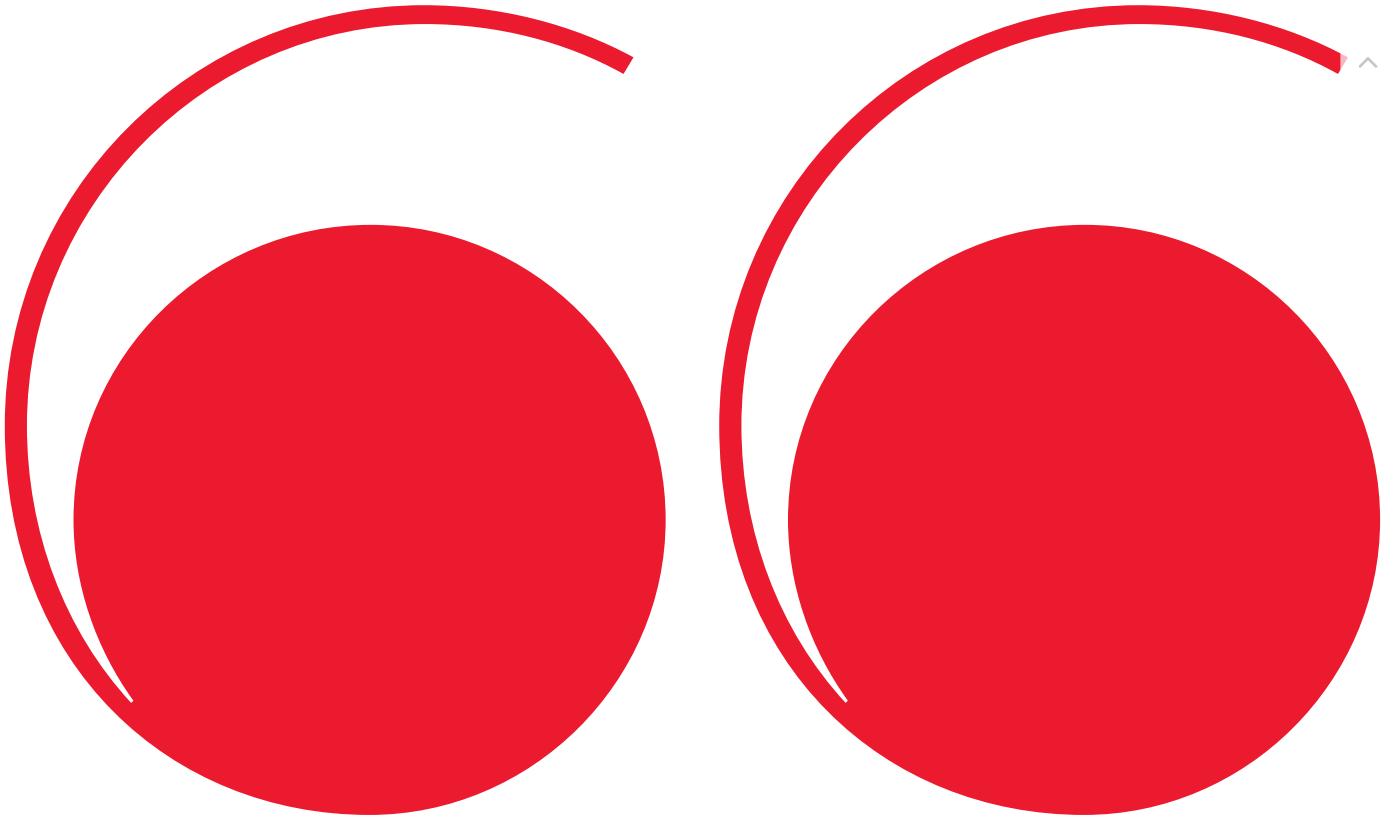


THE ZIMBABWE PARK AUTHORITY TIGHTENS SECURITY IN HWANGE NATIONAL PARK

🕒 June 11, 2022 📁 Zimbabwe 👁 0 Views





By Tatira Zwinoira for The Independent in Zimbabwe

Under the mild May sun, the whirring of the drone could be heard with almost every step.

Like “big brother’s” watchful eye in the sky, one wouldn’t look up to know a drone was hovering several meters above a group of journalists nearby.

It stuck with the group as they were shown the construction of several buildings at the new ‘Makona’ campsite in north-west Zimbabwe’s Hwange National Park, some 100 kilometers from the main camp.

The campground is being built by the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) and will consist of eight blocks, an entertainment facility, an administrative office and a state-of-the-art security checkpoint.

Makona is expected to cover 4,000 square kilometers within the park, which spans 14,000 square kilometers of wilderness.

“This will be a state-of-the-art facility that will house our rangers to monitor the wildlife area in and around the camp,” said ZimParks spokeswoman Tinashe Farawo, who led the group of journalists during a week-long media tour.

Farawo told journalists the drone is just a concept of the kind of high-level security being implemented by the agency.

By building these new campgrounds, ZimParks wants to prevent a repeat of the 2013 massacre of more than 120 elephants who were poisoned by poachers.

Farawo said when the elephants were poisoned, it was difficult for ZimParks to move from the main camp to the site. He added that having on-site housing would also make it easier for rangers to respond to wildlife affecting nearby communities.

One of the closest communities to the park is the district of Tsholotsho, which is about 10 kilometers away.

Farawo said building Makona will ensure rangers can protect elephants. Hwange National Park still has a number of blind spots where poaching can occur, so on-site rangers are required.

"We have about eight blocks that will house two families per block, then the administration office. There will be a house for our officer in charge (of the camp). There will also be a workshop... but the main purpose is to improve the welfare of our rangers," said Farawo.

"Now the camp will be fully staffed with an officer in charge, with a staffing capable of responding to emergency calls from the communities."

He said it would also ensure officers now have improved welfare as a result of the accommodation.

"It's because of the IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) who are doing a tremendous job. Our officials will also have entertainment centers so they can relax even after work," Farawo said.

"You can watch DSTV, play snooker, football and lots of other entertainment." Makona previously had two buildings, with the construction of the new buildings being funded by \$2 million (£1.6 million) budget support from IFAW, an animal welfare organization based in the United States.

"This is a huge project that is the result of our partnership with the International Fund for Animal Welfare. Over the last two years they have committed more than \$2million (£1.6million) and we are very grateful," said Farawo.

"The road we used from the main camp here, Makona, is about 100 kilometers long and at some point you had to drive a day on this road because of the Kalahari sand.

They helped and it's now navigable. We used to deploy our rangers here from the main camp and given the distance it was really costly."

However, ZimParks is limited in its ability to provide accommodation and meet its overall conservation mandate as the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly reduced tourism revenue.

As reported in this issue, ZimParks is underfunded at \$6.76million (£5.41million) for 2022. This has caused it to struggle to pay its employees.

“We are talking about operational payroll funds that total about ZW\$55 million (£142,660) in local currency per month... the accommodation of our rangers needs to be improved,” said Fulton Mangwanya, ZimParks general manager, in an interview.

“Right now I’m a month or two behind on these salaries and there’s a risk that if we don’t pay them, these rangers will become poachers.”

He said there were just over 2,000 rangers but another 1,000 were needed.

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