

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 62 / JUNE 2008

1 – WHERE ARE ALL THE ANIMALS?

Do you recall visiting the Matobo National Park years ago, and seeing good quantities of game? The Sable herds that were always resident along the road to Maleme? The Wildebeest near Imadzi, and Impala along the western half of the Circular Drive? Indeed, so well stocked was the Game Park, that it earned an international reputation for being the best location to see not just rhino, but a host of other animals. The National Park was well stocked with game, and visitors were almost never disappointed. Today visitors return from a day visit to the Park without seeing a single animal. Even visits to the Game Park are now proving fruitless. Where have all the animals gone?

Giraffe were once plentiful in the Game Park - they are now rarely seen. Zebra have become a target in both the Park, and on neighbouring farms, where the poachers are expertly skinning the animal and largely leaving the meat. Large antelope are a rarity. One only has to look at the behaviour of the animals to know that something is wrong. Previously the game was relatively “tame” - today the animals run at the sound of a vehicle or person. Warthogs were quite happy to graze at the side of the road, in full view of the cars - today if you see a warthog, it is from the rear, tail straight up, as it heads for the thick bush. Local tour operators are expressing concern that their clients are not satisfied with the poor game viewing on offer - they contrast it with what’s on offer in other parks in both Zimbabwe, but more importantly, the region.

Unlike Hwange National Park, we do not have the benefit of an annual game count that could lend scientific weight to these observations. However, we have a host of people who have regularly visited the Park over many decades. Their observations may not be proven in hard fact - but they are more than persuasive. The collective observations of all these people are simply too much to ignore. So where has it all gone wrong?

When questioned previously on this topic, National Park Authorities point to game capture and relocation as being partly responsible, and to droughts. These may well be contributing factors - but there are a whole host of other considerations. We have repeatedly received reports of gun fire within the Park. When questioned we are told that it is scouts shooting at dogs - is this correct?

Is there excessive “shooting for the pot” by National Park Authorities? The MCS has always said that this has no place in a Park like the Matopos - it is simply too small, has too many visitors and in any event shooting for the pot is against the very substance of the law that created our National Parks. Have our objections been heard - it seems not.

In addition to this, we must give consideration to the inability of Parks to enforce the law. Poaching includes the theft of timber and grazing. Large sections of the Park are now unfenced, and grazing of cattle remains widespread, with no determined effort made to control this. We guess it is difficult to keep domestic animals out when there is no fence, so we have to ask why Parks have allowed so much fencing to be stolen? Theft of fencing was previously vigorously pursued, but in recent years it has become acceptable, leaving the present park administrators with an enormous problem. Every effort, within financial limitations, is being made to maintain the Game Park Fence, but even this is not successful, whilst the remainder of the park is being neglected. The whole park is worthy of protection, indeed the law requires such. Until there is a considerable change in the revenue of the Park, we can’t see the authorities having the means to replace the missing fencing. But this does not absolve the authorities from enforcing the law, and taking action against those who poach.

We are aware that almost all gates into the Park are now either broken or open. Even gates between the Game Park and the Khumalo Communal lands are standing open. Why are the gates not being kept closed, and locked? Why were they opened in the first place? Why are they not sealed and kept closed, and why are the folk who wander through not being apprehended?

Why are persons allowed to graze their cattle in the Park, why when fencing materials are stolen is there inadequate follow up, why is the boundary of the Park not being maintained? We have asked a lot of questions - many of these have been asked of the Parks Authorities previously. We still await their responses. They really come down to one simple request of our Parks Authorities – enforce the law and defend the Park. Is this too much to ask?

2 – NEXT EVENT

Date 15th June 2008
Venue Anglesey Farm, Kezi Rd
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!

We will be travelling down the Kezi Rd, approximately 50km out of town. Mr Ian Patullo will meet us and show us places of interest on his farm.

3 – REPORT BACK

Nine vehicles and twenty-eight bodies - what a wonderful day to be out and about in - clear skies and not too hot. Our vehicles trundled up and over kopjes and finally stopped next to a communal home where the soils were fertile and the crops (beans, sweet potatoes, fruit trees and reeds) were in excellent condition, with a clear stream running by. A worn path led us to the base of Amadzimba and a short climb into the long low cave. A myriad of paintings greeted us with remains of grain bins hiding in the back recesses - this cave is known for having the best quality and range of Bantu art in the Matopos, whilst the older rock Bushman art is impressive. Another short hike took us over to another unusual hollow where there were paintings and finally, we returned to the vehicles for a quick refreshment and then set off again toward the Mazhowe Valley. Here lunch was set out under lovely Mountain acacia's and thereafter a few stalwarts followed our leader along the river (through his memories of rock slides and pristine banks - the rock slide was much smaller than remembered and the banks are now trashed from deforestation for meagre slithers of fertile ground). But undaunted those that wanted, took to the water and slid down the smooth granite whose shades ranged from grey to maroon to pink and black - they splashed and laughed and recalled their youth whilst the children now carry a memory of their own. The return to "urban bliss" saw us wander along the old Gwanda road, seeing in the distance the caves we had previously been to - now seen from the other side!

Who said there wasn't anything happening in Bulawayo or anything to do over weekends!!!

4 – BLACK RHINO SHOT

We have received reports that a black rhino was shot in the Matobo Game Park in early May. We have not been able to verify the details of this report, but it has however been confirmed by a number of reliable sources that a rhino was the victim of poaching. The MCS is concerned by this report, as it suggests that the IPZ is no longer effective. The Matobo Game Park enjoyed an international reputation for its rhino population – that has just been shattered.

5 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

National Parks fees increased in mid-March, and we detail the new charges below.

Entry	\$320,000,000	Non-resident US\$15 (\$12 regional)	Children under 12 half price
Vehicle	\$80,000,000	Non-resident US \$5	
Eagle	\$8,000,000,000;	Regional US\$64	Tourist US\$128 per lodge per night (4 persons)
Lodge	\$5,000,000,000 ;	Regional US\$55	Tourist US\$110 per lodge per night (4 persons)
Chalet	\$2,000,000,000 ;	Regional US\$37	Tourist US\$73 per lodge per night (2 persons)
Camping	\$200,000,000;	Regional US\$5	Tourist US\$10 per person per night

All figures quoted above are Inclusive of VAT

Park fees are increasing almost monthly without 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 \$50,000 000 (\$30,000,000 children). Non-resident fees remain at US\$10, GBP6, Pula55 or ZAR70 (children half price)

6 – RAINFALL

The rainy season has come to an end, and bar any winter guti, the season's final figures are

1,004mm in the Eastern Matopos, and 565mm in the Western Matopos.

7 – WORLD HERITAGE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Committee was appointed in 2004. Its mandate was to manage the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site, and to draw upon representation from a wide cross section of stakeholders. The Management Committee's first task was to draft a Management Plan, which was successfully done. Many of the objectives of the Management Plan remain unfulfilled due to financial and other constraints arising out of the economic and political crises in Zimbabwe over the past ten years or so. After this initial enthusiastic start however, the operations of the Management Committee have been of some concern. To our knowledge it has not successfully convened a single meeting in the past twelve months. Of greater concern is that the mandate for the Committee is limited to a period of three years – this expired in early 2007, and now, mid-way through 2008, nothing has been done to address this problem. The Matobo Conservation Society has raised the matter with the UNESCO Zimbabwe Commission (no response), and with both National Parks and National Museums (also no response)

Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will read how the Management Committee has failed to protect the integrity of the World Heritage Site. Clearly there is a need for this body to be urgently reconstituted. At the same time, there requires a commitment to secure some legal standing of the committee so that it has real power to protect the World heritage Site – at present it relies on moral authority only.

We are not surprised by the failure of the Management Committee. At the outset of the bid to have the Hills declared a World Heritage Site, it was identified that one of the major problems was the multiplicity of ownership within the site. Unlike Great Zimbabwe or Khami that are the responsibility of National Parks, the Matopos has to contend with National Parks, National Museums, two Rural District Councils and a number of freehold land owners. In establishing the Management Committee no effort was made to identify a single authority that would be responsible for the site. The MCS has all along contended that National Museums would be the most appropriate custodian of the site, and this responsibility should be assigned by the Government. At present, the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site is an orphan, with no parent to protect it!

The Matobo Conservation Society will continue to press for the reconstitution of the Management Committee, and has already made presentations on a more appropriate structure. Discussions have been held with senior Government authorities. Our failure to take action now could well result in the Site being placed on the Endangered List – a step towards de-listing. It would be enormously embarrassing if Zimbabwe were to achieve the distinction of the first de-listing of a World Heritage Site! Our Authorities well know the seriousness with which the World Heritage Bureau undertakes its tasks – even the magnificent Victoria Falls has been placed on the Endangered List due to management committee failures. If the World Heritage Bureau can do that to such a site, how much more for a young, relatively unknown, site like the Matobo Hills!

It is very sad to see how our Government does not even pay lip service to the World Heritage system. We can only hope that in time this will change and that Zimbabwe will take greater ownership and care of these special sites. Our management of all five sites in Zimbabwe falls far behind the manner in which they are managed, developed and protected in neighbouring countries such as Botswana and South Africa. In signing the World Heritage Protocol, our Government undertook to protect and maintain the World Heritage Sites within our borders – this was our obligation and responsibility to the World. We have let the global community down.

We have much to do – and this again underscores the need for a strong Management Committee.

8 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2008

Our annual subscriptions fall due on the 31st July. After some deliberation, your committee has decided to set the subs at the following levels -

FAMILY / INDIVIDUAL	\$ 500,000,000
SPECIAL / PENSION	\$ 100,000,000
CORPORATE	\$ 5,000,000,000

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

9 – WORLD HERITAGE SIGN

The Matobo Hills World Heritage sign has been completed. Your committee decided to defer the erection of the sign until all elections are over – it would only become a billboard for various political parties!

10 – MOUNTAIN BIKE CYCLING

The Zimbabwe Cycling Federation will stage a National Mountain Bike stage in the Matopos on 7th June this year. The race will entail several circuits around Mwazi, starting and finishing at the Matopo Mission.

11 – UN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY

The UNEA arranged for the planting of nearly 2 billion trees in 2007. They plan an even more ambitious target for 2009, the planting of 7 billion trees! That is about a tree for every person on our planet. The MCS has participated in previous tree planting exercises, with some success. We will be calling on our members to participate in the 2009 tree planting with an exercise for the Matopos. Obviously indigenous trees will be planted, and where members can't make it out, we will arrange for collection and planting on your behalf. So, take this as an early warning – if you are going to grow seeds there is still enough time!

12 – ECONET TOWER

Members travelling out to the National Park will have noted the erection of a new cell phone tower in the vicinity of the Matobo Police Station. We understand that this is an Econet cell phone tower. Your society is concerned with this development on a number of fronts. Firstly, we believe it was erected without any form of Environmental Impact Study being conducted, yet it stands adjacent to the National Park. We note the existence of a long-standing black eagle nest on the southern end of the hill on which the tower has been erected – it will be of interest to see if it impacts on the breeding of this particular pair. Secondly, the tower has been erected within the World Heritage Boundary. Does a cell phone mast fit with the concept of a “cultural landscape”? We think not. More importantly, the Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Committee was not consulted. This is itself raises serious questions about the management of the World Heritage Site.

Members may note that a similar tower exists behind REPS – this tower, owned by Net One, is outside the World Heritage Site, and consequently we have no comment to make on it.

Your Society will be writing to Econet and the appropriate authorities, to bring to their attention our concerns.

13 – CALENDAR 2008

Herewith the draft Calendar for 2008

- 19 October Venue tba
- 30 November AGM

14 – HILLSIDE DAMS TRUST

Members will be aware of the establishment of the Hillside Dams Trust. Members of your committee will be assisting the programme to restore the site, and the MCS will provide technical support. We will not be able to commit to greater participation as the area falls outside our sphere of interest – but we do support the project and urge members to participate. Visit the website, which has a link to the latest Matobo Conservation Society Newsletter and details – www.hillsidedams.com

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15 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2008/9

Due by 31 July 2008. Changed Address? Please update our records only if you have changes

NAME	ADDRESS
MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY	
AMOUNT Cheque / Cash	
EMAIL	

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