

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 51 / MARCH 2006

1 - INTRODUCTION

Summertime is here, and with it a whole range of activities have been taking place in the Matopos. We hope that our members have been able to enjoy the rain and the sun in the "Old Hills" - and the fun that goes with it!

2 – ERROR - EDITION NUMBER 50

Our Newsletter No 50 contained errors in respect of the dates referred to. The corrected paragraph is re-printed below; we missed a whole decade of our existence and reported dates from 2002 instead of 1992! Our apologies. "You will have no doubt noted that this is a special milestone, yes, our 50th newsletter! An interim committee to establish the MCS was set up in 1992 and the first Newsletter was published in early April 1993. This was sent to all those persons who had expressed an interest in the initial stages of the Society. The second newsletter was issued in September 1993 ahead of the establishment of the MCS in October 1993, and the third issued in June 1994. Since that time we have issued a newsletter every quarter. Copies of all our publications are with the Bulawayo Reference Library."

3 – MATABELELAND SYMPOSIUM

The Aloe and Succulent Society of Zimbabwe holds an annual symposium, and the fifth such event was entitled the Natural History of Matabeleland. A number of speakers from Bulawayo were invited to speak at the one-day event, and this included your Chairman, who spoke on World Heritage Sites with special focus on the Matobo Hills. Khame Ruins and Victoria Falls are the other Matabeleland World Heritage Sites. Over 200 persons attended the event, held in the Botanical Gardens in Harare. Other local speakers included Peter Mundy on birdlife (including the Matopos Black Eagle Survey), Don Broadley on reptiles, Viv Wilson on mammals (and carnivore research in the Matopos). Other speakers included Meg Coates-Palgrave (trees), Rob Burrett (Pre-history), Alan Gardiner (butterflies) and Russell Taylor (WWF) with the Aloe and Succulent Society Chairman, Mrs Scotty Wrench winding up at the end. It was a fascinating day for all who attended - and helped to educate our northern friends about the treasures of the Matopos and Matabeleland.

4 – NATIONAL PARKS UPDATE

With effect from 1st January 2006, and again with little notice, the ZPWMA dramatically increased entry fees to all

Parks. Entry fees for Zimbabweans leapt by 250% on the November charge, whilst a new category of Resident, non- Zimbabwean was introduced at a whopping 475%. The Non-resident (tourist) rates remained the same, payable in US\$. Accommodation (which has been under-priced previously) has increased by approximately 200%, and two new rates have been introduced both payable in forex, that is for Foreign Tourists Regional Visitors, at about half of the full Foreign Tourist rate (all given below). The car levy (for which we are still awaiting justification given the condition of the roads) increased by 400%. The entry fee has increased by 1,300% year on year - an impressive achievement for a Government department when the CSO says inflation for the same period was only 502%.

The lack of advance notice saw a number of visitors to the Matobo National Park turning back on 1st January as they had not reckoned with such massive hikes. In a country with a severe fuel shortage this is most regretted. Your society has taken the issue up with Parks, and we await their response.

Entry \$280,000

Resident, non-Zimbabwean \$460,000

Non resident US\$15

| | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Car \$100,000 | | | |
| Eagle \$2,800,000 ; | Regional US\$64 | Tourist US\$128 | per lodge per night |
| Lodge \$2,625,000 ; | Regional US\$55 | Tourist US\$110 | per lodge per night |
| Chalet \$1750,000 ; | Regional US\$37 | Tourist US\$73 | per lodge per night |
| Camping\$525,000 | Regional US\$10 | Tourist US\$5 | per person per night |

All figures quoted above are exclusive of VAT

5 – SUBSCRIPTIONS

Have you paid your supplementary subscriptions, due by 31st January 2006?

Members \$60,000, special rate \$15,000

6 - NEXT EVENT

| | |
|---------|---|
| Date | 12 March 2006 |
| Venue | Besna Kobila Farm (Camp Dwala) |
| Meet | 8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Hotel |
| Travel | All vehicles, but see the note below |
| Details | Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks |

Dr Don Broadly will accompany us on this visit, which will focus on reptiles and amphibians and promises to be interesting. The route is via the Old Gwanda Road, (subject to rain) with which members are familiar. Limited accommodation is available in the area the night before the outing for those who want to make a weekend of the event. Phone Des Stephens on 091211156.

PLEASE NOTE the change of date from that previously advised in Newsletter 50.

7 – REPORT BACK

Despite the ever-present threat of rain, the condition of the roads, and the general shortage of fuel, around fifty members participated in the outing to the Cave of the Stork. The walk, as always, took a little longer, but the bubbling streams, and magnificent views from the cave, made the effort all worthwhile. Following lunch, Moira Fitzpatrick gave a fascinating talk on the Scorpions of the Matopos, and we will be carrying excerpts from this talk in this and future newsletters (see below). I am sure those present enjoyed the talk, even if the specimens were a little hairy! Later in the afternoon, a small group visited the new colony of *Streptocarpus eylesii* found in the area (see below).

8 – STREPTOCARPUS EYLESII

A team of MCS members, whilst hiking in the eastern Matopos, came across a considerable colony of *Streptocarpus eylesii*, one of the most rare plants of the Matobo Hills. This small and delicate plant has only been located at two other sites in the Matobo Hills, only one of which is in the Matobo National Park. The plant, which has a single large leaf, as large as a plate, and flat on the ground, produces a stem of blue / purple flowers not dissimilar to an African violet.

Flora Zambesiaca records that the type specimen of *Streptocarpus eylesii* (i.e. the specimen/collection from which the species was first described) is a collection made by Fred Eyles in November 1902 from the Matobo Hills ("in wet cavities under shadow of granite rocks").

The find has been reported to various authorities. The location is not far from the Lumane tree ferns (*Cyathia dregii*), and a specimen of *Cussonia specata* was also found. This underlies the importance of this area from a botanical perspective.

9 – RAINFALL

The hills have enjoyed wonderful rains, though with a marked distribution from west to east. The dams are full, streams are flowing and the veld looks wonderful. The rainfall figures as at 26th February are as follows - Eastern Matopos 825mm (33") Western Matopos 455mm (18"). Matopos rainfall is generally behind Bulawayo and annual average.

10 – MATOPOS ADVENTURE CHALLENGE

The annual three-day Matopos Adventure Grand Challenge was held over the weekend of 17th to 19th February. Whilst the race started in Bulawayo, most of it fell within the eastern hills. The gruelling event included over 175Km's of cycling, 50km's of hiking, 14km's of canoeing, and even a length of

swimming! Some of the hike sections were done in the late evening, with teams coming in as late as midnight! Fortunately, the rain held off for the three days! Two teams travelled from Harare to participate in the event, and the winning team completed the race in 23 hrs, 59 minutes.

11 – SCORPIONS OF THE MATOBO HILLS

This series of articles (which starts with an introduction in this newsletter) has been generously contributed by Moira FitzPatrick, Principal Curator of Arachnids, Natural History Museum, Bulawayo.

With the onset of the hot and humid weather, scorpions will be out in abundance, having hibernated during the cooler months. It is during these summer months that many people are stung, and little information is available about which scorpions are dangerous, and when and what medical treatment should be given. The Matobo hills are home to the largest scorpion in the world, the rock scorpion, *Hadogenes troglodytes*, so it seems apt to write a series of articles on these ancient creatures and hopefully clarify the many misconceptions about scorpions and their stings.

All scorpions have neurotoxic venom and the venom gland is situated at the end of the tail. However, the effect and use of it vary from family to family. There are three families of scorpions in Zimbabwe, all of which are found in the Matobo Hills:- The rock scorpions and cryptic scorpions (Liochelidae), the burrowing scorpions (Scorpionidae) and the thicktailed scorpions (Buthidae). These will each be featured in future newsletters