

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/0 30/94

NEWSLETTER 37 / SEPTEMBER 2002

1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM of the Society will be held at 3:00pm on Saturday 9th November at Camp Dwala. Details below. We enjoyed tremendous support last year and we again encourage members to attend. Equally important, a number of long serving committee members are standing down – we are sure you would want to express your appreciation – and we need therefore to elect new committee members. The Society will only be as strong as the committee we elect to guide it, so please consider if you could assist. The committee meets monthly – and no special environmental skill is required – just enthusiasm and a desire to help!

2 – MATOBO HILLS ECO-CHALLENGE

The inaugural “Matopos Adventure Challenge” was successfully held on 28th July, with 16 participants. It is hoped that this will now be expanded and attract more participation in future years.

3 – WORLD HERITAGE UPDATE

The ICOMOS representative, Mrs J Deacon from South Africa, will be inspecting the proposed Matobo World Heritage Site from 14th to 18th October. We look forward with confidence to this critical audit. A preparatory meeting of the stakeholders was held at Whitewaters on 1 October, and a feature appeared on ZTV in September.

4- NEXT EVENT - AGM

Date	Saturday 9 th November
Venue	Camp Dwala, same venue as last year
Meet	1:15pm to leave by 1:30pm, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!
Speaker	Mr A Kumirai, Director, Western region, Nat Museums and Monuments

Following requests made by members, the Annual General Meeting will again be held at Camp Dwala, in the Eastern Matopos. The route from the Matobo Mission will be signposted, so members wishing to travel out earlier and enjoy a picnic lunch will be welcome. An evening braai will once again be held, and limited overnight accommodation (including camping) will be available on a first booking basis. Members are reminded that this is a private game and botanical reserve, and should act accordingly.

5- NEXT EVENT - MATOPOS ECLIPSE

Date	Wednesday, 4 December 2002
Venue	Antelope Dam
Meet	4:00am to leave by 4:15am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat! It is suggested that you bring clothing appropriate to the weather conditions. Bring eclipse-viewing glasses. Entry Fee - \$150

It is important that we leave promptly as we anticipate increased traffic and roadblocks en route.

We anticipate arrival at the designated site by 5:45am. Sunrise is at 6:05am, with the eclipse starting at about this time. The period of totality will be at approx 8:15am lasting for 1 minute 20 seconds. On arrival members will be able to select areas of their own choice for viewing – it is not recommended that we congregate in one large group, but spread ourselves out in the general selected area. You will be able to lay out a breakfast while enjoying the early morning. A short talk on the eclipse (what to expect and look out for etc) will be given at 7:00am. Following the period of totality, the eclipse will continue until 10:16am. We suggest that members take a picnic lunch, and return at their leisure in the afternoon. Don't forget your litter! Members wishing to travel out the day before and camp must contact the Secretary.

We will be joined by Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe, and the Ornithological Society.

MEMBERS MUST TAKE CORRECT EYE PROTECTION GLASSES. Precaution must also be exercised if you are using a telescope to avoid damaging the lens.

6 – REPORT BACK

Dr Peter Mundy accompanied the Society on our last outing, and we were invited to join him on an exercise to inspect, and ring, a black eagle chick. This was a wonderful opportunity to see the Ornithological Research Unit at work, and for our members to see up close this magnificent bird. Even though the white chick was only 5 weeks old, it still had large talons and beak, no disguising it as a predator. We also climbed Bambata, firstly to see another black eagle on a nest, and secondly to appreciate the various bird's territories in that area. Peter shared his considerable knowledge, and the outing proved to be one of the most fascinating we have enjoyed. It was of course so appropriate given the role of the black eagle in the Matopos and the World Heritage bid.

7 – MATOBO DUIKER RESEARCH

This article was submitted by Andrew Bowkett, Field Researcher, Small Antelope Project, Marwell Zimbabwe Trust.

Marwell Zimbabwe Trust is currently studying the ecology of grey duikers (*Sylvicapra grimmia*) and other antelope in the Matobo National Park. Fieldwork began in May 2001 and is based in the area around Toghwana and Mtsheli Dams in the eastern part of the park. The study aims to investigate population density, habitat use and social behaviour of grey duiker, a species for which surprisingly little formal research has been published given its widespread distribution. One of the main reasons for this dearth of literature is the secretive and often nocturnal nature of grey duiker; these factors are compounded in the Matobo Hills by the rugged terrain and often dense vegetation. Nevertheless, we feel significant progress in elucidating the cryptic lives of these antelope has been achieved.

Fifteen 1 km transects have been marked out and are walked at regular intervals in order to count antelope sightings, spoor and droppings. Evidence for six antelope species has been regularly found: grey duiker, steenbok, klipspringer, reedbuck, bushbuck and kudu. Population densities for duiker can be extrapolated from dung counts and used to compare different areas and habitats. Duiker social ecology, in terms of home range size and the nature and extent of home range (territory) overlap, is being investigated through the use of radio telemetry.

Preliminary analysis of results indicate that grey duiker occur at relatively high densities in this area of the Matobo Hills and utilize all types of grass and woodland. There is significant habitat overlap with steenbok although duikers prefer densely wooded grassland and steenbok open grassland. Radio tracking has revealed relatively small diurnal home ranges, which are comparable to those, published for red duiker (average 9.5 ha in Natal). Duikers are consistently found in the same locations and return to these areas following disturbance (for example being captured). These findings indicate a strong attachment to their home ranges as reported for other southern African duiker species.

Several potential predators have been sighted in the area including black eagles, crowned eagles and rock pythons. However, the only evidence of predation encountered so far has been from leopards, two out of seven radio-collared duiker are known to have been killed by this predator. Another potential threat comes from poaching. Snares have occasionally been found in our study area and several incidents of poachers being apprehended carrying small antelope in the Togwe Wilderness Area have been reported to us by National Parks.

However, the often anecdotally noted decline in antelope in the Matobo National Park may not be as a direct result of human off-take. Several antelope species are known to adapt in response to human disturbance (including duiker and steenbok) often through altering their behaviour patterns (for example by increasing nocturnal activity). In our study area kudu sign is frequently encountered and yet they are rarely seen and when they are they take flight immediately. In contrast kudu in Hwange National Park (and to a certain extent even in the Whovi Wilderness Area of Matobo) are far more easily approached. For whatever reasons it is possible that antelope in the Matobo Hills may simply be more cryptic than previously, rather than less numerous.

In contrast to certain species, such as black eagle, leopard, and rhino, the Matobo Hills are not famed for their antelope. However, as with most African habitats, antelope are likely to be an integral component of the Matobo ecosystem and therefore research into their biology and concern as to their conservation are important, even if often overlooked.

8 – ECLIPSE

Alternative viewing sites to that selected by the Society (see above) can be found by contacting Western Safaris on 79232, Co-ordinating Zimbabwe on 242 298, or the Bulawayo Publicity Association.