

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 59 / OCTOBER 2007

1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held at Gordon Park on 25th November 2007, at 10:00am, to be followed by a picnic lunch. The choice of venue is not by chance - we wish to join the Boy Scouts Association and salute their 100 years since their founding in 1907, and to really get you into the swing of things, the Scouts have arranged a whole series of events for us to participate in. We hope our members will respond with enthusiasm!

Firstly, members are welcome to travel out on the afternoon of Saturday 24th November, from 3pm, and camp the night at Gordon Park. There is limited lodge accommodation, which can be booked (on a first come first served basis, with respect to age!) with the Chairman. On Saturday evening, under the well-known Gordon Park (Africa) Rock, we will have a social braai (bring your own meat etc). On Sunday morning short local walks will be arranged ahead of the AGM at ten - which of course will start with morning tea! A series of obstacle courses (involving activities for both adults and children) will be arranged by Norman Scott – just a taste of some of the things that the Scouts get up to! - and especially for the children, a route through Piglets Cave! We will arrange for tree and bird identification walks as well. So plenty to do over the whole week-end!

Our guest speaker to follow the AGM will be Norman Scott.

For those not able to make a week-end of it, you can travel out to Gordon Park at any time, or meet up at the Churchill Arms at 08:15 for 08:30 departure on Sunday 26th. Park entry should be free if you advise the gate that you're travelling to Gordon Park - please do not abuse this facility. This promises to be a fun filled week-end, with something for everyone, and a chance for us to get away from our daily chores and enjoy our "Old Hills".

2 – FIRES

Our newsletter 58 had barely been delivered when the feared veld fires, which had already been prolific in much of the hills, swept into the northern parts of the National Park. The whole of the Matopos Dam area was destroyed, along with a large section running from Hazelside across to the Old Gwanda Road. Others parts of the hills also went up in flames - aggravated by strong dry winds at that time. There have also been major fires in the Toghwana area, and other parts of the Park. In the hills as a whole, thousands of hectares have gone up in smoke - and as this is repeated now on an annual basis the environmental degradation is starting to show.

In September (Herald, Thursday 6th Sept) it was reported that Government had, with immediate effect, banned for the next 3 months any form of burning outside residential and commercial premises in order to control uncontrolled fires in the country. Environment and Tourism Minister Francis Nhema said adding extensive parts of the country including timber estates, game parks and conservancies, farms and pasturelands have been destroyed by fire during the past 2 months. Whilst the action is commendable, it is a case of shutting the door after the horse has bolted - and no real effort is made to apprehend the culprits. So the pattern is likely to be repeated again next year.

3 – WORLD HERITAGE SIGN

The Matobo Hills World Heritage notice will be erected ahead of the AGM, along the Matopos Rd.

4 – RAINFALL

The heat of October is upon us, and the outlook for this rainy season is one above average. The first light pre-season showers have fallen, and as at 15th October the rainfall was measured at 66mm in the

Eastern Matopos, and 42mm in the Western Matopos. Gordon Park is measured at about 30mm. Early days yet, as we hope for good rains!

5 - BLACK EAGLE SURVEY UPDATE

Phase III has begun – to see whether everyone grows up and fledges safely. Of the nest sites so far checked, 17 are occupied by eaglets, higher than in the last couple of years. Fledging dates are going to be quite widespread, because three weeks ago the BES saw all age groups from brown jobs with golden heads (not long to go), to little pure white fluffy jobs (only just started).

6 - NEXT EVENT

Date 25th November 2007
Venue Gordon Park, Matobo National Park
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!

The Annual General Meeting will be held at Gordon Park at 10:00am. Following the meeting, Norman Scot will speak to us about Gordon Park, and the centenary of World Scouting - with emphasis on the role that the Matopos played in the establishment of this movement. Baden Powell developed much of his thoughts on scouting during his time spent in Bulawayo and the Matobo Hills in 1896, so it is fitting that we join the Boy Scouts and mark the Scouting Centenary at Gordon Park.

7 – REPORT BACK

On Sunday 26th August a smaller party than usual travelled out to Gordon Park to join up with the Black Eagle Survey. After the obligatory tea, and a quick check on the nest across the Mtshelili Valley (in which the chick was keeping a low profile) we moved onto Mineral King Farm to observe a second site. Once again, possibly due to the heat of the day, the chick was lying low, so attempts to see him/her were not too successful, but he was spotted! We returned to Inungu Lodge for a picnic lunch, and then a delightful walk up a nearby dwala which yielded lovely views across the Maleme River, and up to Efezi and Worlds View. After this walk, the main party carried onto a third nest site on the Kezi Road, and here were rewarded with a lovely view right into the nest, with chick and all! A few weeks earlier, Black Eagle Survey members had, for the first time witnessed the “Cain and Able” struggle at this nest.

8 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

National Parks fees were increased again from 1 October, and we detail the new charges below -

Entry	\$400,000 Resident, non-Zimbabwean	\$500,000	Non-resident	US\$15 (\$12 regional)
Children under 12 half price				
Car	\$100,000			
Eagle	\$8,000,000 ;	Regional US\$64	Tourist US\$128	per lodge per night (4 persons)
Lodge	\$6,000,000 ;	Regional US\$55	Tourist US\$110	per lodge per night (4 persons)
Chalet	\$2,000,000 ;	Regional US\$37	Tourist US\$73	per lodge per night (2 persons)
Camping	\$500,000	Regional US\$5	Tourist US\$10	per person per night

All figures quoted above are Inclusive of VAT

It would appear that Park fees are going to be increased regularly (price freeze notwithstanding) and whilst we will endeavour to keep our members updated, we are unable to get advance warning, so please check ahead of any visit.

The National Museums and Monuments entry charges to Rhodes grave and the San painted caves are \$200 000 (\$112,000 children). Non resident fees remain at US\$10, GBP6, Pula55 or ZAR70

9 – BULAWAYO LECTURE SERIES

Your Chairman presented a lecture on the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site, and its management, on Thursday 20th September. Following the presentation, a series of questions, and debates raised very interesting points – and certainly identified the fact that the present Management Structure is simply failing in its duties. The overall sentiment expressed was that The Matobo Conservation Society, as one of the mid-wife's of the World Heritage Status, needs to reengage the parties and seek the reestablishment of the Management Committee if we are not to face enquiries from the World Heritage Bureau, and possible listing as an endangered site. Unfortunately, time did not permit a viewing of the promised slide show on the Matobo Hills.

10 – RHINO UPDATES

Of the five white rhino relocated by National Parks in July from the Matopos National Park to the Hwange National Park, one had subsequently been reported snared. However, the animal was captured and the snare removed. By all accounts the five animals are now well settled.

11 - FORESTRY

Zimbabwe is losing between 300 000 and 400 000 hectares of forest annually due to illegal tree felling in peri-urban and farming areas. Intermittent power outages, increasing population and general lack of monitoring have resulted in a 100% increase in deforestation from between 150 000 hectares and 200 000 hectares 2 years ago, Forestry Commission of Zimbabwe acting operations manager Abednigo Marufu has said – *Herald*, Thursday August 30, Pg 4.

Zimbabwe's forests under threat after endless winter power cuts

Business Report, Wednesday June 6

HARARE - Israel Thebe points in despair to dozens of fresh stumps that have appeared overnight in the heart of Mukuvisi Woodlands on the outskirts of Harare. "It takes a good 50 years for a tree to grow fully," says the forestry manager. "This took place in just one night." Mukuvisi has long been a popular destination for day trips by schoolchildren from Zimbabwe's capital, who can catch a glimpse of wildlife on their doorstep. The sanctuary, however, has seen a recent upsurge in night-time visitors - axe-wielding trespassers who make a beeline for its forests to feed the demand for firewood in a country where power cuts have become perennial. Although the authorities try to halt the scalping, Thebe fears it is a losing battle as people become desperate to keep warm during winter. "We have had to hire night guards but the wood poachers always find ways to evade detection. Give it another two years and most of this forest will be gone," he says. Not even saplings are spared as the poachers strip their bark to weave into rope to tie bundles of stolen firewood. Residents of Harare's townships, unfazed by prospects of arrest for breaching forestry laws, are often seen carrying bundles or pushing cartfuls of firewood from neighbouring farms. Their sense of impunity is not surprising given that the fine for cutting down trees protected under the forestry act is Z\$2 500, the equivalent of 35 South African cents at black market rates. The economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, where the annual rate of inflation stands at more than 7 000 percent, has impacted on every aspect of daily life. But while the effect on issues such as life expectancy and employment have been well documented, the environmental impact is just beginning to be felt. Zimbabwe imports 40 percent of its power, with 100 megawatts coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 200MW from Mozambique and up to 450MW from South Africa and 300MW from Zambia. But imports are set to stop this year due to an anticipated power deficit across southern Africa resulting from increased demand, leaving many residents with no alternative to wood fires to cook and stay warm. The demand for wood is good news for some. Agnes Mutero, dwarfed by a pile of firewood at her stall in Harare's main marketplace in Mbare, admits she is doing a roaring business. "For me the power cuts mean more business," says Mutero, who sells a small bundle of firewood for Z\$20 000. "If I get arrested, I always pay a fine and come back to work. I cannot let my family starve when I can feed them by selling firewood." But environmentalists warn that everyone will pay the price of such short-term opportunism. "Firewood poaching is a real threat to our natural forests," says Fiona Munyepfu, a project officer with the watchdog Environment Africa. "One just needs to go a few kilometres outside Harare to see the extent of the destruction, which is being exacerbated by the electricity cuts," she says. Mbare resident Luckymore Kondo says the power cuts leave consumers with little choice, although he is well aware and concerned about the long-term dangers of rampant tree cutting. "Most of the time we use firewood for cooking yet we pay our full bills at month's-end," he complains. "I wonder what will be left of the forests if the electricity problems persist. Something needs to be done to stop this." Manufacturers can switch to diesel-powered generators to keep their machines running, but it is not a viable option in a country with chronic fuel shortages.

MATOPOS COMMENT

Years ago, donkey carts loaded with firewood were a regular sight along the Old Gwanda Road. A considerable effort was made by the Umzingwane Rural District Council and the Forestry Commission to stop this practice, and today such loads are never seen. Of course, the wood may be transported by vehicle, but it seems that this is not happening.

Ten years ago, at the height of the tourism boom, wood carving had reached such proportions that the *Kirkia acuminata* (White syringa) was threatened with extinction in the Silozwane area of the Khumalo Communal Lands. Today the collapse of tourism has brought a reprieve to the *Kirkia acuminata*.

What are the lessons from these two small examples? Has deforestation slowed in the Matopos? Despite the stories above, evidence on the ground demonstrates that deforestation is continuing. The slash and burn practice continues in the hills, forested areas are being steadily depleted, and some areas are now completely devoid of trees. Whilst the wood may not be “exported” from the Matopos, the growing human population, with no other fuel available, is consuming more wood. This is the challenge that we as a society need to face. How do we demonstrate to our rural folk the importance of maintaining the forests? How do these folk source alternative energy as there seems little hope of paraffin returning to the pumps any time soon?

More importantly, what steps need to be put into place now to prevent deforestation being driven by a recovery in tourism in the years ahead? How would authorities stop wood loads being moved into Bulawayo?

Having said all this, there are still some wonderful parts of the hills, outside of the National Park, that are relatively untouched. These forests should be protected to provide the rural folk with a sustainable harvest, and not be allowed to face unrelenting pressure from the axe!

12 – CROSS TO CROSS ADVENTURE CYCLE

On the 22nd September the first of what we hope will become an annual mountain bike event took place. The 55km ride, took the participants from the Inungu Cross up the Maleme valley and across the hills to the small cross on Mquilembegwe near the Matopo Mission. The scenery en route was spectacular, and some technical sections provided an exciting challenge for the cyclists. Whilst the September heat caught up with the cyclists along the way, all enjoyed the event and vowed to participate next year. The race was held in memory and honour of Rev Fr Odilo, whose Birthday occurs at this time (14th October), and who was responsible for the erection of the Mt Inungu Cross.

13 – SOUTHERN GROUND HORNBILL SURVEY

With acknowledgement to Julia Dupree, Babbler Oct-Nov 2007.

Now that term has started again, our industrious and dedicated team are diving back into the far yonder to the last area to be visited in rural Matopos, for discussions and interviews with the schools. They will also be attending cluster meetings with school heads to present final details of the next and probably most important phase of the survey to date.

There are reports of a group of 20 Ground Hornbills to be investigated and logged, and hopefully shortly we will see breeding activities.

A full report will be prepared at the appropriate time, but suffice it to say that the survey is excellent, we are indebted to our team who are dedicated, knowledgeable and carry out their work meticulously, modestly, without publicity, fuss or bother and with little funding. What’s more, they seem to enjoy themselves!

GROUND HORNBILL SURVEY REPORT

Elsbeth Parry and her merry men and one woman are gearing themselves up for a trip or two to the last area to be visited - the far south-east Matobo Hills - to talk to the last cluster of schools. They will also be attending meetings of the cluster heads to discuss the next stage of the survey.

Excitingly 20 more Ground Hornbills have been reported which will be logged and verified. Meanwhile, breeding should start soon so hopefully further nest sites will be located. This survey has been intensified and is now running at high speed - breathless, in fact!

14 - LITTER

The dumping of household, building and light industrial waste has again emerged along the Old Gwanda Road. Small examples can also be seen on the verges of the main Matopos Road – wonderful introduction to visitors to Bulawayo and the Matopos! It is incredible that people who have sufficient means to firstly produce the waste, and to then convey it, are unable to make a drive of a similar distance to deposit their waste at the Municipal Dump. It does not say much for the citizens of Bulawayo that they can so easily spoil their environment, when there is no need to do so! Any members who see people dumping their waste should report the time, place and car numbers to the Hillside Police.

15 – WEZ OUTING

The annual WEZ outing to Quiet waters will be held on 18th November. MCS members are welcome.

16 – MEMBERS ADDRESSES

Every quarter we issue our newsletter, and a number of e-mails return. We attempt to resend the e-mail a maximum of three times before giving up! Apologies to those who therefore do not receive their newsletters, but we do try! On investigation, more often than not a member has changed address and not notified the Society. Alternatively, members have left, and not advised us. Please help to keep the MCS database up to date, notify us of any changes, and if you know of members leaving or who have left, please let us know.

There is a batch of e-mail addresses that consistently fail, and these will be deleted after this newsletter. If you hear of a member complaining that they are not receiving newsletters, please ask them to confirm their details with the Secretary.

17 – ERRATA

The last newsletter started with the words “Autumn is upon us”; this should of course have read Spring!

18 – LAST REMINDER

Don't forget the Annual General Meeting. Members are always needed to serve on the committee – so please support the event, and volunteer to help!