

Spring
2003

SEBAKWE NEWS

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REGISTERED CHARITY : 328461

Zimbabwe Today

All looks normal on the journey from Harare airport to the centre of town, until you see people queuing for bread and the line of cars waiting outside the petrol stations. Many of the drivers will sleep in their cars in the queue overnight waiting for a tanker delivery, when it is their turn to get fuel at the pumps, they are often rationed to just 20 litres for each car.



In the country areas, the shortage of mealie meal, salt, sugar and other basic foods is showing by the physical weakness of the schoolchildren, who are having to have emergency food at the schools, provided by international welfare organisations.

A week before our visit at the end of January, half the farms in the Midlands Conservancy had Section 8 notices served on them. This had caused great concern and insecurity amongst the farmers, the staff and farm workers, because it had been understood that the farm evictions were completed.

Whilst in Harare we went to see Florence Msipa, rhino co-ordinator and Brigadier E.W.Kanhanga, the acting Director of National Parks and Wildlife Management. In Kwe Kwe we met Mr G.C.Msipa, the Provincial Governor for the Midlands, to seek support and put the case for special treatment of the Midlands Conservancy. We were told that the Government have not yet agreed a policy for land distribution within the Conservancies.

We were asked to make a written submission to the Hon Francis Nhema, the Minister of Environment and Tourism, pointing out the effect on wildlife if the farms are broken up into smaller units and set out our plans for the building of a Conservation and Education Centre. A few days after our visit Robert Swift, the Chairman of the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy, had a meeting with the Minister, who has now agreed to visit the Midlands Conservancy with the Lands Committee.

We met our builder on site to finalise the plans of the proposed Sebakwe Conservation and Education centre. We agreed the site lay out, approved some amendments to the architect plans and discussed the costs of the project. The Trustees have since agreed that we would like to proceed with the building as soon as we have finalised the lease and received satisfactory assurances from the Government that their policy for land distribution will provide the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy with a long term viable future. This policy must allow for the continuation of a breeding group of rhino and other wildlife to be kept under free-range conditions and protected from the poachers.

Poaching Problems

At the recent Midland Black Rhino Conservancy Meeting the conservator reported that poaching of wildlife within the conservancy was on the increase and becoming a cause for real concern.

The Guards are just keeping the problem under control but wire snares that are made by the poachers from stolen fencing materials are being retrieved from within the conservancy on a daily basis.

As the poachers often fail to return to the vast number of the wire snares that they lay, many of the smaller animals that are caught in them endure a long period of suffering prior to dying. Larger animals that are caught in the snares will usually have the strength to break them away from their retaining wire, they too then spend a long period of suffering as they drag the snare around with them.

Poachers that have been caught in the Midlands area are arrested and handed over to the local police who are giving the matter their full support. To date no rhino within the Midlands Conservancy have been directly affected by this problem.

Stop Press - We have just received confirmed reports that in January/February this year, there has been 5 black rhino killed by poachers in the Sinamatella IPZ and 1 black rhino shot and killed by poachers near the Gubu River in Matusadona

www.blackrhino.org

David Gripper is working on redesigning and updating our website. We expect that this work will be completed and on line to viewers this Spring.

For further details and information about the work and future objectives of the Sebakwe Black Rhino Trust contact :-

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Or visit the Trust's existing Website as given above.

Death of Tafara

In the last Newsletter we wrote about the injuries suffered by Tafara and the treatment she received following getting caught in a fight with a male rhino.

Sadly, I have to inform you that Tafara has died. Just before Christmas, her body was found in dense bush by our guards who had been searching for her.

At post mortem she had several body wounds and a head wound where she had been gored by another rhino, this probably occurred soon after she had been darted and received treatment for her previous injuries.

Although her horns had been removed, this was sometime after she had died, so we do not suspect that her death was the work of poachers, but was the result of fight injuries.

It is particularly disappointing to lose a young female rhino who was well known in the Conservancy, but not old enough to have yet contributed to the breeding programme. This is the only rhino we have lost this year but as some compensation we have had five rhino calves born to bring our rhino numbers up to 60 in the Conservancy.

New Conservancy Vehicle

With the assistance of generous donations from Nicholas Duncan of the Save Foundation Australia and Nic Davis of Rhino Recovery, and a favourable purchase price given by L.R. Manufacture & Sales (Landrover suppliers in Harare) the Midlands Conservancy has recently taken delivery of a fully reconditioned 4 WD Landrover pickup. This vehicle is under the direct control of the conservator Ferdie Terblanche and has greatly increased the effectiveness of his work in the management of the 'rapid reaction force'.



Rhino Population Update

by Nigel Overall

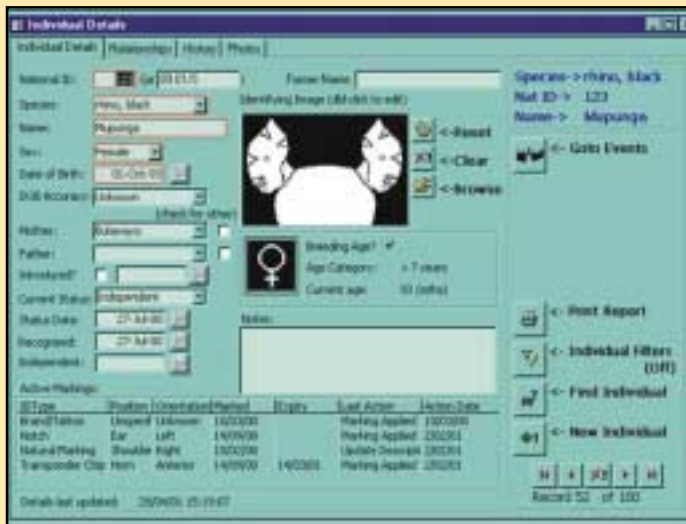
The current set of data for the rhino population in the Midlands Conservancy indicates that during the year of 2002 there have been 5 births and only 1 death. The total population figures are therefore now :-

Aged Males (25 years plus)	5
Aged Females	3
Adult Males (8-25 years)	11
Adult Females	12
Juvenile Males (2-8 years)	4
Juvenile Females	16
Calves (0-2 years)	9
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Total	60



After recent observations and inspection of a number of the rhino by a National Parks representative it was reported back to the Conservancy that all those animals observed were seen to be in a very good condition.

History and data records which have been compiled and held for each rhino within the Conservancy are being transferred from the current paper based system onto a computer-based one called 'Wildb'.



This Microsoft Access Database programme was developed by WWF SARPO for National Parks to assist them in their overall monitoring of the black rhino population.

Once the transfer of existing data is complete information can easily be updated and added to as necessary.

As well as capturing detailed individual, group and event data for each rhino within the Midlands subpopulation, this programme provides the ability to record photographs and identifying images of individuals. These can be edited and updated throughout each animals life.

Co-ordinate data from the regular sightings of individual rhino captured by the rhino monitors on hand held GPS systems can be directly down loaded into the computer database.

As data continues to be collected, over the years it will provide a valuable record of the various rhino's life, movements and locations within the Midlands Conservancy.

The system permits up to date data to be transferred electronically from the Midlands Conservancy's local computer records into the National Parks main database.



Annie's News

At Heathrow we were concerned that our luggage might be overweight. It was full of gifts for the three schools, which we support in the Midlands Conservancy Area. We also had bags packed with medical supplies for Sebakwe Clinic and Kwe Kwe Hospital.

We are most grateful to the National Pen Company of County Louth, Ireland for their generous gift of pens - one for each child, and to Friends of Wychwood Surgery in Milton-u-Wychwood, Oxfordshire for the crayons, magic markers, pencils and books which they had collected for us to give to the children.

Medical Supplies - The Wychwood Surgery and Friends also donated a large quantity of medical supplies – bandages, dressings, medicines and equipment which we were able to deliver to Sister Jimere at Sebakwe Clinic.



Matron Gwaze and her team at the main Kwe Kwe Hospital were overwhelmed with gratitude for the supplies they received and secured them safely into their empty medical cupboards. They had not had any medical supplies delivered for several weeks



Baby Clothes - The baby clothes we took with us were given to an Aids Orphanage where babies are left on the doorstep on almost a daily basis. Many thanks from Zimbabwe, and from the Trust to Annalise for organising the collection for us. Everything will be put to very good use and is highly appreciated.



Rhino Mayday - Symposium will this year be held at the Charity Centre, 24 Stephenson's Way, London. on Friday 23rd May 2003 commencing at 11:30am.

Schools Report

by Annie Gripper



Sebakwe Primary School – It was good to meet everybody again at Sebakwe Primary School and to introduce Dr Paul Holmes. The children gave us a great welcome and they sang and recited for us.

Greatworth Primary School, near Banbury, who have twinned with this school, sent letters and their school magazine and in return we brought back letters and drawings from Sebakwe school for their English school friends. The number of children attending the school has fallen, due to some of them being too weak to walk to school from home, because they have insufficient food.

Tashinga Primary School - We are now supporting a new school on Msena Ranch, which is on the eastern side of the Midlands Conservancy. 134 children aged 5 to 12 years old attend it, they are the children of the settlers who have moved into the area as part of the land redistribution programme.

The buildings were originally a scout camp and each oval building has two classrooms – each class facing opposite ends of the oval. They have no seats but have built some small stone walls padded with mud on the top and these walls each form seating for 4 or 5 children. They have no desks, but lie their books on the floor when they want to write. Their blackboard is a cemented area of wall.

When this school opened they had nothing at all, but last autumn money from the Trust was used to buy books. We took them a selection of gifts this visit and they were so excited they burst into a very spontaneous song of thanks. Nigel Overal and his family had made coloured bead bracelets, which we gave to each of the girls, and the boys had a small toy car to play with. The grand finale was a bout of bubble blowing –it was a delight and great fun to see such happy faces chasing or blowing bubbles around their play area. It was a very moving experience.

In Zimbabwe, school normally begins at 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. but at present in some schools, the school day ends at 12 noon, because some of the children were fainting due to lack of food and fatigue. Some children live as far as 10 km from their school and have to walk there and back daily.

As we left Tashinga School, the children were already standing in line with a dish each, to be given a mug full of porridge prepared on an open fire by two of the mothers. The Roman Catholic Mission had donated the maize for the children, but the supply would only last for one more week. At least for two weeks, all of these school children were having one small daily meal to keep them going.

They were very happy and so very grateful for all the practical gifts we left for them.



Guzuzu Primary School – Due to a shortage of time, we were unable to visit Guzuzu school during this trip, but we left their share of the school presents which we had brought, with Cleeve Fairey, a school governor. He will take them to the school on behalf of the Trust.

Darting of Chinaimoyo

by Pia Maria Weinberger

At the end of November 2002, one of our 12-year-old rhino bulls needed to be darted, after having been wounded in a fight with another bull. As usual we asked vet Dr. Chris Foggin to do the darting, as he knows our area as well as the rhino. For me, it was the first time that I had experienced a darting operation. I was curious and excited at the same time and wanted to know and see every detail.

As there was no chopper available, we had to use a fixed wing aircraft to achieve proper air surveillance. After Chris had concluded all preparations, the three groups – 1 aircraft + 2 on foot, started to look for Chinai. As this rhino was already highly alert it took us 5 hours to get into shooting range, as he was always hiding in thick bush.

The air surveillance was a big help. Unfortunately the Zimbabwe Air Force was of the wrong impression that we were operating in a no fly area and forced us to return to our airstrip 10 Km from the operational area. After almost 6 hours we lost the rhino and had to give up for the day.



The next morning we had to restart our search without air support. Luckily we found Chinai after a short walk and Chris was able to dart him. We were in very thick bush and had to follow the rhino which moved on for quite a distance after having being darted, Suddenly Ferdie, our Conservator, pushed me under a bush – we could hear the rhino breathing but could not see it. Then it moved on.

We had to crawl through thorny acacia bush for another several 100 meters until we spotted it in a dry riverbed, It was already fast asleep – the front legs under its belly and the head slightly sideways with its lips touching the sand. For me it looked like a sweet puppy.

First we covered its eyes, moved it to a more practical position and then covered its body with branches and sprayed it with water to keep it cool from the heat of the summer sun.

There were at least 4 or 5 wounds on the neck, behind the front legs and around the backside. Chris was busy cleaning these 4-inch deep wounds which were infected and inhabited by larvae and worms.

I was busy counting the seconds between each breath as well as checking the oxygen counter fixed to Chinai's ear. Every fourth or fifth breath resulted in a small cloud of dust from the sand. After about 20 minutes we started to run out of time.

Ferdie quickly made a sketch of the ear notches. Chris took some blood samples, injected the antidote, and then we had to run. Each of us chose a suitable tree and less than a minute later the rhino was already on the move. Satisfied after a successful operation we walked back to our vehicles.

It was incredibly exciting and a wonderful experience getting so close to one of our 60 black rhino, being able to touch it and especially to help it recover from its injuries.



The Savé Valley Conservancy

by Paul Holmes

During our recent visit to Zimbabwe we took the opportunity to visit another well-known conservancy, the Savé Valley conservancy. This is situated in the Lowveld region in the South East of the country near Gonarezhou National Park. Meetings were arranged with Clive Stockhill the founder and Graham Conaer the conservator in order to share information. As a direct result of severe poaching problems in the Zambezi Valley there was a catastrophic decline in the population of black rhino. As in the Midlands, this was the catalyst for the original discussions about forming a protected area for rhino in the Savé Valley.

In 1989 21 neighbouring farmers agreed to form a major conservancy for black rhinos and other endangered species involving 3,420 sq km of farmland. With the support of the Beit Trust (a private endowment trust) and the WWF the 1st constitution was signed in 1991 and the largest privately owned nature reserve in Africa had been created. Between 1986 and 1991 33 black rhino were translocated into the area. By June 1999 their numbers had increased to 66 and there may be around 90 there today. (The carrying capacity is estimated to be in the region of 340).



It was in 1992 that a decision was made to commit the conservancy to 'creating a quality tourism product based on wildlife'. This was to include the reintroduction of buffalo and meant, for disease control purposes, the removal of all cattle and the erection of a secure perimeter fence. Internal farm fences were also removed. Other wildlife was introduced including the first translocation of wild adult elephant herds.



As the conservancy includes 21 different landowners there is a considerable diversity of attitudes among them. In the Senuko area tourism and game viewing appears to be the main economic activity but in some of the other areas there is a dependence on game hunting.

A committee regulates wildlife management and the Savé Valley Conservancy Trust was set up to promote the involvement of the rural communities surrounding the conservancy in its economic and conservation activities.

During our two-day visit we were enthralled by the variety of birds and game but saddened to see settler's cattle grazing within the conservancy and hear about an increase in poaching and seemingly unplanned subsistence farming. The Senuko area certainly had the feel of a more traditional National Park and lying in bed in the open fronted rooms gazing at the stars and listening to the hyenas calling, the lions moaning and the baboons fighting it was easy to temporarily forget the severe problems facing the majority of Zimbabwe's human and wildlife populations.



The Turgwe Hippo Trust

by Nigel Overal



The Turgwe Hippo Trust was founded by Karen Paolillo in 1994, after she became personally involved in the survival of a herd of hippo that lived in the Turgwe river during the drought of 1991/1992.

During this period Karen began an intensive feeding programme for the last remaining 13 hippo that were living in the section of the river below her home in the Save Valley Conservancy. In the latter stages of this drought the Turgwe river dried up completely. To ensure the survival of the hippo Karen organised the construction of a concrete pan and arranged for water to be pumped from a bore hole some 16 kilometres away.

Since then Karen has dedicated her life to the study of the hippo and their behavioural patterns, as well as furthering and developing the aims of the trust. This has involved the construction of some additional pans and the sinking of two new boreholes nearby, in order to provide a ready supply of water for use during future periods of drought.

Even though the hippopotamus is not on the list of endangered species, its numbers have drastically declined within the Lowveld region of Zimbabwe, falling from over 2,000 prior to the 1991/1992 drought to around 350 today. About 30 of these live in the Turgwe river system.

Hippo need large areas of water in which to live, but many of Africa's rivers are being caused to slowly silt up as man cultivates land near to the river banks. In addition the hippo feeding areas are now being used for grazing by cattle. Today, as the country's Government continues to push forward with its controversial land resettlement programme, the hippo (like so much of Zimbabwe's wild life) is now under a new threat - that of the poacher.

One of the Turgwe Trust's future aims is to become a hippo sanctuary for 'nuisance animals' which are posing a problem by raiding crops in the farming areas, and also to those that become a danger to humans in built up areas. Developing an educational programme to teach the local children the importance of hippo to the ecosystem is also on their agenda.

Further details of the Turgwe Hippo Trust's work can be obtained from their web site which can be viewed via Gareth Patterson's site :- www.garethpatterson.com

Some Hippo Facts

A hippopotamus can live for up to 45 years and a fully grown male weighs as much as 3 tonnes.

Grazing on the river bank grass lands at night an adult hippo will consume up to 45 kg of fodder in a single nights feed. It will roam around 3 to 4 miles during this period, returning to the water during the day to digest its previous nights feed.

During a 24 hour period an adult hippo will drink up to 56 gallons of water.

A hippo can reach speeds of up to 30 mph on land and spend 5 minutes under water at any one time.

