



Please reply to:

PO Box FM 648, Famaona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 2 / 1993

Since the first Newsletter was sent to you at the beginning of April, the Interim Committee has met another five times, and has dealt with a variety of matters affecting the Matobo Hills in one way or another. Some are dealt with hereunder. It is believed that the work carried out so far will provide a sound base for the Society's future activities.

CONSTITUTION

It is sincerely regretted that the Society's proposed Constitution has taken so long to prepare. This is the reason why another general meeting has not so far been called. However, the Constitution has now been approved by the Interim Committee and awaits discussion and adoption at a general meeting, at which the Interim Committee will stand down and a new committee will be elected to continue the work of the Society for the ensuing year. This meeting will be held:

**on WEDNESDAY, 13th OCTOBER, 1993 at 5.30 p.m.
in the LECTURE HALL of the NATIONAL MUSEUM,
PARK ROAD/LEOPOLD TAKAWIRA AVENUE**

and the Interim Committee asks all those people to whom this Newsletter is sent to please make every effort to attend, and to invite those of their friends interested in the Matobo Hills to come as well.

FINANCES

The Slide Show "The Magnificent Matobo Hills" presented at the Bulawayo Sun Hotel on 30th April 1993 by Richard Mirtle, the Society's Vice-Chairman, was an outstanding success. The Minister of Environment and Tourism, the Hon. Dr. Herbert Murerwa, spent an hour at the show despite a tight schedule, and was informed of the objects of the Society. Total income from the show was \$33,189, of which this Society's share was \$10,000. This share was greatly appreciated so soon after its formation, and part of it and other donations have been used towards the following projects:

- Part cost of a special edition of BUSHBEAT an educational wildlife magazine for children \$2 000;
- National Parks and Wildlife Management, Bulawayo, towards the Dassie Count expenses of Professor Ron Barrie in-the Matobo Hills \$1 335;
- Backpacks for the special teams on anti-poaching rhino operations in the area \$2 500;
- Membership badges for the Society \$635.

MTSHABEZI VALLEY

The Society's Chairman, Gavin Stephens, presented a comprehensive document supported by maps entitled "An Argument for Preservation" and a Proposal, to the Mtshabezi Valley and Development Committee of the Umzingwane District Council on 14th July 1993. They were intended to be refined after discussion and then submitted to government by the Umzingwane District Council. The Council's decision is not yet known. The Mtshabezi Dam is expected to

be completed in 1994, but with normal rainfall this year will hold back a large quantity of water. The Society believes that it is essential for urgent action to be taken to allow local people to benefit from any scheme decided upon, before other decisions are taken which might lead to the eventual degradation of the area. Five members of the Interim Committee visited the dam site on 11th September 1993.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION

A conservation pamphlet in Ndebele and English has been produced by the Society, and with the co-operation of the Regional Director Education and the Provincial Officer of the Natural Resources Board, will be distributed to children in primary schools in Matabeleland. The headmasters of all primary schools in the Matobo Hills area have each received 100 copies of the special edition of BUSHBEAT with the Society's stamp thereon. The Provincial Officer of the Natural Resources Board, Mr Gladstone Hlalakuhle has been invited to join the Interim Committee. Slide shows have been given to Scout leaders, to two schools, and to Falcon College geo workshop. Richard Mirtle and Trevor Hemans were the stars on a ZBC "Morning Mirror" radio programme about the Society, broadcast on 15th April 1993. Articles on the Flora and Fauna, Rock Art and Wildlife in the Matobo area have been written by Interim Committee members for future educational use. A new map of the Matobo Game Park has been printed, bearing the Society's logo. Field trips by individual members of the Interim Committee have been made to Bambata and Maholoholo caves to check on damage reports; Lumane tree ferns and Falls; Diana's Pools; Zhilo School; Esibomvu; Fort Umlugulu; Rhodes' Indaba Site; Mshashasha Falls and to check on road conditions to Mtshelili Dam and in the Game Park. Lantana growth is of much concern.

PROTECTION OF HISTORICAL AND SACRED SITES

Some financial sponsorship has been obtained towards the cost of employing additional full and part-time custodians at specific Rock Art and historical sites. Liaison is being maintained with National Museums and Monuments, which will undertake the payments, all of which will be accountable. A letter of appeal will shortly be sent to registered tour operators in the Matobo area, pointing out the danger of many sites being damaged through ignorance and/or vandalism, and asking for their financial assistance in paying for more security for these sites pending additional government financial assistance becoming available. It is in the tour operators' interests to help in this protection.

WORLD HERITAGE SITE

With the co-operation of the Director or National Parks and Wildlife Management, the Society has obtained a copy of the submissions made to UNESCO for World Heritage Site registration for the Victoria Falls, Mana Pools and the Matobo. The first two were accepted, Matobo not, because the Matobo submission was concerned mainly with the historical and cultural aspects of the area, and not its biodiversity. The Society understands that the five-year plan to be drawn up for the Matobo area by the DNPWLM which awaits funding, will include another request for World Heritage Site status, based on a core of the Matobo National Park, together with other projects involving the sustainable use of natural resources in the surrounding communal lands ("Campfire" etc.). If WHS is obtained, it will mean international recognition to conserve the area, and possible UNESCO funding for research projects.

TOURISM

It is expected that a regional branch of the recently formed National Council for Tourism will soon be opened in Bulawayo. One of its objects is to conserve the tourist potential of Zimbabwe. The Society will make contact at an appropriate time, with a view to close liaison.

- ❖ Finally, once again, please don't forget the meeting on 13th OCTOBER 1993 in the Lecture Hall, National Museum, at 5.30 p.m.

ADDRESS by the Interim Chairman, Gavin Stephens, at the "MAGNIFICENT MATOBO HILLS" Slide Show (30th April 1993)

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed a pleasure and an honour for me to be here this evening representing the Matobo Conservation Society.

Towards the end of last year, a body of interested persons met at the City Hall to consider whether or not there was the need for an organisation dedicated to the conservation and preservation of the Matobo Hills. From this discussion it was apparent that not only was there a need, but a long overdue need for such an organisation and so, earlier this year these same people met once again to elect an Interim Committee that was tasked with formalising the Matobo Conservation Society. To this end I am pleased to report that we are in the process of drafting a constitution, seeking official registration.

We see ourselves as a pressure group to ensure that necessary measures are taken to conserve this unique environment, and serving as a co-ordination function between like-minded organisations, both governmental and non-governmental. We have invited representatives from the following:

National Parks	Natural Resources Board	Tree Society
National Museum	Wildlife Society	Black Eagle Survey Team
National Archives	Ornithological Society	Matabeleland History Society

We have also been in contact with the Bulawayo Publicity Association, Umzingwane District Council and Bulawayo-Esigodini Rural Council.

We are especially mindful of our need to be in close contact with the rural people of the Matobo region, not only to preach the message of conservation but also to ensure that they receive real benefits from tourism and conservation in the area. We do not want to be a City-based organisation, but rather to be a partner with the very people who live in the area that we hold special.

At present there is a considerable move towards the commercialisation of the Matobo region, and we want to see this take place in a planned and controlled manner which benefits the region, and not some company or group of individuals who have no interest in the area other than the profit motive. We are seeking assistance along the lines of the "Campfire Project" so that the rural people will experience an improvement in their standard of living, and at the same time preserve this environmentally sensitive area.

When we considered the activities of the various bodies, I mentioned earlier we came to the conclusion that whilst each or them is active in their special field, no single group operated for the benefit of the Matobo Hills in its entirety, but by pooling resources and co-ordinating our efforts we could achieve major goals along our road to the protection of the ancient Hills. At the same time, we do not want to conflict with their activities but complement them.

We were especially concerned that we should not be seen as just another Conservation Body attempting to gain membership at the expense of existing and very worthwhile organisations, and so considerable thought has gone into the issue of membership of the MATOBO CONSERVATION SOCIETY. We have decided that we will accept members, produce a Newsletter every quarter to keep members informed, arrange field trips and hold regular meetings but at the same time keep in constant contact with the existing conservation organisations.

The Interim Committee has already embarked upon certain goals:

- We are, in conjunction with the Bulawayo Publicity Association, formulating our proposals to be sent to Government and the United Nations for the Matobo Hills to become listed as World Heritage, and look upon this objective as our primary concern.
- At the request of National Museums, we are investigating the possibility of providing guides at major historical sites, which include the more well-known caves.
- We are seeking protection for the Mtshabezi Valley where the construction of the Mtshabezi Dam will provide the region with not just a water supply, but also has the potential to become a major tourist attraction.

As a major project we are examining ways of introducing conservation to the people of the area through education with the possibility of establishing a conservation school.

At the end of all this I have not touched on the real needs of the Matobo Hills. Why should we protect them? Much of what you see and hear about tonight will answer that question. But still, how many people, who live just 30 km north of the Hills, actually know what makes them unique?

To highlight some of the unique features of the Matobo Hills:

The fauna:	Greatest variety and concentration of Birds of Prey in the world The largest population of Black Eagles in the World The biggest Black Mambas The leopard population is the largest in the world The largest concentration of dassies The hills are now an important rhino sanctuary.
The flora:	Greatest variety of trees in Zimbabwe The only Tree Ferns in Matabeleland Trees that are not common to Matabeleland are found in this area A fascinating blend of micro-environments exist Most of the major rivers of Matabeleland South Province rise in the wetlands and on the watersheds of the Matobo Hills.
The geology:	Appears simple but gives rise to such features as Orbicular Granite and the Natural Wall (a dolorite dyke).
The history and culture:	World's greatest collection of rock art The legacy of the Mambo people remains in the many iron smelts The first King of the Matabele, King Mzilikazi, is buried here, whilst the people sought sanctuary here in 1896 The earlier colonial Leaders, including C.J.Rhodes, are entombed within the hills The principal rain God, the Mlimo, is still venerated in the Matobo Each hill name is ancient and has a story to tell.

All the above are however threatened, principally by the rate of population growth that has placed enormous pressures on the environment.

It only remains for me to thank you all for your time and interest.