



## Until the rains come

**Spring in Hwange is a time for action. Collecting precious rainwater is the most urgent task.**

Spring brought unrelenting heat and bushfires: a sweltering inferno. It also brought fresh new leaf and masses of bright yellow pom-pom flowers on the elephants' favourite *Acacia eriolobas* – that amazing phenomenon of vegetation reviving itself in anticipation of rains, rather than as a result of them. However, poetic words can sometimes blur the brutal facts.

Although pumped water inside Hwange National Park was plentiful, I found it depressing to drive out to the adjoining Hwange Estate, home to the Presidential elephant herd.

Was it foolishness, I often secretly wondered, that kept me in this place? Bone-dry pans and fruitless talk screamed at me day after day, daring me to try to do something yet again. Hope persisted, perhaps beyond reason.

The local Ndebele people have a saying: *Ithendele elihle ngelikhala ligijima* – don't just sit there bleating, get up and do something about it! The Presidential elephants were in their fifth year without sufficient dry-season water. Although not my responsibility, I tried once again.

Jim Goddard, a softly spoken third-generation Zimbabwean, as great in kindness as he is in stature, arrived at African Sun's Hwange Safari Lodge with brother Tom to meet with me. We drove onto this unfenced estate, surveying dry cracked sites like antbears deciding where to burrow.

I could feel the enthusiasm mounting as we discovered small dry wallows, created by the elephants in past wet seasons. In addition to scooping existing pans, it would need just a few extra hours of bulldozer time – and the goodwill of Jim – to ensure that some of these mini-pans held greater quantities of rainwater.

On our way along the sandy road to Kannondo Pan came a gift from above. The matriarch, Lady, leading the 'L' Presidential family, appeared on the road ahead. Forever awed by the nobility of these wild, free-roaming giants, I called loudly through cupped hands: 'Lady! Lady girl. Come on, Lady. Come here my girl.'

Mighty trunks swung rhythmically as the entire family lumbered our way. It wasn't long before Lady held my hand within the fingers of her trunk and fluttered long, elegant eyelashes at the Goddard brothers. Lady, of all elephants, would come to introduce herself.

This first step in pan resurrection is being done with the kind assistance of JR Goddard Contracting, Wildlife Environment Zimbabwe and Australian Nicholas Duncan.

It's certain that Lady and all my elephant and other animal friends will appear more regularly once these pans are resurrected. This encounter with Lady was thrilling to the unflappable Jim Goddard. Consider the thrill awaiting tourists who head our way. ■

*Lady held my hand within the fingers of her trunk and fluttered long, elegant eyelashes at the Goddard brothers*

- Lady, a wild, free-roaming giant, eventually granted
- Sharon an extraordinary place in her world. She even
- comes when Sharon calls to her, like a familiar friend.

