

SOUTH LUANGWA CONSERVATION SOCIETY
DECEMBER 2005 & JANUARY 2006 UPDATE

A Happy New Year to you!! 2006 looks set to be another promising year for SLCS with a number of exciting possibilities and projects in the pipeline.

The Luangwa Valley is quite spectacular at this time of year and always such a relief after the high temperatures in October and November.

The river has filled up, always a slow rise to begin with and then suddenly overnight, it is high enough to put the boats in. This is just as well because we have been struggling to drop off patrols by road, and have only just managed to start deploying patrols by river in the last couple of weeks. It's a great way to travel up and down and an amazing way to see Luangwa. At this time of year you can get in to all the channels and lagoons which are usually parched and full of wildlife.

I managed to slip out of the Valley for a couple of weeks over December and am thrilled that while I was away SLCS ran very smoothly with the team in charge.

Rainy Season Fly Camps

For the past two months the majority of the scouts have been concentrating on fly camp operations with each group being deployed for 20 days at a time.

We now have three fly camps operational in the Mwamba, Kapamba and Luamfwa areas. There have been no major results in the last month from the fly camps but earlier on a number of arrests and confiscations were made. We believe that this is due to the presence of scouts and the regular patrols which deter poachers.

Each fly camp includes eight officers, four from ZAWA and the other four are Kakumbi Village Scouts. Thanks to the Mfuwe Lodge, Norman Carr Safaris, Shenton Safaris, Lion Camp, Luamfwa Lodge, and The Royal Danish Embassy, SLCS is covering all costs for the fly camps including incentive allowances, bonuses, food rations, first aid, scout and camp equipment, fuel and transport.

Mwamba Fly Camp was opened in November 2005, and was initially based at Mwamba Bush Camp because water was available at the camp from a borehole, but not anywhere inland. It served its purpose for a couple of months but when the rivers and lagoons filled up we planned to move it further inland where it would be more effective and closer to illegal activities.

Last week we were lucky enough to utilize a helicopter for a few days and were able to move the Mwamba Fly Camp further inland. Without the aid of the helicopter it would have been otherwise impossible to move it at this time of year as we cannot reach the area by road or river. Combining with ZAWA, we also managed to re-supply remote camps with rations and first aid and get up to the escarpment to remove the ZAWA radio repeater for repairs. We are extremely grateful Jeremy Pope and Conservation Foundation Zambia for sponsoring the hours, and also to Mike Reid at United Air Charters (Livingstone, Zambia) for his time and efforts.

During this time we were able to cover an immense part of the park and were pleasantly surprised to find huge herds of elephants in the north eastern section of the park. Some groups averaged two hundred in size, and they have obviously come together at this time

of year when food is plentiful but will no doubt split soon after. It was quite remarkable to be in a position to see that here. We also saw very large herds of buffalo and other antelope including eland, hartebeest, roan and wildebeest.



Radio Repeater Station, Nthunta, Western Escarpment.

2006 Scout Training Program

SLCS will be coordinating and sponsoring another scout training course early this year for the Kakumbi, Jumbe and Malama Village Scouts. Later in the year we also hope to be able to jointly coordinate a training course with Luambe National Park and conduct a combined training course for their Village scouts.

ZAWA have recently given their full support for these training programs using the North Luangwa Senior Instructors that we used last year. The course itself lasts ten weeks and will this year be conducted at Nyamaluma Training Institute adjacent to the National Park. Village scouts from two other Chiefdoms namely Jumbe and Malama have been invited to attend the training course.

Although some of the Village Scouts have already received training we are trying to ensure that they all have the same level of training. The scouts that graduate will also be fully equipped with uniforms, backpacks, boots, sleeping bags and roll mats and other scout equipment. Last years ten week intensive training course was extremely successful, and has produced some of the most effective scouts presently operating in South Luangwa. We hope to be able to continue with this program.

EIA Enforcement Training Workshops 2006

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) will be holding Ivory Enforcement Training Workshops in Malawi and Zambia in April this year. The workshops will involve a number of people from various law enforcement bodies including ZAWA, The Police, Customs and the Judiciary and will focus on building the capacity of enforcement agencies to conduct investigations and effectively combat the illegal trade in ivory. The workshops will analyze the Singapore Ivory Seizure of 6.5 tonnes in 2002 and will concentrate on successes, areas for improvement, Inter Agency Co-operation, Court Procedures, Improving Communication and Co-operation, Arrest, Search, Recovery and Retention of Evidence and so forth. It's a very exciting workshop for us to attend, given that SLCS (at that time Honorary Rangers Rapid action Team) was involved in the initial activities that led to the ivory seizure. The workshop will improve our activities and investigations.

EIA has actively been supporting SLCS since 2000, and over the years have developed a strong working relationship.

Snaring / Poaching

There have been a couple of reports of snared elephants in the last two weeks but unfortunately we have not been able to locate them. I saw a large cow with a very bad snared rear right leg recently, but unluckily it was at 10.00pm and nothing could be done. We will keep an eye out for her and hopefully we'll be able to find her in good time. A young bull with a very badly snared rear leg was reported near Luangwa River Lodge in December and since it was very swollen and infected he was not able to move very far. We located him quickly and after following him on foot we managed to immobilize him and remove the snare. This one was appalling and we had to cut a few inches in to the leg to find the snare. We were very lucky to be able to monitor his progress with the help of the lodge owners over the following weeks and watched him slowly improving. Quite recently the scouts saw him in the park and reported that his leg has healed tremendously, and now he is almost walking without a limp.



Immobilized snared young elephant bull.

We know of at least two elephants poached so far this year. One was in Nsefu Sector and one in Luamfwa Area. Unfortunately in Luamfwa, the scouts only came across the carcass about five days after it was killed. In Nsefu however, ZAWA scouts managed to apprehend two of the poachers, one of which was the hunter. This is not a good start to the year for elephants. Last years elephant mortalities in South Luangwa National Park and surrounding Game Management Area's came to 66. This included elephants poached, controlled, legally hunted and natural deaths.

Later this year ZAWA will be conducting an aerial survey of the park, and we are eagerly awaiting the results so that comparisons can be made between population estimates obtained in 2002 and the ones which will be obtained this year.

Elephant Sport Hunting 2006

After a twenty year ban, Elephant Sport Hunting will continue in Zambia for the second year running. A statutory instrument issued by government, allowing elephant sport hunting has made it possible for ZAWA to sell twenty licenses per year for elephants to be legally hunted.

The aim of elephant sport hunting is to support local communities who do not see the benefits of elephants, but instead sometimes suffer from the presence of these animals through crop damage and food loss. Revenue generated from elephant sport hunting is destined to filter through the CRB's (Community Resource Boards) to the community at local levels. It is hoped that this will reduce feelings of contempt from the community

towards elephants and help to reduce human elephant conflict through community managed projects.

Last year, only five out of the twelve elephants quoted in Upper and Lower Lupande were hunted. It seems that the elephant bulls were not big enough for the hunters. This alone is testament that there are a very limited number of iconic bulls left in Luangwa. The Zambia Wildlife Authority (Mfuwe) has recommended that the number of elephant hunting licenses to be issued in Luangwa be reduced.

Ivory seized in Manila

Zambian newspapers last week reported that 6 tonnes of ivory has recently been seized in Manila and was shipped by a businessman from Zambia. After contacting investigative agencies overseas, we have been informed that this consignment was actually seized some time ago in the middle of last year and that the facts reported in the newspaper were inaccurate. The tonnage was much less, more like one sixth of what was reported and investigations are still ongoing.

SLCS Base

The SLCS Base now houses 20 Village Scouts and their families. After initially securing funding from Elefence International (USA), and later from The Royal Danish Embassy, SLCS now has established itself as a vital partner in conservation in South Luangwa. The fact that almost all of the scouts are housed in one complex means that in emergencies, rapid deployment of patrols is possible. The Honorable Chief Kakumbi has promised to further assist SLCS and the Kakumbi Village scouts by increasing the area of land he very kindly donated to us a few years ago. This will enable us to eventually house all of the scouts at the base.

Results and Activities for December 2005

Number of day patrols – 9
Number of long patrols (10 days each) – 4
Number of short patrols (5 days each) - 3
Number of fly camp days - 30
Number of snares removed – 47
Number of nets confiscated - 2
Number of suspects apprehended – 3
Number of firearms confiscated – 3
Number of drying racks found and destroyed – 4

Results and Activities for January 2006

Number of day patrols – 9
Number of long patrols (5 - 10 days each) – 3
Night operations / ambush / road block – 1
Number of snares removed – 3
Number of suspects apprehended – nil
Number of elephant carcasses found – 2
Number of drying racks found and destroyed – 2
Number of fly camp days – 30

Appreciation

- SLCS would like to thank Walter Podszuk (Visitor to Luangwa) for helping to promote SLCS by including a banner on his Bwana Mitch's Safaris Website.
- Also, special thanks to Harry and Jacky Vlachos (Lusaka) of Luamfwa Lodge for donating 10 new desperately needed life jackets for our river activities.
- Thanks also to Gero Heine (Sea Gate USA) for sponsoring more anti-poaching patrols and persuading his colleagues to support.
- Thanks also to Mark and Belinda Wakefield (UK) for their very kind financial donation to SLCS.
- Thanks also to Heather Anderson for gathering more members for SLCS.
- Special appreciation goes to Jennifer and Matteo Baceda for their financial support that will go towards combating poaching on the Western Boundary of the park. Jennifer and Matteo's interest in combating poaching from this area is a leap forward to assisting the problems faced in South Luangwa.
- Thanks also to Antonia De Matto from Working Hand in Hand (USA) for her ongoing support with SLCS and looking after our US based donations.

Till March, stay well and thank you
Rachel & the SLCS Team.