

Boom in the Bushveld

NEWSLETTER OF THE MABULA GROUND HORNBILL PROJECT

June 2015

Mabula
Ground
Hornbill
Project



'HARDLY HOME' SUMMARISES THE START TO THIS YEAR....

GLORIOUS GORONGOSA NATIONAL PARK: MOZAMBIQUE

This year has seen (finally) the start of the range-wide DNA collection field trips with the first to the eastern part of the range at Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique. An magical place – true wild paradise – and big plans for doing conservation the right way from the start. We are thrilled to be working at this site and are looking forward to the possibility of assisting with capacity building in the Park, and elsewhere. The ground-hornbill populations are doing very well in the Park but there is certainly widespread habitat transformation beyond its borders and the birds are being utilised – here the feathers are used in a ceremonial head dress, but also some skin to strengthen catapults for good hunting and are even for food, something we have only rarely heard reported before. We are very grateful to the whole team at Gorongosa, especially the guards who accompanied us each day, for their support and assistance throughout. None of this could have happened without funding from the National Research Foundation and the National Zoological Gardens



CAPTIVATING CAPRIVI: BWABWATA NATIONAL PARK, NAMIBIA



The birds in the Caprivi were much less skittish than those in Gorongosa, probably as there are still communities living in the Park and so they are used to human presence. We had no problem catching enough groups to get an adequate sample size, despite it being out of the breeding season.



MATOPOS MAGIC: MATOPOS TRIBAL TRUST LANDS, ZIMBABWE

This region of granite boulders, monoliths and much more makes the usual checking of tree nest seem rather ordinary – even the baobabs that usually terrify us 😊. We are working with a Zimbabwean NGO, Children and Nature Conservation Zimbabwe, who are expanding the long-term monitoring of the nests there and maintaining the education and custodianship programme. Good people doing great work and a pleasure to be working with. Sadly, we missed many of the fledglings, much earlier than our SA birds, but next year we will be better prepared to work on Matopos time.



7th – NOT BAD FOR THE OL' TURKEY BUZZARD

PREPARING LOSKOP

The bush-school release at Loskop Dam Nature Reserve, which has been on the cards for too long already, is finally picking up momentum. The shepherds, Petrus Tlou and Poppy Phetla, have been employed from the local community and will be responsible for the monitoring of the release. They are about to undergo their training and then it is all systems go. The Associated Private Nature Reserves granted us a sub-adult male to use as a mentor bird for the hand-reared birds, and the FitzPatrick Institute graciously captured and transported the bird for us. He has settled well into his new group well and is in good condition. We have met with as many farmers and community members as possible within a 20 km radius of the Reserve, to ensure that everyone knows about the intended release and that we detect any problems before the birds are released. There are a few farmers in the area who still use poison and snares and we continue to work with them to find alternate solutions before the release takes place. We are also going to be testing new ways to anchor release groups on safe land to reduce the risk of them wandering into unfriendly places.



NORTHERN REACHES

We spent an intensive two weeks working in the Limpopo River Valley population area to reach as many schools as possible. The team spent several hours with learners from fourteen schools, reaching a total of 3547 learners and 179 teachers, with a presentation, DVD and then fun activities and games.

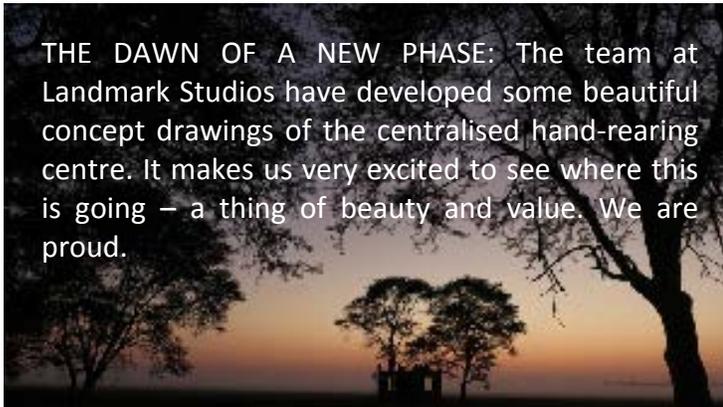
We learned much from this outreach: learners sharing that poison is still being used indiscriminately in these communities to deal with livestock predators and that there are localised incidents of people hunting the birds for meat. They also shared the localities of more groups for us to monitor and work with through the custodianship programme.



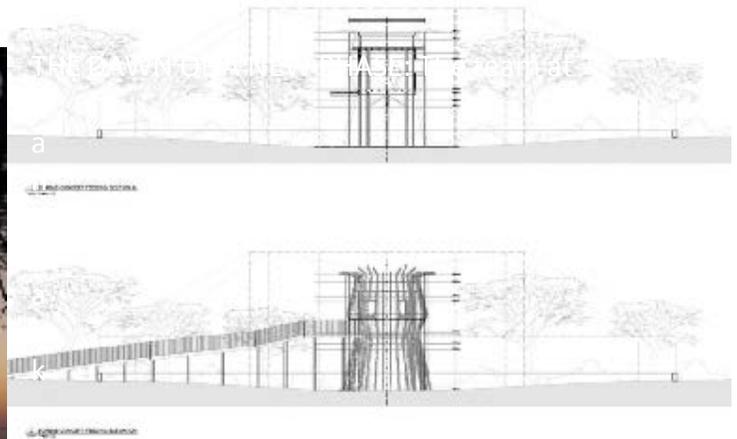
NEW RESEARCH PROJECT

In collaboration with Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute and the National Zoological Gardens of South Africa, we have launched a new study to investigate several aspects of endocrine health: both sex hormones and the effect of stress hormones (a vital part of any reintroduction programme where stress must be managed extremely well to ensure that no acute nor chronic symptoms reduce chances of survival or breeding). We have already selected one MSc student and once trial tests have been conducted we will be looking to enrol a second.

CONCEPT DRAWINGS DEVELOPING BEAUTIFULLY: BAOBAB REARING CENTRE



THE DAWN OF A NEW PHASE: The team at Landmark Studios have developed some beautiful concept drawings of the centralised hand-rearing centre. It makes us very excited to see where this is going – a thing of beauty and value. We are proud.



EVEN WILD PLACES CARRY HIDDEN RISKS

This young bird, destined to be the next alpha male, succumbed to a small piece of wire that was lying around in the veld, perhaps old fencing material. He swallowed it and it pierced his heart (see x-ray). The programme vet, Dr Katja Koeppel, managed to operate successfully but he succumbed 13 days later to heart failure. To survive that for so long he would have made a strong alpha and mentor. We are saddened by the loss of his valiant genes.



For a full report of all of our activities for the last six-months feel free to email us: project@ground-hornbill.org.za

Without the support of all of our sponsors – big and small – we can achieve nothing. Thank you.

