

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 60 / DECEMBER 2007

1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting was held at Gordon Park on Sunday 25th November. The meeting was well attended with about 40 members present. The “Lodge” at Gordon Park was a most useful venue, and our appreciation to Norman Scott and the Boy Scouts Association is recorded. Your committee was returned largely unchanged at the Annual General Meeting. Whilst continuity is a good thing, so is an infusion of new ideas, and so we urge members to give this some thought in the year ahead. At the first Committee meeting the following office bearers were appointed:

Chairman Gavin Stephens
Secretary Carolyn McDowall
Treasurer Barbara Muchechetere
Members Shelagh Adams, Mike Phillips, Judy Ross, Norman Scott, and Roy Stephens.

Our Vice-President Bobby Hogan stood down at the AGM as she is getting married in December and will be relocating to Botswana in January 2008. She has promised to return for all our outings next year! Bobby has served on the committee for some years, and amongst a number of projects, she will perhaps be best remembered for arranging the annual Matopos Clean Up days which have proved most beneficial to the National Park. She has also been our trusted “postmistress” in distributing our newsletter. We wish Bobby well in her new environment and record our appreciation for her contribution to the MCS and the Matopos in general.

2 – RAINFALL

As this newsletter is written, we are coming to the end of a lovely wet spell that has seen substantial rains fall within the Hill’s. As a result the year-to-date figures are all above average, and fast approaching the 50% of annual average mark! Of course, the months of January and February will be critical – they are the months that failed last year after a good November start. We understand that the Mtshabezi Dam is spilling, and that others are not far off – if they have in fact not filled this past week. As at 19th November the rainfall was measured at 456mm in the Eastern Matopos, and 270mm in the Western Matopos.

3 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

National Parks fees will be increased from 1 January 2008 by 525%, and we detail the new charges below. New accommodation / camping fees were not available at the time of enquiry:

Entry	\$2,500,000		Non resident US\$15 (\$12 regional)	
Children under 12	half price			
Car	\$1,000,000			
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

4 – WORLD HERITAGE SIGN

Paint has been acquired to complete the Matobo Hills World Heritage sign and we look forward to erecting it in the near future, near the Maleme river bridge opposite REPS.

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	27 th January 2008
Venue	Mtshashasha Falls
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles, but will need to assess road conditions closer to the time
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

Last year we planned an outing to the Mtshashasha Falls (“the Cascades”), but cancelled it when the January rains failed which left the falls a mere trickle. We hope that this year we will be more successful! There is a 45-minute walk to the Falls, one of the most delightful walks in the Hills, through the Mountain Acacia (*Brachystegia glaucescens*) forest. Those who want to swim will be able to do so at the bottom of the waterfall. These are the largest Falls in the Matopos, and well worth the walk.

6 – REPORT BACK

The things we have to do at AGMs

The day of the AGM dawned somewhat apprehensively with lowering skies and puddles from a recent shower. Undaunted a fair number of MCS folks assembled at Gordon Park - some having spent the night there in comfort - certainly not in true “scouting style”. Breakfast aromas wafted as some late starters tried to get themselves towards themselves. The chairperson had taken several early birds for a typical “short” walk and in so doing had managed to lose the MCS Vice-President!! But the show had to go on and after several – “we’ll give them another 5minutes” the meeting commenced, sans VP. When the “lost” ones eventually arrived there was much bantering re the whereabouts of the newly engaged couple.

After lunch there were 2 “short” talks - the first given by Norman Scott speaking on the origin of Gordon Park and the life of Baden Powell. This was accompanied by a short film - although the sound track sadly did not materialise. The second was given by Leon Wuyts on the computerized rainfall data collected from 30yrs at Gordon Park, and 100 years from the Matopo Mission, and how it fitted into the greater scheme of things – this was his A level computer project and was very well presented. The surprise came when Norman announced that as several of the audience had succumbed to the peaceful setting and the gentle background murmur of the speakers; the scouts had set up an obstacle course. Well those that could; did, and those that thought they could tried, and those who were sensible enough to know, watched. The mixed bag scrambled, swung, hopped, crawled, wobbled and staggered through poles, tyres, ropes and wheelbarrows to the accompaniment of laughter and shouts of encouragement from those wise enough not to try. Yes it was an honest to goodness obstacle course which every scout has to do. But that’s not all folks -“Piglet” awaits! For those of you who are not acquainted with Gordon Park, Piglet is a tunnel through a kopje – not for the claustrophobic mind you! Each group was given a scout or two to direct and aid us on this journey - somehow ours seemed to think we needed to do a bit of chimney walking!! So it was that we had the “deluxe Piglet which brought us out into the daylight above the “waterfall” (still haven’t found the fall bit yet!), just in time for the last crumbs of tea. The day turned into evening and we headed for home just as it started to drizzle and by the time we arrived home it was a downpour – even the Bullfrogs had to vacate their waterlogged holes.

Our thanks go to Norman and his scouts – may the movement continue and there always be a Matopos there for us all.

PS some of the younger more athletic crowd have confessed that they were a bit stiff the next day!!

7 – ADVENTURE CYCLING

A number of short Mountain Bike rides have taken place in the Hills, with 32 cyclists participating in the one event around Mwazi Hill near the Matopo Mission. There will be additional outings arranged in 2008, and the usual major three day races events are scheduled for February.

8 – LUMANE FALLS TRAGEDY

It was reported that a group of 22 youngsters visited the Lumane falls on Saturday 15th December to celebrate the end of their A- level exams. The youngsters went swimming in the falls, and two of the

party went missing, presumed drowned. At the time of writing, the bodies had not been recovered. This is a sad reminder to all our members to exercise caution if you are swimming in any flooded rivers or waterfalls in the Matopos this rainy season.

9 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2008

Your committee has decided to raise a supplementary subscription due by 31st January 2008.

Are you fully paid up from 2007? Please check your records to ensure that these have been paid. Your committee has increased the subscriptions as follows:

FAMILY / INDIVIDUAL	\$ 5,000,000
SPECIAL / PENSION	\$ 1,000,000
CORPORATE	\$ 50,000,000

If any member needs to discuss a payment programme for these fees, please approach the Chairman.

10 – JOINT MCS / WEZ / BIRDLIFE MEETING

Representatives of the MCS, WEZ and Birdlife met in early December to discuss activities in the Matopos in 2008. Hopefully there won't be too many clashes of activities (if any) in 2008! More importantly it allowed a sharing of ideas on various projects and plans for 2008 – limited to the Matopos. It is important that our efforts are combined and that the Environmental Lobby works as a team when meeting with various authorities. There is much scope for combined work in the Hills – but also a number of areas of shared concern, such as National Park fencing, domestic cattle grazing, and poaching to name a few. There are also some very positive projects underway by WEZ and Birdlife to which the MCS may be able to assist.

Consideration was also given as to how the stronger Societies may be able to assist those that are currently struggling, and it is hoped we can save them from extinction!

It is hoped that the meeting will become an annual gathering so that we can coordinate our efforts and share resources. This first meeting was certainly useful and constructive.

11 – CLIMATE CHANGE

Where do we stand on the issue of climate change? Is it a lot of hype? What does it mean for the Matopos and how should we be changing our environmental management to combat the potential effects of climate change?

The evidence suggests that the World is subject to Global warming brought about by the activities of mankind. From 1975, the World's population exceeded the level at which the planet could sustain it. We are now consuming the planet at a rate greater than the planet can either regulate or regenerate itself. And populations and economic development are both increasing, adding to the problem.

The World Community has just completed another Global Summit in Bali, Indonesia to examine Climate Change. The first such meeting was held in Rio in 1995 and we are familiar with the Kyoto Agreement. Whilst Zimbabwe acknowledges and subscribes to these various resolutions, and we possess on paper strong environmental legislation, the will or financial ability to work effectively for the benefit of the environment is sadly lacking. This is of major concern if we are, as a country, to take the very necessary steps to contribute towards the global effort to save the environment and slow down climate change. More importantly, we need to be a part of the environmental movement if we are to avoid driving our country down into the abyss of poverty, as seen in the Sahel region of northern Africa. Firm action is required in the semi-arid regions of the country, which includes those areas south of the Matopos, if we are to preserve the fragile environment in that area.

Over the past 10,000 years (or so!) the south central African plateau, on which the Matopos is located, has steadily dried out. This is demonstrated by the changes in vegetation. Due to the unique aspects of the Matopos, including such things as altitude (relative to the surrounding land), relatively higher rainfall, which includes winter guti, and of course massive run-off from the dwalas, a number of plant species that were once found throughout this area, are now found only in the Hills. Examples that come to mind are the Tree ferns (*Cyathia dregeii*), the Cape Chestnut (*Caledendron capensa*), the Royal Fern (*Osmondo regalia*) the *Streptocarpus eylesii* and others. These plants have disappeared from the surrounding veld. Global warming will place all these plants at risk, and will accelerate the trend of the past 10,000 years. On such a scale, one must wonder what can really be done to help.

Research indicates that in Matabeleland North average temperatures have risen by 1-2% in the past 20 years. The information is not available for Matabeleland South, but with the growing degradation of the environment in the drier southern province, we can be sure that a temperature change of at least this magnitude applies. Examinations of our rainfall patterns indicate that the annual average rainfall, over a one hundred year period, is little changed. Yet in the past ten years we have experienced some of the most extreme weather patterns – the driest season ever in 1991/1992, the hottest day in 1987, whilst the wettest year ever was only in 1997 / 1978, incredible hail storms, and for the first time, dust storms blown up over the Matopos from the drier lands to our south in the early-90s. Is this all a co-incidence? Our rainfall patterns have become more erratic – drier years followed by very wet years, and greater unreliability – but on average, no actual change, and it would seem much the same cycle with 7 to 10 year periods of mostly dry seasons followed by periods of mostly above average years.

Historically, cyclones (or more correctly tropical depressions) would travel up the Limpopo valley and affect the Matopos about once in ten years. However this seems to be changing. Cyclone Eline was in February 2000, Cyclone Japhet in March 2003 and the tale end of another cyclone in February 2007. Cyclones that travel up the Zambezi Valley tend to drag in dry air over the western part of the country - cyclones that travel up the Limpopo Valley (or Lundi River) result in very wet periods over the Matopos.

Our weather is not created in isolation. Global warming will raise the temperature of the Indian Ocean. This will give rise to more cyclones. At the same time, the warmer waters flowing south down the Mozambique Current will mean that more cyclones are able to “travel south”. So instead of a cyclone every decade, we face the possibility of more cyclones affecting the Matopos more frequently. So whilst we will see increased drought years, we will also see more cyclones. The conclusion is that our rainfall will become more erratic.

What then is the projection? The fluctuation between dry and wet periods will threaten the vegetation of the Matopos, and the population living there. In dry years, local farmers will move their fields ever closer to the stream bank – and then out of the blue, heavy cyclonic rains will cause heavy flooding. Fields will be swept away – and stream banks will collapse and become eroded. Damage to the stream banks is also caused by excessive grazing of domestic animals. There is already significant damage caused to all the rivers outside of the National Park. Stream Bank cultivation is rife, siltation of the river beds is extreme (even the Maleme Dam in the National Park has lost about a third of its volume through siltation). In the dry years, the river bank vegetation will suffer, but this vegetation is critical to protect against floods. It is vital that we protect the stream banks to guard against the flooding that will follow the cyclones.

We need to stop the massive and widespread veldt fires that sweep through the hills each year. In the more extended dry periods which we anticipate, more damage will be caused to the vegetation by runaway fires. Indeed, the whole concept of land management and land use will have to change. With respect to all parties, management of the land will have to be done in a more responsible manner than today’s basic subsistence farming permits. The changed weather patterns will force changes on local land use – and if we do not adapt, then we will just invite environmental disaster and increased poverty for the people living in the Hills. But it does not have to be a disaster. Improved water management, good well maintained dams, irrigation schemes and the like can change the way agriculture is practiced. Of major importance will be the protection of the wet lands and sponges so that water is held in reserve through the erratic rainfall patterns.

The basic need is for appropriate education at schools and amongst the adult population of the Hills. This challenge cannot be faced in isolation, but will require considerable team work from all stakeholders.

This is where increased pressure from bodies such as ours could make Government enforce the Environmental legislation already in existence. As we said earlier, the problem in Zimbabwe is not the theory – it’s the practice! With climate change bearing down on us, we have to become more active in upholding our environmental law. There is no doubt what the role of environmental bodies like the Matobo Conservation Society will be in the years ahead.

12 – CALENDAR 2008

Herewith the draft Calendar for 2008

27 January	Mtshashasha Falls
06 April	Venue tba
June	Anglesey Farm
October	Venue tba
23 November	AGM

WE WISH ALL OUR MEMBERS A MERRY CHRISTMAS, HAPPY NEW YEAR AND SAFE TRAVELS!