



PO Box FM 648, Fomona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 21/ MARCH 1999

1 - COMMENT

We have just past the half term mark for the present committee, so this serves as a reminder to our members to start to give some consideration as to the next year. Again, we appeal to members to consider making themselves available for office - there really is so much to try and achieve.

Subs will also fall due in the near future. Each year we seem to have some confusion over this issue, so here's how it is supposed to work! Subs fall due on 31 July and are for the Oct 1999 / Sept 2000 year. We will advise you in due course, but please make a note in your diary.

2 - RAINFALL

The season has come to an end, and sadly again the rainfall was poor. The Eastern Matopos received approximately 600mm (24 inches) and the Western Hills 500mm (20 inches). Both these recordings are below average, at 60% in the East, and 80% in the West. With water having been released from the Mtshabezi dam, and little inflow, the volume of water has fallen from last year, so our hopes of seeing it spill this year were disappointed.

3 - NATIONAL PARKS MASTER PLAN

The Society was asked to send representatives to a "Matobo National Parks Planning Meeting" that was to be held in March. Unfortunately, the facilitators from DNPWM HQ, Harare, were asked at short notice to attend a meeting in Washington, in connection with the World Bank's funding of our National Parks. The meeting, which was to have been attended by all stakeholders, will be rescheduled.

The Society has obtained a draft plan for the Matobo National Park, and members of the committee have examined this. A report has been compiled which contains a number of serious questions. This will be submitted to both the DNPWM and to the Matobo Committee.

4 - WORLD HERITAGE

The Matobo Hills has been registered on the coveted World Heritage Tentative List. This means that it is only one step away from World Heritage status. However, lack of funding within National Museums has prevented the completion of the final submission. A great deal of substantive ground work is required to support the submission, and then a formal submission, complete with a video presentation, is to be made. National Museums have approached the World Heritage Convention to seek assistance in this matter, and your committee will be examining ways of lending its support.

Dr Eric Edroma, Chairman of the World Heritage Bureau, visited Zimbabwe in January to review existing Sites, and visited the Matobo Hills. He was impressed with the Matobo submission, and visit sites within the Hills. He has pledged his support for the submission. The World Heritage Bureau meets in December, but unless funds are found almost immediately it would seem unlikely that the submission would be ready for that meeting.

Whilst progress is slow, the initiative is being maintained. We will keep you updated on events.

5 - NEXT EVENT

DATE	Sunday 30 May 1999
VENUE	Fort Umlugulu, Pioneer/Military Cemetery/Diana's Pool/1896 Battle Sites
MEET	Ascot Service Station, 8:30am
DETAILS	This is a visit into the north eastern Matopos, full of history. It is intended spending a little time clearing the cemetery, which has become neglected and vandalized, so please bring spades, slashers etc if you want to join in with this part of the exercise. Lunch will be held at Diana's Pool, which is the site of a rehabilitation project by the URDC. Mr. Barry Knight will lead a discussion on the battle sites of the area. And for those who wish, there will be an excursion to Rhodes Indaba Site.

6 - REPORT BACK

65 members and visitors (including a strong contingent from the Matabeleland Branch of the Wildlife Society) attended the last field trip to Amadzimba Cave, where David Erwee gave a presentation on rock art. The event was just that little more exciting when the group took to the 4x4 vehicles to travel the last few kilometers. Some members continued to the summit of the hill and enjoyed the fine views offered, and lunch was enjoyed in a grove of Mountain Acacia (*Brachystegia glaucescens*). Unfortunately, due to the generally dry conditions, the streams and waterfalls of the area were not nearly as impressive as hoped, but the hills still looked terrific. In the afternoon, members visited Gulubaghwe cave, and for some, went on to the Cave of the Fish, on the same hill. All told, we enjoyed another informative and interesting outing, with special appreciation to Dave Erwee, who gave a lecture on rock art generally, as well as highlighting specific examples in Amadzimba Cave.

7 - BLACK EAGLE SURVEY / ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY UPDATE

We were horrified to learn that the Black Eagle Survey had been denied access into the Matobo National Park to continue their annual Black Eagle Survey. This survey is the longest running ornithological study in the world, and is an entirely Zimbabwean programme. However, National Parks have now insisted that the survey obtains a research permit from the DNPWM in Harare, a requirement waived previously. Needless to say, any involvement with DNPWM HQ goes under the title "bureaucracy", and as only a handful of permits are issued each year, the Survey was rejected. We could use words like outrage, but will be more restrained at present. The society will liaise with the Black Eagle Survey and assist where possible.

Fortunately, not all has been lost. The Black Eagle Survey continued their work this last season in the areas outside the Park, whilst the OR unit of the National Parks conducted the necessary work within the Park. Co-operation between the OR and the Black Eagle Survey has saved the day - what a shame that the entire National Parks structure can't work in this manner.

The latest survey shows that the black eagle population enjoyed a breeding success rate (that is young per pair) of 34% in the National Park and Commercial farms, and 10% in the Communal Areas for the 1998 season. It must not be forgotten that over the life of the survey that there has been an overall reduction in the Black Eagle population, and effort is underway to determine the factors behind this.

The Ornithological Society of Zimbabwe held its AGM at Maleme Rest Camp in February. Your Chairman was asked to give a talk on the Matobo Hills and the Society, which afforded us the opportunity to become better understood and known amongst the local and Harare members.

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

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