

Dear All

My header was sent to me by Peter Jones from the River Club. It is a flock of flamingoes gliding over the river. A very unusual sight and, as Peter comments, they must have got lost.

LIVINGSTONE

Sports Facilities

News in Livingstone is all about the UNWTO. Government officials come and go and most were in town for one of those meetings ... and all state that they are preparing Livingstone for the UNWTO. The Minister of Sports, Chishimba Kambwili has announced the construction of a modern stadium in Livingstone. We are told that this will start in January 2013 and will have a seating capacity of 30,000! We are not told where the new stadium will be sited. It will, though, be modeled on the Levy Mwanawasa Stadium in Lusaka.

Chishimba Kambwili visited Maramba Stadium and was shocked at the state of it and said that money would be found to rehabilitate parts of it.

Street Naming

Director Margaret Mudenda of Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority was also in town. Her project is to get the street names up and running. For those of you who don't know Livingstone we have lots of roads which have long had their road names stolen. Some roads were never named. For a new-comer in town it can be very confusing trying to find a house.

Also confusing is the fact that the street numbers do not run consecutively and can be very odd. Generally, I think, the houses are known by their plot numbers which are allocated when the plot is identified. For example my house number is 91. It bears no relation to its place on the road – I am actually no 2 along the road. I can only assume that it is House no 91 in my suburb. If anyone wants to get directions to my house there is no point asking them to find number 91 because it won't help at all.

Margaret Mudenda: *The project of street naming and numbering will run concurrently in Livingstone and Lusaka. We will ensure that we put up infrastructure which people can't steal.*

Time Keeping

The Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Nickdon Chilanga, took a tour of some government facilities at opening time. Opening time for the Victoria Falls border is, as we all know 6am, but few travellers arrive there then because they know that probably no officials will be there, let alone ready to work. But the Minister arrived at the border at 5.55am and waited for the Customs and Immigration officials to get to their spots ... he was not amused as they wandered in one by one ... mostly late.

The minister also visited the Passport Office with the same scenario. The Road Safety Agency suffered the same fate. Nickson Chilangwa's comments: *We need to have a change of mindset among border staff especially as Livingstone will be co-hosting the UNWTO general assembly.*

Security

There were no comments in the press about security. In Livingstone we don't tend to have serious crime but when I popped into town just now I was told two stories of men entering properties with a gun and a panga, beating up the occupants and generally being nasty pieces of work. During the week I had an email telling me of tourists being attacked when visiting the park along the gorges.

Some months ago there was a serious incident where one person was shot and killed. The government quickly came on the scene and ordered changes. I was told that the police had been given new vehicles to patrol the streets and to react to incidents quickly. Personally I have never seen these vehicles in action.

Security has to take priority in Livingstone as a tourist town. I know that the Livingstone Tourism Association has been talking with the police about setting up a special Tourism Police Unit. We have had one of these before and it didn't work because it was not funded properly.

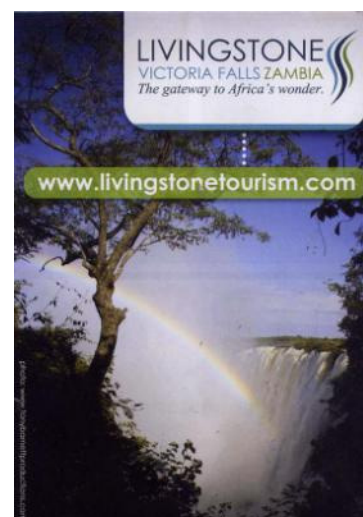
In the meantime I have noticed the gradual increase in road blocks. It was such a breath of fresh air when the government came in and said that the constant use of roadblocks should be reduced. I keep my driving licence on the seat in my car so that I can hand it to young policemen to prove that I am legal to drive ...

A New Hotel?

Radisson Hotels are considering constructing a new hotel in Livingstone. According to a report the hotel group says that it can be constructed before the UNWTO but, as yet, they have not found land on which to build.

Map from Livingstone Tourism Association

Livingstone Tourism Association has printed a very handy map for visitors to Livingstone.



ZAMBIA

Forest Fires

Forest fires and bush fires are the norm in Zambia. As soon as the grass is dry at the end of the rains it seems that many people walk around with a box of matches and have fun setting light to anything and everything. Is it a national sport?

Fires in our parks are a major concern. Parks should be an environment for all creatures. When the bush is set alight the larger animals can probably run away but many of the smaller ones cannot. Think tortoises, frogs, mice, rats. Think insects, butterflies, chameleons. Many of these creatures die in a bushfire.

Nature has to be in balance and although bushfires do happen now and again naturally, our parks in Zambia have changed because of the compulsive whim of people who like to light fires. Many of the people lighting fires in parks are also poachers, of course.



When I was in Hwange National Park in July, I only saw two small bushfires which I assume happened by accident. The rest of the park was as it should be. Here are some photos from Hwange – one at Mandavu and the other from Sinamatella.



Compare that with Kafue National Park:



A team of experts from the US Forest Service have recently been to Kafue National Park to look into the problem of the continual bushfires in the park. Here is part of the report:

***Fire Monitoring in Kafue National Park
From US Department of Agriculture***

Managing wildland fire is pretty much the same anywhere in the world. You need to think carefully about when and where to apply it and how to starve the fire of fuel in places you don't want it. There are several ways to do it—but you need to know how.

As a U.S. Forest Service fire applications specialist, managing wildfire, monitoring ecosystem response and teaching others how to do so has been Tonja Opperman's job for years. She is so good at it that recently the Forest Service International Programs invited her to teach fire monitoring in Zambia's Kafue National Park.



"Kafue is a largely undiscovered national park more than twice the size of Yellowstone, and although the ecosystem is relatively intact, the Zambian Wildlife Authority overseeing its management has precious few resources to commit to projects," said Opperman. "It was a privilege to work with local ecologists and fire managers to help Kafue move another step closer to implementing a landscape strategy for dealing with unwanted fire."

As a lead with the Forest Service's Wildland Fire Management Research Development and Application Unit, Opperman partnered with The Nature Conservancy and taught Kafue park employees techniques for fireline and post-burn monitoring, use of equipment, ignition pattern techniques and fire-briefing standards during classroom exercises before going out to the field to conduct live-firing exercises.

Fire plays a key role in the maintenance of a healthy Kafue ecosystem and managers are well-versed in its use. Although there is not a desire to eliminate fire here, there is a need to control the time of year it burns. This is done by purposely igniting fires just after the wet season, removing most of the fuel before the land really dries out. Early-season fires, when the ground is still wet, have few negative ecological effects; however the dry-season fires tend to burn intensely and uncontrollably. This pattern is significantly reducing shrub cover across Kafue, which provides essential wildlife habitat.

The skills Opperman brings to Zambia will be of important use in the years to come as local and international tourists visit the park to see lions, elephants, kudu and impala in a beautiful landscape mosaic borne of (the right kind of) fire.

There are varying views on bushfires, here is one from Kasanka

***From Kasanka Trust Website about bushfires
By Edmund Farmer, Director, Kasanka Trust***

Many people unfamiliar with the region will think that all bush fires are bad and should be prevented in a national park. However to pursue this policy in management has been proved time and again disastrous! When the rains finish in April/May, the hot sun starts drying everything up, so that by October (the hottest month) the central African bush becomes a tinderbox. Any fire started by accident or deliberately would sweep uncontrollably over huge distances.

The high temperatures caused by burning of very dry grass scorch and even kill trees, destroying woodland. It's not possible to prevent any fires being lit. Poachers will deliberately burn the bush, and fires traditionally used by villagers outside, will come across the park boundary. Narrow firebreaks are little use against such huge fires, which have burning particles swirling in their strong winds, and can continue across a few leaves lying on the ground to find fresh fuel the other side of the firebreak. If an area does not burn one year then the dried grass and leaves will remain and add to the fuel load the next year.

The historical origin of fire in the region is controversial but man is generally implicated as the main source. Over thousands of years the vegetation has been modified with a reduction in evergreen forests and an increase in fire resistant trees, so that the dominant woodland is now *Brachystegia* or 'Miombo' as it is locally known. This has an open enough canopy to allow short to medium grasses to grow and has an annual cycle of fire. Kasanka also has some good examples of 'Chipya' woodland that has spaced taller and shorter trees allowing more sunlight in and hence denser grass to grow. Late fires in the tall grasses under Chipya woodland can be particularly hot and destructive. ...

Kasanka National Park

Kasanka is Zambia's bat park. In November around 8-10 million straw-coloured fruit bats migrate to the park filling the skies with their black silhouettes as they emerge from their roosts in the evenings.

Kasanka Trust has recently been given US\$800,000 by the World Bank for the protection and development of Kasanka and Lavushi Manda National Parks. The grant comes under the Global Environmental Fund.

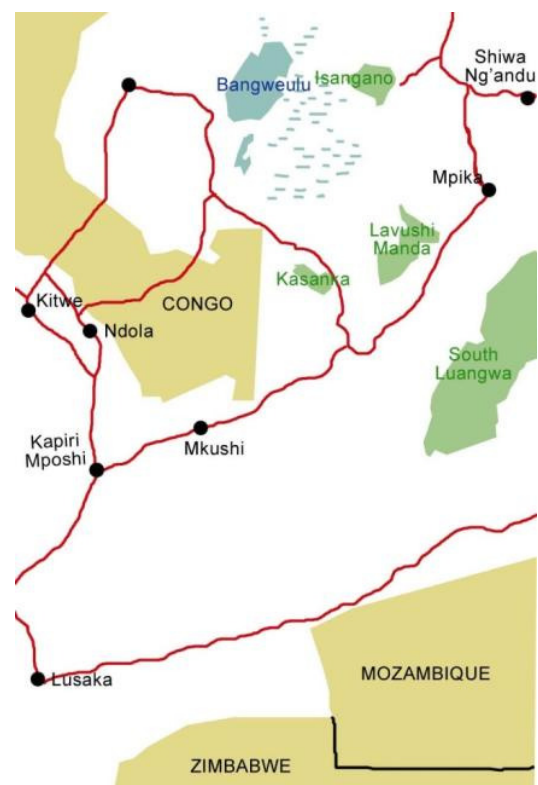


Kasanka and Lavushi Manda are both IBAs – Important Bird Areas - and are safe places for migrating birds to stop or pause en route. Nearby, Bangweulu Swamps is a Ramsar Site and another IBA. Kasanka has a recorded 460 bird species.

In 1986 the Kasanka Trust took over the management of Kasanka with the help of Zambia Wildlife Authority. It was largely depleted of wildlife but, since then, with protection, the wildlife includes lion, hyena, caracal, aardvark, elephant, hyrax, zebra, bushpig, warthog, buffalo, sitatunga, bushbuck, reedbuck, waterbuck, puku, lechwe, roan, sable, hartebeest and grysbok ... and lots of the little things ...

Lavushi Manda is an important wildlife area but is in probably much the same condition as Kasanka was in 1986. With this grant from the World Bank, with hard work and determination, Lavushi Manda will become another major attraction in Zambia.

Kasanka Trust is also applying to the Zambian government to apply for World Heritage status in order to protect the wildlife especially the bats. As one of the largest known bat migrations in the world, it seems important to recognise this worldwide and to have the area protected for generations to come.



Stephen Robinson Photography

Stephen has just put another collection of photos on his website. They are from Zambia Fashion Week in London. Check it out on: www.spirit-of-the-land.com



ZIM-ZAM

UNWTO

Lots has been going on in Livingstone and Victoria Falls Town for the UNWTO. Inspections by a UNWTO team have been ongoing with lots and lots of meetings. Following the celebrations for the 'one year to go' date of August 24th a countdown has been started. Every day on Zambezi FM Radio there are programmes with interviews of people involved in the run up to the event.

However, it would seem that not everyone is in favour. In fact I have read comments on several websites saying that the hosting of the event is a bad idea for both Zambia and Zimbabwe. Most interestingly a petition has been started to call a halt to the whole event:

<http://www.change.org/petitions/stop-united-nations-world-tourism-organisation-from-honouring-president-mugabe>

Petitions such as these have a huge impact.

Save Conservancy

Discussions have hotbed up about the issuance of Hunting Licences to top ZANU-PF officials. The Ministers of Tourism and of the Environment and the Prime Minister are trying to douse the flames of a fire which was started by the granting of these licences. It is becoming clear that it is likely to spill over into the whole of the tourism industry and the run up to the UNWTO. The EU is also saying that economic sanctions which were lifted in July may be reintroduced if the matter is not resolved.

Professional Conference Organiser

UNWTO has ordered the governments to appoint a professional conference organiser so that everything is organised properly. Both countries are trying to organise the meeting on a shoestring and UNWTO officials feel that the only way for it to succeed is that local organisers are themselves organised.

One problem has arisen that UNWTO insists that hotel rooms are sold at no more than US\$200. This, of course, is rather dire for most hoteliers in the region as August is the height of our tourist season and rooms without the UNWTO are normally full ... and selling at US\$500 or more for the best ones.

Development Sites

Sylvia Masebo, Minister of Tourism, addressed stakeholders at a meeting in Livingstone during the week. At the meeting various development sites were mentioned: Zambia Air Force Chalets, Hubert Young, part of Dambwa Forest, and others were identified as being offered on 30 year leases. ZAWA offered Songwe for a 100-bed hotel and the old ZAWA Camp for a 24-bed lodge. The Livingstone City Council offered land next to the Civic Centre for a hotel.

Of course, we have been here before ...

The government expects private investors to jump at the chance to take up these investment opportunities. We shall see. Any development in Livingstone will not be just for the UNWTO; it has to have a long life. With the world still in recession and holidays in Africa among the most expensive, with Zambia being the highest in the region, I just hope the would-be investors do some proper research.

Other developments mentioned for Livingstone were new toilets, markets, bus terminus, street lights, shopping mall and convention centre.

ZIMBABWE

Save Mana Pools

The "Save Mana Pools" campaign is running a logo contest on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SaveMana. The objective is to come up with a logo concept that can be used to brand the online campaign and be further used in print, on websites, stickers, posters, T-shirts and caps etc.

The one prize is open to Zimbabwean schools only. It's a \$1000 donation to the best entry in the "Save Mana Pools" logo contest from a Zimbabwean school that makes at least 3 submissions in the name of the school. This specific prize is on offer from Zambezi Safaris in the UK.

Contest details are available at http://www.facebook.com/SaveMana/app_326243490804979.

Kariba Houseboats

Please would you let all your clients that are booking House Boats, be warned that the thieves are around again at antelope island. We finished our trip at Antelope Island on Tuesday afternoon, only to wake up wed morning to find our Tender Boat had been stolen. It was found floating around the island minus the Motor.

NAMIBIA

Trade Fair Cancelled From AllAfrica.com

The Katima Mulilo Town Council has cancelled this year's trade and agricultural fair, saying it could not find a suitable venue to host the event. The cancellation has left more than 100 exhibitors in the cold. The event was to take place in mid-September.

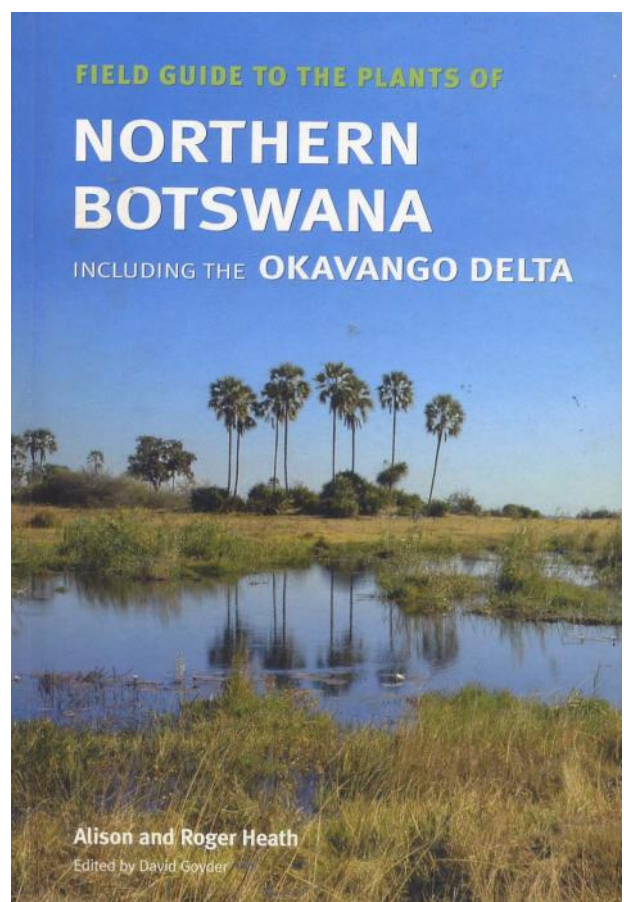
"We have a problem regarding our venue. The Industrial Park in town where we normally host our fair has been fully booked," spokesperson for Katima Mulilo Town Council Muyoba Muyoba told New Era yesterday.

Muyoba says the council could also not afford to compensate the tenants who conduct business from the Industrial Park. Usually the town council leases the business space to tenants and compensates them for loss of income during the days that it uses the business slots to host the trade fair. "We did not raise enough funds this year," Muyoba explained.

There are fears that that the cancellation will put exhibitors off, causing them to lose interest in future trade exhibitions at the town. ...

BOTSWANA

When I visited Kasane the other week I found a fabulous book. It is a beautiful book of plants from Botswana and should be in everyone's reference library.



Tracks of Giants

August

By Ian Michler

I have on many occasions accompanied guests, friends or family through the Makgadikgadi Pans of northern Botswana. Without fail the feedback has always been one of only two responses: a few have questioned my sanity for bringing them to such a dry and barren world, but most have simply been blown away by the stark majesty of the place.

And these widely diverse responses reflect the very nature of the planet's vast environments that exist on the edge of extremes. Because of the climatic patterns brought to bear on their geographical locations, the landscapes and the adapted biodiversity have evolved to survive amidst severe environmental fluctuations. When the rains do come, there are fleeting moments of obvious bounty, but mostly, these are arid regions, seemingly parched of life and comfort. For some, this suggests an unfamiliar harshness and hostility that immediately evokes a sense of foreboding, but on this occasion, everyone was thrilled to enter the realm of the Makgadikgadi.

We were extremely fortunate to have Mike Holding and Tanya Jenkins, two of the continent's most respected and well-known wildlife film-makers, lead us in the two-day crossing. Long time locals to the Okavango and the greater region, they have been involved in so many inspiring documentaries over the years, including recording the breeding cycle of the million or so flamingos that inhabit Sowa Pan during the wet season, and the Botswana sections in the hugely successful Planet Earth series. We would no doubt have found our way without them, but the way they shared their considerable experience and knowledge, (and their food I might add), of the place while filming this short leg of the expedition for us brought a fascinating dimension.

Situated south-east of the Okavango Delta and within the central regions of northern Botswana, the greater Makgadikgadi system exists as a single ecological unit covering almost 30 000 sq. kms – this includes the Makgadikgadi and Nxai Pan National Parks (7 300 sq. kms), which were integrated in 1993, and the two major salt pans of Ntwetwe (6 500 sq. kms) and Sowa (almost 5 000 sq. kms). The rest comprises a number of smaller pans, seasonal water bodies and surrounding grasslands that are integral to the system. Regarded as the largest salt pan complex on the planet, the sediments are remnants of an ancient super-lake that began drying up less than a million years ago when tectonic movement ensured the Okavango River ceased flowing into the basin.

But, despite its size and fragile nature, the vast majority of this area comprising the two pans and the surrounding grasslands still does not have any form of protection status. And it is these areas that remain a vital wet season range for a significant variety of species and biomass of wildlife. During wet years, once the first smattering of rain falls, the region plays host to one of Africa's few remaining migrations – tens of thousands of animals, mostly zebra and blue wildebeest, trek from the Boteti River in the west, and they are joined by a lesser number of animals arriving from the Linyanti and Savute regions to the north, all in search of grazing. The animals disperse sometime in March and April once the rainwater pans have dried. The birdlife can also be prolific in wet years. Brine shrimps and algae stir from the salty waters providing food for hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of both lesser and greater flamingos that arrive to breed on the southern edges of Sowa Pan. And pelicans, waders and waterfowl congregate mostly towards the northern edge where the Nata River enters.



While not as impressive, the wildlife to be seen over the rest of the year is just as appealing. Brown hyena and aardvark, two of the most elusive of the nocturnal creatures are seen regularly, and oryx, caracal, eland, suricate and red hartebeest are other prominent species that act as draw-cards for the region. And sightings of elephant, lion, cheetah and kudu occur from time to time. Without any formal protection of the entire region, Botswana is at risk of losing a significant and unique component to its wildlife heritage. There is talk, and apparently plans exist for an integrated management plan, but this needs to happen sooner rather than later as mining companies, domestic livestock and unregulated tourists are moving in on the area.

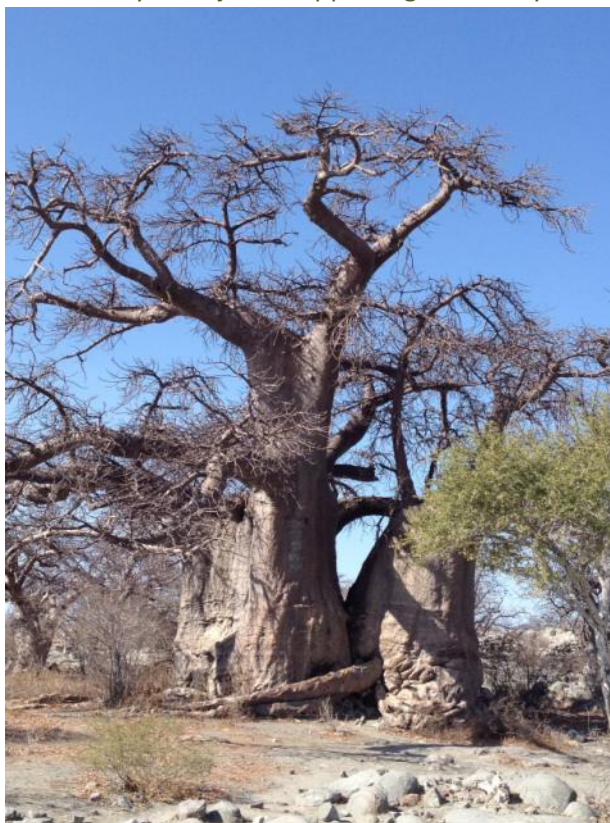
A related issue that needs addressing is that of the veterinary fence that runs from Nxai Pan along the western and southern edge of the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park before bending eastwards and extending towards the centre of Sowa Pan. Constructed in the mid 2000's, it came about at the instigation of the rural communities to the west as an attempt to keep wild and domestic animals apart.

Initially, it succeeded in keeping domestic stock out of the park, but without maintenance, the fence has in many places become a mess of tangled wire and fallen poles. Is it not time to re-assess this fence with an eye to removing it? Fences such as this remove the onus of responsibility for sound husbandry practices from stock owners to every other stakeholder – and at the same time, the alignment of this one has caused havoc amongst wildlife populations.

From the Pans, we headed to the Khama Rhino Sanctuary where we bade farewell to Team McCallum, Steve Moubray (the holder of the Yellow Jersey) and the Berning's. What wonderful company and riding partners you all were. From there it was on to the Northern Tuli Game Reserve, another important wildlife reserve and component to the Limpopo /Shashe TFCA that includes the Greater Mapungubwe area. Tucked away in the far eastern corner of Botswana where its border meets those of Zimbabwe and South Africa, this private reserve has much to offer, particularly with regards to elephant sightings. Here we were warmly hosted by David Evans and his team from Mashatu Lodge (www.mashatu.com). We had time to ride the first morning of the Tour de Tuli (www.tourdewilderness.com) as guests in David's group, before we retired to an afternoon of rest – many thanks to David for his firm support of the TRACKS project.

Before ending, I must mention one particular stop on this recent leg. Our route from Pandamatenga to the Pans was made all the more memorable by a one-night stay at Nata Lodge (www.natalodge.com), situated a few kilometers outside the village of Nata on the northern tip of Sowa Pan. Going back 30 years and more, there is hardly a seasoned Botswana traveller that is not familiar with this famous stopover on the Johannesburg to Maun road. Recently rebuilt and expanded, the lodge offers an extremely convenient and comfortable way to break this journey. We were at their camp site and everyone in the TRACKS team voted the ablution facilities by far and away the best we had encountered on the entire trip. Many thanks also to Diane and James French, the General Managers, for inviting us all to a sumptuous dinner.

Tomorrow (4 August 2012), we cross into South Africa at Pontdrift and head for Musina and then on to Pafuri in the Kruger National Park. We now have the wind in our sails as we approach the last quarter of the trip. The day we arrived in Tuli, we passed the 4 000km mark – and we have all admitted that it's a great feeling to know we only have a 1 000 or so to go. Frank and Johnny particularly have an added zest to their daily routines as their wives, Ida and Carol, have joined us – a very warm welcome to them and we shall be on our best behaviour while they are with us for the next week or so. And then Ian and I have much to look forward to when we reach Pafuri in four days time – Tessa, Liam and Sharon will be there to meet us. Now that's certainly worth pedalling 100kms or so per day for!



SOUTH AFRICA

Roan Antelope in Kruger National Park

[http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global\[_id\]=86727](http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global[_id]=86727)

ROAN antelope face extinction as a species (?????????) after an anthrax outbreak in the Kruger Game Park at the weekend killed 30 of about 100 roan antelope in a breeding herd fenced in near the Mopani rest camp.

William Mabasa, spokesperson for the game park, said the breeding programme — known as the Capricon endangered species project — was started to prevent the rare roan antelope (*Hippotragus equinus*) from becoming extinct.

The breeding camp in the Mooiplaas area in the north of the park was set up in 2002 and 19 roan antelope were moved to the Capricon project from a similar breeding programme, the N'washitshumbe project, near Punda Maria, which breeds with between 60 and 70 roan antelope.

Mabasa said anthrax was endemic to the Kruger Park and broke out from time to time. Outside the breeding herds there are only about 30 roan antelope roaming in the Kruger's three million hectares. Game wardens who inspected the Capricon breeding project during the weekend discovered the carcasses. After tissue samples were taken, the carcasses were burned to prevent the bacterium that causes the disease from spreading.

Anthrax is a deadly bacterial disease and is highly contagious for both humans and animals.

Mabasa said visitors to the game park should not touch any dead animals. "Report such carcasses without delay at the nearest rest camp or game warden," he said.

OTHER STUFF

1 September – International Vulture Awareness Day

From the Farmers Weekly in 2011

I have printed this before, but it is worth printing again ...

... Believe it or not, the most catastrophic environmental holocaust, unparalleled ever in recorded history, occurred recently when India's vulture population, comprising nine species and generally considered the healthiest in the world, suddenly plummeted from 40 million to less than 60 000 birds in under 10 years.

This staggering 99,85% decline represents the entire vulture population on the Indian sub-continent. It doesn't reflect the true and far worse collapse in the three most affected griffon vulture species – the Indian long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*), the slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*) and the Indian white-backed vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*). Twenty years ago, the latter was considered the most numerous large bird on earth. ...

The long-billed vulture (Gyps indicus) is another casualty of diclofenac.

Photos: Courtesy of Abré J Steyn

The slender-billed vulture (Gyps tenuirostris) has suffered the effects of diclofenac.



In India, livestock and human diseases have skyrocketed, because the veterinary cattle medicine diclofenac wiped out its vulture population of 40 million in under a decade, as discussed in last week's issue. Although India, Nepal and Pakistan finally banned the manufacture and veterinary use of diclofenac, recommending meloxicam as a safe alternative, it was too late. The damage had been done. It must never happen again.

What's disturbing is that the international chemical industry has no intention of preventing a similar disaster in Africa. With callous indifference to the threat posed to African vultures, China, the world's main diclofenac producer, Brazil and Egypt's Pharco Corporation are all jostling for market supremacy to sell the drug throughout Africa. Pharco already supplies 20 African countries, including Namibia and Swaziland. While it's known as diclopar in Tanzania, Pharco markets it as declope in Kenya where, in some parts, a 70% decline in scavenging birds has already been recorded over a three-year period. For the first time, a large-scale population decline in scavenging raptors in and around the Masai-Mara has also been documented. But not all vulture mortalities are from diclofenac. Thousands are killed by Masai tribesmen setting poisoned bait laced with the highly toxic, over-the-counter pesticide carbofuran for cattle-marauding lions. If this trend continues, the annual East African wildebeest migration, during which thousands of animals die, will turn into an environmental and health disaster.

The Egyptian vulture is already extinct in South Africa. They were once numerous and called "white crows" by farmers.



SA's vultures at more risk than rhinos In South Africa vultures are dying at an alarming rate, but here the picture looks different. Although some die when farmers attempt to kill certain predators with poison and many still get executed on Eskom powerlines, most succumb, not to a modern veterinary drug, but to the age-old traditional medicinal muthi trade that's rooted in superstition.

The majestic and powerful lappet-faced vulture is the least numerous vulture species, and possibly the next to go extinct in South Africa.



Some time ago, I met Brian Jones of the Moholoholo Rehabilitation Centre near Hoedspruit, at Olifants Camp in the Kruger National Park. He was there to collect impala carcasses to feed about 200 poison-paralysed park vultures, which he tried to save and nurse back to health. Many more were found dead, all with their heads and feet cut off.

They're certainly not safe in the park and several local people feel that South African National Parks staff members are involved. The phenomenon has escalated throughout the Lowveld, peaking during the build-up to the soccer world cup. Similar to the perception of rhino horn in Asia, many Africans believe vultures possess medicinal and supernatural powers. Various vulture parts are prescribed for a variety of common ailments, while their brains and feet are supposed to provide clairvoyant powers, foresight and increased intelligence. By eating a vulture's brain, a sangoma is said to receive greater powers to communicate with the dead. Sangomas pay R4 000 or more for a dead vulture. So, if you want good luck in gambling, if you want to win the Lotto or pass matric, or even if you want to know who messes around with your wife, a vulture's head or foot is said to do the trick.

This trade is huge. A recent study, which Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife participated in, concluded that there are

almost 60 000 “consumption events” of vulture parts annually, with the vulture muthi industry worth an estimated R1,2 million annually in eastern South Africa alone.

Eskom must also put its money where its mouth is. There are hundreds of kilometres of unprotected powerlines running through the Kruger Park, with hyenas consuming all electrocution victims before morning.

In South Africa, vultures are more rare than rhinos. With less than 3 000 birds left in all seven species, and a pair only producing one chick annually, the mortality rate far exceeds the breeding rate. If trends continue, certain species could be extinct within the next 10 years.

In the next 25 years, we’ll probably lose six species, including the endemic Cape vulture. The seventh – the Egyptian vulture – is already officially extinct. In the modern world, it’s inconceivable for any nation to embrace space-age technology and progress with one hand, while clinging to stone-age superstition with the other. This is a lesson Asia and Africa must still learn.

Contact Abré J Steyn on 083 235 4822 or e-mail abrejsteyn@vodamail.co.za.

Small Hydro a Potential Bridge for Africa’s Energy Divide

By: Wim Jonker Klunne

From September 2012 World Rivers Review

Africa is home to one of the world’s largest off-grid populations: approximately 590 million people live with no connection to their national electric grid, according to the International Energy Agency. Grid expansion in Africa has been notoriously slow, and thus new solutions are needed to bridge this energy divide.



Small hydropower can play a pivotal role in providing energy access to large parts of Africa, either in stand-alone isolated mini-grids or as distributed generation in national grids. The potential role of small hydropower in eradicating energy poverty has been recognized by a number of national governments and donors, and is a key element of the UN Energy Access for All program.

Yet for all the potential, most African nations have done little to tap this resource. The lack of small hydropower development in Africa is the result of a host of persistent barriers.

WOLFGANG’S COLUMN

VODACOM GETS PRESIDENTIAL PRAISE FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Even for a large corporation like Vodacom in Tanzania, is 450.000 US Dollars considered serious money and no wonder none other than President Jakaya Kikwete has offered his personal praise and appreciation to the company’s CEO Rene Meza at State House Dar es Salaam last weekend.

‘I would like to express my appreciation to Vodacom for the support and relentless effort in this cause’ after learning that the funds have been given for a three year wild dogs, aka painted dogs or hunting dogs project.

Partners with Vodacom were TANAPA, NCCA, the Frankfurt Zoological Society, the Grumeti Fund and the Ngorongoro District Council who are all working hand in hand to boost numbers to ensure the survival of this ever rarer species. 11 groups are under the project being monitored, three within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and a further 8 in Loliondo, totaling to about 200 animals.

Decades ago the painted dogs, aka hunting dogs, numbered thousands in the wider Serengeti / Ngorongoro area, freely roaming with little chance to come across humans or their livestock, but they have been

decimated in the past by poisoning as well as rabies, for which veterinarians of TANAPA are now providing treatment and inoculations. 11 wild dogs were released from 'protective custody' recently, all wearing radio collars to ascertain their location and range.

The late Hugo von Lawick dedicated a photographic book on the species and regularly drove from his camp at Lake Ngutu into the Serengeti plains, seeking to follow the fast moving packs, but just as Hugo passed on years ago, so did many of the wild dog packs vanish from the plains.

Vodacom's CEO on the occasion was quoted to have assured President Kikwete of continued support towards the project beyond the current phase, to ensure the long term monitoring and conservation efforts by TANAPA. Well done indeed, good news to report.

ARUSHA STEPS UP AS PAN AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL MEETING SHIFTED FROM NIGERIA

Organisers of the 13th Pan African Ornithological Congress have reportedly decided to shift the October event from its previous location in Nigeria to Arusha, where cost and other considerations appear to have been met by the host city, stepping up with an attractive events package to make the last minute move possible.

The meeting, last held in South Africa in 2008, will discuss continental issues on bird conservation and in particular the question of more and more birds entering the red zone of being endangered.

Local environmentalists and conservationists have already vowed to use the meeting to draw public attention to the ongoing plans by the Tanzanian government to build a soda ash plant, and related infrastructure like road and rail access, right in the most critical breeding zones of the large numbers of flamingos, which only breed in the mud flats of Lake Natron. Said one regular contributor on condition of anonymity: 'The decline of some vulture species is already on the agenda and it is important that this man made problem is discussed and ways and means found to restore vulture populations where they have almost disappeared. But with the flamingo issue on Lake Natron we have a chance not to make such mistakes and threaten the birds with extinction but avoid it. If we raise the issue and all experts will tell our government that this will be an irreversible mistake, maybe they can see their errors and desist from building such a plant. Now that this meeting has come to Arusha by almost default, we need to use the presence of African ornithologists and experts to make the most of it'.

The information received over the weekend does not give exact dates when the meeting will take place but once available this will be published here, although the venue was confirmed to be the Corridor Springs Hotel in Arusha. Delegates will find special offers for pre- and post conference tours to the Northern circuit national parks of Tarangire, Manyara, Ngorongoro and Serengeti, where they can witness the rich variety of birds found inside and outside the country's protected areas.

Sent to me by an Australian ...



Have a good week

Gill