

Friends of Hwange Trust



Conservation Work Update - Aug 2021

We made a quick working visit to drop a consignment of medical supplies at the Main Camp clinic at the end of July. Night-time temperatures plummeted to below zero, but the days were balmy.



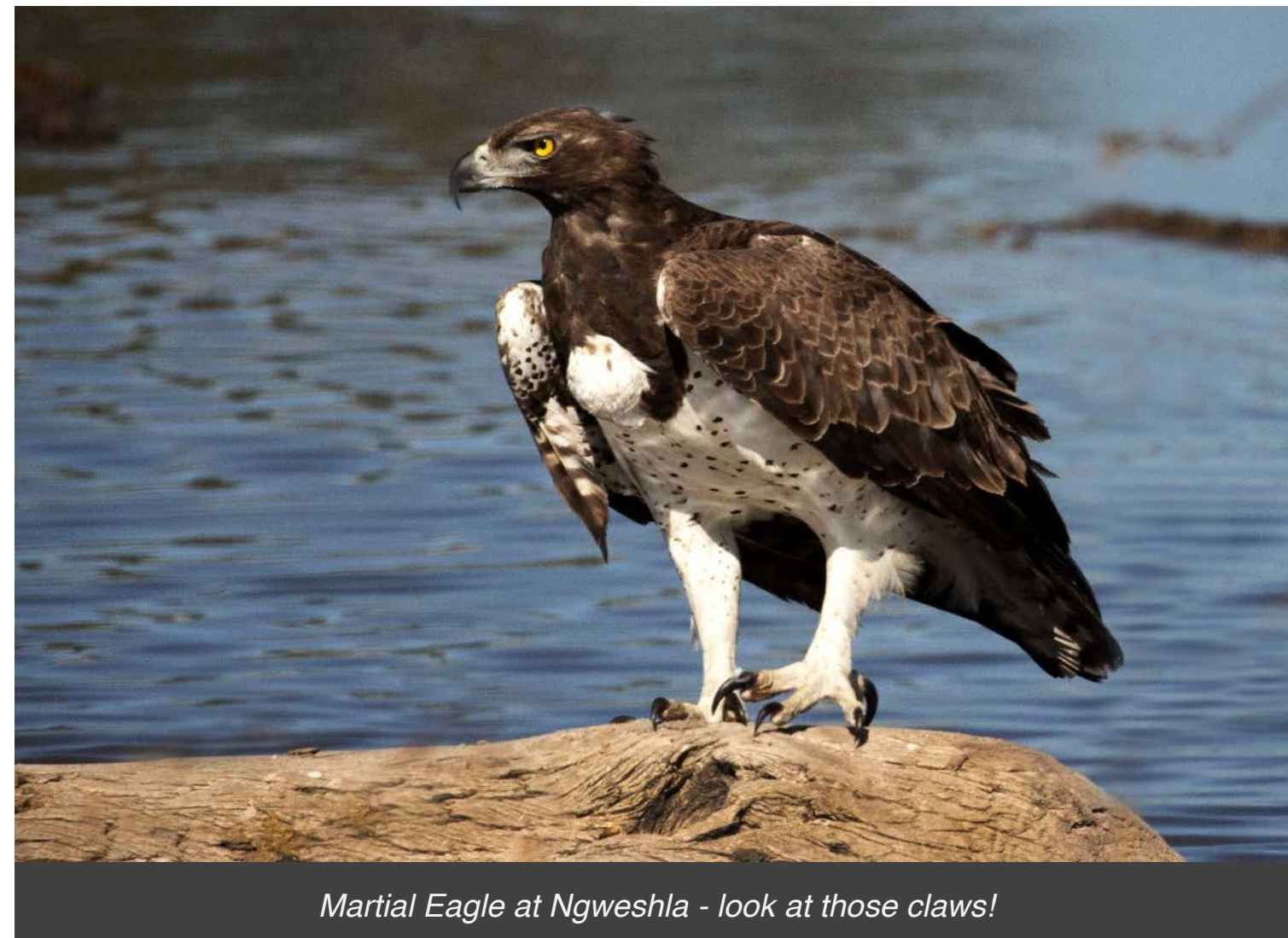
Vegetation is prolific with abundant, dry grass. A block of ground on the Balla Balla loop was recently control-burned and the resulting flush of green grass has already attracted zebra, wildebeest, waterbuck, and kudu not seen in that area for some time. Controlled fires help eliminate invasive plants, and sterile dead bush. Nutrients are returned to the soil in the ashes of vegetation that may otherwise take years to decompose.



After an exhausting effort and much toil, work on the fireguards was completed at the end of June. Maintaining the fire breaks is important to help to slow or stop the progress of a bush fire should one break out.

There is still a little natural surface water in some places and the pumped pans are mostly full. However, with elephants starting to congregate, water levels are bound to start dropping quickly although we have no doubt that demand will be adequately met by the solar pumps. However, necessary maintenance is of paramount importance to keep them operating efficiently.

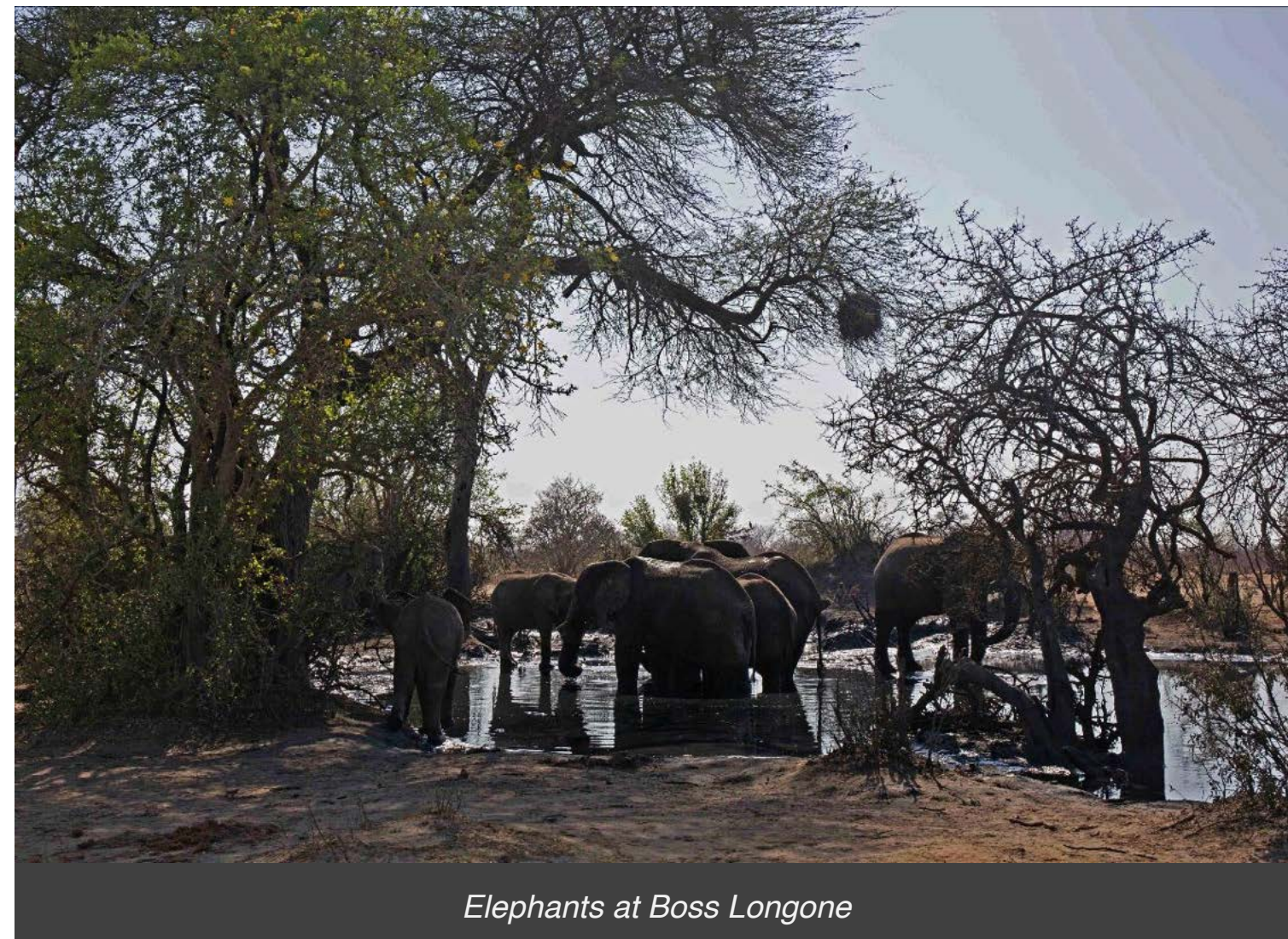
Although we always welcome any rain, heavy downfalls in certain areas earlier this year created some problems. The casing of the original borehole at Ngweshla rusted and disintegrated causing surface water, sand, and mud to gush down into the hole. A drill rig was engaged to try to clean it out, but an obstruction lower down meant progress was short-lived. In short, another borehole had to be drilled as Ngweshla is such a key pan. The existing solar panels have been connected to the new borehole together with a new pump and motor. Happily both solar systems at Ngweshla are now in good working order.



Martial Eagle at Ngweshla - look at those claws!

There was a similar occurrence at Sicheche although we suspect elephants may have contributed to the problem there. They pulled the pipe out of the borehole which allowed rainwater and sand to rush down the hole. The depth of the hole was reduced which meant no water could be pumped. The drillers managed to clean this out and the 30-metre length of pipe that the elephants very kindly removed has been replaced. A new motor and pump have been connected to the system, but it seems the borehole may need to be re-cased.

Other pans requiring attention were Mbiza which needed a new inverter and Boss Longone that required a new pump and was nearly bone dry as it has been frequented by elephants all season. In addition, assistance was provided to the ranger base at Makona by provision of a pump for their borehole. At Guvalala our long-nosed friends (the elephants) decided they'd like to divert the water away from the pan, so they removed 25 metres of piping and took it away never to be found. The pipe has since been replaced and buried down deep using a dam scoop.



Elephants at Boss Longone

Masuma Dam has long been of concern. It is a hugely important water source and therefore comes under severe elephant pressure during the dry months. Although it falls out of our management area, Friends of Hwange funded the drilling of an extra borehole and solar pumping unit there a few years ago, but still the pan has struggled to cope, even when using a generator to pump water at night. Early this year another borehole was drilled. It has been equipped with solar panels and a pump and in addition, a lithium-ion battery, recently developed, has been installed to pump water at night. This breakthrough technology is hugely welcomed, and we eagerly await the benefits.

At Kennedy 1 a brand-new solar pumping unit has been erected on the second borehole that was drilled late last year. This is cause for celebration as several attempts have been made to locate a site that can produce significant yield. A road has been cut from the borehole to the camp and we're awaiting use of a TLB to dig the necessary 1600 metre trench for the piping. This will link up with the pipes that lead to the pan.



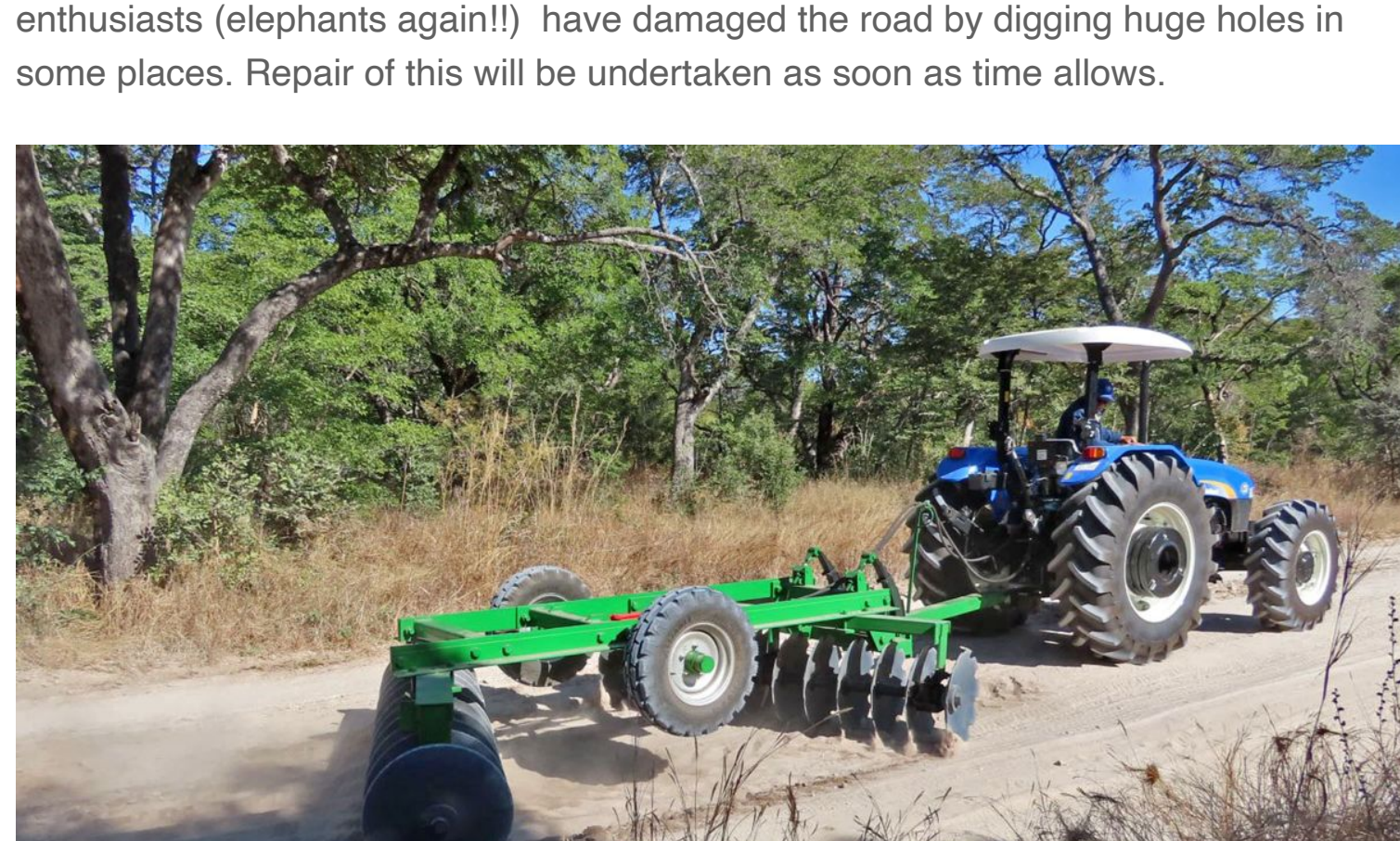
Solar Array going up at Kennedy 1

Many of the solar stands and panels have rusted. The rust needs to be removed and the stands re-painted. Makwa was first in line to be smartened up followed by Sinanga, Luvungi, Ngweshla and Nyamandhlovu (including the tatty-looking water tank stand). There are still lots more to be done.



Picnic Site Maintenance: We have been frustrated to date by many hold-ups, but at last have the list of requirements in hand. The Ngweshla picnic site has been backfilled with tons of earth and a new game fence and gate installed. Further improvements planned include kitchen repairs, improvements to the camp attendant's living arrangements and dedicated space for day guests. The camp site at Kennedy 1 will also have a new fence and gate erected, basic maintenance attended to and a space for day-guests established. Work is set to re-commence within the next week

Our shiny, new tractor has already been useful for work on the fireguards and has also been used to grade the road from Kennedy 1 to Main Camp. This has done much to improve the bad corrugations. From Balla Balla to White Hills our gardening enthusiasts (elephants again!!) have damaged the road by digging huge holes in some places. Repair of this will be undertaken as soon as time allows.



On the ANTI-poaching front the Ukhozi scouts under the management of Paul de Montille from DART continue to patrol the Dete, Mambanje and Marist Brothers areas to find and remove indiscriminate, cruel wire snares. Anti-poaching patrols in the Chokomela/Nyantui area are important to halt incursions into this poaching hotspot. Derelict copper phone wire has been removed from the Sikumi Tree Lodge area as well as in and around Dete town. National Parks has been assisted with weekly ranger deployments along with replenishment of water and firewood to various ranger stations



Almost invisible Guinea Fowl Snare



Almost invisible Impala Snare

Animal rescue: A call was received from a private area outside the Park one Sunday evening recently to attend to a badly snared young buffalo. There are risks in darting an animal late evening as not only might an attempted rescue be unsafe for the buffalo but the herd could panic in the dark posing great danger to the rescue team. However, the chances of finding the calf the next day were slim, so the decision made was to go ahead with the de-snaring exercise.

The darted buffalo walked only a short distance before going down. Despite its proximity to the rest of the curious herd, it seemed the other buffalo knew that help rather than harm was at hand, and they allowed the team to get on with the job without any hint of aggression. The long copper strands of telephone wire snare that had been wrapped around the animal's neck and rear leg were quickly cut off and less than 15 minutes after being darted the animal was back on its feet and able to re-join the herd.

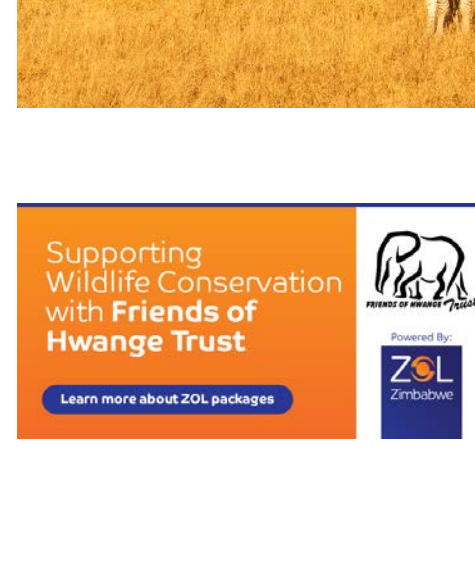
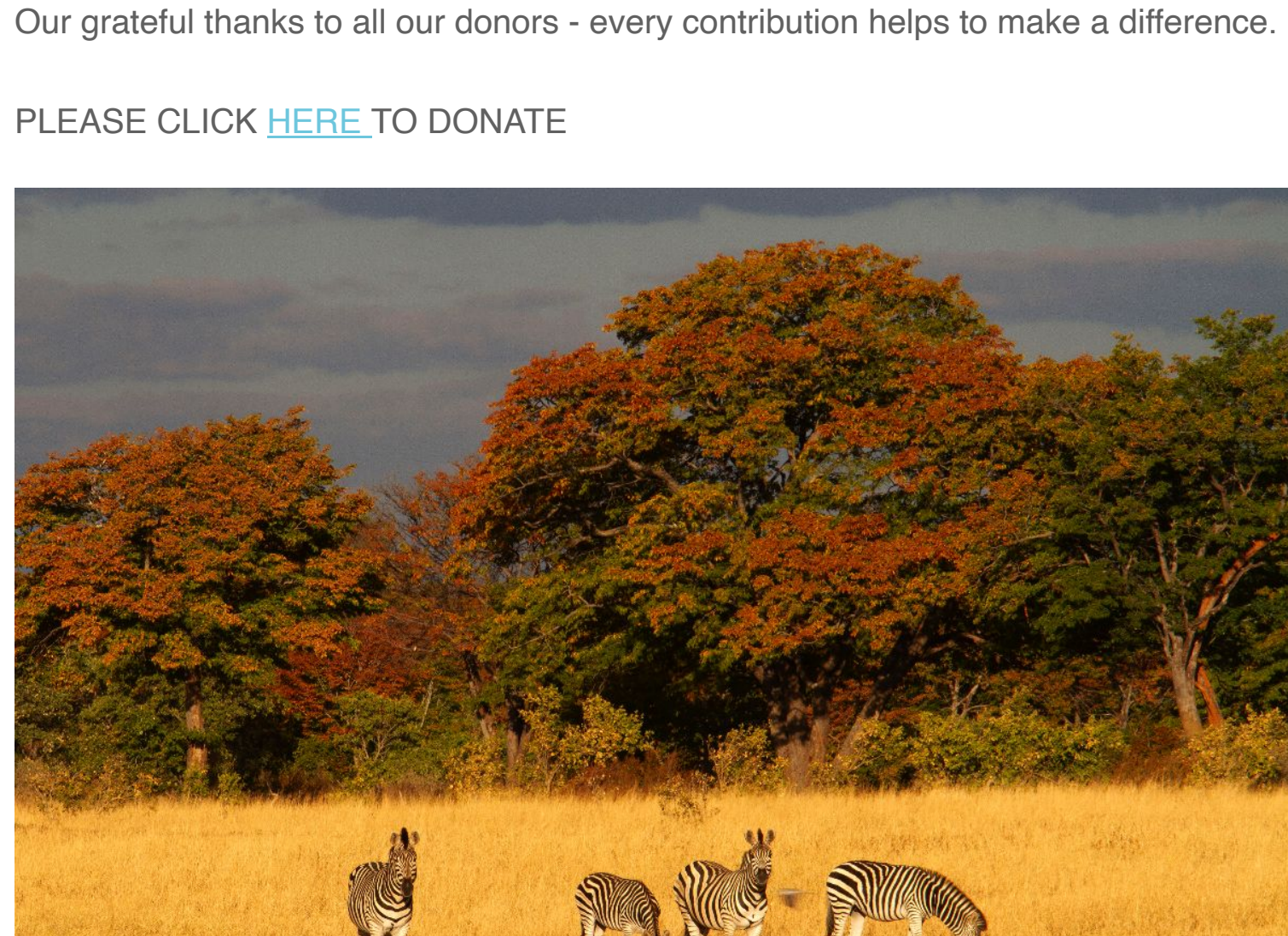


None of this work is possible without funds and there are many kind people that support the work we do. Special mention must be made of Carolyn Rountree, Dr Wolfgang Hennig, Dr Frank Zindel facilitated by Simply Africa, Liam Hamilton Potts and colleagues, Taylor's Africa, EverEden Foundation, Hwange Conservation Society (UK) and SARF (Australia) for their ongoing, very generous help. In addition, Agristructures in Harare, Halsted's in Bulawayo, and Kiggen Construction have contributed significantly to the campsite renovations.

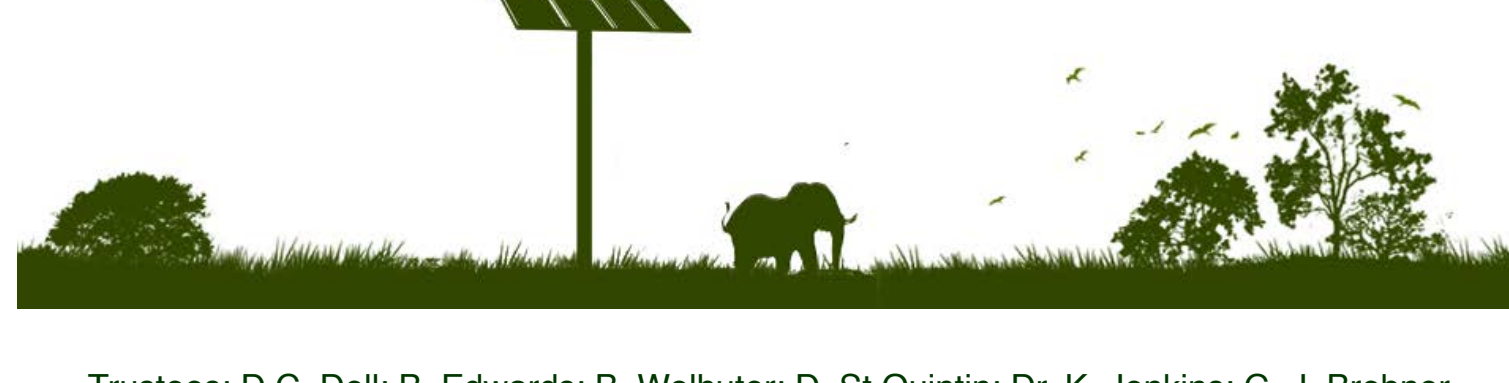
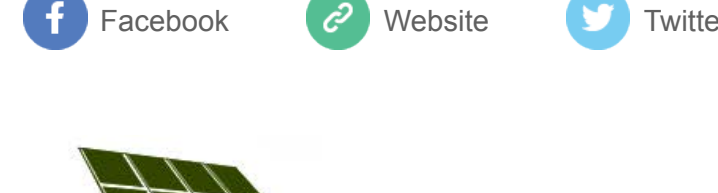
There is a huge amount that still needs to be done. We encourage contributions from local Zimbabwean Companies and individuals as it is they that will benefit most from the campsite reno.

Our grateful thanks to all our donors - every contribution helps to make a difference.

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Friends of Hwange is committed to ensuring the future of Hwange National Park and its wildlife. Contributions are always most gratefully welcome.



Trustees: D.C. Dell; B. Edwards; B. Wolhuter; D. St Quintin; Dr. K. Jenkins; G. J. Brebner

