



PO Box FM 648, Famona, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 52 / JUNE 2006

1 – ROWALLAN PARK TO CLOSE

The Girl Guides Association, who have occupied the Rowallan Park (just off the Circular Drive, adjacent to Imadzi hill), has taken the decision to vacate their camping ground. Much of their infrastructure has been the subject of theft and breakage, whilst water supplies (by National Parks) have been erratic. The final straw was the demand by the National Parks for an exorbitant annual rental - a figure that the Association simply cannot meet. We are greatly saddened to see this facility that benefits our younger generation, being closed due to the current problems we face.

The Girl Guides Association will hire Gordon Park from the Boy Scouts Association as and when the need arises. The Scouts are still negotiating with Parks over their lease and arrangements.

Your Society is also concerned as the future use of the Rowallan Park facilities and we will endeavour to keep you advised on developments.

2 – SCORPIONS OF THE MATOBO HILLS

(With appreciation to Moira FitzPatrick, Principal Curator of Arachnids, Natural History Museum, Bulawayo.)

We continue with our articles on Scorpions in the Matopos, and in this newsletter we look at the first group.

Liochelidae (Thin-tailed Scorpions)

The rock scorpion, *Hadogenes troglodytes*, are very large dark scorpions, which live in the cracks between rocks. The total body length of the female is about 18 cm. The tails of the males are exceptionally long and thin as they are used during courtship, and males can measure 21 cm in total body length. In spite of their size, they are not aggressive and rarely use their sting, relying on their broad pincers for defence and prey capture. The pincers and tail segments are richly endowed with long sensory hairs which enable this scorpion to detect both prey and predator. Rock scorpions are superbly adapted for living in close spaces. The tail is laterally compressed and in the normal resting posture is curled on its side, and the pincers, body and legs are flat. The feet are highly specialized for locomotion on hard substrates, providing a vice-like grip that enables the scorpion to walk upside down on rocks and cling to smooth surfaces. Rock scorpions take about 8 years to reach sexual maturity and can live for over 25 years. They have small brood sizes (about 20 young) and a slow rate of reproduction (gestation period of up to 18 months) making this species particularly sensitive to habitat destruction.

The cryptic scorpion, *Opistacanthus asper*, are also dark in colour with an orange tip to the tail and orange/brown legs. They are smaller than the rock scorpions (about 10 cm in length), slow moving and non-aggressive. They live under the bark of trees, especially *Acacia* sp, and forage on trees and bushes at night.

Stings from Liochelid scorpions cause mild localized pain lasting for about twenty minutes and mild swelling for less than forty-eight hours. No other effect should be felt.

3 – NATIONAL PARKS UPDATE

Mrs Thom (Principle Warden - formerly Provincial Warden) had been transferred, and replaced by Mr Tawonda Gotoza. We welcome Mr Gotoza to Bulawayo and look forward to a mutually beneficial relationship during his posting.

4 – RAINFALL

The rains have now ended, and the hills certainly responded well. However, it is very apparent that there were a number of trees that died in the drought last year. The rainfall figures as at the end of April are as follows - Eastern Matopos 1,070mm (42,8”), Central Matopos (Toghwana dam) 660mm (26,4”), Western Matopos 700mm (28”)

5 – SUBSCRIPTIONS

Yes, it is indeed that time of the year again, when subscriptions fall due. We note that a number of members have not yet paid the supplementary fees that were due in January 2006, and would ask you to please check your records to ensure that these have been paid. Your committee, mindful of the inflation rate in excess of 1,000%, has increased the subscriptions as follows:

FAMILY / INDIVIDUAL	\$ 650,000
SPECIAL / PENSION	\$ 150,000
CORPORATE	\$6,500,000

6 - NEXT EVENT

Date	4 June 2006
Venue	Gulati
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles, but trucks preferred
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We will be travelling into the northern Matopos. This is the area closest to Bulawayo, and has been chosen to help members beat the fuel blues! The return journey will not exceed 100kms, and we hope that enough members will be able to save some fuel to join us, or arrange for lifts with those lucky enough to have fuel. There is no specific site to visit, rather the morning outing will include a climb to the top of Gulati, one of the highest points in the Matobo Hills. The views are wonderful from the summit, and the climb is not too strenuous. In the afternoon a light ramble over dwalas and across valleys will be held.

7 – REPORT BACK

As is our custom, those wishing to enjoy one of MCS field trips met at the Churchill Arms, and we set off for the Stephens' farm (having being joined by a group boys, and staff, from Falcon College, Senior Natural History Society). The area is reasonably well known to many of our members, as we have had outings there before. As always, however, no matter how much on visits areas in the Matopos, the views and the scenery are always “new every morning”, and the bush is particularly lush and green after the recent rains.

On arrival, the mandatory tea and biscuits were produced, and then we set off on a ‘short walk’, led of course, by Gavin, (According to some members, Gavin does not understand the difference between short and long, but the jury is still out on this), The bush is lush and thick at this time of the year, but there are trails that have been cleared to make the hike a little easier, and we had a wonderful amble down to the escarpment of the Mtshabezi Valley. Along the way, we were shown some incredibly interesting features in the granite kopjes. These were perfectly spherical holes that were in the rock, obviously made by human hand, although the reason for their existence is not apparent. We also saw the Baobab that is at the highest altitude in the country, and a very interesting old fort, where walls have been build “Zimbabwe Ruins” style. The view over the Mtshabezi Valley is truly wonderful, and as always, Gavin was able to point out various feature kopjes, and give some interesting history of the area.

The return to camp resulted in a group of stragglers (I think it is this group that are in doubt about Gavin's inability to understand the English language), but everyone did make it back, even Peter Johnson. The return journey incorporated a swim for some through ‘the tunnels’ (the tunnels are found in a stream, and one can swim from pool to pool in the stream, by negotiating the tunnels underwater – not something for the faint hearted to attempt), and a slide down the rock slide into a lovely rock pool for others, (far less terrifying than the tunnels).

After a hearty lunch, we were treated to an interesting talk by Dr Don Broadly, on amphibians and reptiles of the Matopos. We were joined by a group of young people from the local Matobo Mission Primary School Conservation Club, and it was encouraging to see their interest.

After the talk, with the day officially over, some folk went home, while others opted for another “short walk” (and this was fairly short), down to the tunnels, for another challenging swim, and then a meander up the stream back to camp.

As a comment, a newcomer to these outings, was absolutely amazed at the fact that the elderly members of the group are so sprightly, and are able to survive Gavin’s “short walks”. Well done to you all!
(With appreciation to Craig Friend)

8 - DONOR

An anonymous donor has paid all outstanding pensioner subscriptions for 2005, including the supplementary charge in January 2006. We record the appreciation and gratitude of the members.

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9 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2006/7

Due by 31 July 2006. Changed Address? Please update our records

NAME	ADDRESS
MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY	
AMOUNT Cheque / Cash	
EMAIL	

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