

Disaster Ruaha River Update
December 2022 and GOOD news



October 29 2022 -
The totally dry Ruaha River, with green putrid pools. Two crocs are battling to survive, but the hippos are unable to use such poisonous water.

All photos
looking upstream Ibuguziwa

By mid July 2022 the Ruaha River was barely flowing at the bridge and had stopped further down stream.

By August it had stopped completely.

It is true the rainfall this past rainy season, 2021/22 (across much of Tanzania) has been almost non existent, and one could assume that this was the reason for the low flow we saw.



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However, what I had suspected in my last update was true:-

Due to poor rainfall, and lack of crops, many farmers have moved in to use the water from the 7 rivers that flow into the Ihefu.

This was indeed the case, providing conclusive evidence that the off take had this time proved too much for the ailing river. that the once Great Ruaha River could no longer flow.



One day I sat watching one of these man made sand dams. A Pied kingfisher (pictured above) was hovering over the water in the sand dam, looking for food. It thought it saw something so dove in but came up without success. This happened several times with long periods of hovering as it tried to see something move, but each time it came up with nothing. In the end, hunger and desperation led this poor little creature to frantically dive again and again, faster and faster, but there was nothing there ... after at least 10 minutes of exertion it landed completely exhausted on the nearest stick.

It broke my heart.

November 2022

I was lucky enough in November (2022) to spend 3 weeks in Ruaha.

I was shocked to see how dry the river really was.

I had seen it run dry every year since 1994, this phenomenon has been happening since 1993.

But this time it was different.

It was DEAD dry.

I mean that literally.

The Park management had dug sand dams to try to help the poor animals get water to drink.

This was really a last resort and not by any means ideal.

But at least it was something.



All the water based birds, who depend on life that lives in and around the river faced this same problem.

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**Now for the
good news!**

26th December,
the Ruaha River
was flowing!

By the 28th it
was flowing past
the Lunda area.

(Ibuguziwa
Photo left)

Photo courtesy of
George Angelides

On Christmas Day, thanks to some major rain storms, not only the Ruaha was flowing but many of the sand rivers like the Mwagusi started too, also some of the local water pans managed to fill up.

So the animals and birds can now relax and finally enjoy some clean water and fresh food not only for water based birds but also grass and new leaf for animals. What a relief for everyone!

Such a contrast from the very hot, bleak and dry world we were all living in for months.

(Water pan, Lunda area pictured below. (Photo courtesy of Kichaka)



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Now for even more good news!!!

On the 22 of November I was sent a video showing the illegal dams in Usangu made by the illegal farmers, being destroyed by a huge dredger/shovel which was a governmental directive.

The Vice President, Dr Philip Mpango, gave a very strong, and moving speech about the drying and dying Ruaha River and of the destruction of the important wetland Usangu basin (Ihefu). The Ihefu wetland is the heart of the Great Ruaha River, without which the river cannot survive. Its destruction is due to over (illegal) extraction of water by farmers and illegal grazing by pastoralists.

I am so thankful, and grateful that the government is now addressing this serious dilemma.



On this note however, I would like to point out that the Southern Highlands, is the area that feeds most of the 7 rivers entering the Usangu (Ihefu) wetland,

These 7 rivers are the main players in filling up the Ihefu, which in turn fills up the Great Ruaha and consequently the newly completed Nyerere Dam.

So it is vital to ensure that the sources of each of these important rivers are not destroyed by cultivation and over abstraction.

I know that many of these seemingly small and insignificant rivers are now being tapped for mechanical irrigation by some of the large scale farming developments in the area.

This has to be of concern if the Nyerere dam is to be filled each year.

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There is nothing more fundamental to life than WATER.
It belongs to everyone.

The overuse of water directly from rivers and wetlands all over Tanzania is a growing issue that has expanded uncontrollably over the past few years.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heart felt thanks to the government for addressing this serious dilemma. I wish you all strength and courage to see this difficult issue to fruition.

I also would like to thank the journalist who brought this matter to the attention of us all.

Let us all work together.

Let us embrace our differences, and co-create a bright new future.

**We are all connected in some way;
by the river, by the weather and by our compassion for each other.**

Everything is possible!

'Together we stand - divided we fall'

If you would like to see more information on the history of the low flows of Ruaha please see the Ruaha Flow charts on my website starting in 1964.

You can see that each time a rice scheme opened the flow of the Ruaha river decreased in Oct/Nov.

The first to open was Mbarali in 1976, and then Kapunga in 1988.

It also shows that the first 'no flow' dates for Ruaha was in Nov 1991.

please visit these links to my website

[www.The Ruaha notes.com](http://www.TheRuahanotes.com)

<https://www.theruahanotes.com/updates>

<https://www.theruahanotes.com/water-flow-charts>

Please use the link below to access the complete flow notes

1994-2020

https://www.theruahanotes.com/files/ugd/504282_b73283511c3947b5b6f27dca716195bb.pdf

use the link below to access the complete flow notes

1965-1993

https://www.theruahanotes.com/files/ugd/504282_d4c9b7fa2c3e450588363f4012fe4875.pdf

<https://www.theruahanotes.com/water-level-notes>