

Project Update July 2010:

Starvation Island revisited



I stood, rather pensive, watching the guys launch the boat, not because of any issue with them, but because I was about to embark on yet another trip across lake Kariba to Starvation Island. The Island has become such a part of my PDC life having experienced some near death experiences there during the five years since we first introduced the dogs. The last time I had been there was in April and it was the memories of the appallingly rough crossing that was making me rather agitated. The Lake at least looked calm enough this time!

We do not have dogs on the island at the moment, however we do have a certain responsibility



ZPWMA Scouts carrying bales of grass

towards this programme. This particular –visit was prompted by the need to check on a feeding programme for the resident impala and waterbuck that were dying of hunger as the result of exceedingly high water levels in Lake Kariba. The panacum grass they rely on for food had been covered by the lake waters. The feeding programme was initiated and spearheaded by nearby Bumi Hills Safari Lodge. They had raised considerable support from the Zimbabwe people and were busy sending bales of grass and feed over to the island on a daily basis in conjunction with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority, who control the area as part of

Matusadonna National Park. It made no sense for us to duplicate efforts and so, with support from Sea World, we combined our efforts. The bales of grass had been delivered and I wanted to see what was happening.

Everything was well under control with the Management of Bumi Hills doing an excellent job. They collected the ZPWMA scouts in the morning and then ferried several boat-loads of grass and feed to the island. By this stage they had three “drop zones” established and it was interesting to see the impala and waterbuck observing from a distance as the food was spread around. The ZPWMA scouts patrolled the island while the boats went back for more feed, checking for any new carcasses and snares.

Several animals have died, though not too many, thanks to this concerted effort. With the lake waters now receding, we hope that the worst is over. There is enough food to last up to the end of August and hopefully by then the impala and waterbuck will be able to feed themselves again properly. However, the situation will continue to be monitored.

Back in Hwange, Jealous was busy trying to keep up with the Kutanga pack. After losing their pups in June, they were now fully nomadic, covering enormous distances each day in the search for food. The GPS collar on Bulls Eye was filling in all of the gaps and indicated that the territory being used

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by the pack was approaching 2000 square kilometres! A typical territory size just ten years ago was 750 square kilometres. With Greg, Jealous had witnessed the pack kill a sub adult female kudu late one evening, which is a good meal for a pack of six hungry dogs. However rather than wait around as they would normally do after such a feast, they moved some ten kilometres away, possibly getting into another area for hunting while they still had the energy to do so.



Wilton and his Bush Camp team had another very busy month with the camp hosting two schools from outside of our normal programme area in addition to the local schools. It was a pleasure to host the children from Hwange Orphans (funded by Christian Care) and Acacia Primary School from Zambia. This was the second time that we had had children from Christian Care and the first from a school outside Zimbabwe, quite a success and the children from Zambia didn't want to leave! A



Children enjoying the Bush Camp programme.

THANK YOU card displayed in the office speaks volumes on the impact the camp had on the children.

During Wilton's post camp visits he discovered that the children had talked enthusiastically to their parents about their experiences. One boy from Ndangababi School said his father had made a comment that "the bush camp should be a forever thing as the children had opened up their mind on nature and conservation issues."

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