

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 54 / SEPTEMBER 2006

1 – AGM

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday 19th November 2006 at Granite Ridge at 10:00am. We can never have too many helpers, and with the problems we all face, the more people to share the load the better. So please think of new committee members to come on board and help keep our society active and relevant. There are also some special projects ahead that require enthusiastic leaders. Mrs Leila Hunt will speak to us about the Matobo Volunteer Programme, which has recently started in the Hills.

2 – AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Your committee has examined the constitution, and will propose the following amendments be approved by the members at the Annual General Meeting:

Para 6 Annual General Meeting

Para 6.1 The society shall, not later than 31 November in each year, hold an Annual General Meeting.

We are unable to secure audited accounts within 31 days to meet the current requirements.

Para 6.5 Notice of the Annual General Meeting must be given in the local press, which may include any local electronic newsletters. The notice shall be included in a newsletter to all members at least 30 days in advance of the meeting.

Costs of publication in the newspaper is prohibitive, and generally not read by members.

Para 10 Appendix

A Chairman

A-2 The Chairman may serve no more than five consecutive years in office.

It is felt that a three-year period is too short a period

3 – NEW TREE FERN FOUND

During the Trans Matopos Race held in July, a team, which participated under the Matobo Conservation Society banner, discovered a third colony of tree ferns in the Lumane valley. The colony consists of a single larger tree fern, with a number of smaller ferns around the base, and is situated in broad sunshine on the banks of the river. Its location is very different to that of the tree ferns further upstream, that are sheltered in a shady, wet gully, protected from the dry October heat.

A follow up study was held in August and teams of members tracked the various tributaries of the Lumane River from source to the new tree fern. Whilst no new tree ferns were found, a substantial colony of the rare club moss *Lycopodium* was found, and a number of fern specimens have been sent to the National Herbarium for identification. A census was carried out at the three tree fern sites, and the population appears stable, even if dominated by smaller plants. Only a few mid-size tree ferns remain but are looking very strong, whilst none of the old taller plants exist.

This latest find reinforces the importance of this area from a botanical viewpoint, and your Society has informed the various authorities of the latest find.

4 – TRANS MATOPOS RACE

This four-day event saw six teams (three of three members, and three with two members) race across the hills from the Mpopoma River in the west to the Lumane River in the east, with overnight stops at Gordon Park, Camp Dwala and on the Batisalangana River, with the finish back at Camp Dwala. The winning team (in MCS colours) completed the 105km course in 20 hours thirty-four minutes. For once the weather was good and the teams all enjoyed the event – even if they were a bit foot sore! There was a surprising amount of water for this time of year in the streams and rivers, and participants were able

to see the change in vegetation as the race progressed from the lower, drier west to the higher, wetter east. The MCS provided each team with a booklet describing places of interest that the participants would be passing, and pictures of each aloe species in flower to aid in identification.

5 - MEMORIAL SERVICE - Fr ODILO WEEGER

A memorial service for Fr Odilo will be held at the Gordon Park Chapel on Saturday 14th October 2006, at 8pm. Members of the MCS are invited, and are welcome at Gordon Park from 3pm onwards. There will be provision for braai's in the evening. Bring a torch and your own chairs! Those attending should inform the Park Gate that they are travelling to Gordon Park, and no entry fee is then payable.

6 - NEXT EVENT

Date	19 th November 2006
Venue	Bambata
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

Following the AGM, we will have a picnic lunch at Granite Ridge. In the afternoon we will travel to Bambata cave. This is one of the great caves of the hills, and has been extensively studied. So apart from enjoying the lovely walk to the cave, we will be able to reflect upon the archaeological findings that make this cave one of the most important sites, not only in the Matobo Hills, but worldwide. For those with more energy, there will be a climb to the summit of Bambata where the fine views can be enjoyed.

7 – REPORT BACK

(With appreciation to Bobby Hogan)

It was a privileged few who set out on a crisp, clear morning to Gulati communal land, joined en route by Brian and his British volunteers from African Impact. Norman Scott and a scout by the name of Leon were waiting for us, not far from the green "clock room" on the Toghwana road, to lead us to our parking spot. Norman then proceeded to take us on the scenic route, ostensibly to show all the tree enthusiasts a forest of Mnondo trees, to Gopila shelter. Everyone was impressed to see paintings of a high quality, including a large tree, a fish, rhino, a polychrome giraffe many antelope and human figures. In the centre of the well-sheltered overhang was a large grain bin in fairly good condition and the floor was littered with pieces of pottery. Back up on the ridge one could look across the Mtsheli valley with a clear sight of "worlds view". It was a short walk back to the vehicles but on our return the English tourists, struggling to cope with all the fresh air, were desperate for cigarettes so Brian had to oblige by rolling a couple of leaves from a nearby bush in paper to fortify them for the next stage of the outing. A short drive around to Gombo Philo hill in the next valley brought us into an open vlei and a perfect place for our picnic lunch. After a much-needed cup of tea, we left the ever-faithful Mary in charge of the camp and ambled along the headwaters of the Shumba-Sham stream from its source. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to go all the way down the valley, which was proving to be very interesting. After lunch (surprisingly eaten at a reasonable hour), Brian informed us on the workings of African Impact. In essence tourists come to Zimbabwe to both experience the country, and participate in environmental activities such as snare removal, clearing lantana, repairing roads and burning firebreaks etc. Roy, fondly referred to as four by four due to his two walking sticks, engaged low range and set off with great zeal in search of the elusive rare aloe. The rest of the party meandered up the Kopje to feast their eyes on the magnificent panorama. As Craig exclaimed on reaching the top, "there is no place on earth that can compare". Anywhere else in the world, a landscape so beautiful would have ten busloads of tourists trudging up the path to the top of the kopje. All too soon the day came to an end and weary yet rejuvenated, we began to wend our way home, delighting in the magnificent *Aloe excelsa* which was in full scarlet flower.

8 - CONTACTS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions were due at the end of July. Any member with subscriptions outstanding will not be able to participate in the Annual General Meeting. We will also be deleting all unpaid members from our database following the AGM.

We also remind members to please notify us if they change address. In particular changes to e-mail addresses are important, as for the majority of members this is the only means of communication between the society and its members. The Society endeavours to contact members when e-mails fail to get through, which is a time-consuming exercise, only to find the member has left without notifying us of a new address.

9 – SCORPIONS OF THE MATOBO HILLS

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

Buthidae (Thick-tailed Scorpions)

Common buthid species in the Matobo Hills are the striking scorpions, *Uroplectes*. *U. flavoviridis* and *U. planimanus* are found under rocks and logs while *U. vittatus* is found under the bark of trees. These are all small slender-bodied scorpions reaching a maximum of 8 cm. *U. flavoviridis* is a dark green to green and yellow scorpion, and the others are yellow to orange scorpions with black markings. Their nippers are small, while their tails are fairly thick. They are extremely aggressive and when disturbed, will sting readily. Many people are stung by *U. vittatus* when collecting firewood or sitting on logs and *U. flavoviridis* is probably responsible for most scorpion stings in Zimbabwe. Stings of *Uroplectes* cause severe burning pain lasting 24-48 hours, followed by a dull ache for a week, sometimes a mild local inflammation occurs, no other symptoms should appear. Paracetamol can be taken to relieve the pain, and a cold compress applied immediately to localize the venom. Antihistamines have no effect on scorpion stings.

The large (up to 15 cm) thick-tailed scorpion, *Parabuthus raudus*, has only recently been collected in the western Matobo Hills. This species is light yellow/brown in colour with the last three tail segments a dark brown/black. *P. raudus* digs a shallow burrow at the base of vegetation in sandy soil and is the most common scorpion in the Kalahari sand system. All *Parabuthus* species have highly toxic venoms which they use to overpower their prey and drive off adversaries by stinging them. The nippers serve merely to hold their prey whilst it is being stung. The thick tail accommodates powerful muscles which ensure that the sting penetrates deeply into the victim's body so that the venom is quickly dispersed. *Parabuthus* species are very aggressive and will sting readily. When disturbed, they raise their abdomens off the ground and curl their tails up tightly, ready to flick the sting forward. These scorpions may also make a hissing noise by scraping the sting along a granulated area on the upper surface of the first two tail segments. *P. raudus* has been known to spray venom when extremely provoked.

***Parabuthus* stings**

The sting causes immediate excruciating pain of a burning sensation. The pain lasts for a variable period, usually extending from a few hours to one day, maybe longer. Within an hour, however, systemic symptoms may also be experienced and hospitalisation is recommended. These symptoms include:

- raised blood pressure
- increased perspiration
- increased salivation
- difficulty in breathing which is the primary cause of death
- muscle pain and cramps
- general weakness
- stiff gait and unable to stand and walk

Children who have been stung may have signs and symptoms similar to those seen in adults, but the most outstanding clinical feature is a unique form of restlessness, characterised by crying and screaming, uncontrollable jerking of the extremities, chaotic thrashing movements, flailing and writhing. The patient is unable to lie still and is difficult to restrain. This restlessness has been described as "extraordinary and duplicated by little else in medicine".

The spectrum and degree of symptoms is determined by a number of factors, including the species involved, the body mass and physical health of the victim, and the amount of venom injected. Those with lung and heart problems are at greater risk. Deaths, resulting from respiratory and/or heart failure have occurred in Zimbabwe as a result of stings from other *Parabuthus* species but not *P. raudus*.

10 - NATIONAL PARK FEES

Entry	Zim Z\$ 402,50	SADC US\$12	Int US\$15	Car Z\$115
Camp	Zim Z\$ 819			Foreign US\$6
Eagles	Zim Z\$8,190	SADC US\$66	Int US\$130	
Lodge	Zim Z\$6,552	SADC US\$57	Int US\$113	
Chalet	Zim Z\$4,680	SADC US\$38	Int US\$75	

Zim refers to Zimbabwe Residents, SADC rates are payable in US\$ or ZAR / Pula equivalent

11 – WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Your society was represented at a meeting of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Committee. It appears that the management plan was very ambitious, and consequently many of the goals have not been achieved. However, some progress has been made, and this needs to be documented, and submitted as part of the annual report. A new Management Committee will be put in place in the New Year, and your Society should be included.

12 – BIRDLIFE NEWS

Opening on 14th October 2006, at the Natural History Museum, there will be an exhibition to commemorate World Bird Watch. This has been arranged by Birdlife Matabeleland, and features birds that are found in the Matobo Hills.

13 – INTEREST

"The year of unnatural disasters" Agence France Presse Tuesday December 27 2005, PARIS

In the space of a year, a tsunami, an earthquake, brutal storms and floods have claimed more than 300,000 lives and cost at least 100 billion dollars in damage. Humans prefer to view these catastrophes as the result of misfortune, of randomness, of the unfathomable forces of Nature, of the whim of gods or of God. But the exceptional disasters of the past 12 months raise a far more difficult question. Could mankind be to blame? For many scientists, the deep pain from this year's string of disasters is to a very large degree man-made. From the Mississippi delta to the mountains of Kashmir and the beaches of the Andaman Sea, governments failed in almost every case to respect the basic laws of sustainable development. In a nutshell, these rules are: don't house people in places that are at risk to disasters - but if you do, respect natural defences; keep the population growth to sensible limits; build wisely and ensure high safety standards in construction; and set up effective alert and response networks in the event disaster does strike. *"We like to talk about natural disasters because it puts the blame on Mother Nature (but) it's nonsense, it misrepresents what the causal factors really are,"* said Anthony Oliver-Smith, a doctor of anthropology at the University of Florida at Gainesville. *"Obviously, there are big, big hurricanes and there are big, big earthquakes that will create a certain amount of damage. But the degree and level of destruction is really much more a result of society than it is of the natural agent."* The October 8 earthquake that struck Kashmir, killing 73,000 in Pakistan and 1,400 in India, exposed shoddy construction standards in which homes and schools became killers and the lack of emergency backup in a vulnerable seismic region. The Geological Survey of Pakistan described the temblor as *"a wakeup call. Construction codes are non-existent, or criminally violated,"* it said. *"It is feared that if mushrooming construction of inferior quality continues unchecked in the cities, half the newly-constructed buildings will crumble in 20-30 years with just a moderate earthquake hitting the region."* In the case of the December 26 2004 Asian earthquake and tsunami, which killed at least 220,000 people, the toll was amplified by the burgeoning development on the Indian Ocean coastline, where villages, towns and tourist resorts have sprung up in the past decade. This was most notable in Thailand, where hotel complexes were built right on the beach, thus putting them right in the path of a big wave, and mangroves and coral reefs, which would have dampened much of the impact, had been destroyed. *"Indiscriminate economic development and ecologically destructive policies have left many communities more vulnerable to disasters than they realise,"* said the Washington-based environmental group the Worldwatch Institute. A classic example of this was the monsoon flooding that hit Mumbai in August, temporarily transforming the city of 15 million into the so-called "Venice of the East" where streets were drowned and more than 400 lost their lives. Experts blamed the tragedy on decrepit drainage dating back to the British colonial era, explosive growth in slum housing and the loss of green areas and river channels that used to soak up rainwater seepage and then take it out to sea. *"A myopic view of development and misuse of no-development 'green' zones has virtually killed the city,"* said Chandrashekar Prabhu, an urban planner. Such folly is not exclusive to a developing country. On

August 29, Hurricane Katrina laid waste to New Orleans - a delta city built below flood level and whose coastal wetlands, which would have been a useful buffer against storm surge, had been destroyed by developers. Katrina left a trail of a thousand dead across the US Gulf coast and an economic bill variously estimated from 80 billion to 200 billion. It was the peak in an Atlantic hurricane season that broke records for duration, the number of storms - 26 tropical storms, 14 of them hurricanes - and severity, with three reaching the topmost category of five on the Saffir-Simpson intensity scale. The tsunami and quakes were natural events whose impacts were magnified by human mistakes. The big, troubling question is whether Katrina and Co. were spawned by man. Climate scientists are loath to pin a single event, or even a season, to the greenhouse-gas effect. Despite this, a small but increasing number of experts are venturing the opinion that the 2005 hurricane season was no accident, for it coincides with ever-rising sea temperatures that fuel bad hurricanes, and a year set to be the warmest ever recorded. Others urge caution, saying it could be years before we get confirmation as to whether 2005 was just a freak year for storms, part of a natural cycle for hurricanes, or the start of a man-made phenomenon. Oliver-Smith says it is too early to say whether the string of catastrophes of the past 12 months has dented mankind's obsession with economic growth regardless of the cost. *"It's a tough call to say that people's consciousness is being changed by these disasters,"* he said. *"We will do anything rather than change."*

14 – FINAL REMINDER

Don't forget the AGM on 19th November, and you must be a paid-up member to vote!