

**Bird monitoring projects at Sinamatella, Zambezi National Park and Matetsi Safari Area  
Volunteers will support Bhejane Trust in its birding activities collecting data in Hwange  
National Park, Zambezi National Park and Matetsi Safari Area. Those data will be used for  
different research programs**

## 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 drier. 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.

The association originally operated as DART with the aim of helping the Parks and Wildlife Authority at Sinamatella, mainly with rhino monitoring but also with any other non-profit activities.

Over time they have taken on a number of roles at Sinamatella and now they are mainly concerned with 1. Rhino monitoring 2. Logistical support of rhino protection, 3. Monitoring of the Sinamatella ecosystems and 4. provision of water for animals in the dry season.

The reason they started the project was that the Parks and Wildlife Authority, like much of Zimbabwe, faced complete breakdown during the times of the economic decline and it was clear that outside assistance was needed to keep the Park running smoothly.

They offer three main solutions to the problems

1. They act as a channel for donor support,
2. They physically carry out most of the necessary environmental monitoring ourselves
3. They offer technical support and advice.

Since 2012 they have separated from DART and operated as Bhejane Trust

Bhejane Trust works in Sinamatella which is a part of Hwange National Park, in Zambezi National Park and in Matetsi Safari Area. There are endangered species in those areas such as black Rhino, Cheetah, Wild dogs, Elephants and a number of bird species and types such as Ground Hornbills, Vultures, Storks, Cranes and raptors

The main projects that Bhejane Trust has achieved at Sinamatella are:

1. Receiving and installing donations of water pumping equipment, including solar pumps so that the game-water situation is finally approaching the point it had reached before Zimbabwe's economic collapse.
2. Setting up of a logistical support base for rhino and other wildlife protection activities. This is mainly represented by three vehicles and food supplies for patrols
3. Setting up of a number of environmental monitoring projects including road transect counts, water point counts, bird counts and atlasing and a fixed point camera survey.

At Zambezi National Park and Matetsi they have....

1. Installed solar pumps and rehabilitated other infrastructure such as roads and a viewing platform at Chamabonda Vlei, leading to a major revival of this long-neglected part of the Park.
2. Set up environmental monitoring programmes within the Zambezi National Park and Matetsi Unit Seven.

For 3 years, Bhejane Trust have received 9 missions and 37 of Planète Urgence's volunteers to support its activities of wildlife protection (counting of animal population, road transect, assistance with game-water supplies,...).

## Objectif

The main objective is to assist two strongly supported, 'citizen science' projects by monitoring of bird population.

The projects are:

1. Southern Africa Bird Atlas Project (2) (SABAP 2), organised by the Animal Demography Unit (ADU) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and
2. The African Waterfowl Census, organised by Wetlands International through Birdlife Zimbabwe

Over 400 bird species are regularly found in the Park. As the park is a protected area, no birds are exposed to danger. However, a number of species found in the park are in danger elsewhere and the Park is an important refuge for them.. The most severely endangered species found at Sinamatella are Lappet-face vulture, White-headed vulture, Grey-headed parrot, Hooded vulture, Bateleur, Ground hornbill and Martial eagle. Vulture are particularly in danger due to an increase of poisoning, indeed poachers want to stop vultures from revealing the presence of other poaching activity by leading rangers to carcasses of poached animals. Around 2400 suspicious vulture deaths were reported in Southern Africa in 2013 which could be somewhere between 5 and 10% of the regional population and could lead to extinction.

In this framework, Bhejane Trust is realistic and accepts that given Zimbabwe's terrible economic problems there are unlikely to be any major steps taken in the near future. If changes are certainly taking place in the Park, Bhejane Trust sees its role as documenting these changes within the bird population rather than initiating any preventive measures. The main challenge to BT's projects is a hugely reduced number of people with an interest in and knowledge of birds, compared to the 1980s and 1990s. They are 'citizen science' projects, relying on ordinary members of the public for the supply of data.

In order to protect these animals as best as possible, the creation of field cards identifying all the bird species present in the park is needed as well as a deep data collection.

In 2014, Bhejane Trust partnered with the park authority to begin a specific vulture monitoring project throughout Zimbabwe. Bhejane Trust's activities within this project include locating vulture nests in Sinamatella and Matetsi. Data on vulture is collected by Birdlife Zimbabwe.

The objective of SABAP is to have a minimum of six field cards for each 'pentad' (but there is no limit to this number) and for the waterfowl census it is to have continual counts over as long a period as possible of as many water-bodies as possible. Then, the data collected made available to anyone who may have an interest in those information.

So far BT has submitted 169 cards from 39 pentads. There is no limit to the number the association could do but it has sixteen pentads with little or no coverage at Sinamatella and all at Matetsi have poor coverage so far.

So far, a lot of atlassing is done as part of BT's daily work, the data collected are then submitted for both projects for further analysis.

The main reason for BT for wanting support from volunteers is that with the volunteers the association can cover areas that are not often visited. In all Bhejane Trust's monitoring projects, volunteers are a very important catalyst, breaking the normal routine and getting Bhejane Trust to do the more difficult things that otherwise get postponed. For example the association only has three atlas cards for an area called Elephant Pan. Two of those were collected when they had

volunteers with them. The other value of volunteers is simply that of extra eyes leading to better observation – the more observers, the more we see

## Intervention du volontaire

Participation of the volunteers:

For the SABAP project, the volunteers will be asked to list the different bird species they will see within specified areas. SABAP works on presence or absence lists that include a measure of commonness or importance in the order in which species are listed.

For the waterfowl census, the volunteers will be asked to count the birds at large water-bodies. This project requires accurate counting of individual of individual birds of a limited range of species.

Volunteers would have knowledge of birding to be interested in this mission but they are not expected to have any specific skills. Prior knowledge of Hwange birds isn't vital.

Volunteers usually become familiar very quickly with common species. If they happen to see a bird they are not able to recognize, they will have to take a picture of it for later identification.

A couple of training days have been included in the scheduled.

Those training days will be composed of different stages in order to provide all the tools needed to the volunteers:

Stage 1 – The training will start by explaining why SABAP is useful for bird conservation, for conservation in general in Southern Africa and for Hwange.

Stage 2 – The volunteers will learn how SABAP works: citizen science, the Animal Demography Unit at University of Cape Town, how SABAP 1 worked and how SABAP 2 differs (including an explanation of the basic protocol – data collection within a limited area and for a limited time period. The importance of the order in which species are identified.

Stage 3 – A look at the commonest small land birds, using photos, reference books, sound clips and actual birds if they are in the vicinity. The volunteers would look at a selection of ten or fifteen species by sight and four or five by sound. The actual number of species would vary with seasons as many are migratory

Stage 4 – A look at the commonest large raptors.

Stage 5 – A look at the commonest water birds

## La mission

Aéroport                      Victoria Falls

### Transfert sur le lieu de mission

At arrival at Victoria Falls volunteers are met by a driver from a specialist tourist-transfer company (which works for many years with Trevor) and driven to Victoria Falls by seven-seater minibus. The journey takes approx 30 minutes.

From the airport to Hwange town takes approximately one and a half hours.

From Hwange Town to Sinamatella the transport is by open 4 x 4 Land Cruiser and takes approximately one hour.

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.

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 Sinamatella, the volunteers will sleep in National Parks lodges in Sinamatella Camp.  
At Matetsi or ZNP, accommodation will vary but may be in tents or built accommodation at Matetsi Water Lodge.

At Sinamatella Bhejane Trust has permanent access to a two-bedroomed house with two beds in each room, attached bathroom, toilet, kitchen and lounge. Where there are more than four volunteers, BT leases similar accommodation from National Parks. Electricity is available but subject to occasional cuts, especially in the rainy season. The internet access is via satellite and extremely expensive so it is requested to be used for important email only.

At Sinamatella, breakfast and dinner are eaten at the lodge where volunteers are accommodated. Lunch is usually eaten in the field.

If the volunteers are camping, breakfast and dinner will be taken at the camping site. Lunch might be taken on the field.  
At Matetsi and ZNP, the same arrangement will apply

### Moyens mis en oeuvre

Few materials are needed. Bhejane Trust supplies recording sheets and a spotting scope. Reference books are also available.

All volunteers will need a pair of binoculars suitable for birding and a notebook, a sleeping bag and personal kit (clothes, toiletries, towel etc)

In November and January, birding is excellent but mammal populations are low. The weather is often hot and dry but rainy periods of three or four days at a time are possible. Sometimes longer rainy periods occur. When it rains it can be cold. Good rainwear is an essential as the vehicles are open with minimal cover.

In July the weather is dry but cold – very cold early in the morning and at night. Warm clothes are essential for these cold times but during the day temperatures are usually in the low 20s. Bird numbers are relatively low but it is expected to see around fifty species per pentad per five days.

### Organisation

Number of Volunteers: between 2 and 6 people

The volunteers will work in three different places:

1. Sinamatella sector of Hwange National Park and the adjoining Deka Safari Area.
2. Zambezi National Park
3. Matetsi Safari area

Sinamatella and Deka are largely Mopane woodland and scrub with sandy ridges where the vegetation is scrub Combretum and Diospyros. There are some natural and artificial water points in the dry season, many natural pans and rivers in the rains. Both areas have good populations of large mammal species, particularly in the dry season. Zambezi and Matetsi have Zambezi Teak woodland on sandy ridges with scrub Combretum on exposed basalt rock and occasional grassy areas. Large mammals are present, especially in the dry season.

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.

Day 1 Arrive at Sinamatella.

Day 2. Training in bird recognition and the SABAP protocols.

Day 3. Birding at Mandavu dam and in and around Sinamatella to familiarise the volunteers with local birds and begin a field card for Mandavu Pentad.

Day 4. SABAP data collection in two different areas, one in the morning, one in the afternoon.

Day 5. SABAP data collection in two different areas, one in the morning, one in the afternoon

Day 6. Vulture nest monitoring

Day 7. Water bird counts.

Day 8. Water bird counts

Day 9. Computerise data and submit to SABAP or Birdlife Zimbabwe

Day 10. Move to Zambezi National Park or Matetsi Unit Seven.

Day 11. SABAP data collection along the river section, one pentad in the morning, one in the afternoon. Also locating vulture nests

Day 12. SABAP data collection, one pentad in the morning, one in the afternoon. Also locating vulture nests

Day 13. Morning SABAP data collection in Chamabonda. Afternoon; data capture

The mission does not normally stop at the intermediate weekend but it can end on the last Thursday evening/Friday morning so that the volunteers reach Victoria Falls late Friday morning and visit the Falls etc.

The volunteers will be working between 6 and 7 hours per day in average.

On a typical "SABAP" day, volunteers and BT would leave Sinamatella early in order to reach the intended pentad as the birds become active. Sometimes this would involve camping in a remote area so as to be ready to list birds at day-break. The volunteers would spend the morning trying to visit all habitats in the pentad by driving where roads are available or walking where they are not.

For example they would try to visit any grassland patches, woodland, riverine vegetation, water-bodies and so on, spending time listing the species present in each.

After lunch they would move to another pentad and repeat the process, aiming to finish in late afternoon and then either return to Sinamatella or pitch camp ready for the next day.

In the rainy season a typical count would be from eighty to one hundred species per pentad and in the dry season around fifty species.

For water bird counts the volunteers would be based at Sinamatella and would travel to the chosen water-body after breakfast. At each site they would attempt to identify and count all water bird species present – for example ducks, storks, herons, waders, plovers and many others. The count would be done from one or more points around the water-body (depending on its size) using binoculars and telescope.

Vulture nest monitoring involves locating nests and observing them to discover if there are eggs or chicks present. At Sinamatella this might involve going to one of the known nest colonies and walking the area to locate nests. At Matetsi, most nests can be located from the vehicle. Counting of vultures at carcasses can not be planned in advance but is something they would do if the opportunity arose. Vultures are not at their nests in January so could not be observed at that time.

### Remarques

No specific knowledge related to birds is required to take part to this mission

For this project, volunteers must be physically fit.

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. 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 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 will 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 but some people like to use gaiters even with long trousers as the seeds can be very irritating.

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. Volunteer should 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.

## Les bénéficiaires

Nom des bénéficiaires Bhejane Trust

Nombre de participants 0

### Motivation des participants

Bhejane Trust already works with Planète Urgence and has found the organisation's volunteers serious and helpful.

Observers are available locally but there are not enough of them