



Dambari

Wildlife Trust



Annual Report 2025

ABOUT DAMBARI

OUR MISSION

To promote the furtherance of biological knowledge, the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources while integrating conservation across boundaries in selected landscapes in Zimbabwe and adjacent countries.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Dr Simon Tonge - Chair
Mr Gavin Stephens - Vice-Chair
Dr Moira Fitzpatrick
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Mr Kenneth Jerrard
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STAFF MEMBERS

Ms Verity Bowman - Director
Dr Nicola Pegg -Senior Researcher
Mr Bright Sagonda - Education Officer
Mr Tafadzwa Tichagwa - Community Projects Officer

OFFICE CONTACT DETAILS

Physical Address: 11 Beryl Drive, Hillside South, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
20.21015 °S 028.59026 °E
Postal Address: P.O. Box 3863, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Telephone: +263 712 366 916

Email: director@dambari.com or admin@dambari.com



IMPACT STATEMENT



Dambari
Wildlife Trust

2025 in numbers



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

10 ha wetlands protected
150 ha grazing lands under
management



WILDLIFE MONITORING

Matobo
2,595 camera trap days
1,978 database entries
35 mammal species



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

>200 people involved
11 villages engaged
3 community workshops
2 wards addressing
human-wildlife conflict
1 Parliamentary Portfolio
Committee guided tour

CONSERVATION ACROSS BOUNDARIES

BIODIVERSITY
MONITORING
RHINO MANAGEMENT
CAMERA TRAP SURVEYS
COMMUNITY RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT



RHINO CONSERVATION

75% juveniles ear-notched
95% black rhinos photo-verified
95% white rhinos photo-verified
627 database entries
Populations stable



COMMUNICATIONS & AWARENESS

4 radio interviews
3 community WhatsApp groups
11 focus sites for posters
2 wetland conferences attended
1 research report

Our 2025 funding partners:



AWARDS



Dambari was recognised as the Sustainable Development and ESG Impact Award Winner at the Matabeleland South Investment Awards 2025.

Dambari was awarded the Wildlife Environment Zimbabwe's Ted Hyson Wildlife Trophy 2025. It is an annual award presented by WEZ to individuals or groups demonstrating exceptional dedication to Wildlife Conservation.



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

2025 was another challenging year for the Trust. After the hiatus of the previous year, we were able to resume our work in the communities in the Umzingwane District, and our staff have been busy with workshops and community engagement, trying to make up for lost time. On the other hand, Matobo District is still closed to us, and this has been the case for two years now. This makes us very sad because the Matopos is at the very core of our being. Attempts to determine the reason for our Memorandum of Understanding not progressing were initially fruitless, but recently and somewhat elliptically, we have learned that priority is being given to organisations involved in development projects. Intangibles, such as education, sustainability and conservation appear to be de-favoured at present. Nevertheless, we continue to batter at the gates of bureaucracy in the belief that ultimately the rightness of our cause will prevail, to the benefit of both the place and the people.

I mentioned last year that the US Fish & Wildlife Service had, at very short notice, withdrawn its funding for Rhino Operations in the Matopos, which is administered through Dambari's good offices. This was a serious blow to rhino conservation in the region but the fact that Rhino Operations did proceed as planned in September despite it, is a tribute to many people. Our director and her team galvanized action and our trustees here in Zimbabwe, and of our supporting Trust in the UK, managed to find the resources necessary. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of them for their efforts and, particularly, to the anonymous donors who underwrote everything. As I write, nothing appears to have changed in the US government's hostile view of the world, so I fear that the chances of USF&WS one day resuming its role are receding daily. We showed that we can make one-off responses to adversity, but it is a logistical and organizational drain on our ability to carry out our work and is no substitute for solid, regular support on agreed timescales and intended outcomes.

By the end of the year rumours we had heard that our major, long-term, supporter in the UK, the Wild Planet Trust, was going through an existential crisis proved to be true. The trust has told us that its support will cease from May 2026. Its assets have been sold to a Dutch company that runs several zoos and we are now in talks with them to see how much, if any, of the Wild Planet Trust's conservation work they will continue to fund in the future. Finding another sponsor as generous and committed as the Wild Planet Trust has been for the last quarter century is not likely to prove an easy task so a period of hand to mouth existence seems likely.

There were no changes to the Board during the year and I would like to extend, even more than usual, my thanks to all of our staff, and my fellow trustees, for their efforts on the Trust's behalf during this particularly trying year, and to all our funders, particularly the Wild Planet Trust, for the last time, the Chessington Conservation Fund, in the UK for their continued support and SAVE Foundation, Australia who has been a stalwart rhino conservation partner.



Simon Tonge



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In 2025 Dambari Wildlife Trust was recognised at the Matabeleland South Investment Awards as the Sustainable Development and ESG Impact Award Winner. We were very pleased to receive this acknowledgement for the practical contribution we have made to the communities of Umzingwane and Matobo Districts in the past several years. We were also pleased to receive the Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe, Ted Hyson Trophy for individuals or groups demonstrating exceptional dedication to Wildlife Conservation.

We continue to work closely with Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife and the Natural History Museum as technical partners in facilitating conservation and research projects both locally and nationally.

We have strived to maintain momentum in our projects despite some setbacks and hope to have completed the registration as a Public Voluntary Organisation as directed by the PVO Act 2025, by early 2026. Whilst this process has consumed time and administrative resources, non-compliance will have onerous consequences for our ongoing work and status as a Not-for-Profit, Non-Governmental Organisation in Zimbabwe. Once registered we will receive a unique registration number and be known as Dambari Wildlife.

My team is resourceful and determined to ensure that the communities we have been working with continue to benefit from our guidance for a sustainable future, based on conservation education for the youth and support for wetlands and biodiversity in the areas in which they live.

Your partnership is critical to maintain support for the wild areas that sustain the legendary wildlife that live alongside people and contribute nationally to the income generated from tourism for the people living in these special areas.

Thank you for your ongoing interest and support.



Verity Bowman

Director



TOWARDS RESILIENCE IN THE MATOBO HILLS

Dambari Wildlife Trust Ecosystem-based Adaptation Project in the Matobo World Heritage Site



Ward 8
Community
Members during
a feedback
meeting on the
problematic
animals in their
area.

Progress and Achievements

The primary objectives during this period:

THE HUMAN-WILDLIFE COEXISTENCE PROJECT

Community engagement remained central to the human-wildlife coexistence project throughout 2025. Feedback meetings were conducted in Wards 8 and 9 to share findings from the baseline data collected in November 2024 and to discuss practical solutions with local communities. Farmers reported increasing incidents of crop damage and livestock losses caused mainly by baboons, monkeys, jackals, and leopards. Communities expressed willingness to adopt non-lethal deterrent methods but highlighted the need for training and additional resources. Baseline survey results identified several priority problem species affecting livelihoods in the two wards. In Ward 8, carnivores such as jackals, spotted hyenas, and leopards, along with monkeys, baboons, certain bird species (specifically the Quelea), and invasive weeds, were highlighted as major concerns. In Ward 9, communities identified leopards, mongooses, jackals, monkeys, baboons, snakes, and rats as priority species requiring management attention.

The findings informed the development of mitigation strategies, including the promotion of non-lethal deterrents and improved livestock management practices such as mobile kraaling as well as construction of predator proof kraals. To support communities in addressing these challenges, educational infographic materials in isiNdebele were distributed, providing simple and practical strategies for deterring wildlife from crop fields. Institutional engagement also formed a key component of the work as regular reporting was maintained with the Umzingwane Rural District Development Coordinator, and participation in district meetings ensured alignment of project activities with district development plans.





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Coexisting with some of the common problematic animals of the Matobo Hills



Baboon (Indwangu) and Vervet monkey (Inkawu)

If left unchecked, baboons and vervet monkeys can cause severe devastation to crops e.g., maize. To prevent conflict, use lookout posts to spot them when they enter fields, use of tins filled with small stones along fences to alert when they come in is also effective. Drive them away from crop fields using noise e.g., banging tins and using electronic horn speakers.



Snakes (Inyoka)

Snakes cause conflict through bites, which can be medically significant, especially with venomous species.

Reduce snake habitat and food sources around homesteads and keep your yard tidy, removing potential shelters like woodpiles to minimize chances of conflict.



Quelea

Quelea are extremely social birds, meeting wherever possible depending on food availability.

Drive quelea away from crop fields using noise e.g., banging tins and using electronic horn speakers to reduce crop loss.



Spotted Hyaena (Impisi)

Spotted hyaena may kill livestock including adult cattle. Livestock management ways like kraaling animals at night and using visual barriers can be very effective. Spotted hyaenas mostly hunt at night, so it is important to build kraals near areas of high human activity near settlements. Using domestic dogs to warn people if predators approach may also help reduce livestock loss.



Leopard (Ingwe)

Leopards hunt at night & rely on smaller prey which are usually found in big numbers. Effective control measures include use of kraals with tall walls and thorn bushes along the top, mobile kraals, herding and fencing. Use of dogs is also effective in giving warning.



Black Backed Jackal (Ikhanaka)

Black backed jackals kill small livestock, weakened animals and spread rabies. Management measures should include fencing and kraaling of animals at night. They often kill young animals so kraaling small livestock during breeding time is necessary. Use of guarding dogs is also effective.



Mongoose (Uhobo)

Mongoose kill livestock specifically chickens, and occasionally other small animals at homesteads.

Protect poultry and other small livestock with secure enclosures, like meshed fences and covered shelters.

Together let Us Avoid Human-Wildlife Conflict



AWARENESS & ADVOCACY FOR WETLAND CONSERVATION



A healthy Wetland in Matobo

Awareness raising and advocacy for wetland conservation were also undertaken through multiple platforms throughout 2025. Activities included participation in wetlands awareness events, media engagements, and youth dialogues on wetland conservation and policy. Presentations delivered during these engagements highlighted Zimbabwe's progress in wetland conservation, the importance of community-led conservation models, and the need for stronger multi-sectoral collaboration in wetland governance in areas such as the Matobo World Heritage Site. Radio interviews and public discussions further helped to promote awareness of the ecological and cultural significance of wetlands in the Matabeleland region building up towards Ramsar COP 15.

Engagement with national policy processes and stakeholders was also undertaken where presentations and discussions with researchers, government representatives, youth groups, and environmental organisations were carried out to contribute to ongoing dialogues around wetland protection and environmental governance.

In addition, site visits were coordinated for the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environment, Climate and Wildlife to key wetland sites in Umzingwane District, including Morning Glory Wetland and Diana's Pool. These visits allowed policymakers to directly assess ecological conditions, understand threats to the wetlands, and appreciate the role of community-driven conservation initiatives.



International engagement was also achieved through participation in the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in Victoria Falls. The conference provided valuable insights into global wetland conservation priorities, youth participation in environmental governance, and innovative financing mechanisms for conservation. Lessons from the conference emphasized the importance of strengthening community stewardship, enhancing policy engagement, and building partnerships to support long-term wetland protection.

Overall, the activities undertaken across the 2025 period contributed to strengthening community engagement in conservation, improved monitoring of human-wildlife conflict, raising awareness about wetland protection, and strengthening collaboration between communities, government institutions, and conservation organisations. These efforts continue to support the broader goal of promoting sustainable ecosystem management and enhancing biodiversity conservation in the Matobo Hills landscape.



Members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environment, Climate and Wildlife and community members on site visit.



MATOBO BIODIVERSITY MONITORING PROJECT

Environmental Education And Awareness

The Matobo Biodiversity Monitoring Project is an environmental education and awareness programme that marked its fourteenth consecutive year in 2025. This project would not have been possible without the incredible long term financial support provided by our principal donor, Chessington Conservation Fund. The project aims at educating young people and communities at large to sustainably utilize their natural resources and take care of the environment. Environmental education and awareness activities were not conducted, as the Memorandum of Understanding between Matobo Rural District Council and Dambari Wildlife Trust expired in August and was not renewed for unexplained reasons.

Efforts to secure approval of the Matobo District MoU continued throughout 2025. The Education Officer engaged with the Minister of Social Welfare and the Matobo District Development Coordinator, but no formal response was received. Regular follow up communications and visits did not yield progress.

Dataset Management continued and all the information from the students' Terrestrial Visual Encounter Surveys, questionnaires, recruitment records and club membership were analysed and uploaded to the database. Indigenous species names were updated and verified by staff at the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo.

A comprehensive activity report was presented at Dambari's Research Advisory Group Meeting in April 2025 that included a proposal to expand the MBMP to schools in Umzingwane District and was approved to begin 2026.

A presentation entitled "How Youth are Involved in Citizen Science in the Matobo Hills" was delivered in Bulawayo under the auspices of the Zimbabwe Professional Guides Association that facilitated dialogue and knowledge sharing among community members.



Bright Sagonda presenting at a ZPGA event on how Youth are involved in Citizen Science in Matobo Hills

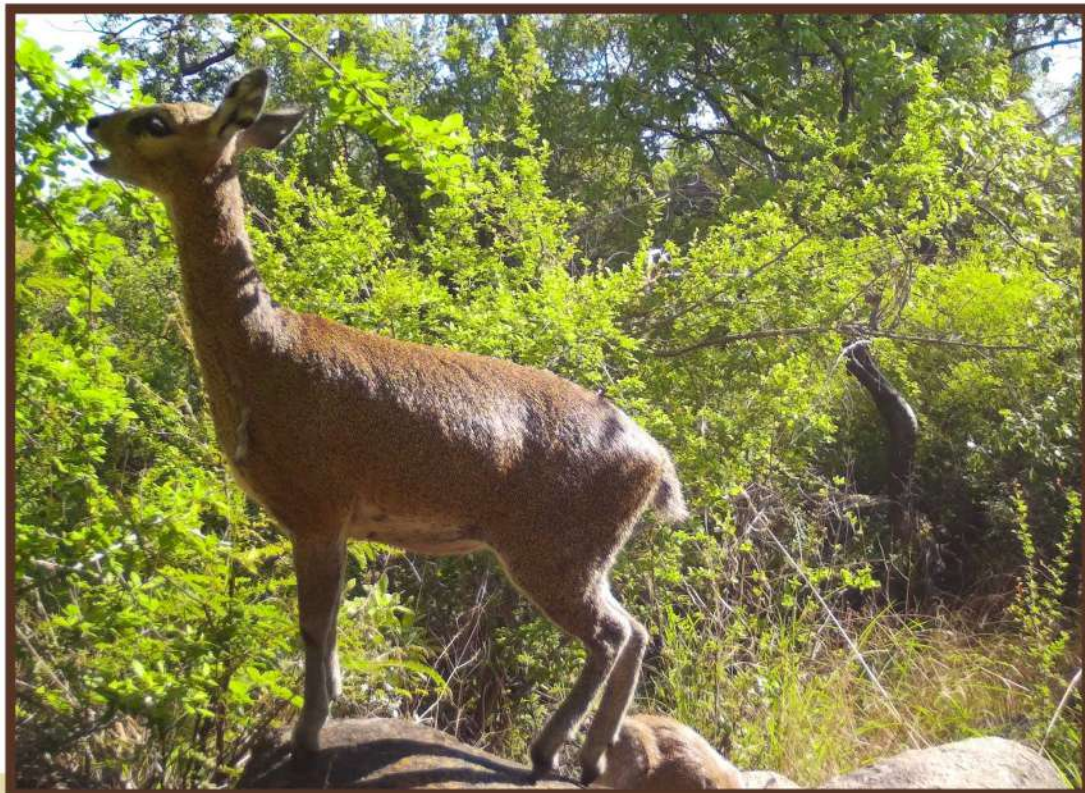


Several initiatives were undertaken to strengthen program delivery including a site visit to the Hillside Dams Conservancy to study litter management practices that could be applied in rural school environments.

Development of a Veld Fire education package outlining causes, impacts and prevention. Comparative education programs in other African countries.

Multiple workshops were attended including;

- Presentation of human-wildlife conflict baseline data in Umzingwane Wards 8 and 9.
- National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) validation workshop.
- Vulture Conservation Workshop with focus on ecosystem services, threats and lead poisoning.
- Provincial National Fire Week Launch and Fire Indaba
- Dambari participated in the Now Educated Career Fair



Klipspringer



RHINO AND MAMMAL POPULATION MONITORING

Rhino Conservation

Continued conservation efforts, improved security initiatives and data-driven management by Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and supporting stakeholders has resulted in sustained growth of rhino populations in MNP since the “poaching scourge” that spanned 2007 to 2013. By the end of 2025, populations of both rhinos had almost returned to 2006 levels – a welcome recovery for the Park.

Fewer white rhino calves were produced than expected during 2025; possibly a reflection of the challenging grazing conditions in 2024 following extensive fires in 2023 and a relatively poor wet season in 2023/24. However, growth remained positive and can be expected to increase further as more females reach breeding age. The black rhino population has remained stable and healthy, with all bull territories currently inhabited.

Rhino management operations – ear notching of juveniles and dehorning – were successfully conducted over 8 days in September. Dehorning, which reduces the amount of horn material and therefore makes rhinos less attractive to poachers, will likely remain an important part of the conservation toolkit in Matobo until security and anti-poaching technologies surpass poachers' capabilities.



A white rhino bull was immobilised for dehorning, and was monitored by the capture team until he was conscious and moving again.

Dambari continued to provide population monitoring support via the long-running camera trap survey funded by Save the African Rhino Foundation. In addition to confirming the presence of rhino (and getting sneak peaks at new calves!), this survey has generated invaluable information on medium and large mammals present in the Park. Whilst no new species have been recorded for some years, changes in abundance of hyaenas (a reduction in brown hyaena and a concomitant increase in spotted hyaena) has been noted, suggesting competitive processes developing alongside range expansion of the latter.



Spotted Hyena



MONITORING WILDLIFE DIVERSITY



Buffalo



Ground Hornbill



Civet



Leopard

In 2024, Dambari assisted African Bush Camps Foundation with developing and running a camera-trap survey in their Bumi Hills Concession on the shores of Lake Kariba. The aims of the project were to establish what mammal species occurred in the concession, their habitat associations and population sizes, with the intention to strengthen management and enhance tourist experiences.

Over 15 months of data collection, more than 55,000 images of 35 species of mammal were captured. Key habitats and zones were identified, underscoring the importance of water availability and vegetation (forage) quality across the year. This improved understanding of the distribution and abundance of all species – many of which were nocturnal and some of which (e.g., caracal, serval, aardwolf and pangolin) were rarely sighted by guides and scouts.



Aardwolf



Elephant



FINANCIAL REPORT

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURE IN 2025 \$



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & THANKS

Our generous 2025 Donors



**Rhino
Recovery
Fund**



**Shape the future
with confidence**





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Conservation Across Boundaries

Promoting biodiversity and environmental stewardship since 1997