



## BANGWEULU SET TO BECOME 'ZAMBIA'S OKAVANGO'

The Bangweulu Swamps is a wetland paradise, home to breeding shoebills and huge herds of endemic black lechwe. Yet for decades the region has suffered from a lack of adequate resources and protection. All that may be about to change, with the creation of Chikuni Community Partnership Park. **Stephen Cunliffe** spoke to Ian Stevenson of African Parks Network, the new project manager.

### What is a community partnership park?

It is a pioneering concept whereby a protected area belongs to the community rather than the state. It has a joint board, comprising members of the community, the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) and a private sector body. That private sector body – in this case African Parks Network (APN) – handles day-to-day management.

### How big is this new protected area?

The Chikuni Community Partnership Park covers 2,900km<sup>2</sup> and the surrounding game management area another 3,100km<sup>2</sup>. We plan to manage it all as a single conservation unit. The CCPP will cater to photographic tourism, while the GMA will earn revenue from controlled trophy hunting.

### Where does all the money come from?

The initial set-up costs are estimated at US\$1.4 million per year, decreasing by more than a third once the project is up and running. The UNDP and WWF Netherlands have pledged funding for the first three years, while donors and tourism will provide longer-term financial support. Initially, ZAWA, the Community Resource Board (CRB) and the six local chiefs who have allocated land will share 25% of the revenue.

### Is much wildlife still left?

The black lechwe population has shown incredible resilience in the face of heavy poaching: there are now thought to be over 100,000, along with 1000 tsessebe and an unknown number of sitatunga.

Large game has been severely depleted, but a few buffalo, elephant, zebra and sable remain. Bangweulu is also designated an Important Bird Area (IBA), with such high-profile species as shoebill and wattled crane among its prolific birdlife.

### Will wildlife populations rebound naturally or will you have to restock?

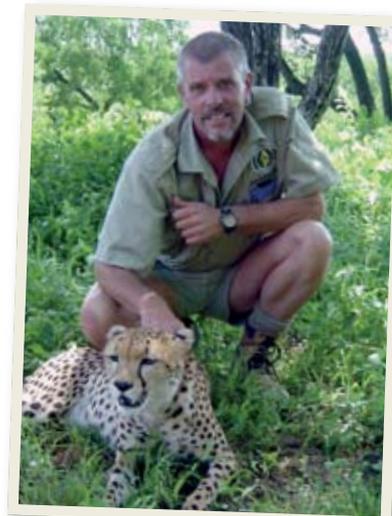
We have laid out a seven-year restocking programme that will begin in 2010 with the release of cheetah. A 20,000ha sanctuary is being mooted to maximise the success of the reintroduced game and to enhance future tourism. Ultimately, we want to see the return of all the region's original wildlife, including lion, leopard, elephant and black rhino.

### Have you encountered any problems?

With 90,000 people living in the area, many of whom rely on subsistence fishing, our greatest challenge is getting local fishermen to adopt more sustainable practices – and to understand that fish stocks are a finite resource. Long fishing dykes and improvised gill nets are devastating the fish populations on which people depend.

### How will you address these problems?

The idea is to use a 'carrot-and-stick' approach. The anti-poaching effort will be expanded, with a force of 24 ZAWA officers augmented by 54 newly-trained village scouts. APN will provide local jobs. Villagers will still have access to the park, but there will be increased education and monitoring of fishing practices. They will also receive revenue via community



development projects, such as beekeeping and fishponds. Other partners, donors and NGOs will help in areas such as education, health, HIV/AIDs and gender.

### Where do you see the project ten years from now?

African Parks have signed a 20-year management agreement with an option to renew for a further 20 years. Bangweulu should be financially, ecologically and socially sustainable within five to ten years. By then, I would want poaching eradicated, sustainable fishing practices in place, wildlife populations growing and local support for the CRB. High-profile tourism operators should be involved, which will generate revenue and bring local benefits. If Bangweulu can realise its potential, then I believe it could easily become Zambia's Okavango.

Find out more at [www.african-parks.org](http://www.african-parks.org) ■