

Project Update November 2008

I often get asked what it is like to be living in Zimbabwe right now. To be honest, that's hard to answer without a lot of expletives, however I will try to illustrate some of the points, in a polite way. To me a perfect example of the difficulties we face is illustrated by our payroll, which for the month of November 2008 was just over 6 quintillion dollars. That's 6 plus 18 zeros. Actually the true figure / value of the dollar would be 6 plus 21 zeros and I am not sure what that figure is called. The authorities here knocked 13 zeros of the currency to make it more manageable because most accounting systems failing to cope with so many zeros. I calculated that it would take our lowest paid member of staff over 200 million years to withdraw their month's pay, given the daily cash withdrawal limits currently in place. Hard to get you head around isn't it !!

Then there is food, or the lack of it. So I now spend time in Harare sourcing basic commodities for our staff from suppliers who import from South Africa. Staff now get paid with a "food pack" in addition to their zeros. My Assistant Manager, Forggie, completes the food pack and the stocks for our Children's Bush Camp and APU by spending on average 8 days a month in Botswana shopping. She voluntarily sleeps in the back of the landrover during these trips to save money. We have been importing fuel and vehicle spares for several years already and we are now resigned to importing just about everything. The phone systems are chronic, thus exacerbating the situation and increasing the time spend trying to source or order anything.

I suppose we could be forgiven for taking our "eye of the ball" under the circumstances, however we don't. Anyone who visits PDC will witness for themselves the absolute dedication and tireless work of our staff. It's a humbling experience. Most if not all of our staff are their families' breadwinner, extended families, not just their own immediate families. The pressure on them is huge, on a daily basis we hear of someone who has died of starvation. As breadwinners they often go without food themselves so that their family members can eat.

Jealous of course is a perfect example and role model. He is the head of his family, his father died recently of TB, which went untreated, as there was no treatment available at any of the neighbouring hospitals. He is the primary breadwinner and apart from his own immediate family of 4, he has responsibility towards another 12 or so people. Happily his new grinding mill is now operational, which will help him financially, however regardless of that he works tirelessly tracking the dogs for us, with a broad smile never far from his face.

The dog news remains encouraging, in terms of the territories that we know of, being occupied by dogs. As reported last month however, these packs are small, which in itself is cause for concern. We have been out early every morning searching for these elusive packs and a recent opportunity for darting and collaring one of the packs was frustrated by, of all things, tourists. Frustratingly, some of the few tourists that visit Hwange NP these days happened to drive by at the ideal darting moment and scared the dogs away into the bush !!! Sightings of the various packs continue to come in, so it is just a matter of time before we get another opportunity. We are anxious to deploy our two GPS collars, which will hopefully give us even greater information regarding the packs movement. Our recent arrivals from Chipangali are doing very well and the process of integrating them with the other dogs we have is going well.