



January 15, 2014

Dear Friends,

Since the formation of the Chiredzi River Black Rhino Charitable Trust (CRBRCT) in 2008, the Organization has been able to support some tremendous achievements in wildlife and habitat conservation on the Chiredzi River Conservancy (CRC) in Zimbabwe's south-east lowveld. We start by thanking all of our donors for their valuable contribution towards the great accomplishments in the Conservancy.

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Although faced with many hurdles in the past, 2013 proved to be the most intense and challenging year to date. As you are all aware from our reports last year, Ruware Ranch Extension, an integral part of the CRC, was targeted for resettlement. The CRBRCT believed that the threat to invade this pristine wilderness block was illegal and had been promoted by certain individuals for both political and personal gain. The board of Trustees agreed that should the resettlement of this core wildlife area go ahead, the tremendous gains in increasing the wildlife populations, preserving the natural habitat, and enhancing the anti-poaching efforts, would be lost. The CRBRCT Trustees met with the Barry Style, Vice Chairman of the CRC, and it was agreed that the challenge to remove the settlers must be accomplished or else the wildlife area would be lost "forever".

I visited the CRC in July 2012 and observed the affected area of Ruware where approximately 360 five-acre plots had already been demarcated for the proposed resettlement. People had begun to build huts and clear their plots, destroying the vital wildlife habitat in the process. During my visit, Barry, Enos Mangwende (Manager of Ruware), and I met with the area Chief's representative who informed us that the Chief was opposed to the invasion of the wildlife block. Most of the settlers originated from another tribal area some 100 miles north of Ruware and had been duped into purchasing plots on the property. Barry and Enos, along with other local residents of the area, tried to convince the settlers that they were illegally occupying these plots. They were warned that the area had been designated for wildlife by the relevant authorities. Furthermore, the region is subject to drought conditions and inhabited by a multitude of wildlife species under the protection of our game scouts. Any livestock that were brought in by the settlers would be at the mercy of lion, leopard and hyena, and crops would be targeted by eland, hippo, bushpig and baboons and other wildlife that reside on the property. Despite the

warnings of the human/wildlife conflict, the instigators of the invasion convinced the settlers to stay.

Efforts by the indigenous shareholders of Ruware to halt the resettlement of the property at both district and provincial level proved fruitless. A decision was made to pursue legal action through our attorneys in Harare. Barry and Enos travelled several times to the Capital to meet with the shareholders and lawyers to initiate intervention through the High Court. Meetings were also held with the Director for Conservation on the Parks & Wildlife board, as well as other influential individuals, to lobby their support for the recognition of Ruware as a valuable wildlife block that requires protection. The CRBRCT used the funds it had available and began a fundraising effort to cover the expenses of fighting to save this pristine wildlife area. On October 31, 2012, the High Court declared that the shareholders were the lawful occupiers of the Conservancy and ordered the Ministry of Lands to desist from allocating any portion of the property to any person for resettlement. The following month the Sheriff of the Court commenced an eviction exercise to remove the illegal settlers from the wildlife block. The operation was then put on hold pending the outcome of an application by the Ministry of Lands to cancel the High Court Order.

It was only in August, 2013 that the High Court eventually dismissed the Ministry of Lands' application for rescission. In the meantime, the south-east Lowveld was reeling from a second consecutive drought year, causing the settlers' crops to once again fail and for their livestock to do poorly because of the lack of grazing. It was realized that the situation would endanger the welfare of the wildlife. Accordingly we countered the increased threat by engaging additional scouts and deploying more patrols throughout the CRC. Although there were some losses of wildlife from poaching, the game scouts managed to apprehend the culprits and stop the illegal hunting activities on the property.

In September, a second eviction exercise was carried out by the appropriate authorities, but was yet again halted by certain individuals. The CRBRCT assisted with engaging the services of an Advocate from Harare to review the High Court documents pertaining to the Ruware issue and make recommendations regarding our case. The Advocate concluded that the initial ruling in favor of the rightful owners of the property still stood and recommended that the eviction of the illegal settlers should continue unabated.

My visit to the CRC in September last year occurred shortly after the second eviction exercise. It brought to reality the huge task that lies ahead for those working on the Conservancy. We were certain that the eviction of all the settlers and the demolition of their illegal structures were imminent. Therefore, we set about to strategize the upcoming months. On the Deputy Sheriff's request, equipment had to be procured to demolish the huts, livestock pens, and brush piles surrounding the fields. Trucks needed to be hired to ferry the settlers and their possessions off the property. Since emotions were running high, the level of security had to be raised for the wildlife, the property and houses of our scouts, and the water points and other structures in the CRC. The other Trustees and friends who had visited the Conservancy during the 2013 season echoed the concerns that I felt about the welfare of the wildlife and staff.

I am pleased to report that as of this date the illegal settlers have been evicted. Those people attempting to re-occupy their plots are in blatant defiance of a standing High Court Order and will ultimately be brought to book. Proposals to establish a core wildlife zone for the protection of the animals and habitat have been submitted to the highest level and we are confident that the precise boundaries for the wildlife preserve will be clarified in the very near future.

The success of this hard fought battle to save the wildlife area has brought a new set of challenges. First: to raise sufficient funds to cover the costs of the legal fees, the services of the Sheriff to carry out the eviction exercise, and the hiring of the equipment to facilitate the operation. Second: to provide financial support to the people on the ground and enhance their efforts to preserve the wildlife and natural habitat. Finally, to ensure that the staff - the game scouts in particular - are protected against retribution from the instigators who promoted the destruction of the wildlife area.

Although the political challenges in Zimbabwe are ongoing, we reiterate our belief that the CRC will remain a protected wildlife area. The CRBRCT will therefore once again host the annual Fund Raiser in Las Vegas, Nevada on February 6, 2014 starting at 7:00 PM. The location of this event will be in the Brunswick Room at the South Point Hotel located at 9777 Las Vegas Blvd. South. Admission to the Fund Raiser will be a \$100.00 donation per person. Your donation of \$100.00 will include heavy appetizers, a cash bar and a chance to win one of the 10 door prizes which includes a Cape Buffalo Hunt on the CRC and a Plains Game Hunt donated by Bossie Mosert of Limpopo Big Game Safaris in South Africa. Individuals can commit to additional tickets as long as the 300 tickets last. Please contact Nick by email or at 559-284-5010 or one of the other Trustees to reserve your tickets. Trustees will also be available at the Buffalo Range Safaris Booth number 2323 at the SCI Convention with any tickets that are still available.

Once again, the Trustees of the CRBRCT, the members of the Conservancy, and the dedicated scouts thank you for your continued interest and support of the CRC and the CRBRCT.

Respectfully submitted,

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Barry Style, Vice Chairman, CRC