

Africa Update
21 April 2009



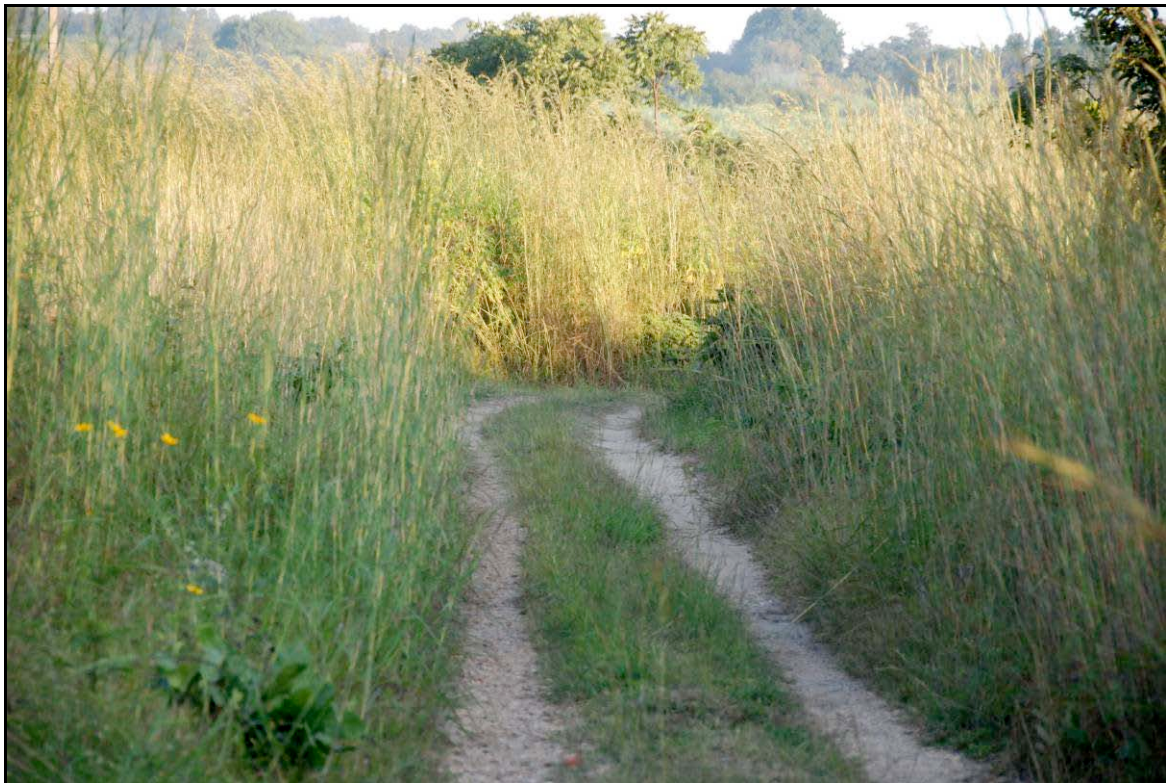
Floods, Snakes and Insects!

Dear all,

Hello again from Africa.

After a month back in Zambia, the rains seem to have finally stopped. This year, the rains were particularly heavy and caused flooding across both Central and Southern African. This included two of the nine Zambian provinces and resulted in evacuations, lost homes, damaged bridges, closed roads and appeals for those affected.

I'm one of the fortunate ones that live in a province that hasn't flooded. Instead, my property has again become a jungle of very tall grasses and plants. Driving down my driveway towards the house has a wildlife park feel about it at the moment. The last six months has brought a number of snakes across the property. We've killed half a dozen cobras or so and one of my workers chased a giant python from the house area back down to the stream. This wasn't that easy as he was very frightened of this large snake. Now he has his sling shot at hand for any further reoccurrences.



The grass down my driveway gets taller each day

As well as helping to chase away pythons, the slingshot will also be useful for dealing with future visits from cobras. As it turns out, these cobras are spitting cobras. How do I know? Unfortunately, Travis and Tina (my dogs) have both experienced the pain of venom sprayed into their eyes. I was present when Travis suffered this about three weeks ago. A cobra at the back of the house was discovered by both dogs and war broke out. One of my workers, Collins, was nearby and ran over to the snake immediately. He began beating the snake with his grass slasher. By the time I arrived, the snake was immobilised and I finished it off with a second slasher (half dead snakes have been known to bite unsuspecting people and kill them). Collins immediately buried it.

Just over an hour later, Collins called me to look at Travis. His eyes were so bloodshot that no white was visible anymore (he looked somewhat possessed). Also his eyelids were swelling to the point that his eyes were shutting. Trying to run milk over Travis's eyes was a challenge as Travis is very strong and resisted all attempts at containment. The poured milk seemed to go everywhere but into his eyes. It was more than swelling that was keeping his eyes tightly shut. I trundled Travis into the back of the car for a trip to the vet (fortunately, Dr. Martin was miraculously available when I phoned in a panic). I then noticed that Tina's eyes were also slightly red so she came along as well. After three injections and daily attempts to administer eye drops, Travis's eyes cleared over the next couple of days and he appears to have maintained his normal eyesight. Tina was found to be fine on examination. Unfortunately, Travis somehow broke a toe a week later and this is taking longer to heal. These incidents have made us wary of being in the cobras' spitting range. For those who can shoot accurately, the slingshot is a good option for dealing with these menaces from a safe distance.



Travis undergoing hydrotherapy for his broken toe

Since I've returned from overseas, I've had more insects in my house than ever before. Even with window and door screens fitted, they still manage to somehow stream into the house and crawl over everything including me. The wet season causes everything to multiply and grow.

The world economic crisis has slowed down business considerably in Zambia. Many foreign investors continue to withdraw and Zambia's mines are closing. This has resulted in massive job losses and further hardships for people. A father of a large family was recently reported to have taken his DVD player to the market to try and barter it for some fish. He had gone from having a reasonable income to having no money at all. This is someone who would have been considered quite well off financially in Zambia.

Now that the rains have finished, I am looking towards beginning the construction of fish ponds on my property. The water permit for this is still being processed and I am hoping it will be sorted out soon. In the meantime, the initial planning and layout can begin.

That's all from me for now. I trust you are well,

Mike



The spitting cobra that poisoned Travis's eyes