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Objective of the Flight:

The objective of this flight was to monitor the illegal buildings within 1 km of the high water mark, camping, vehicle operations, poaching of marine life and illegal sand mining operations on the Wild Coast, and to log the GPS positions of any suspicious activity so that the Compliance Division of the Dept. of Environmental Affairs can serve compliance or prosecution notices by means of ground operations, using the data captured in the form of photos and GPS co-ordinates from our aerial operation.



Pilot report by: Reid Wardle

“Thanks to fog I took off from Rexfield an hour and a half later than our scheduled 06h00 departure, and arrived at Wings Park to take on a full tank of fuel and meet with Rob Stegmann and Loyiso Ndlebe of DEDEA. From there we took off at 09h30 to intersect the coast at Kei Mouth and begin our survey proper.

It immediately became evident that incidents of sand mining and its intensity are on the increase, and, since the previous survey, also conducted with the help of The Bateleurs, a further increase in the number of new structures within the reserve area was visible. It was agreed between Rob Stegmann and Loyiso Ndlebe that the Field Officers needed to sharpen their follow-up work once compliance notices had been issued to perpetrators.

A major concern was the new and massive land tillage in the flood plains around the Wavecrest Hotel, where the southernmost naturally occurring mangroves usually thrive. Incidences of 4x4

activity was and camping within the reserve were noted. Abeam Magwa Tea Estate we suspended our operation and proceeded to Margate to take on more fuel, as well as to get something to eat in their lovely little café next to the control tower. Landing on 04 was a real challenge but we triumphed after only one go-around, overcoming the wind shear from the hangars.

After departing from Margate we surveyed the section from Port Edward to abeam Magwa and although there were fewer new structures, they are still on the increase. Noteworthy in this stretch is that municipalities are erecting ordered blocks of toilets in areas of the reserve where no-one is currently living, thereby encouraging settlement and new illegal structures.

Thereafter we routed directly back to Wings Park where a further fuel load was taken on and where Rob and Loyiso left to prepare for the next few days of report compilation. I landed back at home base (Rexfield) at 18h00 a tired yet very satisfied Bateleurs pilot.

I am always grateful to be part of an organisation that does so much for the environment and I wish to thank The Bateleurs for its dedicated work and the opportunity it provides to be of meaningful service.

Conclusion:

While this was a successful Bateleurs mission in that invaluable data was collected and the goals of the mission were achieved to everyone's satisfaction, it is however frustrating for Rob Stegmann and Loyiso Ndlebe to see so much law breaking from the air, and to be able to act, slowly, only after reports are compiled and ground operations are briefed. Rob Stegman commented that DEDEA should try to acquire the use of a helicopter to deploy ground staff and so be more effective against unlawful sand mining and construction in the reserve areas.