

February 2012

The rain in December and January was good. In some areas it was spectacular, and in others it was about average. But all in all, Ruaha National Park and Usangu area have had more than substantial rains so far this season. Now the middle of February, we have experienced a dry spell which is normal.

From the onset of the rains in early December, the Great Ruaha River had irregular bursts of flood waters, emanating from the various sand rivers in the park and also in Usangu. This water flowed for several days at a time, all from local rainstorms in different sections along its course, but it was never a constant flow. The picture below shows the flood water from a rainstorm on 27th December 2011. This flow lasted only a few days before drying up again. One can tell it is from local flooding due to its brown colour.



Great Ruaha River | Main Bridge | 28th December 2011

Then, on 17th January 2012 the Usangu water came flowing down the river past the bridge at the old entrance gate (Ibuguziwa). This water flowed on to Lunda. We know this is the Usangu water due to its dark, almost black colour (see photo below).



Great Ruaha River | Main Bridge | 28th January 2012

However, as can be seen from the photo below, taken from the same spot some 10 days later, the river level has not risen. It should be doing so if the water was flowing without interruption or abstraction. Also, the water in the photo below is slightly brown, which means that it has mixed with recent floodwater from rainstorms. We know these came from the area just south-west of Jongomero. So, even more reason that the water level should be higher than it was on 28th January. Finally...



Great Ruaha River | Main Bridge | 6th February 2012

The ever present stone marker at my old camp reveals all. If you look at the 2 photos below you can see how low the river actually is. It is about one third as full as it should be. I suspect that the massive off-takes in the Usangu area are greater than ever before. It is no wonder that Mtera Dam is not filling up very fast. If the water was allowed to flow naturally I feel sure that the river, and hence the dam would be an awful lot higher than what we are witnessing at present.



Great Ruaha River | Stone Marker – Sue’s Old Camp | 2nd February 2012



Great Ruaha River | Stone Marker – Sue’s Old Camp | 2nd February 2012

April 2012

The Great Ruaha River has not increased in flow since February 2012. You can see that the grass has grown up without being hampered by any flooding. Therefore, the off-take from the Usangu Basin continues to be in vast quantities. It appears to be more each wet season, leaving less and less to come on through Ruaha National Park to the Mtera Dam.

The rainfall this wet season has been excellent in the catchment area so there has been no shortage there. The river should have covered the stone marker completely, and should remain this way until the end of May.

The first two photos show the river as it was in April 2012, the third photo shows how the river should look at this time of year. This photo was taken two years ago in April 2010. Note there is only the top of the marker showing and no grasslands. The important factor to note is that the rainfall in 2012 was the same as 2010.

There can be no doubt that off-take is increasing in volume each year during the wet season. When will this stop? When will there be a limit on the off-take?



Great Ruaha River | Stone Marker – Sue’s Old Camp | April 2012



Great Ruaha River | Stone Marker – Sue’s Old Camp | April 2012



Great Ruaha River | Stone Marker – Sue’s Old Camp | April 2010

July 2012

The flow of the Great Ruaha River is falling fast. It always does at this time of year.

The first photo was taken on 15th June at the main bridge (the old gate - Ibuguziwa). Note that there are two channels flowing.



Great Ruaha River | Main Bridge | 15th June 2012

The second photo was taken the other day on 30th July from the same place. There is now only the one channel flowing on the right hand side.



Great Ruaha River | Main Bridge | 30th July 2012

The final photo depicts the river from my old camp. The stone marker indicates how much the river has fallen. The peak of the wet season flow usually, or should, cover the top of the rock. This year it only reached half way up the rock, presumably due to massive off-take in the Usangu basin.



Great Ruaha River | Stone Marker - Sue's Old Camp | 7th July 2012

The rainfall this year has been good in most areas, although some areas were reported to be below average.

October 2012

The river is not in good shape. It stopped flowing at the main bridge (Ibuguziwa) on 20th October. These photos are taken from the air as I left from Msembe on 23rd October. I have been away so have not been able to get photos from the bridge as usual. However, I think that these photos below illustrate the state of the river very clearly.

You can see in the bottom photo (which is more or less opposite Msembe HQ) that the river is most definitely not flowing at that point. Also, there have been reports of masses of dying fish on the Jongomero end of the river, with flocks of Pelicans coming in for the feast.

The surrounding landscape shows clearly how desperately dry it is. The lack of edible vegetation only intensifies the need for drinking water for the animals, great and small. This is always the most testing time for Ruaha, and this year is no exception.



Great Ruaha River | Near Msembe HQ | 23rd October 2012



Great Ruaha River | Near Msembe HQ | 23rd October 2012

November 2012

What has happened to our river?

It has been 20 years since this problem started and despite the huge sums spent on research, look where we are now!

The photo below was taken on 22nd November 2012 at the main bridge (Ibuguziwa) There is no flow whatsoever in the river.



Great Ruaha River | Main Bridge | 22nd November 2012