

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648. Famona. Bulawayo. Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 26 / MARCH 2000

1 - NATIONAL PARK

The heavy rains have caused extensive damage to the Park's road system, with most dirt roads rendered impassable and a number of bridges damaged. The all-weather road to Maleme has suffered from a number of potholes, so drivers should exercise care. The Game Park is essentially closed, as only the road to Mpopoma dam is open, and even that is subject to the level of the Ove River. However, the Park took delivery of new tractors, graders and trailers in late February, and will commence work on the roads once the heavy rains are past. If you visit the Park, please be understanding as regards the state of the roads and exercise care, especially at river crossings.

2 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

National Park fees were reviewed early in the New Year, and there have been changes to the Matobo National Park fees, which will come into effect from 1 June 2000. The new fees will be as follows:

Entry	ZWD 30.00	Foreign	USD 10.00	7-day pass	ZWD30.00
Std Vehicle, 1-5 seats	Free	6-10 seats	ZWD150.00	Firewood	ZWD70.00

It appears that none of our recommendations regarding National Museums and National Parks fees have been taken to account and there is a discrepancy in rates charged at the Matopos versus say at Nyanga or McIlwaine. Your Society will attempt to obtain an explanation for the discrimination. A tariff committee has been set up to constantly review fees and we will once again submit our presentation.

3 - MTSHABEZI DAM UPDATE

Along with almost all of Bulawayo's supply dams, the Mtshabezi dam started spilling in February. Of course, for the Mtshabezi, the event was a little more important as this was the first time that the dam, completed in 1995, spilt. Water started to trickle over the spillway on Sunday 19th February, following heavy rains a week earlier in the catchment (around 210mm in five days). However, the full effect of Cyclone Eline came to bear shortly after this, and with over 260mm dumped into the catchment in three days (22-24 February) the river came down in flood, and the water literally roared over the spillway. It tore through the valley behind the spillway, tossing aside trees and boulders, and gauging out huge tracks of land as it raced back to its old riverbed. The noise was heard for some kilometers downstream. The debris blocked the bridge immediately below the dam wall, and as a consequence the approaches were completely washed out and the bridge is unusable. Downstream, the drift across the river on the Dula road disappeared under 3m of water, and when last examined a 2.5m sandbank now sits astride the crossing. There has been considerable damage in the vicinity of the spillway, but now that the new river has cut its path, the veldt will no doubt begin to recover, and repair the damage. Of greater concern is the rampant stream bank cultivation, both above and below the dam. All these crops were destroyed in the flooding, and the riverbank has suffered serious erosion. It is disheartening to see this occur, especially as the MCS has been warning both the URDC and the NRB of these potential problems, but no action was taken. Cyclone Eline has also caused damage to kraals throughout the Matopos, as well as flooding fields. The area has not however suffered to the same degree as other parts of the country, though a good number of roads are

washed out, and bridges left impassable. Please see our special appeal at the end of this newsletter

4 - NEXT EVENT

Date	Sunday 9 April
Venue	Lumani Falls
Meet	Ascot Service Station 8:45 for 9:00 departure
Travel	All vehicles, trucks preferred.
Details	We do not expect to be able to drive right to the falls due to the high level of the river. However, the walk from the first river crossing, where we shall picnic under the mountain acacias, is not too long, nor too onerous. In fact quite a pleasant, level walk. Those who want to swim should bring costumes and towels; rafters are also a good option. Don't forget your hat! We are hoping for a reduced entry fee, but bring along +/- \$50 per person.

5- REPORT BACK

The rains may well have set in, but it did not deter 43 members of the Society from attending our last outing, which was to the Mtshashasha Falls, and as so often is the case, they were well rewarded. Despite 35mm falling the night before, and the deplorable state of the Old Gwanda Road, all the vehicles made it out, even a little VW Golf. Under grey skies, and light rain 41 of the members set off for the falls, but as they walked along, the clouds cleared and the sun came out to greet them at the falls. One member obviously could not wait to swim and had an early, if unscheduled dip when crossing the river! The river was pouring over the falls, in a spectacular display. Those more energetic continued to the bottom of the falls and swam in the much-enlarged pool at the foot of the falls. For many members the visit brought back old memories, for others new memories of much fun. The party reassembled at the car park, and enjoyed a late lunch under the Mountain Acacias. After lunch, our Chairman spoke about the area, the planned Mtshabezi Valley reserve and society affairs.

The falls themselves have experienced massive flooding this year, literally clearing out the pools and sweeping away encroaching bush. There has been a rock fall on the northern bank. In places above and below the falls there has been heavy erosion, which is to be regretted.

PLEASE NOTE. Following Cyclone Eline the access roads have become badly washed out and very muddy. Members are advised against visiting until the ground has dried out a little, which is to be regretted as the falls are most spectacular at present.

6 - MATOBO COMMUNAL LANDS SURVEY

Given the rains that lashed the eastern Matopos, the survey has had to be postponed, and at the time of going to the press, a new date had yet to be set. There had been a more than adequate response, and we look forward to a successful event.

7 - RAINFALL

As at the end of February, and following Cyclone Eline, the rainfall totals for the Matopos were well above annual average, and all dams have been reported as spilling, including those within the Park with the exception of the Matopos Dam.

The eastern Matopos (Matopo Mission) has recorded 1300mm (53") and the western hills (Kezi Rd) 900mm (36"). Average rainfall is 850mm and 600mm respectively.

8 - ASPIVENOM

The Society has been given the right to market an anti-venom pump for use in case of snake or scorpion bites, wasp or bee stings, or plant poisons (nettles etc). They are ideal for the outdoorsman. The product is lightweight, and comes in a waterproof container. If cared for, it should be useful for many many years. The product retails at GBP13 in the United Kingdom, but the Society is able to make these available to members at GBP 8, or at today's exchange rate ZWD 480 (excluding shipping and duty). If you are interested, please contact the Chairman or Secretary, and if the response merits it, the Society shall arrange for the shipping of these units — foreign currency permitting!

9 - SPECIAL APPEAL - CYCLONE ELINE

The heavy rains have caused considerable hardship to people living within the hills. Your Society is arranging for a collection of food and clothing that will be distributed in the areas most affected. Donations can be left at the Wildlife Shop. TV Sales & Hire. Fife Street (10th/1th Ave). Please support this effort.