

16th January 2006

Ruaha, and indeed much of Southern Tanzania has been suffering a drought, the rain very late. However, thankfully on the evening of 11th January after widespread, heavy rain along the Great Ruaha River, it started to flow.



Great Ruaha River | 16th January 2006

This 'flow' continues, however it is a small ribbon of water approximately 4ft wide, which is similar to the 'flow' a couple of weeks prior to the river drying up. The river has been dry this season (2005/06) for a total of 75 days as opposed to last years (2004/05) all time record of being dry for only 30 days. The rain continues but only in light showers here and there. It is possible that the river will dry up again soon.

9th March 2006

Since the early hours of the morning, there has been extensive rain to the west of us (Jongomero end of the park). It looked as though Usangu was getting this heavy rain too.

Now at almost 1.00pm, there is a 'big' river going by; the largest flood this year so far. It has come up some 4ft and is still rising. The water coming by here is not just from the Jongomero but from further west; I hope the Usangu area. I feel sure that some of this water will reach Mtera.

27th March 2006

Last night we had heavy rain, although only 34mm was recorded here. Most of yesterday was grey and stormy, particularly further west of us here at Jongomero.

The Ruaha River is now up about 4ft and is slightly higher than it was on my last update for 9th March. According to observers on the Lunda section of the river, some 140km from us here, the river rose approximately 2ft after the flood I recorded to you all in the last update.

The river dropped to its new 2006, low level of constant flow a couple of days after the 9th March, and has remained at this level until today. The rainfall has improved these past weeks.

31st March 2006

The river has slowly dropped a little more than 2ft since the 4ft flood on 27th March 2006. Then yesterday, 30th March at around midday, I noticed a small change in the rivers flow. It began to rise a little at first, very slowly. Today, I believe that we finally have some water coming in from the Ihefu swamp.

The flow is of a different nature to a 'flash flood' and the colour of the water is now not a muddy brown, carrying silt but a light 'tea' coloured water that has very little silt suspended in it. This hopefully means that the river will continue to flow at this level and maybe more, though it is still lower than it was last year.

As an indication to the depth of the river I make the following observation:

I have just watched 6 giraffe wade casually across the river, the general level of the water is no deeper than up to their knees (in places it is but only for a few steps). It poses no threat for them. In contrast to this from 1994 until about 2000, no animal, save the elephant, would risk crossing the river in February or March (or January, depending on the rain). The flow of water was such that it was usually difficult for the elephants to cross easily, and they would often walk along the bottom with their trunks up acting like a snorkel, the little babies would hang onto their mothers' tail and float along.

I think this gives some visual indication that there has been a serious decline in the wet season flow, which cannot be attributed to low rainfall alone.

5th August 2006

The river is low, and compared to the photos taken this time last year, it is obvious that the level of the river today (5th August) is similar to how it looked around the beginning of September 2005. So suffice to say we are approximately one month drier/lower than last year.

The second thing is, my comments made last year in support of the good work the RBWO office is doing and that their efforts on the Ndembera are making a difference, seems to have been misconstrued by some. So I take this opportunity in clarifying the matter; I am not saying the Ruaha River situation is restored or improving. What I am saying is that the simple and very good task of ensuring that the irrigation gates along this river are closed from June to the end of October has increased the length of time that the trickle of water which "flows" in the Great Ruaha River during the dry season by about 6 weeks.

Before this operation was started, the river would simply get lower and lower by the day and then stop. Now it gets lower and lower by the day but once it reaches its lowest 'trickle' level it manages to maintain this low flow for about an extra 6 weeks before drying up mid-October. Therefore, my point is, that if this simple task was replicated along all the other rivers that flow into the Ihefu, I believe that the trickle we see in the dry season would be substantially improved.

The wet season flow however is another, much more alarming story. This gets lower and lower each year, which is not due to lack of rainfall but from massive over use by irrigation.