



HWANGE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER – JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

NEWS FROM THE PARK

We start 2015 with a report from John & Jenny Brebner who visited Hwange over the New Year:

What better way to see the old year out and the new one in with a few days in Hwange National Park? Since our previous visit which was during the game count when the park was looking so dry and arid, the transformation is just stunning and one wonders anew at the abundance of nature. We had the pleasure – and privilege – of spending four nights at Main Camp over New Year and had a very sloshy, splashy time getting around as there had been lovely rains – and it was still raining for most of the time we were there.

The veld is looking superb with pools of water lying everywhere. The myriad hues of green are spectacular with the lush grass and the trees all in full leaf. Many of the teak were in full bloom and the teak forest just past Guvalala was particularly stunning with its cloak of mauve mantling the dark green of the foliage like a colourful tea shower. Along the roadsides and in the vleis, the many and varied wild flowers are popping up everywhere, some all but hidden by the long grass but on closer inspection, the delicate, small flowers are truly beautiful. Flame lilies were not so abundant but always a delight to see and in places there were great swathes of the common vlei crinum - the droopy pink and white vlei lilies. Small white bauhinias were out in ragged flower and along the White Hills road back towards Main Camp there were bushy patches covered in bright yellow bloom. Rhodesian pimpernel's bright orange stuck out and there were puddles of stud thorn creeping along the road verges. Considering the awful thorns the plant produces, their pinky flowers are gorgeous!

It is certainly a bumper time of the year for those interested in birding with the many migrants all flocking around. There were clouds of amur falcons hunting the vleis wherever we went with many of them hovering before dropping straight down for morsels and when it was raining or later in the day, gathering in large numbers on the trees. Rollers – lilac breasted, purple, European and broad billed – were out in full breeding colour and raucous as ever. Carmine



bee-eaters bejewelled stumps and anthills while the European and swallow tailed bee eaters adorned the bushes. We couldn't believe that we didn't have several barn swallows plastered against the radiator grill as everywhere we travelled, stacks of the tiny swallows flew kamikaze-like, just inches off the ground, straight at the vehicle, veering off in the nick of time. Steppe eagles, tawny eagles, lesser spotted eagles, kites and steppe buzzards were about in numbers and near Kennedy Two we saw two pallid harriers quartering the vlei on the hunt.

At Ngweshla and at Nyamandhlovu, several woolly necked storks and white storks plodding about, and one evening at Nyamandhlovu, seventeen marabou storks mustered, stalking along like an aged crowd of undertakers off to an

unhappy event! We didn't see as many waterbirds as we thought we might but the ponds and pans were littered with ducks, mostly red-billed teal, white faced duck and comb ducks, Egyptian and spurwinged geese, little grebes, blacksmith's lapwings and small waders. At Mabuya Mabena we saw five open billed storks and a lone spoonbill along with a lone abdim stork were seen at Nyamandhlovu. Two coveys of crested francolin were seen with really tiny, fluffy chicks and all the helmeted guineafowl were paired off, some in trios, making a real din at times. A three banded courser with a young chick looked very dismal and damp near the Kennedy 1 picnic site, trying to dry off at the side of the road.



Not expecting to see many animals due to the dense bush and all the foliage, we had amazing sightings of just about everything we expected. This time of the year is great for all the little things, as well as the big. The dung beetles were having a bit of a hard time finding enough dung now that the elephant herds have dispersed. We did, however, see quite a number of elephant during our drives, seeing two very large breeding herds as well as a couple of smaller groups, one with two tiny babies, and several large, solitary gents. A small mixed herd of sable was seen at Makwa and a very large herd of buffalo was spotted on the far side of the Kennedy vlei on the way to Kennedy 2 one day. It was certainly the trip for zebras which we saw by the bucketful, and of course, this time of the year is a delight with all the impala and wildebeest babies dropping. Several small nurseries of impala fawns were

evident with some of the mummies still looking like they might "hatch". Tortoises plodded along the road, mostly meat pie sized but we did see one or two bigger ones. Tock tock beetles were scurrying back and forth, stopping to tock tock now and again; some being unceremoniously swooped upon and carried off by yellow billed, grey or Bradfields hornbills. A large, silvery green boomslang was curled in a blue bush near the road at Nyamandhlovu causing some excitement and curiosity as people weren't sure what it was. Two roan were seen close to the Main Camp gate and several sounders of warthog had small piglets afoot. Cheetah were being seen regularly by others – not us! – and so were wild dog. We came across one pack at Nyamandhlovu, two of which had been finishing off some tasty morsel close to the road, attracting a lot of attention from the vultures and kites circling overhead. Unfortunately, we narrowly missed seeing some heart-stopping action that same evening when the dogs chased a young kudu across the vlei. The poor frightened kudu unwisely chose to leap into the pan for refuge whereupon one of the large crocs zoomed straight in and while the two were having a struggle, apparently one of the enormous hippos torpedoed at great speed into the melee, snapping the poor unfortunate kudu's neck and then left it floating in the pan. The pack of wild dogs circled the pan plaintively lamenting their loss but no doubt the crocs dined off the victim later in the evening! Another pack of wild dog was being seen regularly near Kennedy One and coming back along that road, two of the dogs loped in front of our vehicle for several kilometres before spying a group of impala and heading off into the wet bush to try their luck. Although it took a couple of days, we eventually came across lion. Firstly seeing a group of four, rather distant and in the showery rain, at Makwa. The following day down at Ngweshla we had an extremely distant view of Cecil, the main manna lion down there, as he lay in the open before making off. Finally, on our last evening, we saw a collared male and his female consort at Nyamandhlovu lying mostly obscured in the blue bush – sleeping of course! Acting on a tip off from a friend, we went on the Balla Balla road to find two lionesses just lying in the road and closer to the pan there were two youngish male lions and a beautiful lioness with her two small cubs right out in the open obviously trying to dry out after the day's rain. It was a fantastic way to end our trip, sitting watching the two curious and playful cubs having fun while a diligent mum kept a watchful eye on their shenanigans, giving out soft calls now and again.

For those of you not in the know, John has resigned his position on the WEZ committee as Hwange Water Project co-ordinator, but still assists in any way possible, "working" closely with Friends of Hwange (FOH) through Dave Dell. Although our reports may not hold as much detail about the waterpoints and park conditions, we still intend to send out these newsletters of our visits to the park to those who wish to read them. Once again, we would like to ask any of you who do NOT wish to receive these "reports" to please let us know so that we can delete your addresses from our records.

We should like to wish everyone a very happy 2015, please keep up the interest in our magnificent national parks by visiting as often as possible and we hope that it is a good year for everyone, including our amazing wildlife heritage.

John and Jenny Brebner

Now some news from Gary Cantle's year end report:

Gary reports that the two solar units at Ngweshla are well on the way to being installed and it is hoped that this work will be completed by the end of January. At Nyamandhlovu the stand for the solar unit has been completed and the trench dug for the pipe to the existing engine. Most pans have received good water and are approaching the full mark – this is definitely good news. Makwa and Kennedy 1 are a little low but do at least have water in them. The Main Camp area has had very good rainfall and all depressions are holding at least some water. Thanks to the rainfall the vegetation is starting to grow.

Gary reports having seen lots of tortoises lately and also wild dog (excellent news indeed). Although the elephant herds have dispersed, the Park is full of waterfowl and also many impala and warthog youngsters.

The photos below will show you that not all of the danger in Hwange National Park comes from the wildlife ... a tree fallen directly on top of one the pump attendants' houses...fortunately it was possible to lift the tree away with using a truck ...



Our final report is from Karen Paolillo about Tembia:

Tembia and his family of six hippos have moved a little further away from their normal pool up at the Majekwe weir. The river this year has changed a bit and there is a decent sized pool about half a kilometer upstream from their normal area. They now spend most of their time up there. So to be able to see them and take photos is not easy from the normal side that we drive or walk up to. So what we have to do, once we arrive at the Majekwe weir, is walk along the weir itself in the water flowing over the concrete. At the end we climb up the wall and walk about one kilometer around on the other side and then we can get close to the family. So we only can see them roughly about once a week. We send the game scouts into that area frequently as the poachers are far more active up there, so they can give us an accurate sighting of the hippos on a more regular basis.

Abe, the oldest female in the family, had been missing for over six weeks and every time the scouts said she was there by the time we got up to the weir she wasn't there. Finally on September 13th we saw her and she is fine. Perhaps she had been spending time with Chubby, the young male who lives now all on his own downstream, or maybe she just wanted to be alone. Abe is an elderly hippo and older bulls often go off on their own, so perhaps this is what she has been doing.

In the meantime Tembia has another son, as Picot was born to Odile in February and so far he is in good health. I always worry about Odile's calves as she is not a good mother and has had three of her calves killed while they were still very young. Tembia is spending most of his time these days with Tsakus and Herbert and the other hippos stay

relatively close in this new area. There are plenty of reeds on the one side so they can all tuck up under them. It is now heating up and it has been extremely hot for early September.



Tembia still has the most impressive gape of the two bulls. He is the oldest bull as Kuchek now in charge of the family close to Hippo Haven is a young bull and eight years younger than Tembia. Chubby is even younger, born in June 2004, so he is 11 years younger than Tembia.

The fascinating thing about having studied these hippos for the last two decades and more, is that Tembia was conceived when I stepped in and fed the Turgwe Hippos way back in 1992. Kuchek was named after the first animal that I ever loved, a Welsh mountain pony, when I was a little girl. Tembia is the son of Bob, and Kuchek the

son of Happy, both very important hippos in my book A HIPPO LOVE STORY and both of them now dead. Most young males get chased away from the family, so it is kind of appropriate that these two managed to stay here and now are both dominant bulls to their respective families.

Tembia thanks you as his supporter for caring about his life.

OTHER NEWS

HCS now has its own Facebook page – please have a look and see what you think.

FINANCIAL/FUNDRAISING

Donations:	£1495.00*
Sale of stamps/bookmarks:	£20.00
Talks – Anne & Ian:	£140.00
Collection – John:	£123.15
TOTAL:	£1778.15

*This includes the £1000.00 grant from the T.D. Paton Trust mentioned in the last newsletter and also another donation of £50.00 from our friends at the Croft Pastoral Team – this donation to be used to help the children of Main Camp School.

CONTACT DETAILS

John & Sandra Gillon
38 Sighthill Terrace
Edinburgh EH11 4QG

Kathy Charman
20 Rowlands Road
Horsham
West Sussex RH12 4LH

Anne & Ian Wilkinson
Spotted Dog Cottage
Whorlton
Barnard Castle
Co. Durham DL12 8XQ

Tel: 0131 453 3924

Tel: 01403 265906

Tel: 01833 627377

Email: hwange_uk@yahoo.co.uk

Email: Kathy.charman@virginmedia.co.uk

Email: charitsaub@yahoo.co.uk

Web Site: www.hwangecons.org.uk
Registered Charity No: 1036153

