

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 63 / SEPTEMBER 2008

1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The rains are nearly upon us, the days are certainly warmer, and spring is in the air. That means it is nearly time for our Annual General Meeting - time to inject new blood and fresh ideas into your committee. The current members have all contributed during the year, under difficult conditions, and remain devoted to our cause. But there is always room for more committee members!

The AGM this year will be held at Steadfast Park on 30 November 2008. Steadfast Park is run by the Boys Brigade, and is located in the north eastern corner of the National Park. Consequently, it is not far from Bulawayo, about 35km's from the Post Office, and just a kilometre or two down the Fort Usher Road, off the main road to the Park. We will be shown around the site by Mr Bowman. In the event of rain there is a hall - so all eventualities are covered! The AGM will be held at 10:00am. In the afternoon we have an outing to the 1896 Maleme Camp at Three Sisters planned. Please make an effort and show your support.

2 – WORLD HERITAGE SIGN

Finally, the long awaited signpost has been erected on the Matopos Road at the point where the road crosses the World Heritage Boundary on the Maleme river opposite REPS. The project faced many delays, but was never abandoned! Special thanks are extended to Isla Sheasby for the sign writing, to Zimplow Ltd for the supports and sandblasting, to Paint World for the generous donation of paint, to Portland Holdings Ltd (PPC) for the transport and cement, and to Iain Sheasby for coordinating various activities. The day of installation finally arrived, and despite some delays the team assembled at the chosen site. Norman Scott had been out earlier in the week to prepare the site, and two large holes already existed. Of course, just our luck, for the first time probably this year a Ministry of Transport vehicle passed by, and a Mr Tshuma was most anxious about the activities. Did we have permission, did we have the letters? All the documents were in the Chairman's office back in Bulawayo. After lengthy explanations from our Chairman and examinations by Mr Tshuma, the project was passed to go. The Roads gang left and the lads from First Pioneer Scout Troop set to work bolting the sign to the uprights, and heaving the structure up into place. Mixing of cement, packing with stone, and finally, in a very quick time, the sign was proudly up and secure!

Your committee would like to erect additional signs (not of the same size) at other entry points to the World Heritage Site, so if any members know of suitable materials, please let us know.

3 – BLACK RHINO UPDATE

The Chronicle reported that a National Parks employee being investigated for the poaching of a black rhino in the Matobo Game Park had committed suicide. Given the sudden upsurge in the poaching of rhino country wide, which included rhino's being shot at Imire Park and the Midlands Conservancy, one can be forgiven for thinking the "suicide" was convenient. The stories about the latest poaching are of considerable concern to all involved, and point to a level of complicity amongst people in influential office.

Letters written to the Matobo Parks Authority have, again, gone unanswered.

We have an unconfirmed report that a second black rhino was shot during the month of August. If this is correct, it certainly shows an emerging trend, and clearly our Rhino's face the biggest upsurge in poaching since the dreadful 1980's

In the meantime, a number of white rhino have been captured and relocated during August. This is not in response to the poaching, but part of an ongoing plan to decongest the Matobo National Park, and reintroduce, or support existing populations, within the Parks estates generally.

4 - NEXT EVENT

Date	19 th October 2008
Venue	Whitewaters
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 next field trip has a number of potential challenges:

- 1) Mr Paul Hubbard will be accompanying us to educate us on the grain bins of the Matopos. We hope to visit some sites, but these are within the National Park, and we can't advise the entry fee! Please contact the Parks Authorities, and bring sufficient cash with you. We will notify members on the e-mail list the week before the outing.
- 2) Mr Hubbard may be detained on a research project at the time of the outing. In this case we will postpone the grain bins tour, and divert the outing to an alternative venue. In this case, please bring vehicles that are suitable for all terrain as we can't be sure of the final destination! Mr Paul Hubbard is an archaeologist who has done a great deal of research within the Matobo National Park. His talk will be of considerable interest and enthusiasm, and it promises to be an interesting day.
- 3) Don't forget your hat and bring plenty of water!
- 4) You can also expect the Mopane bees to be out in full force!

5 – REPORT BACK

With appreciation to Judy Ross.

ANGLESEA - OF CASUALTIES AND CARKEYS

We are a dignified bunch on the whole, most are mellowed, weathered and mature like a good sherry. What could possibly happen on a perfect day with so much aged wisdom?

The setting was idealic, a camp built into the kopjes, commanding wonderful views of cut hay fields between varying granite outcrops with a seasonal stream for our feathered friends.

Our walk was leisurely, down along the dry stream bed passing Nkoni cattle; then up over a dwala and back in time for lunch. After lunch it was a walk either around the kopje or for those who felt like dassies up over the daunting hill behind the camp. It was a wonderful day with great company. What happened to the casualties? Ahh yes - well let's see - first we had a young lad slam his thumb in the car door, closely followed by same person doing an elegant faint into his friend's arms. Next was a missed footing down the hill by an octogenarian which resulted in bruises and a few scratches (whatever was in her tea?). Stalwart that she is she refused to spoil the day and after a quiet lunch was able to partake of the stroll around the base of the hill. Our third casualty was returning after the stroll and after being warned about rocks hidden under cut grass promptly tripped over one of said rocks into a small thorn bush and had to have 3 very long nasty thorns removed from his fingers (we do know what he had to drink with lunch!). The funniest part of the day was only revealed to us the next day. This being our illustrious chairman; alias "short walk Stephens"; being abandoned at the site without car keys! He was fortunate in having drink and company as his wait for rescue went well past evening into sunset and onto star gaze. But there were greater powers at work - for on his way home he was able in turn to rescue a friend whose vehicle had broken down.

Now who said our outings were uneventful?

Our thanks to Ian Pattulo for his informative talk on the farm and its surrounds and for allowing us to repose upon its tranquil spot (some for longer than others!).

For the next meeting bring ropes, band-aids, tweezers - oh never mind just get MARS and Quicks (or some street kids!).

6 – UN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY

Don't forget our UNEA tree planting programme for 2009!

7 – ECONET TOWER

There has been a response from Econet to our enquiries regarding the cell phone tower. Econet advised that they had sought permission from National Parks to erect the tower, but that no Environmental Impact Assessment had been called for. Once again, the authorities entrusted with safeguarding our heritage are more concerned with commercial advantage than compliance with the law.

8 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

National Parks fees are being increased every Monday. We are unable to advise of the latest fees, but urge members to contact the Office of the Parks Authority on 63646 / 61018 (or Matobo national park 0838-257/258 or 0838-2504).

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

The National Museums and Monuments entry charges to Rhodes Grave and the painted caves are also being increased on a regular basis. Please contact the Natural History Museum on 230045 for confirmation of rates. Non-resident fees remain at US\$10, GBP6, Pula55 or ZAR70 (children half price)

9 – FIRE SEASON

It's that time of year when our country side is put to the torch. Despite various appeals and awareness campaigns there seems little is actually done to control the widespread burning of the veld. Once again, the Authorities seem to be long on words, but short on action! The Parks Authorities in the Matopos have been attending to fire breaks, but still massive fires have devastated both Parks and private land in the central and western parts of the Estate, even threatening the private lodges along the Kezi Rd.

Have we ever had a spring so full of smoke? How many times has the setting sun simply disappeared from view, rather than slip beyond the horizon? How many mornings do you wake to the acrid smell of smoke in the air? Every piece of grassland in Bulawayo appears to have been burnt - even the smallest verges. Vast tracts of the countryside are again blackened - and this year it was not just Zimbabwe. Huge uncontrolled fires have burnt across southern Mozambique, Swaziland and parts of South Africa, giving rise to the dense haze that characterised much of August. If there was ever a national (even regional) environmental disaster it must be the wanton destruction, every year, of our precious countryside. And still no real action from the authorities.

Is it a coincidence that the prevalence in veld fires has increased since the land grab of 2000? Clearly former farm lands are no longer protected by fire breaks or veld management, and the new owners have little incentive to defend "their" properties against fire destruction. But this does not explain the annual fires within the Matobo National Park. Whilst the Park Authorities are now paying better attention to fire control than in the recent past, it would appear that many fires are started by persons who are entering the Park without authorisation. The poachers, (not just of wildlife but of honey, timber and grassland), the herd boys, the trespassers. All groups of people that Parks should be taking action against – but appear to be reluctant to uphold the law. The destruction of the Park fence, the general grazing of cattle within the Park, and the failure of the Parks Authorities to take any form of meaningful action, has left the area largely unprotected, and so vulnerable to the annual fires. A new approach is required by the Parks Authorities as the current system is simply not working.

NATIONAL FIRE WEEK

With acknowledgment to Togarasei Fakarayi (Birdlife Zimbabwe; Conservation)

Uncontrolled veldt fires are a threat to humans, birds and biodiversity. The fires are mainly caused by humans who misuse fire and other flammable substances. They pose very negative impacts to the environment such as destruction of habitats, loss of life, disrupting functioning of the ecosystem and destroying property. The uncontrolled fires are a problem to biodiversity especially during the winter season and need an urgent national response. It is against this background that the Ministry of the Environment and Tourism invited various environmental stakeholders to a press conference for the National Fire Week: 11-17 May 2008. This was held on the 14th of May 2008 at the Ministry's Main Offices in Harare. The participants for this event include BirdLife Zimbabwe, Environment Africa,

Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Forest Commission, Environmental Management Agency, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, Timber Producers Federation just to name a few.

The acting Minister of Environment and Tourism Mrs F Buka was the guest of Honour. She urged all stakeholders to raise public awareness on the proper handling of fire and other flammable substances to avoid uncontrolled veldt fires during this winter season. The ministry has called for a zero tolerance to veldt fires. It is everyone's responsibility to prevent, control and put out veldt fires. Stakeholders were encouraged to take a lead and work together with the ministry and various communities in a holistic manner on preventing uncontrolled fires so as to save our biodiversity and the environment as a whole. Environmental organizations and stakeholders were also urged to come together and commemorate other national environmental events ahead as this will help to share ideas, experiences and spread information to all corners of the country.

10 – MOUNTAIN BIKE CYCLING

The Zimbabwe Cycling Federation staged the third stage of their National Mountain Bike series around Mwazi in the eastern Matopos on 7th June this year. The race started and finished at the Matopo Mission, with competitors doing three circuits. Members of the Matopos Mission Secondary School volunteered to act as guides and markers around the course - which worked well unless nature called, or a drink was required, when the guide would simply abandon the post. As a result, one or two riders went astray - but all said the event was a success, with the route proving to be the most challenging for some years. Further MTB cycling events are lined up for the remainder of the year, including the Cross 2 Cross race (Inungu to Mquilembegwe) and a two-day stage race across the Hills in mid-October.

11 – WORLD HERITAGE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

It was reported in the *Sunday Mail*, July 27 2008, that Zimbabwe has been elected to a 24-member Intergovernmental Committee that will superintend the implementation of the Unesco Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Was it just coincidence that this report came out at the same time as our last newsletter, in which we commented upon the effectiveness of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Committee? Certainly, if Zimbabwe's record on the ground is anything to go by, then this UNESCO Committee will not achieve much! On the other hand, maybe this is the time to make UNESCO aware of our local problems and work towards the establishment of a new Matobo Management Committee.

In this regard, UNESCO Zimbabwe Commission, National Parks and National Museums held a preliminary meeting to review the Management Committee on 26th September. We hope that something positive will come of this latest development.

12 – CALENDAR 2008

Herewith the Calendar for the last quarter of 2008

19 October	Whitewaters	Mr Paul Hubbard
16 November	Quiet Waters	We are invited to join WEZ in their annual picnic to Falcon's Quiet Waters
30 November	Steadfast Park	MCS AGM
06 December	Venue tba	Birdlife Matabeleland AGM

Your committee has made plans for the quarterly field trips in 2009. If you have any special requests or proposals, please forward them to the Chairman or Secretary as soon as possible.

13 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2008

Our annual subscriptions were due on the 31st July. Your committee has finally given up trying to track inflation and so we have "gone with the flow" and adopted a foreign based subscription. Payment can be made in Zimbabwe Dollar equivalent on the date of payment, or acceptable currency. Corporate members will be billed in Zimbabwe Dollars. For the record, the subs at 31 July were

FAMILY / INDIVIDUAL	R 15
SPECIAL / PENSION	R 5
CORPORATE	R 150

Again, any member who needs a little time should contact the Chairman. Members do make extra donations to assist those in need, and we all understand the problems faced by so many in our society today.

14 – WHERE HAVE ALL THE ANIMALS GONE?

This article appeared in our last Newsletter. Here is a copy of a similar article.

(As reported by the ZIMBABWE CONSERVATION TASK FORCE, 13th August 2008)

NATIONAL PARKS AUTHORIZE SHOOTING OF ELEPHANTS

In the past week, we have received numerous very disturbing reports from tourists and locals alike regarding the wholesale killing of wildlife, in particular, elephants.

According to sources, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management has embarked on an "Elephant Population Management Programme" and this year, around 1800 elephants have already been shot in Hwange National Park alone. Furthermore, they plan on shooting another 1000. National Parks have allegedly contracted South African hunters to shoot the elephants.

It is of great concern that not only are elephant bulls being shot, but cows as well, leaving orphaned calves behind. We have also been informed that they intend to capture the orphans to be domesticated for elephant rides. Elephants with big tusks are being especially targeted.

According to our sources, the tusks and skins have not been sent to Central Stores so many people are wondering what has happened to them. We have the names of some of the unscrupulous hunters and Safari Companies who are assisting in the decimation of the wildlife we have left here.

National Parks have apparently been issuing permits to clients to shoot other animals for rations as well - not only in Hwange National Park, but also in other National Park areas around the country. In addition to elephants, the ration animals include buffalo, lion, kudu and impala.

A hunt was conducted in Chizarira last month where 2 buffalo were shot. Chizarira is not a designated hunting area. The hunt was conducted by war veterans and 2 South African hunters, with the approval of a National Parks official. On another occasion, an elephant with 90-pound tusks was shot by a South African hunter in the same park but first prize goes to a hunter known as "The London Hunter" who has shot 47 elephants in Chizarira alone.

Before the March elections, numerous animals were shot for meat to encourage the hungry people to attend the ZANU PF political rallies and before the June run-off elections, more animals were shot for the same reason. Since the June election, the ruling party has held countless victory celebrations country-wide and animals have been shot for these celebrations as well. We have now just had our Heroes Day commemorations and National Parks donated 7 elephants and 7 buffalo to Mashonaland Central Province for food at the celebrations.

Gun shots are heard regularly in Kariba and last Saturday, a fresh elephant carcass was found about 800 metres from the crocodile farm. The meat, tusks and skin had been removed.

Reports have been received of wire snares hanging neatly from hooks on the trees around the National Parks living quarters at Nyanyana Camp in Kariba and a seemingly constant supply of fresh meat hanging from wires. A couple of years ago, Kariba was teeming with impala, wart hog, waterbuck etc. but now, it is very rare to see any of the smaller plains game there. Impala, which has always been abundant all over Zimbabwe is almost non-existent in Kariba today.

It is heart breaking that the wildlife is paying the biggest price of all in the economic collapse of this country. The wild animals are the best tourist attraction Zimbabwe has to offer and we sincerely hope the authorities will come to their senses and realize that before it is all gone.

15 – SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Mr Lovemore Moyo was elected on 25th August as the Speaker in the House of Assembly. Mr Moyo had been elected in March as the Member of Parliament for Matobo Constituency - an area which covers much of the Matobo World Heritage Site.

The Umzingwane MP, Mrs Nomalanga Khumalo was elected Deputy Speaker of Parliament. The Umzingwane Constituency includes the eastern portion of the Matobo World Heritage Site.

This is certainly an unusual, if interesting position, in that both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker come from neighbouring Constituencies and both include the Matobo World Heritage Site. Is this one more case of the "old hills" making a contribution to the culture of our country?

Your Society will be writing to both distinguished persons to see if their Offices can be used for the better management of the Matobo World Heritage Site and the Matobo Hills in general.

16 - ZAMBEZI SOCIETY AND LEOPARDS

Zamsoc has recently updated the leopard website with an atlas map for determining leopard distribution at the national level as well as with other interesting information and field data.

All members are encouraged to submit sightings of leopards via the website, or via the MCS. Online submissions will automatically come to Dr Purchase but if you would like to submit independently of the internet, please send it to her via email - leopard@zamsoc.org.

Members are also encouraged to forward this request for information to any people they know who might have seen leopard in the last five years.

Zamsoc will update the atlas map on the website every month and members are encouraged to regularly check the website.

Many Thanks for Your Assistance.

*Dr Gianetta (Netty) Purchase
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Zimbabwe National Leopard Programme
The Zambezi Society
PO Box FM 441
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Zimbabwe*

17 – WEZ MATOBO NP PROJECT

Members of the WEZ Matabeleland Committee have held meetings with the Acting Regional Manager, Matabeleland South, and the Warden, Matobo National Park, on efforts to assist the Park. Similar initiatives in Hwange National Park have proven to be mutually beneficial, and the MCS will be contributing to the WEZ initiative.

The preliminary meeting identified a whole range of projects, many of which if acted upon, will see an improvement in the service standards within the Park. Re-fencing of the Park has also been identified. There may be members who can offer their time in the repair of pumps, motors and even vehicles, with WEZ supplying parts and spares. If any member can assist - or would like to make contributions - please contact the Chairman.

18 – RAINFALL

The first rains of the new season are yet to fall, but the long range forecast suggests that we can expect a “normal” season. If this proves to be true, then we can expect to see all the Matopos dams spilling this year, and look forward to the bounty that a good rainy season brings. It will help to heal the damage done by the fires this past spring!

19 – TRIVIA

This newsletter, our 63rd, is the largest yet produced by the Society – a full six pages! This is partly due to contributions made by members, so please continue to send in your news and items of interest!

It is also the 60th newsletter produced by the current Editor.

20 – CONDOLENCES

We extend our sympathy to Peter Johnstone on the loss of Carol, who passed away after a hard-fought battle with cancer. Peter and Carol were regular attendees at our outings, and Carol was a strong supporter of the Society. She will be missed by the MCS and her many friends.

CONCLUSION

Don't forget the AGM on 30 November at Steadfast Park.

See you there!