



Dear All

My header is from the back of my house. The Winterthorn tree is home to my local crow population. Every morning their raucous crowing has been my 'Good Morning', after, that is, the brown-hooded kingfisher has sped through the garden shouting as he goes.

The garden has been quiet of late. There has been plenty of water in the bush and they have all been busy raising their chicks. Now, as the rainy season draws to a close, I hope my bird visitors come back. They are, though, getting fewer and fewer as development continues all around me and I notice children with sling shots stalking the bushes.

LIVINGSTONE

Wildlife Safety on the Kazungula Road

I was reminded by one reader that, for the past 20 years, we have been discussing a bypass for Livingstone. Livingstone's economic future depends on tourism but we are also a major through-road for trucks. When Michael Sata was President he promised that Livingstone would concentrate on the tourism industry, hence the reason for moving the Provincial Capital to Choma. One would assume that he would also have looked at diverting heavy traffic from the centre of Livingstone too. There has been talk by the government of moving the Port Office from its present location by the railway line in order to reduce congestion ... we are still waiting for that to happen.

The most logical route for a bypass of Livingstone would be as shown on the map. Were this road to be put in place, most of the traffic would be diverted from the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park and thereby give much more safety to the wildlife along the Kazungula Road.

The road would turn north at the Park Entrance Gate on the Kazungula Road, run along an existing road to the top of the ridge and then, somehow, pass through Dambwa Forest to the Lusaka Road. The site where the bypass joins the Lusaka Road would also be the place for a new Port Office.



Bhukhans

JOLLYBOYS

Chundukwa River Lodge

Riding in wide open country with only your horse and the wilderness around you has to be one of the most exhilarating experiences. We are excited to share that Chundukwa has grown wings and launched Simalaha Horse Safaris which will be operating on the Zambezi flood plains near to Victoria falls.

G: Simalaha is a relatively new Conservation Area under Chief Sekute with the help of Peace Parks. The wildlife includes impala, zebra, wildebeest, giraffe, puku, waterbuck, red lechwe and buffalo.



ZAMBIA

Parley adopts motion to reduce deforestation News Diggers

Members of Parliament have unanimously adopted a motion for government to strengthen measures to minimize charcoal burning and reduce deforestation countrywide in view of the devastating effects of climate change.

The motion, passed in Parliament, Wednesday, which was moved by Nakonde PF member of parliament Yizukanji Siwazi, stated that uncontrolled charcoal production affected global warming through greenhouse gas emissions. ...

G: I suppose this is a start, but we need more than words.

Happy International Day of Forests! North Luangwa Conservation Project

We may not realise it but almost everything we do every day is connected to our forests; drinking water, using toilet paper, writing in a notebook or building a house, the value of our forests to society is infinite. The NLCP helps support local communities to preserve their valuable woodland areas through our community forestry project that promotes sustainable land use practices. We achieve this by assisting in the formation of Community Forest Management Groups (CFMG) and providing education and logistics for resource assessment and management planning.

G: I have put this in to remind us of all the wonderful places we have yet to see when we are allowed to travel again ... maybe next year ...



WILL MONGU-KALABO ROAD SURVIVE?

Mwebantu

Zambia has received heavy rainfall in the month of January and February that its rivers are swollen and bursting their banks. Last year the country was threatened by extensive drought but the rains wished for, have come in a flood.

Major rivers such as Luangwa, Kafue and Zambezi rivers are all flowing with full and heavy currents and washing away bridges and crossing points in their wake.



In Western province, the heavy rains have caused such high floods that it is threatening the structural integrity of the iconic Mongu-Kalabo road built over the Zambezi flood plains.

The 34 kilometre stretch was built with 26 Bridges over the flood plains and has since been flooded by the high tides. (G: High tides??)



Zesco resumes 10-12 hours load shedding

News Diggers

ZESCO Limited says it will continue with the daily load shedding schedule of between 10 to 12 hours due to insufficient power generation capacity at the Kariba Dam. And Zesco says the power importation deal with South African power utility, Eskom, lapsed on February 29, 2019, and that there are no plans to extend the deal.

Meanwhile, Zesco says it has already used 25 per cent of the 11 billion cubic meters of water allocated to them at the Kariba North Bank by the Zambezi River Authority (ZRA). ...

G: To add to our utility problems, I received a warning that my water would be cut off unless I paid my bill. Surely government can look into our need to have essential utilities like electricity and water during this year as many of us are keeping at home as part of our 'social distancing'. Maybe government can copy other countries by ordering water companies not to disconnect until the emergency is over. Also, now that many factories and mines are closing because of COVID-19, let's hope that the load shedding hours can be reduced.

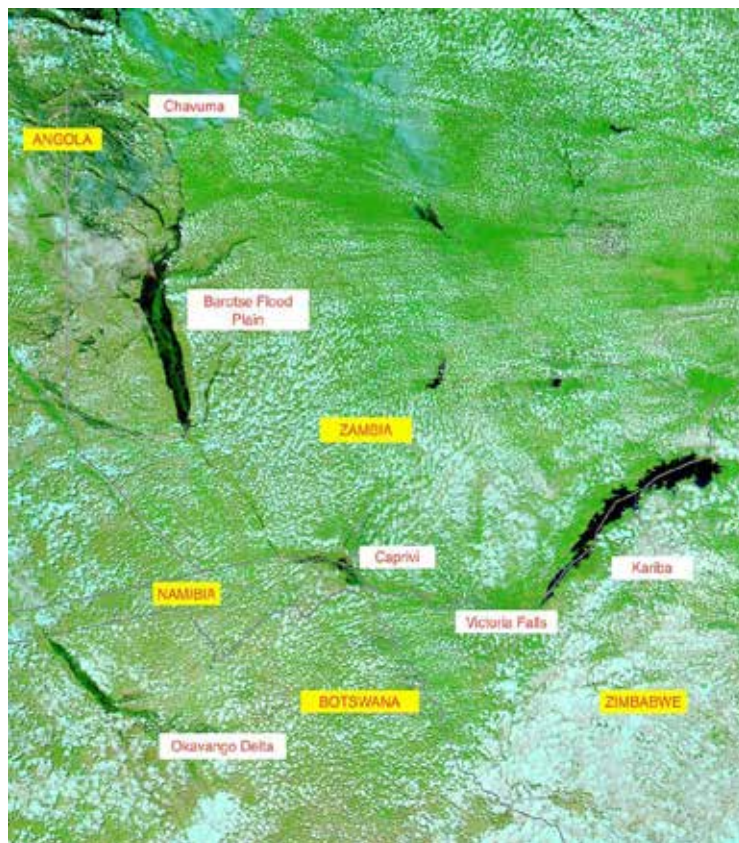
There was another article about ZESCO in The Mast which included this paragraph:

In the presentation, Mwila talked about the rainfall performance and other hydrological factors and indicators, insofar as reservoir operations, the Victoria Falls and the small hydropower stations, the integrated picture of the expected total generation from Zesco and all the Independent Power Producers (IPPs), power imports and exports, short-term mitigation and management of power deficit and an appeal to its clients on power usage.

Does anyone know what this means? It did make me smile, though.

Bhejane Trust

A satellite picture from NASA gives an update on the Zambezi River now. The Zambezi enters Zambia from Angola at Chavuma and in the very top left corner one can see the bottom of the huge swamp in Angola which supplies much of the water to the river. The Barotse Flood Plain is full (bigger than Kariba) with more large rivers coming out of Angola feeding it. The flood waters have now reached the Caprivi - they are just starting to fill up this flood plain. Will not be long before the waters hit Victoria Falls and then Kariba! You can also see the Okavango River at the top of the swamps starting to spread out into the delta



BOTSWANA

Department of Environmental Affairs is in Kasane

TRANSBOUNDARY EXTENSION OF OKAVANGO DELTA WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY

Members of the Steering Committee for the project; Transboundary Extension of the Okavango Delta World Heritage Property recently met in Kasane.

The Steering Committee is mandated to coordinate activities geared towards exploring the feasibility and scope of the potential transboundary of the Okavango Delta World Heritage Property. This is aimed at extending the World Heritage property into Angola and Namibia and to promote and strengthen the integrated sustainable management, use and development of the Cubango-Okavango basin in line with the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area Treaty (KAZA); OKACOM's Strategic Action Programme and the relevant SADC strategic documents such as the Protocol on Shared Watercourses and the Protocol on Environmental Management for Sustainable Development. It is comprised of representatives from the three (3) member states, OKACOM, KAZA, IUCN, UNESCO World Heritage Centre and AWHF.

The committee met on the 26th and 27th February 2020 in Mowana Safari Lodge, Kasane to approve Terms of Reference and develop an Action Plan.



PULA!! HALO OR 'PITSO YA PULA' IN SETSWANA BWgovernment

The Botswana Meteorological Services confirms that the weather phenomenon witnessed in Maun and surrounding areas is called Halo or Pitso ya Pula in Setswana. It is a weather phenomenon which shows reflection of sunlight on ice crystals, showing that there are high clouds in the atmosphere. It shows that rain is coming in the next few days.

THE ONGOING RHINO MASSACRE IN BOTSWANA

Bhejane Trust

The relentless slaughter of rhino continues unabated in the Okavango Delta and at the current rate there will be no rhino left in the Delta within a few months. It is quite incredible that so much effort and money was spent bringing the rhino into the Delta, and then they are not properly protected! They were losing about 2 rhino a week at the beginning of the year, but the rate has picked up to almost a rhino a day at present (12 were lost in one week recently). It is believed there were about 250 rhino in the Delta, but this number must be well below 200 by now – the authorities claim to have lost 47 but I think this is a very conservative figure! Unless there is urgent action, by year end there will be only a very few scattered surviving rhino, and it will mark the biggest failure of rhino translocations ever

The Botswana Defence Force (BDF) who are tasked with patrolling the area are a military unit and are very poor at anti-poaching. Poachers interrogated in Zimbabwe admitted that poaching in Botswana is easy - if you hear a helicopter, stand under a tree, and anti-track across the roads and then you are safe! The only solution is boots on the ground – not army boots but highly mobile specially trained units. There is a desperate need for outside experienced help to assist the anti-poaching effort and put in the required highly mobile armed reaction units to follow up on the poachers. Botswana should have tracking skills available – the bushmen or unemployed trackers from the closed hunting companies, which could team up with the reaction units – one wonders why the BDF do not use them. Intelligence is also vital but this takes time to develop.

It appears that there are several poaching gangs now operating on Chiefs Island. These gangs are Zambian based professionals, whom we are well acquainted with in Zimbabwe!. The Zambians are wary of Zimbabwe and are going around through Namibia, where they seem to have teamed up with some Namibians. The Namibians have had some success in arresting poaching gangs transiting through Namibia though. The poachers enjoy high level support in Zambia, where they get armed and equipped and which is a clearing house for rhino horn and ivory.

There was a dumb article in the Mmegi (a local Botswana newspaper) about the government buying more body bags for the poachers – someone has to get out there and shoot the poachers first and the current success rate of the BDF will certainly not dent their body bag stocks. The government has no idea what to do – they are talking about de-horning which might create enough disturbance to disrupt the poachers temporarily but will not deter them. Unfortunately, the issue also seems to have been politicised by the Government, which is further hindering any action. Thus, the Government is dithering while the rhino die - a “Nero” scenario! They need outside professional help urgently, and the sooner they admit to it and take action, the sooner the remaining rhino will be saved.

Otherwise one day the government will proudly announce the poaching is under control – what they won't announce is that there are no rhino left! Problem solved!!

Once the rhino are finished, the gangs will go back to poaching elephant – it is estimated that over 1000 elephant bulls were poached in Botswana over the last couple of years. Inevitably, this onslaught will resume again, the rhino are just more lucrative at the moment. Like the rhino, there is very little protection for the elephant in Botswana – as already stated, the BDF are a military unit, not an anti-poaching unit. They need to be replaced by a specialized anti-poaching units.

G: Trevor Lane is right, of course. One of the reasons I started this newsletter is to show that our countries have the expertise and experience to solve most of our problems in conservation. Yes, we do need the big bucks to help us with some programmes but we do have the knowledge to help each other in times of need. I think this is a time of need. I do hope the Botswana government, with possibly the help of Peace Parks, can come up with funds and a programme to enlist the many willing game guards throughout our region to come to their aid.

About Trevor's feeling that the rhino horn is going through Zambia, I cannot comment too much. But many Zambians have been caught poaching in neighbouring countries and it seems only right to conclude that we are also home to some kingpins who organise them. Surely we know who they are!



Okavango Wilderness Project

While the world is being crippled by the Covid19 virus, the floodwaters are slowly arriving into Botswana. Oblivious to the devastation the virus is having on the tourism industry in the Southern African Region, the steady flow of water is moving through the delta, filling the empty channels and providing life giving waters to the humans and animals that thrive on it.



NAMIBIA

Dusky dolphin mass stranding

Lüderitz Marine Research

On Friday, the Lüderitz office of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources received a report from a lobster vessel, that a number of dead dolphins had been seen at Hottentot Bay, about 60 km north of Lüderitz. The ministry's research vessel was readied and took a small team of researchers there the next morning (Saturday). The scene that greeted us was beyond sad. Altogether 86 dusky dolphins, including two newborns and several immature individuals, were scattered on the beach in an advanced state of decay.

Unfortunately their decomposed state yielded no clues as to what may have caused this mass stranding. They might have become disorientated for some reason and accidentally beached themselves, or they may have rallied around a member of their group that got itself in trouble.



These relatively small dolphins, known for their impressive aerial acrobatics, occur in parts of South America, southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand and at several subantarctic islands. In southern Africa they are found from central Angola to about Cape Town in South Africa, and from fairly shallow coastal to deep continental shelf waters.

Sadly we will never know what exactly happened to this group, and the heartbreaking images will be hard to forget.

A bird's eye view of Etosha National Park.

Dirk Heinrich

Vast areas of the 4760 square kilometres of the Etosha Pan are covered with water and hundreds of flamingos have found their way from the coast to Etosha, where they feed in the shallow waters. Most water is found in the northern and eastern parts of the big white pan.

Next to the pan in the Namutoni area a lush green landscape greets the visitor. In the bush all little pans, gravel pits and depressions are filled with rainwater and make it easy for the animals to venture in areas which normally are avoided, due to lack of water. The western areas of the park still needs rain. The signs of the drought are still visible, barren soil and lack of grazing can still be seen in large parts of the western side of Etosha. The first rains have left a number of puddles in the landscape but the green vegetation still needs time to appear and grow.

Animals have scattered all over the park to enjoy the fresh vegetation and the ample water available. Birds like Abdim's Storks have migrated in big numbers to Etosha National Park extending the list of species to be seen in the Park by tourists. If enough water is in the 120 km long and 55 km wide pan, flamingos breed here, one of the few places in southern Africa where these colourful but shy birds breed and raise their young. The vast pan not only provides food for the specialized feeders but also protection, since predators will not walk through the muddy pan to reach the breeding colony. It is still not known if the birds have started breeding yet.



Wereldend
in full bloomhoodia



TONGABEZI

SPAR 



Seasonal floods swamp eastern Zambezi region

New Era

Residents in the floodplains of Zambezi region such as Luhonono, formerly known as Schuckmannsburg, are cut off from the mainland via the Namalubi-Luhonono road by the swelling Zambezi River.

The previous year on 11 March the water was at 1,84m while the same time this year it stood at 5,70m. Upon enquiry, Peter Mwala the councillor for Kabbe South constituency said an assessment team has already been established and dispatched to assess the severity of the floods before measures are put in place to assist the affected communities. ...

OTHER STUFF

African Parks

We are pleased to announce that Africa's largest transfrontier conservation area, the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA), received a major boost in the shape of a 16.9M Euro contribution from the Postcode Loterij. Last night at a prestigious Gala event held in Amsterdam, the Lottery's Dream Fund grant was awarded to WWF, African Parks and Peace Parks Foundation – who have joined forces to protect the region's globally significant wildlife populations, counter the potential effects of climate change, safeguard and sustainably harness shared resources across borders, and enhance the well-being of local communities.

“The Dutch Postcode Lottery and their participants have provided a transformational grant which mobilises a unique collaboration between Government and NGO partners to secure this vital network of protected areas, assuring KAZA's integrity as a foundation for social, ecological and economic sustainability in the region” said African Parks' CEO Peter Fearnhead.



Shut down wildlife markets NOW!

Rain Forest Rescue

With their brisk trade in endangered and poached animals, wildlife markets in many countries are driving the extinction of species. The markets are also breeding grounds for diseases that can also be deadly to humans. There is no excuse for the existence of these markets – it's time to shut them down NOW.

The outbreak of coronavirus in Wuhan, China, cast a harsh light on wildlife markets. The Huanan Seafood Market, which offers an appalling variety of live and freshly slaughtered animals, is suspected to be the pandemic's Ground Zero. According to genetic analyses, bats are the original hosts of the virus, but animals from the wildlife market may have transmitted them to humans.

In addition to seafood, the meat of 30 terrestrial animal species is available there, including pangolins, civets, squirrels, pheasants, scorpions, snakes and a variety of rats. Such markets not only play a role in the spread of disease: by selling poached, endangered animals such as pangolins, they are pushing species toward extinction.

Illegal hunting and the wildlife trade, like climate change and habitat destruction, are among the causes of the dramatic global extinction of species. In late 2019, a UN report issued a stark warning about the scope of the catastrophe, predicting that up to one million animal and plant species could soon be extinct. ...

G: Just a thought: During my lifetime I have watched the population grow from 2.5million to 7.7million. So far, COVID-19 has killed 13,000 people worldwide; the number of human births per day is 350,000. The mind boggles ...



WEATHER

Min Temp	Max Temp
17°C (63)	29°C (84)

Still raining ...

EXCHANGE RATES

US\$1	K17.40
	P11.85
	Nam\$17.75
	Zim\$44.50

A SMILE



Have a good two weeks

Gill

I don't know whether there will be any stories for the next newsletter. Most of our lodges around the region are closed. Let's hope there is something to report. I still want to see some photos of the desert flowers which must have come in to bloom after all the rain we have had!

