GLTP would afford tourists a unique opportunity to sample the best of the region's wildlife in one package.

* Name change or just a miss spelling of "Mabalauta" the sub-region head quarters.

The name of the rest camp is Swimuwini not Mabalauta rest camp. The camp takes its name from the handful of large baobabs that occur in fairly close proximity to each other on the little rise overlooking the Nuanetsi River. The five original chalets were each positioned close to a baobab. Swimuwini crudely translates to "The place of the Baobabs"

At the time the article was written \$10 billion equated to an astronomical sum of money which-ever way one looks at the figures – the "official" exchange rate is 250:1 (Zimbabwe dollars to the US dollar, the parallel or black market rate in November was probably in the region of 1800 / 2000:1) My Mathematics may be a little poor but presuming the Authority works within the parameters of the official rate the money required amounts to some 40 million American Dollars or +/- 280 million rand to fund the project.

This then begs the question - Has the Parks Authority, now an autonomous body, the ability to raise this type of money for capital investment when funds for day to day upkeep and maintenance requirements are basically non-existent? Or, is it just another well-timed politically statement aimed at appeasing our neighbors and partners in this project, time will tell!

b. Hunting in the Gonarezhou – Officially Sanctioned?

The following article appeared in “The Zimbabwean” towards the end of September and a day or so later in various overseas press reports. The original source notes the dates of the incident as being the 6th and 7th of September!

Disturbing reports have been received of government sanctioned hunting, operating in Zimbabwe's part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

Some local tourists who visited Sumaweni (Swimuwini) camp at Buffalo bend, southwest of Gonarezhou, two weeks ago were told they had to move camp because a safari outfit, Victoria Falls Hunters, had arrived a few days earlier with a client Mr. Edd Chiziva, to hunt in the park. They were told that the safari company had government connections.

Johnny Rodrigues, Chairman for Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force (ZCTF), said: "The next morning the tourists saw two safari vehicles leave the camp with people on the back of the vehicle holding rifles, a few minutes later they heard shots fired from a heavy caliber rifle which made them very nervous because it was so close to the camp. The tourists then decided to pack up and leave, whilst they were doing this three more shots were fired with one bullet ricocheting somewhere close by."

When the tourists questioned the warden about the hunting he was "very apologetic" and said that he had no control over the matter at all. He also suggested that the tourists not talk about what they had seen. In addition to this incident there have been other reports of hunting and poaching in the area involving National Parks personnel. Tourists on a game drive opposite the Nyahomgwe River confluence with the Lundi River stumbled across a camp full of National Parks employees hanging and drying vast quantities of meat, which they said, had come from two impala caught in traps. The tourists noted, however, that the quantity of meat was much more than two impala's worth.*

The Transfrontier Park was set up in 2003 and covers 35,000 square kilometers in Mozambique (Limpopo Park), South Africa (Krugers Park) and Zimbabwe (Gonarezhou). The park was opened by President Robert Mugabe himself along with Thabo Mbeki and Joaquim Chissano in December 2002. The idea was to turn the area into a huge ecosystem to help protect the wildlife and also attract tourists from South Africa's Krugers Park to visit Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou and Mozambique without the hassle of long border crossings.

Mr. Rodrigues said that the ZCTF had reported the illegal hunting to both National Parks and the Minister of Environment and National Resources but to date had "no response whatsoever".

This subject was, I believe, recently brought up with the Director at the SOAZ (Safari Operators Association of Zimbabwe) AGM – some what of a “hot potato” I gather - strangely no one seem to know a thing!

From what I recall this is not the first time Swimuwini has been used to house hunters and very possibly the same operator. I certainly do not agree with this and would note that hunting operations should be conducted entirely from within the area for which permits have been granted. Rightly or wrongly the Authority, which receives little in

the way of good internal press, will continue to be criticized if they allow this practice to continue. Visitors do not want to see safari vehicles traipsing through a national park with hunters on board or carrying recently taken trophies.

* Unable to trace what river it is that the author refers to as is being the "Nyahomgwe" – Richard Peek, Rob Francis and Richard Aylward all of whom knew the area well don't know!

c. Zambezi River – Mysterious Deadly Fish Infection

From SciDev.Net (London) December 13, 2006

A deadly but as yet unidentified infection among fish in backwaters of the Zambezi River has been detected, sparking fears that the disease could be transmitted to humans.

The infection could affect up to four out of every five fish caught in some parts of Africa's fourth largest river, which flows through eight southern African countries and supports an estimated 40 million people.

Fishermen in Katima Mulilo, Namibia began reporting serious sores on fish in early October, according to Nyambe Nyambe, a Zambian environment and development consultant to the government.

The infection causes blisters and sores, and eats away at the fins and tails of multiple fish species -- notably breams, minnows and catfish -- eventually killing them, although the fatality rate is unknown. There are fears that some villagers are eating infected fish.

"Some fish parasites can be transmitted to humans," said Christopher Magadza, a fresh water specialist in Zimbabwe and former director of the University of Zimbabwe's Lake Kariba Research Station. He added that they can cause muscular cysts and intestinal worms.

"Fish must be cooked thoroughly, otherwise people might ingest fish parasites, smoke drying does not kill the fish parasites," he told SciDev.Net.

"There are reports that some people who ate some affected fish fell sick and our officials are on the ground talking to medical staff who may have treated these people," said Charles Maguswi, Zambia's director of fisheries.

He told SciDev.Net that the infestation was very serious, and called for experts in all affected countries to share information about the issue.

Expert opinion is divided as to the nature, cause and extent of the infestation, which could be caused by a parasite or bacteria. Samples of the infected fish are being examined to comprehend the cause, extent and likely consequences of the outbreak.

"It could be [caused by] a sudden arrival of migrant birds," Magadza suggested.

"Extremely high temperatures can also cause the rapid development of fish parasites, and this seems to be a very serious infestation, but the lack of data on water temperature and fish deformities makes it difficult to read the trends," he said.

Fishmongers reported that they have removed worm-like parasites from some of the caught fish.

"I think this is a regional problem and we are thinking of a collaborative effort in dealing with it," said Shaft Nengu, Botswana's deputy director of fisheries.

The Zambezi River, which has its source in Zambia, is the largest river flowing into the Indian Ocean and runs for 2,700 kilometres through Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

If angling catches are anything to go by this horror story is not anything new, it may have been going on for a lot longer than people realize: In the Ruzi. River in 2004 Mike Fynn caught a large Mozambica that displayed the "rotting" fin and tail

symptoms noted above. In 2006 in elephant bay, also in the Chete area, another “mozie” in the most appalling condition was caught – it was covered in ulcers with large portions of all fins having disappeared, after some “umming” and “aahing” as to what should be done the fish was put in a separate keep net and later disposed of on dry land.

So how bad is the lake effected – of the two fish noted above one showed characteristics of the infection being well advanced whilst the other displaying symptoms that most laymen could see where not right. Looking at it from a percentage basis I guess it equated to slightly less than 2% of our catch for the two years mentioned. Those figurers don’t give any indication as to what’s what but I suspect the situation is a lot worse than we all realize.

It does surprise me somewhat that the Kariba Fisheries Research Institute has not been forth coming with any information.

d. Looking at both sides of the Victoria Falls

ZimOnline 15.12.06

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has ordered the Zimbabwe government to remove a dump site near the Victoria Falls arguing that it is polluting the tourist resort area.

The dumpsite, in the poor suburb of Chinotimba, is a few kilometers away from the famous Victoria Falls which is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

The call to move the dumpsite came as UNESCO officials met Representatives from the governments of Zimbabwe and Zambia to address development projects at the Falls.

UNESCO says Victoria Falls risks being delisted as a World Heritage Site because of uncontrolled industrial developments that could disturb its natural environment.

Sources that attended the meeting held in the resort town last week, said UNESCO had also ordered Harare to stop using a helipad at Elephant Hills Hotel in the resort town. “The UNESCO officials at the meeting also resolved that Zimbabwean authorities should stop Elephant Hills Hotel from using a helicopter pad situated within the hotel,” • said the source.

Zambia and Zimbabwe have in the past accused each other of causing environmental damage to the Victoria Falls with UNESCO threatening to remove the Falls from its list of world heritage sites.

There have been reports that the Zambian government had approved massive plans to build a large hotel, chalets and a world-class golf course on the Zambia side of the Falls.

The Victoria Falls was one of Zimbabwe's biggest tourist attractions before the tourism sector collapsed because of bad publicity surrounding President Robert Mugabe's violent and chaotic land reforms.

Those who know the “Falls” will agree the Chimotimba dump site is not only a ballooning blight on the environment but also a massive health hazard. Sorry, but I don’t see the pussy footing about on the “delisting” of the Falls as anything more than an empty threat.

Had the UNESCO visitors imposed a realistic time frame on the government and council to clean up its act it would have been more meaningful. Similarly the same threat should have made to the Zambian authorities, Livingstone Council (?) to stop polluting the Zambezi River, thousands of cusecs of effluent and raw sewerage emanating from Livingstone and it’s environs are pumped into the river daily. Both

are serious issues with the latter possibly compounding the fish infection problem downstream, it certainly can't do it any good loading the system with nutrients and waste as it does. Ultimately it's going to kill Kariba.

e. Green light for Landmark African Nature Park

Making the Cape Times front-page news on the 12th of December was the following story:

Five southern African countries have signed an agreement to establish the biggest conservation area in the world - a massive trans-frontier national park 14 times the size of the Kruger National Park and almost as big as Italy.

The Peace Parks Foundation has described the move as the most significant conservation effort undertaken in Africa in the last 100 years.

Called the Kavango-Zambezi trans-frontier conservation area, the park will be situated in the Okavango and Zambezi river basins and will cover an area of 287 132 square kilometres. It is likely to be formally established in 2010.

The announcement was made on Monday by the Peace Parks Foundation. The governments of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe signed the memorandum of understanding at a ceremony at the Victoria Falls in which they committed themselves to working together to establish the park.

Werner Myburgh, project manager of Peace Parks Foundation, said on Monday:

"From a conservation perspective, this is the most significant effort in Africa in the last 100 years."

The park will link 36 national parks, game reserves, community conservancies and game management areas. Some of the most notable of these are the Caprivi Strip, the Chobe National Park, the Okavango Delta, which is the largest Ramsar site in the world, and the Victoria Falls, a World Heritage Site and one of the seven natural wonders of the world.

The park will have about 250 000 elephants, the largest elephant population in the world, and may reduce the pressure to cull elephant populations.

While the primary function of trans-frontier parks is conservation of the natural environment, they also have spin-offs of tourism and job creation.

"The main function of such a park is of course conservation, primarily because it creates ecological linkages that cross international borders and allows movement of wildlife across these barriers. It is vital to secure these links. But if managed well, these parks can have major tourist spin-offs.

"One of the reasons is that it allows freer movement of tourists between game areas.

For instance, if a tourist is in Zambia and wants to go the Caprivi now, they will have to go through about four international border posts, but once the Kavango-Zambezi is established, tourists could move there freely," Myburgh said.

He said the establishment of the trans-frontier park may give elephant culling "a breathing space".

"One research model says that if elephants move over large areas between water points, there is a natural dying off of youngsters, which doesn't happen now in the restricted areas. There are about 120 000 elephants in Botswana alone, about 10 000 in Kafue, which is about twice the size of Kruger and virtually none in Angola. Once the Transfrontier Park is established, the elephants will be able to move from one country to another. But first the fences have to come down, the landmines removed and the ribbon development of people along rivers and roads must stop.

"It is very challenging, but very exciting. We already have a major potential donor in the form of the German Development Bank.

"This is unusual, as normally one has to have the product before one gets the funding," Myburgh said.

This is one of 20 existing and potential trans-frontier parks in the Southern African Development Community.

The SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement of 1999 defines a trans-frontier park as a large ecological region that straddles the boundaries of two or more countries, encompassing one or more protected areas, as well as multiple resource areas.

The parks are also designed to lead to enhancement of socio-economic development in the region through nature-based or wildlife tourism, and to promote a culture of peace and regional co-operation.

f. Who is Poaching What?

Although this a perennial and never ending problem there has been a very nasty turn and upswing in cross border "raiding"

Black rhino once again have been targeted by both local and foreign-based poachers – the Midlands Conservancy lost another two animals late in September and at least two rhino have been shot by Zambians in the Sinamatella / Robins since October. The first of the known incidents in Wankie was shortly before the annual game count when an adult male was shot. WES members were driving in the vicinity of Chingahobe Dam close to where the incident occurred - 20 shots over a period of a half an hour were counted! One cannot but help wondering at the brazenness of it all, the poachers appear to show little fear and complete disdain towards those in authority. Had the game count not been in progress the incident would have gone undetected, of this I have no doubt! In the follow up that ensued all, including one who was wounded at Bejani dam, escaped across the Zambezi via Tsowa Island.

From the Cape Times (19th October)

Two arrested as 11 elephants killed in Zimbabwe

Harare - Zimbabwean officials have recovered 22 tusks after suspected poachers killed 11 elephants in a state wildlife park, official media reported yesterday, adding that cases of poaching were on the rise. Two people were arrested. Zimbabwe is home to some of Africa's largest game reserves, but local conservation activists say some species such as elephant and rhino are at risk from cross-border trophy hunters and rampant poaching by people struggling with hunger and rising poverty. The country's security agents, who exchanged gunfire with the poachers, said two people were arrested while some of the poachers fled to Zambia through Botswana. The elephants were killed in Chizarira National Park in central Zimbabwe. Richard Mbewe, the National Parks and Wildlife Department spokesman, blamed the incidents on human encroachment into wildlife sanctuaries. "Chizarira is a problematic spot because of the border and the communities encroaching into wildlife areas," Mbewe said. Conservationists say President Robert Mugabe's land seizures have seen some villagers settling in or near wildlife parks and becoming involved in subsistence poaching while also giving cover to cross-border poachers. Officials put Zimbabwe's elephant population at 89 000, more than half in Hwange National Park in the west, and say lack of funds has hamstrung the country's effective wildlife management capabilities.

From The Bulawayo Chronicle and Yahoo News (31st December)

HARARE (AFP) - Suspected Zambian poachers have killed 17 elephants and a rhino in neighbouring Zimbabwe and wounded a game ranger based near the famed Victoria Falls bordering the two countries.

The ranger from National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority was now recovering at a private hospital in the country's second city of Bulawayo, the Sunday Mail said Sunday.

"On Friday, an aerial view was conducted and what was established was that 17 elephant carcasses ranging from fresh to semi-fresh were discovered," an unnamed wildlife source told the weekly

"All of them had their tusks missing. The most affected area has been the Robins Camp. One rhino has been reported to have been killed,"

Parks and Wildlife Management Authority spokesman Edward Mbewe said: "We experienced some problems of poaching during the festive season and few weeks before.

"In Victoria Falls, we had contact with the poachers and they ran away into Zambia. Three weeks back or in early December in the northern region we also encountered some poachers from outside the country. One, who is of Zambian origin, was apprehended and is assisting us with investigations," he said.

Poachers were also detected at about the same time in the Hwange National Park, Mbewe said.

"We suspect that these are the same poachers who have been coming from Zambia." Ivory trade in Zimbabwe is controlled under a 1997 United Nations convention on trade in endangered species (CITES) which allows for trade in ivory obtained from elephants which died from natural causes.

Trade in ivory was banned in 1989 in an effort to protect elephant herds, which had been ravaged by the demand for tusks, particularly from Asia.

ZimOnline (17th October)

MASVINGO - A Zimbabwe deputy government minister is under investigation for alleged poaching in the giant Gonarezhou National park and Save Conservancies in the lowveld, ZimOnline has learnt.

Environment and Tourism Minister Francis Nhema confirmed the probe telling ZimOnline yesterday that a special taskforce on tourism which was set up by the government was already in the lowveld probing the allegations. "My ministry is investigating allegations of poaching by top government officials including a deputy minister in Gonarezhou and Save Valley conservancies," said Nhema.

The minister however refused to divulge the name of the deputy minister implicated in the poaching activities.

A spokesman for the National Parks, Retired Major Edward Mbewe said: "Poaching in our national parks has always been a challenge and we have since engaged the help of the army to control the illegal practice."

*Several endangered animal species such as the black rhino have been found dead in sanctuaries over the past two months amid reports that senior army and police officials were behind the illegal hunting activities. **

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife, in charge of national parks in the country, has found it hard to contain poaching in national parks.

For example, three suspected poachers were seriously injured in a shoot-out with parks officials in Gonarezhou national park last week. The three are still detained at Chiredzi district hospital where they are under police guard.

Poaching has been rife in Zimbabwe since landless villagers began invading - with the government's tacit approval - white-owned farms six years ago.

There have also been widespread reports of illegal and uncontrolled trophy hunting on former white-owned conservancies now controlled by powerful government and ruling ZANU PF party politicians. The government however denies that politicians are illegally hunting game and insists it still has poaching under control.

** I have underscored this paragraph as it indicates more rhino have been lost than we know about!*

g. Sharon Pincott

Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force Statement - 29th November 2006

A sad day for the Presidential Elephants of Zimbabwe.

It is with disappointment - and with feelings of disillusionment and regret - that Sharon Pincott has finally decided to leave Zimbabwe, and the 'Presidential Elephants' to whom she has dedicated (on a voluntary basis) the past 6 years of her life.

Sharon has fought tirelessly for the ongoing protection of Zimbabwe's Flagship herd of elephants; for the land which used to be their key home range; and for their well-being and safety. But too often, she says, her concerns are met with a great void of silence.

Sharon produced two successful books about her time amongst the Presidential Elephants, and recently released important information on the negative impact of gunfire on elephant conception rates. She spent years monitoring the social structure and population dynamics of the Presidential Elephants of Zimbabwe, and successfully raised awareness about the dreadful snaring situation – and some of the truths about elephants in general. It is with regret that she leaves her work incomplete. It is proof, however, of her dedication and tenacity that she has stayed on full-time in the Hwange bush for as long as she has, even in the face of past threats, intimidation, and the ongoing apathy of some. Sharon says: "The Presidential Elephant family groups frequent the (Zimsun/Touch the Wild) 'Hwange Estate' relatively infrequently now. There is so little to drink these days and nowhere to bathe. Key pans are not being properly maintained. In addition, the elephants are still recovering from unethical gunfire. Lengthy, precise sightings of the Presidential families are more often than not only intermittent now - and relatively few compared to earlier years. There is no point me wasting further time and effort."

In her latest book titled 'A Year Less Ordinary: In the Company of Zimbabwe's Grey Giants', Sharon describes the sad impact - both on the elephants and on the likes of herself who love them - of the land claims within the elephants' home-range; of unethical hunting; of the terrible snaring; and of the apathy of some. (Her first book titled 'In An Elephant's Rumble: Life Amongst the Presidential Elephants of Zimbabwe' is all but sold out.)

"Despite some high-level support, the past three years have been stressful to say the very least. This piece of tourism land was eventually returned and sport hunting banned," says Sharon. "But more problems, and more concerns, just continue to arise, week after week. One can only bang one's head against a brick wall for so many years. And I've been in the thick of it, doing it full-time, for a lot longer than most."

"The Presidential Elephants deserve better," says Sharon. "As do other Hwange

National Park elephants too. But I have come to the conclusion - finally - that the Presidential Elephants will probably never get the 'better' which they deserve. I cannot continue to promote something that is, more often than not these days, no longer there."

Reflecting on her latest book she says, sadly, that it's not about 'Trust', 'Faith' and 'Hope' after all. "It's about lost-Hope now."

Next year, Sharon will continue her voluntary wildlife conservation efforts elsewhere in Africa.

Footnote - I have heard Sharon has been offered a challenging position working with elephant elsewhere in Zimbabwe. At this point I do not know whether she has taken up the offer.

Disgraceful & Sickening

The piece that follows is appalling, it's cruel and callous. From information received it's not an isolated incident. This is the article as received:

TYPEWRITTEN COPY OF ORIGINAL HANDWRITTEN LETTER FROM L.A.D.

GUSH, Tel Hre 788025/091409541

29th October 2006

(any typos are direct transcription from author's letter)

PLOT 478

CHIRUNDU

TEL. 695

ZERO TOLERANCE – CHIRUNDU ON GAME

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I have been involved in Chirundu through either my marine business or my Residential house on the hill for the past 26 years and know the place and environment well.

At the onset of this letter, I have never shot game and therefore do not know the characteristics of their actions when shot.

But last week, whilst up there on maintenance, I witnessed a situation that would sicken the most ardent hunter, committed by National parks Ranger (I only saw one person in green uniform).

My house, which is on the hill, overlooks the floodplain below, and at approx 5.30p.m. on Friday last week, I was sitting outside glassing the floodplains below looking for game.

Amazingly, I noticed a not mature elephant, approaching the hill top, on the plains below – which went into the thick scrub at the base of the hill, below me, out of sight at approx 5.15p.m.

The following incident then took place:

I heard 4-5 shots in rapid succession ring out below me

As the shots occurred at the base of the hill, which is out of sight from my position, I jumped upon my pool pump house to get a better view

I saw this single elephant, trying to scamble away on front kneecaps, as it appeared to me that it had lost the ability to fully stand properly.

The elephant, tried to scamble away, on the road below me, this was followed by a further 4-5 shots into what appeared to me its backside, as the elephant was trying to

run south and the shots coming from the north, on base of hill. The shooter was still obscured from the road, as he was still at the base of the hill. Shots fired so far approx 10. Time period 30-40 seconds

A further volley of shots range out from the same positions, as described above, in rapid succession, again in what appeared to be its backside – total 10-15 shots.

TOTAL SHOTS +/- 25 – TIME FRAME +/- 60 SECONDS

In what seemed like an enormous time frame of 2-3 mins, no more shots fired (possibly changing magazine). Total shots fired approx +/- 25 – total time 4 min.

A National parks ranger was then seen to run parallel to the scrabbling elephant, eventually getting ahead of him. Approx a further 10-15 shots fired into the elephant from either side on, on frontal into the head, I could see the dust fly off the elephant from the bullet impact. The elephant turned and scrabbled in a northerly direction from whence, it came, as the National parks Ranger was ahead of him. The elephant was by now partially disabled, but could still move slowly on its knee caps. **TOTAL SHOTS FIRED – 40 – TOTAL TIME 6 MIN**

The ranger then casually walked up to the elephant that was now feeling the effects of the bullets and fired 3-5 shots into the Head of the elephant, the elephant was at this time crouched down on all fours, but its head held high, with these extra shots, it collapsed onto its side, still very much alive, a further heavy caliber weapon was heard to discharge, and the elephant appeared to be dead. Total shots fired +/- 45 from low caliber weapon, possible AK47 + 1 heavy caliber. Total time 7 min. Distance from my line of sight to elephant, 200mts.

My questions now being:

The floodplains below were always teeming with game – today you rarely see even an impala in over a week

My staff tell me that elephants are regularly shot within Chirundu township and that this is No. 9 this year.

Tim Balance – owner Tiger Safaries – tel Chirundu 633 or cell 011-218594 whom I contacted after this incident, confirms 9 elephant shot – the eighth +/- 2 weeks ago within 200mts of his chalet complex, full of tourists who witnessed a similar incident, but not as gory, but many shots fired with AK47 – tourists so disgusted that part of 12 left immediately vowing never to return!

Tim asked me to do a report on the above incident, which I did and he was going to E mail my report to Johnny Rodrigues, which he did.

I then contacted a friend of my in Cape Town who is a BBC correspondent, but away on Breaking Story – she still to get back to me.

Tim Balance then came up next day to get my statement as he was also putting forward his statement, plus 1 other from another Resident who witnessed a similar incident. He told me the following: please contact him. The Warden Marongora – political appointee – will make no statement – advise from Head Office – the people from Chirundu now demand meat once per month on regular basis. Any rogue or Deemed Dangerous elephants to be shot on the spot – no attempt will be made to conserve these animals, he even pleads with National parks to put a stop to this, as it affects his tourist trade and viability (hence 12 tourists packing up and going)

My domestic staff purchased 4kg elephant meat on my previous visit +/- 2 weeks ago, and gave me to take back to Hre for his wife – he paid the Ranger 1.2k for this and received no receipt – this was the remains of No 8 elephant. The National parks ranger was seen that night at locale Bar in inebriated state.

My staff and Tim Balance inform me that on 2-3 occasions, the wrong elephant has shot and they only stop when they feel the correct one has been shot, if they feel it's a rogue.

In this whole scenario, it appears that Bush Meat is the objective, and financial reward is the prime reason, i.e. no receipt, no accounting.

Initially it saddens me that National Parks who are supposed to look after our game, have deteriorated to such low depths, shooting Big game, with low caliber military weapons, that put the animal in extreme pain, for long periods before its Death, and the inhumane Shooting of knee capping, these magnificent animals, so they cannot escape.

Again I state I have never shot game and do not know that when shot an elephant falls on its front knees and tries to escape, But that is how I saw it and getting shot in the backside is appalling to say the least.

At Rifa there resides a Resident Big Game Hunter – why can't he do this work, instead of these inept rangers, who have no experience and know nothing of single shot culls with correct weapons in short time periods.

For obvious reasons I have felt it wise not to include the name of the writer!

This is by far the worst incident however not the only report emanating from Chirundu.

From The Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force Report – 13th October.

We have received reports from disgusted and heartbroken tourists about elephants being shot by National Parks staff in Chirundu. Some South African tourists have vowed never to come back here. On the one hand, Zimbabwe is trying to promote tourism and on the other, destroying any chances of reviving it.

In the first case, an elephant killed the caretaker of a safari camp so National Parks shot it in full view of tourists who were visiting the neighbouring camp. The local people believed the wrong elephant had been shot. Soon afterwards, an employee of the neighbouring camp was attacked and almost killed by an elephant so that elephant was also shot by National Parks and it was found to have a wound on its head so it is believed that this was the same elephant that killed the caretaker. It is believed that the first elephant was shot in error.

On the 2nd September, the caretaker of a safari camp had too much to drink, stole the company vehicle and then walked into an elephant which killed him. The next day, this elephant was shot by National Parks, again in very close proximity to a safari camp so that tourists witnessed the killing. They say that the elephant was shot 16 times before it finally died.

*A few days later, another elephant was shot. Upon enquiries, a National Parks official in Chirundu replied that this elephant was shot because it was causing problems with truckers. However, a junior official said that this was the elephant that had killed the caretaker and the first one shot, with 16 bullets, had been the wrong one. A fifth elephant was shot, apparently because it knocked over a phone booth. It is reported that it took 40 bullets to kill this one. The following is an eyewitness account of the incident. **

* Reported above

The last incident took place in Charara recently – the writer closes the piece below with the following words – “Pamberi ne National Parks.”

Four parks officials were involved. Although it's a little hard to discern at least two are carrying and using Ak's!

I have five photographs from the clip and will willingly forward them to those interested.

*Herewith further evidence of how well trained and professional our Zim National Parks are when it comes to shooting/hunting wildlife. Perfect proof of what happened down in Chirundu recently, and here in Kariba in the past!
This old 'dagga boy' was apparently previously injured.
The incident took place at Charara site last week, and was captured on digi cam by friends. Parks were NOT pleased that it had been filmed!
Note the bravery displayed by the one individual in pic no. four as he flees for his life. Judging by the stance of the individuals and the amount of smoke and dust, it is obvious they are using the AK47 on auto or repeat??
When all it needed was one or two well placed shots from a heavy caliber rifle fired by one well trained hunter, with maybe one extra man as backup....' just in case'????*

If this is an example of the calibre of field staff entrusted to manage / protect our wildlife then we are in very serious trouble.

As a footnote to this you will recall a year or so back I made mention of the fact that many game scouts over 45 had been retired and their positions made available to "Border Gezi graduates" – the Chirundu incidents smack of "bully boy" training / indoctrination

Conclusion:

Shadowing a year, dogged by controversy, reports of an upswing in poaching, incidents of indiscipline, corruption etc was the tragic news of Clem, Ian Nyschens, Hazel de Beer and Cathy La Granges' passing.

With so many negatives it's been very difficult to find positive news – so what, if anything, do we have? I believe the initial response to Dagaboys Benevolent fund was extremely encouraging and augers well for the future of this project; With Trish's participation down south and Paddy Francis and Jill Osborne's we have three great motivators.

Then there's the crowd in the Falls whom seem ever so willing to organize themselves and arrange a get together. They have also been of great help with photos, news items and other bits and pieces.

The chaps in Harare also need mentioning for their showing at Ruwa, Ian Nyschens' wake / farewell and finally for the support given to Mike and the La Grange family. The turn out at in Triangle to say both goodbye to Clem and, at the same time, give loving support to Em shows how tightly knit a family we really are. We need to maintain these bonds.

In closing, whilst news on the local conservation front may not have been anything to write home about we, as a body of great individualists have, as in times of old, once again drawn closer to each other.

May 2007 not only be a great year for us all but a year that sees us getting together more often, we just need to make the effort to make this happen!

