



Newsletter

February/March 2005

New equipment

I am writing this update from my new laptop, courtesy of our recent Danish funding. It's brilliant and arrived at the same time as our new digital camera and printer so expect to see a lot more photos on the website of ongoing activities.

The next equipment to arrive should be the new uniforms, complete kit ranging from boots and sleeping bags to water bottles and berets, knives and raincoats, the whole lot. These are on the way from Army Surplus UK and should arrive at the same time as our new vehicles, in the next couple of weeks. This is a very exciting time for us and the scouts as we are not used to having such new and good quality equipment.

We have also recently purchased a new 30hp outboard, with money that was secured from the Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation last year. This came at a perfect time as our old engine was about to pack in and needs a good service. Once it is up and running again, we will have two engines for next year's rainy season operations. The river is extremely low at the moment and it looks like we may have seen the last of the rain, so our trips up and down the river are coming to an end.

SLCS Base

We have finally moved in to the office and control room. Although there are still building projects going on at the base and we have materials all over the show, it's great to have a proper office, store room, control room and armory. Zesco (mains electricity) will probably not arrive for another few months so we have set ourselves up with solar power for the time being. We have equipped the control room with new radios so now have comms with everyone on a full time basis.

Richard Zulu (Unit Leader) and Amon Banda (Admin Officer) have also moved in to their new houses on the base with their families. We have four other houses that are double complex being built at the moment, and expect them to be finished in about two months.

In such a short space of time we have seen a huge boost in morale in all the SLCS scouts. They are now incredibly proud of having a real base and proud to be part of it. The scouts have for years, lived in small one roomed huts with only the very basics provided and now that they are moving in to the new houses provided for them, they feel that they are valued and appreciated.

We are receiving more and more visitors to the SLCS base on a regular basis. Apart from local and international tourists, the local Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) visits usually on a daily basis as well as local Community Resource Boards and other organizations. Having a professional and permanent operations base (although not yet complete) has already put our operation on a different scale.

Fly Camps and Poaching

Although we only managed to set up two fly camps this year due to the lack of availability of ZAWA scouts, both camps have been successful and have made a number of arrests and confiscations. Apart from that, the permanent presence of scouts in these areas has acted as a deterrent for poachers.

Our investigations and informer network has grown recently and the past two months have produced an increase in results due to this. The fact that we now have a budget for informers, and are able to pay almost immediately after results are achieved, has led to a number of people coming forward with information.

Informers have also noticed that SLCS has, over the years, employed certain informers as a last resort, once their identity is known and they are no longer safe in their villages. This has happened on occasion and we have seen no other alternative but to employ them or find permanent employment for them within the lodges.

EIA Filming

The Environmental Investigation Agency, one of our longest standing supporters so far, is coming to Mfuwe during the middle of April to film the new base. Although it will not be completely finished then, they will be filming a celebration of the new base and doing a film / slide presentation for the scouts and anyone else there.

GPS Training

Many thanks to Graham Shaw from Lusaka, for taking the time while he was in the Valley, to come and train some of our new scouts on the use of GPS. Thank you also for all the other tips and for the equipment donated. Graham kindly donated a number of berets, hats, bush knives and water bottles which have already been put to good use.

Other Projects

SLCS have recently been talking with the Elephant Chili Pepper group in Livingstone, and are in the process of forming a joint project for Luangwa.

This type of project has already been established in many areas in Africa and has proved to be very successful if carefully monitored. The project is targeted at villagers who are in conflict with elephants over their crops.

The chili fence project is a simple, cost effective way of protecting crops. It includes two to three single strands of string such as sisal, dipped in a paste made of old engine grease and crushed chilies. The strings are then drawn round the field. Combined with small fires and the farmers shouting, the elephants normally keep away. However, the fences need to be checked on a regular basis and re dipped in chili every two weeks. The most time consuming part of the project will be checking on the fences and encouraging farmers to take up the initiative. We will also be encouraging farmers to grow chilies to sell to the Livingstone Pepper Group, who will in turn sell them on to a chili sauce manufacturer. In this way, not only will the crops be protected, but the farmers will receive an alternative source of income.

ZAWA/SLCS combined investigations and partnership with Chief Mpumba.

SLCS and ZAWA recently undertook a combined investigation operation in Mpika. Together with the area warden, a group of three SLCS officers and three ZAWA officers targeted the Great North road from Lusaka to Mpika. Joint operations with Bangwelu Area Management Unit included a number of road blocks, train searches (Tazara) and field operations. SLCS also assisted in a number of deliveries of food rations to remote scout camps on the Western side of the national park. The operation resulted in seven suspects being apprehended for illegal activities, the confiscation of bush meat being sold openly on the Great North Road and being transported on the Tazara train and also the confiscation of two firearms.

ZAWA and SLCS also met with Chief Mpumba and Chieftainess Serenje to discuss matters affecting wildlife conservation in their respective areas. They discussed future possibilities of joint projects on the Western side of the park. For those who are not familiar with the area, Chief Mpumba's area and Chieftainess Serenje's area is probably home to the majority of poachers coming in to the South Luangwa National Park. The Area Warden and I will be visiting Chief Mpumba in the next couple of months to design a combined project between SLCS, ZAWA and the Mpumba Community. We hope that with combined anti-poaching efforts and community development, we will be able to reduce the level of poaching in the park coming from that area.

Elephants and hunting

Unfortunately, despite opposition from various conservation organizations and other concerned individuals in Zambia and abroad, it seems that Zambia is going ahead with Elephant Sport Hunting this year.

One of the hardest parts of fighting a proposal like this is that we do not have hard facts about elephants in Luangwa or Zambia as a whole. Most of us here are familiar with the different herds of elephants that live around the lodges and camps and are especially familiar with the large bulls that are seen regularly. However, this is not enough. As ZAWA has seen an increase in elephants over recent years, they are of the opinion that it is time to start hunting. The large bulls we see are most likely going to be the target animals for hunting. Despite ZAWA's promises that the revenue from hunting will be ploughed back in to conservation efforts and back in to the community, SLCS is still opposed to the idea. So far this year, we have found 10 poached elephants that we know of and there are likely to be some that we have not found. This is already nearly equal to the number of elephants that are going to be hunted this season.

In order for anyone to take this matter seriously, an intensive elephant study needs to take place. At the moment, we are in the process of drawing up an outline with the ZAWA ecologist for the best possible way to do this. SLCS will then seek funding for such a study to take place.

February & March Patrols

During the various long and short patrols over this time, 37 snares were removed, several suspects apprehended and firearms confiscated. Ivory was also recovered. An elephant carcass was found plus a snared impala. Several illegal fishermen were apprehended and their nets confiscated.