

Wildlife Protection - Zambezi & Hwange National Park

Historique

In 2000, a series of political changes occurred in Zimbabwe and caused a rapid economic meltdown as well as the collapse of many vital industries, including agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. This led to widespread unemployment and many socio-economic problems. People with critical food issues had little choice but to enter wildlife areas and kill wild animals for food.

Therefore, the increase in poaching and the economic recession caused many challenges and difficulties for the National Parks and their Authorities. Nowadays, because of the lack of government funding, National Parks have difficulties to function and are relying on external donors and conservation organisations for assistance. For this reason, PU volunteers offer valuable support to the various National Parks Units.

1. Hwange National Park

Hwange was established in 1928 when the first Manager, 22 year-old Ted Davison was sent to transform 14,500sq km of wilderness into a non-hunting wildlife reserve. He set up his headquarters at a place now known as Main Camp, near the village of Dete.

The Park is situated in North Western Zimbabwe along the Botswana border. It is an area with limited surface water and poor rainfall, which is making commercial agriculture impossible. In early times, the land was inhabited by traditional bushman tribes and Ndebele hunters who ventured there during the wet season.

During the dry months of the year, most of the people and animals moved away to the permanent river systems of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers. Hence, in an attempt to provide permanent water and to keep animals in the Park throughout the year, Ted Davison drilled boreholes and pumped underground water into natural pans (shallow waterholes). Animals became dependent on this water supply and no longer needed to leave the Park during the dry season. This process continues today. As a result, the population of many animals has increased dramatically. In fact, nowadays, this region probably hosts the highest density of elephants in the world.

Hwange is Zimbabwe's largest National Park and with more than 500 species recorded, it's a paradise for wildlife enthusiasts.

The Park is divided in three main areas, and each one of them is managed by rangers, manager and environmentalists:

- Main Camp area in the North-East, which is the largest area and where most of researchers and organizations are working/operating.
- Umtshibi, which is 15 kilometres away from Main Camp.
- Sinamatella in the North-West, where there is another camp, named after the area.
- Robins, in the West.

These Camps are actually small villages, located inside of the Park, where tourists and researchers can have access to rentable housings when needed. National Parks' staff working in the area can also live in these housings, as well as their families.

Wildlife in Hwange National Park:

The Park and its ecosystem are relatively well preserved and are even a sanctuary for many regional or world rare species such as cheetahs, painted dogs, rare birds such (Yellow Crimson breasted Shrike, Ground Hornbill...), roan antelopes and Oryx.

Poaching issue:

However, even if fauna is relatively preserved, poaching is still a threat for the park. Thanks to researchers and NGOs working in the park, damages created by poaching and the economic recession have been limited or restricted in Hwange National Park. However, for this situation to be maintained, animals need continued protection. This will help preserving the positive dynamic existing in Hwange Park and which is very fragile because of poaching and hunting threats.

There are two types of poaching in Hwange: subsistence poaching and commercial poaching (targeted rhinos horns and elephants tusks).

There has always been subsistence poaching along the borders of Hwange National Park. Before, small groups of people used bark rope to make "snares" and killed small animals for food. This did not disrupt the animal population. In recent times however, as the economy of Zimbabwe has collapsed, poaching has become commercialized and unsustainable. Using long lines of wire snares, poachers have eliminated entire populations of animals in some National Parks.

2. Zambezi National Park

Zambezi National Park (ZNP) was formed in 1952 by the amalgamation of the Victoria Falls Nature Reserve (set up in 1937) and the Victoria Falls Game Reserve (set up in 1931). The Zambezi National Park is adjacent to the town of Victoria falls and covers a surface of 55 000 ha. The park is crossed by a road going from Victoria Falls to Botswana, which basically divides the park into two very distinct areas: the river section, which is dominated by the presence of the Zambezi River and the Chamabondo vleis section.

Its northern part, called the "Zambezi section", is bordered by the Zambezi River. On the other side of the river, there is Zambia. This area has a denser fauna frequentation, due to the presence of the river.

The southern part of the ZNP (called 'Chamabonda section') is much dryer. The Chamabonda section only has one road, from the South of the park to the North. At the moment there are no tourists visiting this side of the park due to a lack of visibility (high grasses) and a lack of attractivity (only one road and very little game viewing).

The park is composed of 4 types of landscapes : a vast open swathe with high grasses (southern part), small bushes (both southern and northern parts), the Kalahari forest (more like woodlands, with big trees growing on sand, both in Northern and Southern sections) and the river side (northern section).

Tourism in ZNP :

Nowadays, and since the poaching dramatically increased in 2008, there are not enough animals in the park to attract tourists. However, in the North of the park, there are actually four lodges for housing tourists . Most of people coming to the Park are Zimbabweans or Victoria Falls residents.

Wildlife in ZNP :

In Zambezi National Park live numerous species, such as elephants, cheetah, impalas, reedbucks, sables and waterbucks. However, the park has still to be developed and dynamized in order to attract tourists.

Poaching in ZNP :

As in Hwange National Park, there are two types of wildlife poaching in ZNP, subsistence poaching and commercial poaching.

- Subsistence poaching in ZNP is mostly a threat for impalas, as their number is rapidly diminishing. However, Kudus, which are also a target of this type of poaching, are reproducing fast enough not to become endangered.
- Commercial poaching is much more significant and involves very often well organized, funded, and armed networks. This type of poaching is aimed for bigger animals, such as elephants (for their tusks) and buffaloes for their bones because they are worth a lot on the market. These organised poaching networks in ZNP often come from Zambia.

Nowadays, Hwange and Zambezi National Parks' real issue is the lack of resources. Hence, rangers and ecologists do not have access to vehicles in good working order and this is preventing them from doing their job: patrols, data collection... Therefore, organisations such as Bhejane Trust make up for the parks lack of resources by, for instance, bringing their support, maintaining waterholes, transporting rangers and providing useful equipments.

3. Behjane Trust :

The volunteers will work with an organization called Bhejane Trust.

Bhejane Trust is a Zimbabwean organization, founded the 30th July 2012, by three trustees: Stephen Long, Trevor Lane and David Brian Arthur Carson.

Over the past four years, they have been active at Sinamatella and the project has evolved from just rhino monitoring to take in all aspects of assistance to National Parks. With most of their activities at Sinamatella, they are colleagues of the Parks staff. Hence they make collective decisions with Parks and usually work along with them, in order to actually carry through whatever plans they make.

Bhejane Trust's presence at Sinamatella allows them to assist some external research organisations with data collection, mainly sightings of the animals they are studying. The Bhejane Trust was focussing on rhino conservation. The project is now managed by Stephen' son. Indeed, BT continues to assist National Parks in a census of black rhino around Sinamatella. Now, the trust carries out several other projects such as the collection of bird distribution data, regular 24 hour's game counts and road transect counts. BT members also regularly report sightings of Wild Dogs to the Painted Dog Conservation Project, Cheetahs to Cheetah Conservation Zimbabwe and other animals. Since 2013, BT is coordinating collection of data by Parks rangers for the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP).

Data collected by BT and its partners are transferred to park's ecologists in order to help them in managing the park and its ecosystem. For instance, depending on the number of animals seen, environmentalists will decide to reintroduce some species in the park or to keep an eye on some other species. These data also help the park staff fight against poaching by disclosing which species are poached and which animals to protect.

Along with these wildlife based activities, Bhejane also supports the National Park authorities in numerous other ways. In ZNP, BT sometimes provides material and equipment to rangers. BT also assists rangers in Hwange National Park by transporting them and by providing them with food and materials on the field when it is necessary.

Finally, BT supports Sinamatella's school with donations, transport...

BT has no formal employees except one of the trustees: Stephen Long (a trained ecologist), who is based at Sinamatella with his wife Sue. Support and management staff at Victoria Falls and at Sinamatella are unpaid volunteers.

Objectif

The main objective is to assist wildlife conservation in Zambezi and Hwange National Parks by collecting various form of animal population data.

This main objective brings about various activities and sub objectives:

(i) ZNP road transect:

Objective: to produce a set of baseline data for large mammal populations which can be used in subsequent years to monitor population changes.

(ii) 24 hours' count at Chamabondo Vlei.

Objective: same as in (i)

(iii) Road transects and 24 hours' counts at Sinamatella.

Objectives: same as in (i) and (ii)

(iv) "Outlying area patrol"

Objectives:

- detect the presence of rare or other interesting species: Wild Dogs, Black Rhinos, Cheetah, Lions, collared Elephants and Buffaloes, Ostriches and Brown Hyenas.
- search for signs of illegal activity (especially snares) at water points in areas that are rarely patrolled. The aim of this activity is to support the anti-poaching unit and help it to point more efficiently the areas subjected to poaching pressure.
- list birds as per the protocols of the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP 2). This project is now in its second part (the 1st one was in 1997) and its aim is to create a bird atlas.
- locate and monitor nests of vultures and Black Eagles still for the SABAP 2 projects.
- monitor water supplies for animals in areas away from tourist routes.

(v) Mandavu Dam bird count.

Objective: to collect data on bird numbers at Mandavu Dam, which is the largest body of water in the Park and therefore holds a good representative sample of the water birds in residence at any given stage of the year.

(vi) Assistance with game-water supplies.

Objective: To help Parks staff maintain water supplies for animals during the dry season. •Development activities (One day per mission).

Intervention du volontaire

• Supervision of the volunteer :

Referent(s) for supervising the volunteer and missions:

Trevor Lane and Stephen Long. Both are trustees of Bhejane Trust.

Stephen Long will accompany the volunteer on the ground.

• Participation of the volunteer:

DETAILS OF SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES

Apart from road transects, all activities will be carried out by foot, with the protection of armed rangers.

-ZNP road transect:

The counting is done from a vehicle, on roads.

-24 hour's count at Chamabondo Vlei:

Bhejane has taken the responsibility to extend a series of dry season game counts at Masuma Dam in the Sinamatella area, for which data goes back approximately 30 years.

Volunteers are usually working in pairs, and they observe and record all mammals drinking at the dam throughout a 24 hour period. The dam can be watched from a viewing platform with no risk.

-Road transects and 24 hour 's counts at Sinamatella:

Road transects will be done from a vehicle, on roads that are opened to normal tourists.

Sinamatella already has considerable baseline data on populations collected during the past years by volunteers. Hence, to continue monitoring will permit to detect any changes that may trigger management actions by the Parks Authority.

-Assistance with game-water supplies:

A lot of the dry season water supplies for animals are artificial. Pumps are maintained by the Parks Authority. Bhejane Trust assists the Parks staff in keeping this game water infrastructure running.

The objective is especially to maintain solar pumps, which have been donated by Bhejane Trust.

-Development activities (One day per mission):

In Zambezi National Park, these could include work on water supplies for game ,in Chamabondo Vlei, refurbishment of the viewing platforms or in Siansimba Camp, searching for snares along the river.

At Sinamatella, our main development activities involve installation and maintenance of pumps for artificial water supplies for game.

At each water point, volunteers will circle the area, checking the trees and bushes for snares and looking for tracks of Cheetah, Wild Dogs, Ostriches and Rhinos along the paths . They may also set camera traps or collect cameras that were set by previous patrols.

Moreover, at water points, volunteers will note the amount of water available (ie 'full', 'half full', 'nearly empty' etc). This sort of information can be valuable because much of the water supply for animals in Hwange is artificially pumped and knowledge of the amount and distribution of natural water can help when decisions are made about increasing or decreasing the artificial supply.

La mission

Aéroport Victoria Falls

Transfert sur le lieu de mission

At arrival at Victoria Falls volunteers, are met by a driver (Harrison) from a specialist tourist-transfer company and driven to Victoria Falls by minibus. The journey takes approx 20 minutes. From Victoria Falls, transport into the Zambezi National Park is by 4 x 4 open safari vehicle. Depending on the part of the Park the volunteers are going to, the journey takes between thirty minutes and one hour. The journey from Victoria Falls to Sinamatella takes around 3 hours and is by minibus, then by 4 x 4 vehicle at the Park arrival. Throughout the time spent in the park, transport is in 4x4 open-topped safari vehicles.

The volunteers will be met by Trevor Lane, Stephen Long or Harrison at the airport, depending on circumstances.

Victoria Falls airport has a cell-phone network and it is easy for the driver to communicate with Stephen Long or Trevor Lane in case of difficulty. If Harrison collects the volunteers at the airport, Trevor or Stephen will certainly meet and greet them in Victoria Falls which is only 15km from the airport.

Condition d'hébergement et d'intendance

- At Siansimba (Zambezi National Park): The accomodation is in tents, in a camp next to the river. Breakfast and evening meals will be served in camp and lunch will be taken 'in the field'. 3 nights + 1 night at the counting platform ,chamabondo

- At Sinamatella (Hwange National Park): The accomodation is in two or four-bed National Parks Lodges Accommodation which are comfortable and adequately suit the life and activities of field researchers but are not

luxurious. At Sinamatella, breakfast and evening meals are served at Lodge 15 where some of the volunteers will sleep and where we all meet for meals, briefings etc. (4 nights in the lodges + 1 nightcamping at Masuma Dam)

- Camping out in the park: sometimes this is at organized picnic or camping sites with toilets and washing facilities but more often we simply stay somewhere close to the work we are doing and there are no such facilities. (3 nights)

- Victoria falls Rest Camp (Vicfalls) (1 night)

Moyens mis en oeuvre

Bhejane provides tents, mattresses, and other necessary equipment and we carry a supply of fresh water with us. Volunteers should bring their own sleeping bags.

At Zambezi National Park, accommodation is in tents on the site next to the Zambezi River. As at Sinamatella, Bhejane provides tents and mattresses.

Organisation

Number of Volunteers: between 3 and 6 people

The Volunteers will spend approximately half of their time in each Park.

Each volunteer mission will be different because of the ever-changing circumstances in the Parks but a typical two-week programme would be as follows.

PROGRAM:

Day 1 - Arrival at Victoria Falls. Transfer to Zambezi National Park. No formal activity in the afternoon. Overnight in camp.

The transfer from the airport to the park will take approx 1 hour 30 mins. On arrival we will set up camp then spend the rest of the afternoon getting to know each other and discussing the programme for the week.

Day 2 - Vulture nest survey at Chamabona vle. We will drive the length of the Chamabonda vle recording vulture breeding sites and getting to know some of the large mammal species present in the park.

Days 3 and 4 - Road transect mammal counts. We will drive a pre-determined route in the western end of the river section, Zambezi Natinal Park, counting and recording all large mammal species that we see. Likely sightings are baboons, vervet monkeys, kudu, zebra, impala, giraffe, elephant and warthogs.

Day 5 - Travel to Sinamatella, stopping in Victoria Falls town on the way to shop for supplies for the rest of the mission. Transport on the main road will be by mini-bus but in and out of the two Parks will be by open 4 x 4 vehicles.

Day 6 - In the morning we will carry out a briefing on some of the activities for the rest of the mission. Around 11.00 we will depart for a road transect mammal count along the Kashawe loop and Lukosi River Drive. The route is approximately 70km and will take the rest of the day.

Day 7 to 13, activities will include:

Mandavu Dam water-bird count, where we try to count certain species of bird using the dam. We will also be able to get close views of the many other animals using the dam such as buffalo, elephant crocodiles and hippo.

Painted Dog Research. We will join the research team from Painted Dog Research for a day, starting very early in the morning, returning for a late breakfast, then going out again in the afternoon to search for Painted Dogs. We will probably concentrate on the Gurangwenya Pack who breed each year in the hills close to Sinamatella.

12-hour or 24-hour mammal count at Masuma dam. Masuma was counted regularly in the late 80s and early 90s and is always counted in the annual WEZ game count so there is a large body of data which our counts add to. All large mammal species are counted and we can expect to see elephant, buffalo, kudu, impala, warthogs, waterbuck, zebra and hippos.

Overnight accommodation on a 24-hour count is in tents at a public fenced camp site with good facilities (toilets, shower etc). The count

ends at 12.00 and the volunteers will then return to Sinamatella where the data can be entered on the database.

Road transect mammal counts. We will carry out counts along the Salt Spring loop and the Sinamatella River Drive.

Vulture nest monitoring. We will travel to one of the known vulture colonies such as Bumboosie River or Guyu and record nesting activity. This will be done on foot, possibly with assistance from a drone. The distance walked is likely to be around 5km. We will be accompanied by an armed ranger.

Game-water assistance Bhejane trust is heavily involved in supply of water to the animals in the Park ('Game Water supply'). During the dry season there are numerous repairs, both small and large that need to be carried out, often as a result of damage caused by elephants. Volunteers are able to help with many of these tasks which will probably arise at short notice during their visit.

Uploading data to the computer. From time to time we will spend a few hours transferring data from field sheets to the computer.

Day 14. Volunteers leave Sinamatella in the morning and travel by mini-bus to Victoria Falls where they can visit the Falls during the day. Overnight accommodation is at a Lodge in Vic Falls town. On the next day, Harrison will collect the volunteers around 10.30 and transfer them to the airport.

Remarques

For this project, volunteers must be physically fit but do not need to have special skills.

The volunteers shall have a good English level to fully understand instructions.

The climate is similar at ZNP and Sinamatella. During the cool dry season (April to August) the weather is warm (up to 25 degrees) by day but can become very cold, sometimes even below freezing, at night. Volunteers must bring suitable clothes for this range of temperatures. Camping at Zambezi can be especially cold in June and July. Volunteers must make sure they have a sleeping bag able to keep them comfortable in temperatures that may drop as low as zero degrees during the early hours of the morning. In the hot dry season (September to November) night time temperatures are more comfortable and can be quite high (15 to 20 degrees or more). Day time temperatures are also much higher, often reaching well over 30 degrees. As well as being suitable for the climate, the volunteer's clothes should also be suitably coloured. Drab colours, especially green, brown and khaki are essential when camping.

• WHAT TO BRING:

Clothing and Personal Kit -

- Victoria Falls: In Victoria Falls 'T' Shirts and shorts are fine most of the time but you may like to bring a set of light casual clothes for going to a restaurant at night.
- Fieldwork: We will be doing lots of outdoor activities including occasional walking. While volunteers will be walking, they will be accompanied by armed rangers.
- I suggest a minimum of 3 sets of loose green/khaki-type shirts and trousers plus a hat/cap and comfortable socks and boots. If you want to wear shorts in the field you might need a pair of short gaiters to stop your socks being filled with spiky grass seeds. Long trousers that tightly cover the top of your boots will work just as well.
- June and July nights and early mornings can be very cold so bring something warm to wear.
- Day pack : It is useful but not essential, to have a pack to stow your camera, water bottle, sunscreen and other personal stuff when we are working or walking - but the aim is to carry as little as possible.
- Personal Water bottle: You should bring your own water bottle with approx 500ml to 1L capacity.
- Torch or flashlight: This is essential. I would advise you bring a head torch with rechargeable batteries or a suitable supply of batteries as you won't be able to buy any in the Parks.
- Camera and Video: Highly recommended. Bring rechargeable batteries or a suitable supply of batteries plus an adequate supply of photo memory cards as you cannot purchase these things in the Parks.
- Binoculars: A good pair of binoculars is essential.
- Sunscreen: Even though it is winter you will need 35+ sunscreen. Insect repellent may be useful in the evening in the early part of the dry season (April through to June)
- Personal toiletries and medicines: Bring normal personal stuff like toothpaste, shampoo etc. Also bring personal medicines like headache tablets and antiseptic cream. Something to relieve insect bites and stings may be useful but there are very few insects to be seen from June through to the first rains in October or November. You will need a

personal towel, especially when we are camping.

- Sleeping bag. You will need a sleeping bag when we are camping. Winter nights, especially June and July can be very cold. From September onwards a thinner sleeping bag will be fine.

This project is set up by our usual partners in Zimbabwe. Therefore, you can look at mission's reports on the former project online, on project fiche n°474.

Les bénéficiaires

Nom des bénéficiaires Behjane Trust

Nombre de participants 3

Motivation des participants

Bhejane Trust : PU's volunteers support is very important as it helps Bhejane Trust to achieve the above objectives and to provide a real assistance to the parks.

Hwange National Park : Management of the Park is organized in a structured hierarchy with a number of specialized units that deal with the various different functions and activities in the Park. The Park is a very large area to manage and there are never enough rangers available for all the work to be done. For this reason, Bhejane Trust and Planète Urgence volunteers are able to provide valuable support to many of the different units in the Park.

Zambezi National Park: Bhejane Trust and PU's volunteers make up for the lack of funding.