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SEBAKWE NEWS

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www.blackrhino.org

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Rhino Poaching

We have continued to have serious poaching problems in the Midlands Conservancy and in order to combat poaching all our adult rhino were dehorned in September 2006, some had radio collars put round their necks. Norman English has been appointed as Security Officer and together with our guards and monitors is trying to track down and catch the poachers and protect the remaining rhino.



Sadly, although the adults were dehorned, Seniorita and her calf were killed by poachers in November 2006 and one juvenile male killed in early December 2006 – in each case they were shot with bullets from an AK47 Rifle and the small stump of horn was hacked off.

After three births this last year, we now have twenty black rhino left in the main Midlands Conservancy, not including those at Iwaba Esatates.

On December 26th by pure chance, an AK47 rifle was discovered in a plastic bag hidden in a hole in an anthill along with 84 rounds of ammunition. This weapon is being examined to see if it matches the bullets recovered from the rhino killed by poachers. A reward of one million Zimbabwe dollars was paid to the person who discovered the weapon on one of the Conservancy farms.



Conservancy Land Reform Policy

The Government policy for Wildlife based land reform has now been finalised and will bring about changes in the ownership and management of conservancies and wildlife ranches in Zimbabwe. Current farmers will be encouraged to remain in operation and the conservancy will operate through a corporate model and has different indigenisation options, which will include working in partnership with Parks and Wildlife, Local Communities and private indigenous investors.

The Conservancy will be managed through a Trust. The criteria for the selection of the new stakeholders must include interest and experience in wildlife conservation, a capacity for business development and management and an ability to contribute to the asset base.

In the past the funding of the Conservancy has been undertaken by the input of the member farmers through land levies, provision of farm guards and practical support of housing and vehicles etc. This local support has been supplemented by external donor support.

Following our recent visit to the Conservancy and assurances from Hon. F.Nhema, Minister of Environment and Tourism, and the local Governor of the Midlands, as well as our meetings with the farmers and new stakeholders, the Trustees of SBRT have agreed to continue to provide donor support to the Midlands Conservancy. However, we expect the new stakeholders, as well as the existing farmers, to provide their support and share of the management costs and capital investments required to ensure the future viability of the Conservancy.

I quote Norman English in his report. *'With the Policy for Wildlife based Land Reform now finalised, a unique opportunity exists for the current land holders and the new shareholders to take the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy forwards with the common objective for the survival of the resident rhino population and associated wildlife and its habitats'*.

Blankets For Zimbabwe

Last autumn we received an e-mail from Keren Lovett of British Airways Community Relations, informing us that there were surplus B.A. blankets available free to charities – provided we collected them from Heathrow.

So we drove up and filled the boot and the back seat of the car with about 400 blankets and returned home where they were stored in my attic and packed into 16 large parcels.

John Gillon of Hwange Conservation Society then arranged for these to be flown to Harare. The blankets are much needed for the Education Centre and will also be used by the guards and monitors when camping out at night. Many thanks to Keren and B.A. for thinking of us and also for the extra 100kg baggage allowance she arranged for our last visit to Zimbabwe.



RHINO MAY DAY will be held at the Meeting Rooms, London Zoo on 30th May at 10:30 a.m. Tickets are £10 each and obtainable from www.savetherhino.org

Robert & Jenny Swift

One casualty of the Land Reform Act has been that Robert and Jenny Swift have had to leave their farm and homestead at Bemthree Ranch. The last two years has been a very stressful time for them both, but despite the personal loss of their farm, we are hoping that they will be able to stay in the Conservancy at their Nyangombe Safari Camp and still be involved in the future management of rhino and wildlife.

We owe them both a great debt of gratitude for all the work they have undertaken for the local community especially for Sebakwe Primary School, the Medical Clinic and the Education Centre. We hope they will still be able to continue with this work.



Their friendship and tremendous support on all our visits to Zimbabwe has always been greatly appreciated and we wish them well for their new life after their enforced retirement from farming.

Norman English

Last autumn Norman English gave notice to leave National Parks, and the Midlands Conservancy immediately offered him the position of Chief Security Officer. We are delighted that he has accepted this offer and we are fortunate that we have obtained the services of someone who is very experienced in anti-poaching work.

Norman has produced a report on the way forward for the Conservancy and is seen on the left of this photograph talking to Nicholas Duncan, Chairman of SAVE Foundation.



New Trustee

My name is Dr. Alastair Neale and I am thrilled and delighted to have become a trustee. I am a good friend of Paul Holmes and through him I have heard a lot about the Black Rhino of Sebakwe. We have had various fund raising events to help.



I am married and have three children and lucky enough to live in a beautiful part of Shropshire. I am a Child Psychiatrist working in Telford. This is a busy and challenging but rewarding job. I am very interested in contrasts and similarities facing children as they struggle to grow up across the world. When I have spare time I enjoy walking in Wales, photography, playing football and help run a local youth group. I feel very privileged to visit the Trust first hand and I hope that it will inspire me to work to raise much needed money for the area over the next few years.

School Visits - by Alastair Neale

I felt very fortunate to be asked to join the trip to Sebakwe, as a friend of Paul Holmes we had held events in our village to raise funds for the Trust and what interested me in particular were the schools; so I volunteered to help Annie visit as many schools as possible with enthusiasm (particularly when I heard I could drive a four wheel drive vehicle !)



I found the experience deeply moving, with feelings of hope joy and despair simultaneously. All six schools that are encompassed by the Trust were visited and thanks to BA allowing us additional weight allowances we were able to take quite a lot of pencils, paper ,books, atlases maps and footballs which without exception went down a treat. We also introduced the new sport of 'Frisbee Throwing' to Zimbabwe which seems up to now to have passed the country by.



The schools visited were Poldale with 250 pupils, Rockvale 120, Sebakwe 100, Mpani 55, Guzuzu 263 and Musena 200, there were common problems in each school. All schools lacked the basic resources enabling teachers to teach properly, books, paper and even chalk. Many pupils were not attending because of the very modest fee asked, AIDs was having a devastating effect in all the communities and many of the children were hungry.

We have arranged for the children in all the schools to have the high protein drink - Mahewu each day. This will be distributed to the schools from the Education Centre.

Each school had its own problems, Poldale had a new school which lay empty waiting for a new roof. Rockvale had a new building but the children had to sit on a rubble floor, Sebakwe was in crisis because the new land owners were not farming the land and therefore the farm workers and families had all had to move away so the numbers at school had plummeted.



Perhaps the most needy school was Mpani, this is located in a previous homestead and the children are the offspring of war veterans, the numbers of children attending school seemed very low and most children were out on the land working when we visited.

There were however noticeable positives in all the visits that left you with a feeling of hope amongst the despair. Of most importance the children were a delight, they were bright, engaging, attentive and so keen to learn. The teachers had very high standards and they were always dressed impeccably - despite the circumstances and were committed to the one aim of getting the children an education in order that they could move out of the poverty that had trapped their parents.



I was left with one very positive thought that the future of Zimbabwe lay in the lives of these children and the Black Rhino Trust may be enabling one of the countries next leaders to go to school. This thought has spurred me on to look at how I can help the Trust to help these schools in anyway possible. The Trust is now going to try to invest money in improving the primary schools in the area working on buildings and basics such as books etc. Anyone wishing to help raise money for the schools contact the Trust.

Scholarship Committee Meeting - Paul Holmes

During our recent visit to Zimbabwe in January we were invited to a meeting of the scholarship committee who choose the local children for the SBRT rhino scholarships.

So far six children have received scholarships to attend Rio Tinto boarding school. The schooling is organised by CAMFED. Some parents of the successful children also attended. We were surprised and pleased at the number of people who had made the effort to travel considerable distances to come to see us. With the aid of a very capable translator we were able to keep up with the comments from the enthusiastic group.

Six local schools are involved in the scheme and the selection committee includes each of the school's development committee chairpersons and school heads. The parents and schools were extremely grateful that the donors in the UK had given opportunity and hope to the community. The local councillor said *"thank you for giving life to this society, if there is no education there is no life"*

The group asked if it would be possible for more children to benefit by sending extra children to go to the much cheaper day secondary schools and cut back on the more expensive boarding schooling. Boys and girls are selected according to intellectual potential and needy background.

Visit to CAMFED office in Harare

On our last day in Harare we managed to see Winnie Farao in the CAMFED Harare offices. We discussed with her the proposal from the scholarship committee regarding the possibility of funding fewer places in boarding schools so that money could be released to fund more children to go to less expensive day secondary schools. CAMFED is dedicated to fighting poverty and AIDS in rural communities in Africa by educating girls.

CAMFED began in 1993 by supporting 32 girls in rural Zimbabwe. In 2005, more than 246,520 children benefited from CAMFED's programme of educational support in some of the poorest regions of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana and Tanzania. We were told that CAMFED in Zimbabwe now provides scholarships for 5,627 children. They have a variety of programmes detailed on their website www.camfed.org The SBRT provides money for scholarships for disadvantaged girls and boys.



Scholarship Selection Committee



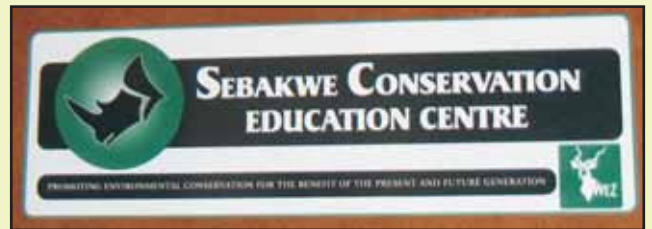
Scholarship Selection Committee Meeting



Annie Gripper, Winnie Farao, Paul Holmes, Alastair Neale

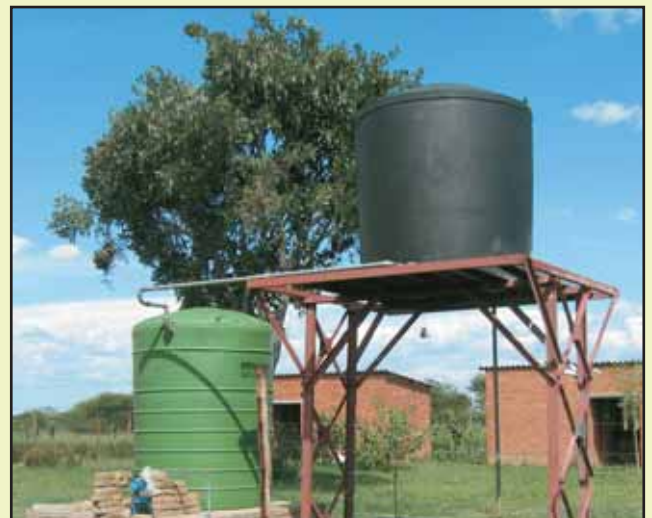


Conservation & Education Centre



We visited the centre several times during our recent trip to Zimbabwe in January and were impressed by the facilities and information available. We were shown around by Palloma Pachiti and met Lorraine Mpunzi from Bulawayo University who is studying at the centre (see photos).

The facilities are constantly being improved as funds become available and we were shown new information boards, the library area which is being enhanced and a new water storage tank by the borehole which will enable sufficient reserves of water to be built up for periods of high demand. The dormitories are about to benefit from a generous donation of dozens of blankets from British Airways. It is hoped that this will encourage more children to stay for weekend camps. I am told (but have no experience) that British Airways first class blankets are particularly comfortable.



We were shown numerous wire snares which had been set in the bush by poachers. These snares had been collected during school field trips.

Enquiries are regularly received from local schools, colleges, universities and other conservation NGOs wanting to work with and use the centre's facilities.

The centre opened its doors in 2004 and had 1676 visitors in 2005 and 1787 visitors in 2006. From the above descriptions of the activities and events associated with the centre it can be seen that it is making good progress towards its goal of "promoting environmental conservation for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations".



Activities at the Sebakwe Conservation and Education Centre

by Paul Holmes



A wide range of conservation and community based activities take place at the centre with the aim to promote environmental conservation for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. In the last quarter of 2006, for example, events have included the following:

Wilderness and environmental camp:

60 children from Tasunga and Chiedza primary schools visited the centre for a day's wilderness and environmental camp. They received a wide range of lectures on wildlife and environmental education topics. They were also preparing for the provincial wildlife quiz at the end of the month.



Wildlife quiz competition:

On 26th September 21 schools from all over the Midlands province met at the centre to take part in the wildlife quiz competition organised by the Education Centre in conjunction with WEZ (Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe – formerly the Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe <http://www.zimwild.co.zw/>). It was very encouraging that schools as far as Thornhill and Gweru attended. Congratulations to the team from Goldridge junior school that came first with 90 points and Sebakwe Primary school, second with 83 points. Both schools went on to the national competition in Harare.



Environmental Educator Course/workshop:

This four day annual course was completed by 15 teachers from Kwekwe district. It consisted of a series of lectures coupled with a day of field work in the conservancy. The teachers learnt about regional and international perspectives of common environmental issues such as global warming and wildlife depletion. It is expected that they will conduct a school based research project on a particular environmental problem in their locality.

Batanai Beekeeping Project:

Members of this community conservation and development project continue to meet at the centre and work on their project. The club members are very keen and the Forestry Commission are due to lead a training workshop on bee keeping and forestry management.



School heads consultative and review workshop:

43 head teachers from local district schools met to discuss the educational programmes offered by the centre and to review the progress on their school environmental policies. Issues raised by the heads included the need for staff from the Sebakwe Conservation centre to visit the schools to encourage the teachers and discuss how children can be helped to have access to the centre particularly when funds for transport are limited, and the need for more training workshops for teachers to improve their environmental and wildlife knowledge.

Scouts Cub camp:

The local Scouts Association held a training camp for their cubs at the centre in December. Nineteen cubs wanted to be taken through the Scouts environmental scheme and they had an exciting time learning about 'wildlife, air, soil, and water' in the field and at the centre.

The programme of events for the first quarter of 2007 includes:

- **Community outreach** focusing on poaching, deforestation, sustainable farming, water harvesting
- **Capacity building workshop** for councillors, village heads and community representatives, aiming to establish environmental information centres within each ward
- **Community conservation workshop** to identify key areas of concern within villages and establish working solutions
- **Environmental Educators' 4 day introductory course**
- **Teachers refresher workshop** wildlife and environmental education
- **World Wetlands Day** poster competition
- **Delivery of Mahewu drink for schools**



Annie's Page

Eden Children's Village.

Thank-you Christine Halliday and all your family and friends who donated the lovely knitted baby clothes and also thank-you to the friends from St. Georges Church at Shrewsbury who gave us baby and children's clothing. We arranged for them all to go to the orphans of Eden Children's Village, situated in an old farming district near Doma in N.W.Zimbabwe. These children have lost both parents to the Aids virus, and their ages vary from 2 weeks to 12 years.

Eden Village has five thatched cottages at the village and rents four houses in the nearby Mhangura mining area. They have 95 'in house' children and care for their every need as well as 80 community based children who are able to live with a family member, but who still need support for food, clothing, and school fees.

The Orphanage is run by Judy and Rory Ervin. Maize, soya's, sugar-beans, fruit and vegetables are grown on the farm which also provides meat, eggs and milk for the children, but they are unable to provide baby formula. We hope to visit the orphanage when we next go to Zimbabwe.



Scholarship Report

In January 2006, three girls from the Conservancy were awarded scholarships to Rio Tinto Secondary School near Kwe Kwe. They have all had very good reports with higher than average marks at the end of their first year exams. Well done girls. We were saddened to hear Nomatter had lost her mother this January but following the funeral she has returned to school and is more determined than ever to do well there. We send her our best wishes.

In January 2007 three more scholarships were awarded to two orphaned boys and one girl whose father had died. They are Juma Mungwena, Brighton Bukuvanl and Stabile Zulu – all aged 15 years. They have settled in well at Rio Tinto School. We send a big thank you to all our Scholarship fund donors.

Guzuzu School

The river did not prevent us reaching Guzuzu this time. There are 263 children here, of which 56 are studying for '0 levels'. The seven young male teachers were delighted to receive gifts from England and they quickly distributed them to the children.

A new classroom has recently been started for the Secondary pupils. They have timber stake walls, a good sized blackboard and half a rush roof. They sit on wood branches but nowhere except the mud floor to rest paper as they write and they desperately need exercise and text books. There was a positive and happy atmosphere and the children, as always, were delightful. They sang for us and as the singing progressed so did the clapping, swaying and dancing. They just oozed rhythm, and we joined in too.



My First Rhino Trek - Alistair Neale

I had not quite realised what I had let myself in for as we headed off in the back of the safari truck heading out to look for a rhino, after an exciting trip we met up with our guides and Norman explained the rules. It was a windy day the visibility was poor due to dense thicket and the quietness of the bush was interspersed with large claps of thunder. We crept forward, after some time our anticipation grew, there was an unnerving feeling that there was a rhino around - (verified by fresh dung).

We went on, Norman had the quickest glimpse of her, yes a live frisky mum was in the area. We wait, checking for climbable trees (there were none) and Norman went off to investigate. We were in total suspense and fear, suddenly a crashing noise only yards ahead and some grunts and snorts, she could come straight out of the thicket head to head with me! What to do? well no sooner had that thought occurred to me than I felt a hand on my shoulder and it was no other than Paul hiding behind me and John was also seen crouching behind Annie!

I had never thought of myself as a human shield before, but such a role was not needed, said rhino headed off for cover but where was Norman? After some minutes of serious concern a blood stained man appeared, shirt ripped, he had come face to face with her and had to hit the deck as fast as possible. In doing so had cut himself quite badly on a thorn bush but at least not had a head to head with the rhino. This was one of the most exciting experiences of my life. so far.



Detecting the Rhino's location



Tracking the Rhino on foot



The photo



Norman returns

