



# Free to roam Hwange

It was a day of celebration when nine captive elephants were released into Hwange National Park



• ABOVE: The released elephants, shortly after walking out of the transport truck that transferred them into Hwange National Park. LEFT: It was a day of celebration for all involved.

When I think of Hwange Estate, I recall the sounds of this land: the unmistakable cry of bateleur eagles as they soar the summer thermals, the haunting howl of black-backed jackals and a melody of rumbles from the friendly Presidential elephants as they wander by so very close. The adjoining Hwange National Park sounds different to me: diesel engines pumping life-giving water, the grunt of a hippo and laugh of a hyena, and the silence of scores of stately giraffes crossing the plains.

It was into Hwange National Park that nine rehabilitated elephants were released last year. They had been taken from the wild to be trained for use in the controversial elephant-back safari industry. After the Zimbabwe National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ZNSPCA) uncovered counts of cruelty and abuse, the National Parks Authority and its ministry supported pleas to release these elephants.

I joined ZNSPCA chief inspector Glynis Vaughan, the animal welfare group Four Paws (which assisted with rehabilitation and funding) and SPCA South Africa in the park for the occasion. It was an emotional time. These elephants symbolised an end, we hoped, to the future capture of wild elephants for commercial use. It was a great day for Zimbabwe's grey giants.

Back on Hwange Estate, I sat in my 4x4 among Lady, Lantana, Whole, Whosit and others. How anybody could want to interfere with the extremely close bonds of wild

elephant families I couldn't understand. I could understand tourists wanting to get close to elephants; I'd revelled in that practically every day for the past nine years. Here, amongst the wild, free-roaming Presidential elephants of Zimbabwe you can get ohh-so-very-close – while being 100 per cent certain that no cruelty has ever taken place to enable this.

Come and revel in the nobility and freedom of Africa's giants. And be sure never to turn a deaf ear when mankind gives them reason to cry. ■



■ You can help keep the pumps going to fill Hwange National Park's water pans. Deposit your donation into the Save Hwange Trust account number 6209-3759-086 at First National Bank, Sea Point branch number 201809. For more information, tel 0861-312-312, web [www.flameofafrica.com](http://www.flameofafrica.com).

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