

Kasanka Website Newsletter October 2004



I must start with an apology to all our supporters for the long time which has elapsed since the last newsletter and website updates. This has been entirely due to the author being too busy to find time to sit down and write and not at all due to a lack of news!

The Kasanka project continues to grow in strength.

KASANKA CONSERVATION CENTRE



Work has started to build a new Conservation Centre just outside the park near the Mulaushi entrance gate. The centre is intended to fulfil multiple roles and be a base for all the activities which don't need to be based inside the park at the lodges. In particular:

- A home to the Trust's ever-growing community project allowing better access for community members, meeting places, reference library, display facilities and accommodation for visitors.
- A base for academic and professional researchers with accommodation, simple laboratory and reference library. This could expand in future with buildings for specimen storage.
- An education centre for visiting school and adult groups.
- A base for student groups, volunteer groups, and expeditions working in and around Kasanka.

The Trust has been very fortunate to secure funding from the Beit Trust in the amount of GB£30,000 towards the cost of building the centre. This will pay for construction of staff houses, visitor accommodation, offices, library, laboratory, and a large central building for meetings, lectures, displays and dining. Included in the budget is solar powered electricity and water reticulation. Construction work is underway on 8 structures already with local artisans being given contracts for completing buildings. We hope to have the centre finished by the end of 2005.

KASANKA TRUST BRINGS THE DARWIN INITIATIVE TO ZAMBIA



The Trust is delighted to announce the approval of an application made in conjunction with the University of Aberdeen to the UK government funded Darwin Initiative. This is a funding scheme which helps poorer countries to achieve a better understanding of ecological systems and implement sustainable management programs. Two central components are applying British expertise which couldn't otherwise be afforded, and training of host country nationals (Zambians in this case).

The Darwin Initiative project in Kasanka is getting under way at this time and will fund one or two post doctorate experts to study the hydrology, grazing ecology and fire management of Kasanka national park. The expert(s) have not yet been appointed and a job advertisement can be found on the University of Aberdeen website.

The project will also sponsor 2 graduates to attend the Durrel Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) at Canterbury University for a Masters degree course in Tourism and Conservation. The first student has already started the course this year.

Thirdly the Darwin Initiative project will fund training for local staff on site in Kasanka particularly to improve the skills and knowledge of local guides.

As the project gets fully underway we hope to bring you regular news updates on its progress.

ZEBRAS BROUGHT BACK TO KASANKA



In July 2004, 9 Zebras were transported from Southern Zambia and released in Kasanka. The funding for this job came in the year 2000 from three generous individual supporters and has been waiting for the animals and capture teams to be available. The Zebras were very generously donated by Tony Middleton who owns a game ranch near Kalomo in Southern Zambia and they were captured and transported by Ian Parsons a wildlife vet based in Mazabuka.

Arriving at night they were released in the dark to minimise the time in captivity. Zebras are highly strung and particularly difficult to manage and transport, and was sad but not unexpected that one of the animals was released injured, and died a couple of days later. The good news is that the others seem to be settling in to their new home - there always has to be a high risk when releasing animals in an unfenced national park that they will wander off and never be seen again!

The buffalos translocated into Kasanka in 2001 appear to be settling in well and breeding with the residual buffalos in the park. It's particularly encouraging to be seeing a herd of 13 together now. The status of the Tsessebe on the other hand is uncertain as there have been no confirmed sightings for some time.

CHALILO CLINIC



Many of you will have been following the (sometimes painfully slow!) progress of the Chalilo Clinic. This project has been a flagship of the Kasanka Trust's community support and was championed by the late Dr. Tim Ashworth secretary of the UK Trust.

I am pleased to be able to report that the clinic is now functioning and providing treatment for residents. It is staffed by an experienced male nurse Mr. Mulenga who has proved very committed and dedicated to the job. At present he is living in a temporary house built by the community but which has iron sheets and solar lighting. However one standard house has just been completed by the community building team. The materials have been supplied by Kasanka Trust who received funding for 2 houses from the Dutch "Stitching" charity FIDES. Work is continuing now to complete the second house at which point the clinic will be complete for now.

Kasanka Trust is still paying for a watchman Mr. Kaheha and an assistant health worker Elisha Mwape to complete the clinic staffing. Meanwhile the Trust is looking for a sponsor to provide ongoing support for the running and maintenance of this much valued facility.

AIR CHARTERS AVAILABLE FROM KASANKA



In July 2003 Sky Trails Ltd. was granted an Air Service Permit by the ministry of Transport to operate an air charter service based in Kasanka National Park. This has been an enormous help to developing tourism in the region as it means visitors can now be flown by charter from to and from **Lusaka, Bangweulu, Mfuwe, Shiwa N'gandu** and any other destination at much reduced cost. It is also often possible for visitors to book a sightseeing flight over Kasanka and Bangweulu which provides a spectacular different perspective.

Sky Trails also specializes in aerial surveys to count wildlife populations and has done a lot of work with the Zambia Wildlife Authority counting animals in national parks and game management areas around Zambia.

Possible expansion plans include adding a twin engine aircraft, or a smaller plane suited to spotting work for anti-poaching.

There's a definite vacancy for an experienced commercial pilot who wants to work in conservation as well as charter flying. It could also be a business opportunity for a partner to invest in the growing business which is turning away work for lack of a second pilot! **Contact Edmund Farmer by email if you are interested.**

IMPROVEMENTS AT SHOEBILL ISLAND



Recent visitors to **Shoebill Island**, the Trust's lodge in the Bangweulu Wetlands will have noticed some improvements to the comfort levels. Flush toilets are being fitted to replace the old "long-drop" loos and some new reed huts are under construction in a rolling replacement of the tents. This is part of a program to bring this remote camp up to international standards for the growing number of visitors.

Shoebill sightings were excellent in 2004 with most visitors seeing these amazing rare birds even in September. The best time though is earlier in the year just about everyone seeing them up until the end of July.

COMMUNITY PROJECT FUNDED BY DUTCH



The Kasanka Trust's Community extension work has been able to continue thanks to funding from the Royal Netherlands Embassy (in Lusaka). They have paid for 2 full time extension workers who have been carrying out conservation education, working with the community resource board, supporting income generating activities. As I write groups of children from local schools are being brought in to the national park on educational visits.

In 2003 the Holly Hill Trust funded, amongst other items, the production of a video film to sensitize the community on issues of conservation and resource management. This film has been shown at many centres around the community using a mobile video unit. The response was very positive and it is planned to have further screenings to reach more people.

The Kafinda Community Resource Board is a body formed under the wildlife act and democratically elected to represent the community in matters of resource management. The Trust gives 5% of all tourism revenue to the community resource board. This funding has been supplemented in 2003 and 2004 by a generous grant from DED (German Development Service). The CRB uses this money to sponsor numerous local development and conservation initiatives and receives technical and training support from the Trust's extension staff.

CAMPING SITES IN KASANKA NATIONAL PARK



By popular demand camping facilities have been expanded in Kasanka to provide for the growing number of self-sufficient travellers. A site near the pontoon has sites for several groups to camp at the same time and the Fibwe site near the sitatunga hide remains available on a restricted basis by prior booking. Work is slowly progressing to open a camping site at the Kabwe camp on the lower Kasanka. This should be operational for 2005.

The two Lodges, Wasa and Luwombwa have been busy and received some routine maintenance and re-thatching prior to the coming rains. Wasa lodge now has 6 ensuite chalets and 4 non ensuite, whilst Luwombwa has the three large ensuite chalets (2 with a second family bedroom) and 2 simple older chalets.

SCOUTS ON PARTOL



The Kasanka Trust's scouts continue to patrol the park and fight the scourge of poaching. Despite their hard work, poaching levels remain high.

In 2003, 29 suspects were arrested, 500 wire snares recovered and 9 illegal firearms seized. Between January and September 2004, scouts had already arrested 39 suspects, seized 12 guns and picked up no less than 936 wire snares! This shows that the problems are not lessening and we cannot afford to let up on our effort if we are to retain and build on the successes of the project to date.

In July 2003 the Trust sponsored 2 of its senior scouts and a ZAWA officer to attend a special advanced training course in Kafue National Park. This helped motivate the individuals and they have been encouraged to pass their new skills on to their colleagues.

TOURISM INCOME GROWS



Income from visitors to Kasanka and Bangweulu has continued to grow and now covers the majority of the costs of managing the park. However there is still a funding gap that needs charitable support, and operating costs have been growing at a considerable rate. It is worth considering that whilst most of the Trust's income is pegged US \$ terms, the US \$ had been static in its exchange rate to the Zambian Kwacha for 2 years but local Kwacha inflation has been running at about 30% p.a.

We need to thank all those who have visited for their support and remind them that all surplus generated from tourism activities goes directly to conservation and community development work.

A new full colour brochure covering Kasanka and Bangweulu is in production and should be available within a week or two. [Contact us](#) for more information.

BRIDGE OVER THE KASANKA



The long awaited bridge over the Kasanka river, at the pontoon site, should be completed by the end of 2004. We have been lucky not only to receive some funding from a UK donor for its construction but have also had the generous offer of a pile driving team at bare cost price to sink the necessary foundations. They should be starting work any day.

Those of you who have fond memories of the old pontoon crossing will be pleased to learn that we plan to reposition the pontoon at another Kasanka crossing point at Kabwe!

NEW MULEMBO AIRSTRIP



At the end of 2003 work finished on a new airstrip near to **Wasa Lodge**. Being only 5 minutes drive from the park headquarters makes it very convenient for management purposes as well as tourists visiting Wasa. Some gravel has been laid down and it is hoped to have the airstrip operational throughout most of the rainy season.

FRUIT BATS



Yes it's that time of year again! The incredible **fruit bat colony** is returning to Kasanka as I write. As usual they arrived within one day of 22nd October, but this year they are grouping up faster than last and there are already a lot of bats to see! For anyone who has never seen the spectacle of the Kasanka fruit bats, I can only say come and see it for yourself before you can believe it. The world's bat experts continue to describe it as the largest gathering of fruit bats in the world. They usually stay at least until Christmas, although some years the last bats have gone by Christmas day and other years there are still good numbers in January. To be sure of seeing them at their peak you should plan a visit between November 5th and December 15th. Last year the Trust hosted a successful visit by a group from Bat Conservation International led by Merlin Tuttle, and Heidi Richter an American Masters student completed here field research on the bats.

This year the Trust has a special offer on fully inclusive accommodation during the bat season at the Kasanka Lodges. [Enquire for details.](#)



Professor Paul Racey writes:

“Every year at about this time, thousands of straw coloured fruit bats *Eidolon helvum* arrive at Kasanka and take up residence in trees in the Mushitu swamp forest. The numbers build up to a peak in November when several million individuals are thought to be present. They remain until late December or early January and then depart. Such large roosts are known in other parts of Africa, often in urban areas as for example in Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Accra and Abidjan, although the numbers of bats in these roosts are reported to be declining. Straw coloured fruit bats are also known to be migratory, moving north and south of the central belt of Africa in search of food. That is what is happening at Kasanka, where the bats feed on the abundance of fruits such as waterberry and wild loquat which are present at this time. Both males and females are found in the roost and the females are either pregnant or suckling young, so the abundant fruit must help them meet their increased energetic demands.

Where the Kasanka bats come from is a mystery since no such large colonies have been reported in the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the border of which is only 30kms west of Kasanka. To answer this question will require satellite telemetry and we are seeking funding to buy a few tags (at £2,500 each) to carry out a pilot study.

Fruit bats such as *Eidolon* are important pollinators and seed dispersers in Africa. The baobab *Adansonia digitata* relies on *Eidolon* for pollination, and small seeds, such as those figs, pass rapidly through the bats unharmed and are distributed over wide areas.

To see the millions of bats at Kasanka dispersing at dusk against the setting sun is one of the wildlife wonders of Africa. However, we need to find out more about them to ensure that they are not threatened in those places where they spend the majority of the year and continue to return to feast in Kasanka's woodlands and enthral future generations of visitors.”

P.A. Racey
Regius Professor of Natural History
Department of Zoology

University of Aberdeen



DONORS TO THE KASANKA TRUST

The Trustees and staff of Kasanka Trust would like to thank all those who have contributed to the work inside Kasanka and the surrounding communities over the past 2 years. All contributions however small or large are warmly appreciated. In addition to the many individual supporters we would like to thank the following organisations:

The Holly Hill Trust
The Beit Trust
FIDES Stichting
The Darwin Initiative
DED (German Development Service)
Royal Netherlands Embassy (Lusaka)
Luawata Conservation



