



Dambari
Wildlife Trust

Annual Report
2023



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
Dr Christopher Foggin
Mr Kenneth Jerrard
Mr Todd Moyo
Dr Kirsten Pullen

STAFF MEMBERS

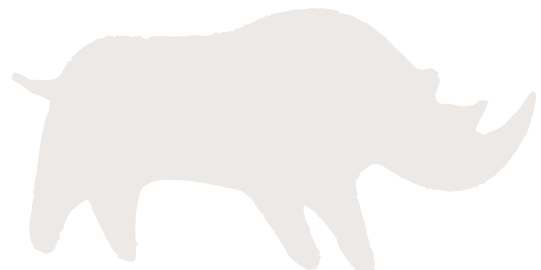
Ms. Verity Bowman – Director
Dr Nicola Pegg – Senior Researcher
Mr Bright Sagonda – Education Officer
Mr Tafadzwa Tichagwa – Research Associate / Project Field Officer

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Dambari
Wildlife Trust

2023 in numbers



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

18 ha wetlands protected
260 ha included in grazing management plans
25 indigenous trees planted at 5 schools
50+ indigenous trees propagated



RHINO CONSERVATION

100% juveniles ear-notched
98% rhinos verified
759 database entries
1 research project



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

810+ people involved
4 exchange visits
8 community meetings
1 community workshop

CONSERVATION ACROSS BOUNDARIES

BIODIVERSITY MONITORING
RHINO MANAGEMENT
MATOBO CAMERA TRAP
WETLANDS AND WEEDS



WILDLIFE MONITORING

4,765 camera trap days
3,000+ database entries
36 wild mammal species
1,132 wildlife records by school pupils



TRAINING & EXCHANGES

174 school pupils
5 school fieldtrips
64+ community members
6 ward monitors

TOPICS

- ❖ Grazing management
- ❖ Wildlife & environmental monitoring
- ❖ Wetland conservation
- ❖ Wildlife conservation



COMMUNICATIONS & AWARENESS

1,700+ rural community members reached
130 branded t-shirts
8 posters produced
3 newsletters shared
1 golf competition

Our 2023 funding partners:

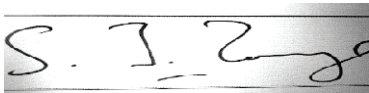


CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The Conservation Across Boundaries programme, centered around the Matopos, has been central to the work of the Dambari Wildlife Trust for the last decade or more. An important component of that work has been the USAID funded project on water resilience in the region which came to an end in late 2022. The challenge during 2023 was to try to embed the project's findings and newly developed water management systems, so that it did not become yet another project in Africa that failed as soon as the funding ended. As at the end of the year, the team remain optimistic that most of the communities with which they worked have continued the agreed water conservation measures to their own benefit, and that of the region as a whole. Water is arguably the single most precious scarce resource in Southern Africa but climate change, which is no longer a looming threat but an actual problem of the here and now, may yet play havoc with all our plans.

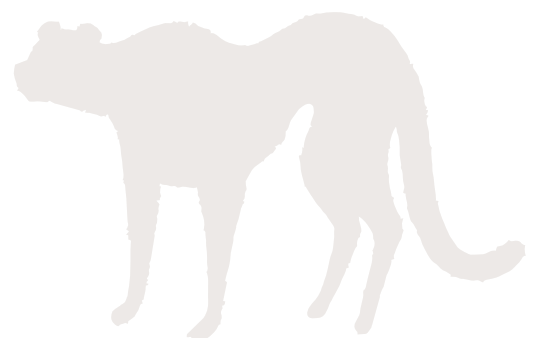
The failure of the 2023/24 rains is likely to have profound ecological and economic effects in Zimbabwe in the short term, and does raise the question: is the Kalahari desert on the move northwards and eastwards again, as has happened many times before in the history of Southern Africa?

Rhinos have been the focus of much of Dambari's work during its entire existence and I am pleased that the Trust was able to provide its usual professional support to the rhino operations work that took place in the park in September. The team have also been carrying out ecological studies on the lesser known of the two species in the Matopos, the Black Rhinoceros, to try to understand their diet, movements and spatial needs. I would like to extend a welcome to Dr Kirsten Pullen who joined the Board in 2023 and to extend my thanks to all of our staff, and my fellow trustees, for their efforts on the Trust's behalf; and to all our funders, particularly the Wild Planet Trust, in the UK for their continued support.



Simon Tonge

Chairman



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

It is my pleasure to present to you the Dambari Wildlife Trust annual report for 2023.

While the world is trying to cope with a variety of adverse situations, and the realization that Climate Change will alter our lives and living conditions in the years ahead, the work implemented by Dambari is proving to be highly relevant and effective in tackling Climate Change in the Matobo Hills in southwestern Zimbabwe.

We are grateful for the support that we have received from Wild Planet Trust for the Conservation Across Boundaries programme and from a range of individuals and organisations that support the continuation of the work DWT started more than 25 years ago.

As you will see in the following pages, Team Dambari has remained committed to our goals and the work planned for 2023 has been completed successfully.

Among other major highlights is the news that the MBMP Schools Conservation Clubs project has over the last 12 years impacted 2,565 senior school children by introducing them to the importance of learning about and caring for their natural world.

The ongoing conservation work with both species of rhino in Matobo is ensuring the population is monitored carefully and enjoys a steady growth rate.

The Community projects have been embraced by the Matobo peoples and they are enjoying the benefits of access to water all year round providing the potential for good food production and improved grazing for their livestock.

However, maintaining our ongoing activities and fundraising remain a critical concern for the Trust's future and the work we do toward sustainability and biodiversity conservation across the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site. Please consider making a donation to support this critical work.



Verity Bowman

Director



TOWARDS RESILIENCE IN THE MATOBO HILLS



Community Champion speaking on her farming success during the CFLi Exchange visits in Ward 8

The CFLI Land Management and Rehabilitation Project

The Matobo Hills Consortium of three organizations (Dambari Wildlife Trust (DWT), Inkanyezi Development Trust (IDT) and Zimbabwe Humanitarian and Livelihood Development Trust ZHLDT)) made significant achievements on the land management and rehabilitation project in the Matobo Hills World Heritage site throughout 2023. Of key importance is the implementation of monthly environmental monitoring visits to target wards (wards 15 and 16 Matobo; and wards 8 and 9 Umzingwane district) to keep track of the progress made by communities towards implementing project established ecosystem-based approaches to the impacts of climate change. These include wetland conservation (two wetlands under rehabilitation and protection in ward 16) and holistic land and livestock management to ensure water availability and improved crop production. Continual environmental visits to the target areas have ensured that the communities remain engaged on the initiatives that improve environmental health for example grazing plan implementation in ward 8 Gante area Umzingwane district throughout the year. Significantly, the communities of Gwandavale and Lushumbe in Matobo district ward 16 maintained the protection drive on the Tshogono and Enutheni wetlands respectively which has ensured water availability for livestock and gardening activities throughout the year.

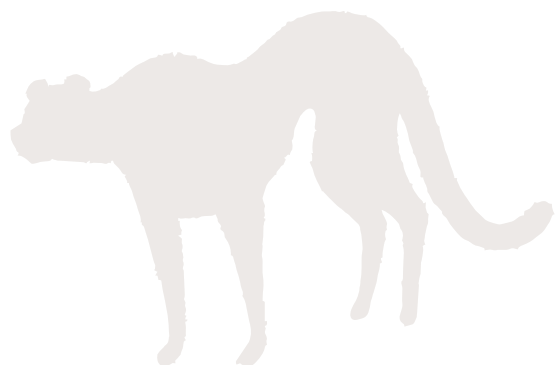
Throughout the year, due to positive impacts made from ward 8 communities spearheading grazing management, the need to invite other communities to go there and learn grew. Thus, through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives CFLI, the consortium conducted learning exchange visits amongst the targeted wards. Under this program, 48 participants from the wards where grazing management hadn't been implemented well yet (i.e., wards 9 Umzingwane, 15 and 16 Matobo), were invited to ward 8 of Umzingwane district to witness and learn how they could share and implement the same approaches back home. On the other hand, ward 8 that spearheaded grazing management had 16 participants also invited to visit ward 16 Matobo where wetland protection was successful. The major objective of these visits was to catalyse effective land management and rehabilitation in communal areas of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site through learning experiences and knowledge exchange.

TOWARDS RESILIENCE IN THE MATOBO HILLS

Throughout this program, the consortium promoted the voices of women, the youth, and vulnerable members of the society, while acknowledging the societal norms and values that must be worked on within. For visits to Umzingwane Ward 8, it was noted that livestock owners were the principal participants, and this resulted in fewer youth being involved since relatively few young people in the Matobo Hills own livestock. Subsequent project monitoring visits after exchange visits to facilitate the implementation of holistic land and livestock management and wetland conservation in respective villages were done.

These aimed at assisting participant champions in setting up mobile kraals in their crop fields to enhance productivity. In ward 8 a visit to a wetland that the community intend to protect was made and we assisted the community with demarcation of where the fence line should be placed to protect it. The work continues with feedback meetings on the exchange visits to be done at village level to share the experiences and knowledge with the wider community to enhance implementation of the project's approaches in the target wards.

A key moment in the year was an opportunity for a team from the lead organization (DWT) to attend the USAID Resilient Waters Program Grantees' Learning Exchange Workshop in South Africa. This was a great learning opportunity for us as we had a chance to learn from the approaches and experiences used by other organisations under the Resilient Waters Program. This included lessons learnt on emerging best practices for community work that can increase the effectiveness of our work within the Hills. For the Project Officer, Mr. Tichagwa, it was also a great opportunity for networking with other people that he shares the same vision with. Dambari Wildlife Trust expressed gratitude to USAID Resilient Waters Program for affording them this opportunity for the learning and to participate in trending matters such as building resilience against the impacts of climate change.



Matobo Biodiversity Monitoring Project Environmental Education and Awareness



The Matobo Biodiversity Monitoring Project is an environmental education and awareness programme initiated in March 2012 by Dambari Wildlife Trust. 2023 was another successful year thanks to the grant provided by Chessington Conservation Fund.

The project works with school pupils at five rural secondary schools within a ten-kilometer radius of Matobo National Park, Zimbabwe and pupils are taught and participate in different environmental activities that aim at promoting sustainable utilization of natural resources and reduce environmental degradation in the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site.

Achievements

- 104 pupils were recruited as biodiversity monitors and educated on the conservation of wildlife (vegetation, birds, mammals, invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians), indigenous knowledge systems, management of grazing lands, human-wildlife conflicts, and conservation of wetlands. This brings the total number of pupils who have been in the clubs up to 2,572 since 2012.
- Six unique informative and awareness posters were produced and distributed to schools.
- Sixty-nine pupils from the 2022 cohort continued into 2023 and they were awarded certificates of participation for being regular club members.
- Propagated and distributed pod-mahogany (*Azelia quanzensis*) saplings to schools for planting.
- Continued the annual monitoring of wildlife by encouraging pupils to record ad hoc animal sightings.
- Each Term feedback newsletters were produced.

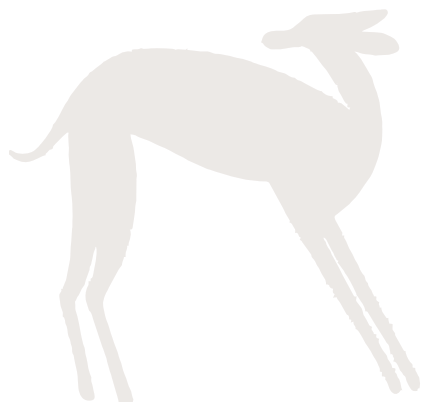


Matobo Biodiversity Monitoring Project Environmental Education and Awareness

Challenges

- On a few occasions, the Clubs timetable clashed with other extra-curricular school activities such as athletics and ball games.
- Some delays occurred in granting permissions by local authorities for the field trips.
- Delays in obtaining school timetables hampered efforts to produce the project's timetable early in term 1, reducing the contact time with the club members.
- Despite applying for local authority permission well in advance we had to continuously chase up for a response to the application.

The project is entirely donor funded and Chessington Conservation Fund has been the principal donor since 2015. Their 2023 Grant allowed us to continue this critical work for another 12 months. With this vital support Dambari continues to play a significant role in environmental education by helping pupils and communities to develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues, building the necessary skills to make informed and responsible decisions that help prevent or reverse environmental degradation.



RHINO CONSERVATION



Young rhino ready for dehorning with veterinarians, PWMA and DWT technical staff in attendance.

Dambari remains committed to rhino conservation in Zimbabwe, and partners with Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority in Matobo National Park. In 2023, we continued with routine monitoring through camera trapping, conducted rhino management operations in September, and launched a new black rhino research project (the first formal study on Matobo black rhino since the early 1990s).

Rhino monitoring

The twelfth consecutive year of camera trapping (a project funded by SAVE African Rhino Foundation, Australia) generated 759 records of rhino, with 75% of photos enabling full or partial identification of individuals (rhinos were clearly identifiable in 42% of photo sequences). A further 36 species of wild mammal and ten species of bird were photographed over the year.

The importance of camera trapping for monitoring the population and health of rhinos was underscored in 2023. Two black rhino calves born during the year were first recorded by camera traps, and the sexes of several calves (black and white rhino) were confirmed from photographs. In addition to confirming individuals, camera trap photographs also drew attention to two black rhinos with wire snares around their lower legs. Whilst the snares were probably not intended for rhino, the damage caused by snares on limbs can be fatal. One of the rhinos was assessed during rhino management operations (the wound had healed over), but unfortunately the other animal – a newly independent calf – could not be located and was found dead in early October. Camera trapping also helped us to track a white rhino bull's exploration of the park and eventual establishment of a new territory (displacing some other territory holders in the process).



RHINO CONSERVATION

Black rhino research

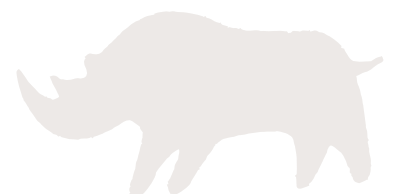
This new project, supported by Caledonia Mining Corporation, resulted from concerns over some black rhinos straying out of the park. To understand what was driving this trend, a year-long study of distribution, habitat selection and feeding ecology was launched. The results indicated that a combination of social, habitat and human pressures influenced black rhino distributions. Whilst suitable habitat was well-distributed across the Intensive Protection Zone, black rhino tended to avoid areas close to human settlements and areas with high levels of livestock encroachment. Social pressures – particularly on subadult males – pushed animals into peripheral areas. Black rhinos also preferentially utilised areas with high woody plant diversity, and had a broad diet, particularly in the wet season.



Rhino management operations

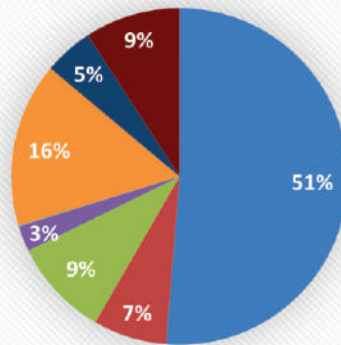
Annual rhino management operations, to ear-notch and dehorn rhinos, were successfully conducted over 11 days in September, with financial support from Caledonia Mining Corporation, US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Great Big Rhino Project (Paignton Zoo). In-kind support was also gratefully received from The Farmhouse in the Matobo Hills and Sauerdale Airfield and Banff Lodge in Bulawayo.

Through ear-notching, very high-quality data for the black and white rhino populations in Matobo have been available since 2010, enabling us to track individual performance and overall population changes. Dehorning remains a necessary component of the security toolkit in this small population; data indicate that poaching rates have declined since routine dehorning was implemented in 2011.



FINANCIAL REPORT

SUMMARY EXPENDITURE 2023



- CAB Conservation Across Boundaries
- MBMP Matopos Biodiversity Monitoring Project
- RW Resilient Waters
- CFLI Canada For Local Initiatives
- RHINO Rhino Conservation Projects
- MRCMP Matopos Rhino Camera Monitoring Project
- JRS JRS Herpetology
- WET Wetlands & Weeds

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS

We are grateful to the following organisations for their financial support of projects within Dambari's Conservation Across Boundaries Programme in 2023.

We are also very grateful to our numerous followers and supporters on social media for staying in touch.

