

## Project Update December 2008

It's raining in Zimbabwe. Quite literally and the life giving water has brought a fresh flush of green to the desperately dry bush. There is new life everywhere. Impala fawns are amusing to watch as they race along behind a "babysitter" intent on learning to run as quickly as they can. Newborn jackal pups play happily and the young warthogs race by with antenna like tails held high. Outside my house a little beater has two eggs in a nest, so I am eagerly awaiting the birth of these chicks.

It's raining in my heart. This should be a time of plenty, when people plough their fields and plant their maize seed in preparation for the year ahead. The rainy season can be the difference between life and death for many. Good rains and a good harvest means life, poor rains and a poor harvest can mean death, especially in Zimbabwe today. I visited Jealous at his new grinding mill to bring him his wages during his much-deserved time off. He has ploughed his field and planted the maize seed that PDC purchased for him and its entire staff. However he informed me that he is one of only a handful from his village that have done this. Most do not have seeds and many are too weak to plough even if they did have the seeds.

For PDC there are so many similes that can be used. For me, I see it as if we are standing on the edge of a gorge, peering into the depths below. Its not as if we are going to fall in, over my dead body will that happen. Its as if we have to work our way along the edge of the gorge until we can find our way across. We must get across. We have come so far with the support of so many of you. We have achieved so much together during a period of incredible complexity and difficulty, delivering a world-class conservation programme. The emphasis for the coming year is to make sure we can keep this programme on track. With your continued support I have no doubt that we will achieve this.

I talked to Morgan two days before he died about his continued employment with us. Not because I didn't want him anymore, far from it, but because he was past retirement age and I wondered if he was now at the point where he thought he had done enough and wanted to go home. He would hear nothing of the sort. He talked of his desire to finish what he had started, of how Greg and I have demonstrated that same determination time and time again to finish what we start, not to let people down. I smiled at him and told him that he has never let us down.

In recent days so many of you have responded in a similar fashion, recognising that even by Zimbabwean standards, we are experiencing particularly difficult times. Jon Vannini's constant encouragement and Charlie Knowles' email of committed support and wise council. Mel Shepherd's heart felt concerns and determination of committed support. Water bottles that filter out cholera bacteria being dispatched without hesitation. A phone call from Chris Hennessy pledging emergency funding, all I have to do is ask. Tusk Trust and Barty's aptly titled "Cycle of Life" bringing us unexpected and timely funding. These are just a few examples, really there are too many to mention. It's that kind of commitment that drives us on, it's the oxygen, if you like, that keeps us going.

The dogs have the same determination. I learnt that lesson very early on when I witnessed the exploits of Eyespot, who famously kept his brothers pups alive, hunting alone to feed them and their mother after poachers had torn the heart out of the pack. A recent sighting of 14 dogs just down the road from us was received with huge smiles. The other packs in the region, though small in terms of individual pack members, are hanging on and our work at the rehab with our waifs and strays continues to go well.

2009 promises to bring so many more challenges our way, however we are as determined as ever and quietly optimistic because of your support.