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Intro for the Annual Report:

This regular, biennial mission was again requested by Jeanetta Selier of the Central Limpopo Valley Elephant Research Programme. As before, Jeanetta asked for our assistance with a count of elephants in the Tuli Block, an area spanning parts of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

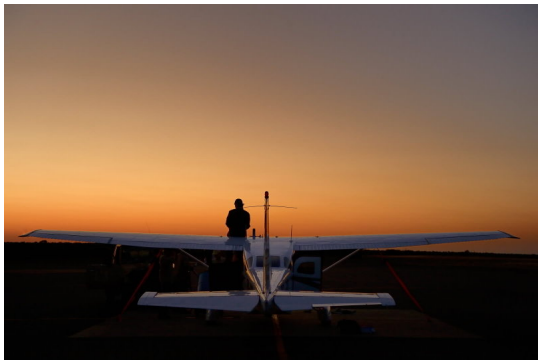
The flights took place over three days in September and the Bateleurs pilots who volunteered were again, Avroy Shlain, Raymond Steyn and Timothy Webster, flying a Cessna 182, a Cessna 206 and a Cessna 182, respectively.

The report presented below was prepared by Jeanetta Selier.

Counting Elephants in the Tuli by Jeanetta Selier

It is two years since we last counted the elephants in the Tuli and a lot has happened since. Not

only has the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area been established adding more land to conservation, especially on the South African side, but hunting in all three countries have intensified. This year has also been one of the driest years the Tuli has experienced since the early 80's. The purpose of this elephant count was not only to reconfirm what we already have established during six prior counts, that the elephant population remains stable what numbers are concerned in the Tuli, but also to see how the change in land use practices in the area has affected the elephant distribution. For this reason we included more properties on the South African side than we did in prior years.



The total aerial count was scheduled for the 7th to the 11th of September and three pilots from The Bateleurs (Avroy Shlain, Raymond Steyn and Tim Webster) offered their help once again. But on Friday, the day we were scheduled to leave Johannesburg for the Tuli, weather conditions did not play along and the count was delayed by one day. Luckily, on Saturday the weather cleared enough for our three-hour flight to the Limpopo Valley airfield where the rest of the crew awaited our arrival. The afternoon was spent sorting out teams, fuel and a quick flight to help prepare everyone for the count the following day. Over the next two days we counted elephants in Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa!

The Tuli was drier than I have ever seen it in all of my ten years here as a field researcher, and the groups of elephants were the smallest I have ever experienced. Groups as small as a mother and calf were counted during the two days, and these groups were scattered across the landscape. Flying across Sentinel Ranch in Zimbabwe, we spotted elephant tracks converging from all directions. At first this looked strange, but then came the realisation that all the elephants were walking once a day to an orange feeding area below a sandstone ridge. We spotted close to 200 elephants in the vicinity of the oranges and the following morning there was not a single orange left! This was the only area where we spotted large groups of elephants.