



PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/0 30/94

NEWSLETTER 53 / JULY 2006

1 – OBITUARY

The Society records with great sorrow the passing away of our Honorary Life Member, Rev Fr Odilo Weeger CMM on Thursday 8th June at the age of 93 years. An outstanding man, who led by example and enjoyed an incredible life, he will be missed by not only the Society, but by the people of Bulawayo in general. As a tribute to Fr Odilo, we copy below the citation given to him by the Society when he was awarded Honorary Life Membership on 23 October 1998:

The members and committee of the Matobo Conservation Society in General Meeting, proposed and approved unanimously, that Fr Odilo Weeger, be appointed as an Honorary Life Member of the Matobo Conservation Society in recognition of his considerable and exemplary contribution to the objectives of the Society.

Fr Odilo was born in Arberg, Germany in 1912, and following his ordination in 1938 he travelled to South Africa to take up his missionary vocation. He was posted to Bulawayo in April 1939 and so his association with this city, and with the Matobo Hills, in particular, was established. Whilst Fr Odilo was posted to numerous missions in Matabeleland, he frequently served within the Bulawayo Diocese, and has been permanently based at Christ the King Catholic Church, Hillside, since 1970. During this period, he has built up a considerable understanding and knowledge of the Matobo Hills, its people, culture, history, rock art, flora and fauna. He is perhaps best associated with the great cross erected on Mt Inungu in 1982, and the annual pilgrimage there every 25th May.

Fr Odilo has served as chaplain to the Boy Scouts at Gordon Park, and was instrumental in the building of an outdoor chapel there. Since 1990, Fr Odilo has served on the Matobo Committee, which oversees the management of the Matobo National Park. He supported the establishment of this Society from the first meeting held in December 1992, and whilst his Sunday duties preclude his involvement in our field trips, he continues to visit the hills weekly, and as such has been able to provide a constant flow of information on the various sites and areas visited. He continues to take a keen interest in the Black Eagle Survey, and with his wealth of knowledge of the hills, frequently accompanies visitors from all over the world to our beloved hills. We the members wish to record in public our appreciation and respect for the services rendered by Fr Odilo.

We therefore declare Fr Odilo Weeger duly elected as an Honorary Life Member of the Matobo Conservation Society

Approved at the Annual general Meeting of the Matobo Conservation Society, 23 October 1998.

As a missionary in Matabeleland North, Fr Odilo founded 32 schools and 3 mission hospitals (Fatima, St Lukes and St Mary's), all of which are operating today. In those early days, he cycled much of the area of Matabeleland North, travelling between Victoria Falls, Wankie, Dete, Matetsi, Lukosi and other remote and far-flung locations on his bicycle. Flooded rivers proved no obstacle as he would swim across and on one occasion, he rescued a boy from the croc infested Lukosi River. He was well known amongst the Bulawayo hospitals, probably visiting every patient who ever stayed overnight! Fr Odilo was the recipient of the Silver Cross (German Federal Republic), Civic Honours (City of Bulawayo) the Silver Elephant (Matabeleland Boy Scouts) and the Golden Lion (Zimbabwe Boy Scouts) amongst other awards. However, it was for his love and knowledge of the Matobo Hills that Fr Odilo held a special place in the MCS. Fr Odilo retired from the Matobo Committee in 2002, but was an ardent supporter of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Bid, which was successful in June 2003. He continued

with his regular outings to the hills, but sadly this year, was prevented from holding the annual Africa Day service at Mt Inungu. He will be sorely missed by us all, but never forgotten.

2 - NEXT EVENT

Date	30 July 2006
Venue	Gulati Communal Land
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!

As will be seen when reading the report on our last outing, poor weather prevented us from enjoying the outing as planned. Consequently, your committee has decided to repeat the outing, as an extra for this year, in the hope that the weather will be kinder to us the second time around! We have found a delightful valley for lunch, with good walks.

The return journey will not exceed 100kms. 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 organised.

3 – REPORT BACK

(With appreciation to Mary Friend)

After days of blue skies, no wind and bright sunshine, Sunday morning dawned cold, wet and miserable. The craven members of MCS met as arranged at Churchill arms, albeit several grumbling about the fact that they would be more comfortable in bed (mostly the men I noticed!). Nine cars set off for the Fort Usher Road, windscreen wipers at the ready, and after a somewhat 'scenic route' we reached Gulati, getting close was impossible, the good rains have left large, boggy patches and, by now, it was raining in earnest and was very cold. I took a wet photo of the hill, very impressive and I will return in nicer weather.

We then backtracked a few kilometres, stopping to admire the aloes, mainly *chabaudii*, which were magnificent. We eventually found a pleasant spot to disembark and enjoy tea and later lunch. People did their own thing exploring the area, and having a certain amount of communication with the local residents, mainly youngsters. Carol and Peter Johnson had clients with them, a charming American couple, and I think they really enjoyed the somewhat different experience. By 11:30 a.m. the skies had lightened and there was a fair amount of blue sky. I had promised Jenny Brebner it would clear by 10:30, but was an hour out! After lunch, taken in good fellowship and chat as always, Roy spoke to us, and read to us from writings that he is preparing for a book on Matobo, firstly about the area we were in, then on the geology of the Matobo area as a whole. It was very very interesting. I feel it will give us all a deeper knowledge and clearer view of our beloved Matopos Hills. At this stage, most people decided to call it a day, but seven intrepid members back-tracked to Ikali, a dominant domed hill that the four younger members climbed, one older member started out on the walk but was 'turned off' by a barbed wire fence and the two remaining of us, watched from the comfort of our camp chairs. One of the climbers was a schoolboy. It's so good to see youngsters on our outings and something to be encouraged.

Going back to Roy's talk, he told us how he had been in the area as a Boy Scout of 14 doing his First-Class Journey, as Roy is only a bit younger than me, that's a long time ago, but very important that our children and grandchildren carry on the love and concern for the Matobo area. Thank you, Roy. Raptors seen in the Ikali area were brown snake eagle, black-breasted snake eagle and a gymnogene. Despite the weather, another memorable outing for Matobo Conservation Society.

4 – SCORPIONS OF THE MATOBO HILLS

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

Scorpionidae (Burrowing Scorpions)

Burrowing Scorpions, *Opisththalmus*, are endemic to southern Africa and one species *O. glabrifrons* has been recorded in the Matobo Hills. They are medium to large in size (12 cm), with large robust pincers and relatively thin tails. *O. glabrifrons*, a yellow species, live in burrows in clay soils which

they make by loosening the soil with their powerful jaws and scraping it out by the strong, short legs and the last segment of the tail, hence the tail is somewhat thicker and more muscular than the Liochelids. The burrow entry-ways are characteristically oval in cross-section, conforming to the cross section of a scorpion's body. The pincers are stout and rounded, enabling the scorpion to seal off the burrow when necessary.

Burrowing scorpions usually wait at the entrance to their burrows and catch passing prey or forage on the surface in the area immediately around their burrows. Most activities such as birth, maternal care, moulting, and feeding take place in the burrow. For this reason *Opisthophthalmus* females are unlikely to be encountered, but males may be seen during the mating season when they abandon their burrows in search of a female. Humans are therefore rarely stung by burrowing scorpions.

Stings from *Opisthophthalmus* are more painful than those of the Liochelids, with localised pain and swelling lasting for up to a week. There have also been several reports of mild systemic reactions lasting for 8-24 hrs.

5 – TRANS MATOPOS ADVENTURE RACE

The third annual Trans-Matopos race will be held from 20 – 23 July. The route starts on the Mpopoma River, and will reach as far east as the Lumani River with night stops at Gordon Park, Camp Dwala and Zhilo / Bezha Pass. Members interested in participating can contact Des Stephens on 091 211156.

6 – CONDOLENCES

The Chairman and members extend their sincere condolences to Mr Trevor Hemans and family on the loss of his dear wife Judy in June. We also extend our sympathy to the Erwee Family on the passing away of Harry in May.

7 - SUBSCRIPTIONS

Don't forget your subs – due at the end of July

Ordinary Members \$650,000

Special (Pensioners) \$150,000