

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 64 / DECEMBER 2008

1 – NEW COMMITTEE

The Annual General Meeting saw the election of a new committee;

Chairman	Iain Sheasby
Vice-Chairman	Gavin Stephens
Treasurer	Barbara Muchechetere
Secretary	Jean Whiley
Members	Shelagh Adams, Paul Hubbard, Norman Scott.

Whilst we thank the new committee members for volunteering their time, we also thank those of the last committee who were not available for re-election; our Secretary for the past two years, Carolyn McDowall, and members Judy Ross, Roy Stephens and Mike Philips. Our outgoing Chairman, Gavin Stephens, had served the maximum term of five consecutive years, and is replaced by former chairman Iain Sheasby.

2 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Around twenty members gathered at Stedfast Park for the AGM. However, before the formal proceedings began, John Bowman took the party on a tour of the Camp. Obviously, the walk about was of much interest, as morning tea, and the following meeting, were delayed by an hour! Stedfast Park, with freshly cut grass, looked in superb condition, whilst the historic 1897 first Bulawayo Methodist Church provided much interest. Apart from describing Stedfast Park and its history, John spoke about the Boys Brigade and its activities, and the role that Stedfast Park played. He also outlined the current problems faced at the Park.

The AGM proceeded with much informal debate amongst members, and this was followed by lunch. In the afternoon those still keen to walk set off down the Sandy Spruit to an attractive waterfall site - there was water in the pools, but the stream was not flowing. It would be quite spectacular when the stream comes down in flood!

The day was a delight, only spoilt by three changes to National Park entry fees in the space of five days, and the resulting confusion!

3 – BLACK RHINO UPDATE

The Society has received confirmation from the Dept of National Parks regarding the poaching of rhino in the Matobo National Park earlier in the year.

During early October yet another rhino was shot bringing the tally to three in about as many months. This is shocking on its own, but when one recalls that no rhinos have been poached since the 1950's when they were introduced into the hills, and then three are lost in a matter of months, then clearly we face a major challenge.

4 – UN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY

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

5 – AMATEUR ACHAEOLOGISTS

The MCS received the following request from a member.

PLEASE insist that if people do find artefacts at any archaeological sites (caves, battle sites etc) that they LEAVE them in place. Already we can see artefacts have been pocketed over the years and this deprives future generations of the chance of seeing material. What happens so often is that they go

home and then are later thrown away as rubbish! Apart from being illegal, the removal of artefacts destroys critical evidence for future studies.

7 - NEXT EVENT

Date 25th January 2009
Venue Lumane Falls
Meet 8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Ascot Car Park
Travel All vehicles, subject to weather
Details Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

This is a fairly long drive, but very much worth the effort! We hope to picnic in the vicinity of the falls, but if the river prevents us from doing so, then a walk will be required. For the adventurous, bring your costumes! We hope to have a talk on Matopos Ichthyology.

8 – REPORT BACK

(With appreciation to Judy Ross.)

Whitewaters Day

It was an indecisive day - so, over dress or under dress? That was the question.

Eleven vehicles trekked out to Matobo Game Park and checked in and paid the necessary entrance fees. Of the group, several were new faces which always add interest. We hope they have not been put off and will join us again!

A short chat was given by Gavin about the murder of Lobengula's sister, whose bones lie within the rocks next to the Game Park Gate, and then onto our final destination, just within the National Park. As is our want, sustenance was had and then the scramble about the rocks in search of paintings and grain bins began.

For this expedition, we were led by the archaeologist of note - one Paul Hubbard - who for the rest of the day waffled on delightfully about how and who and why these grain bins are so important (to him anyway). He expanded on theories purported by the two sides and revealed he wasn't convinced by either side but seldom gave his own theories leaving each of us musing over our own.

The October heat was probably the greatest challenge, and the Mopane trees under which we picnicked provided little relief. But we are a tough lot, and through parched, survived the day!

The walks after lunch to wondrous paintings were secured by GPS routes of 400m to 700m (GS you could learn something from this!). It was an incredible day; one was amazed at the density of bins, smelts and paintings in such a relatively small area and to think we only scratched the surface! Well, I am one for more of these and thank you Paul for your enthusiasm and knowledge.

9 – SOUTHERN GROUND HORNBILL SURVEY

This is a unique and valuable survey whose report will, for the first time, document the fact that Southern Ground Hornbills nest and roost in granite as an alternative to trees. It has also been demonstrated that this area provides a safe haven where the species appears to be thriving and is revered and unharmed by the community.

A preliminary report of the findings will be produced at the end of this year, indicating how many Hornbills have been sighted forming how many groups, where nest and roost sites have been found, and hopefully breeding details.

The survey team have put out an appeal for boxes, plastic containers, paper, second-hand clothes, books, magazines, etc. for the schools. Conservation club members in 28 of these schools are acting as observers for the survey and more are expected to be drawn in next year. Ring Elspeth Parry on 231202 to arrange collection and/or delivery. Your assistance will be invaluable and much appreciated.

10 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

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). Prices change without notice!

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 San painted caves are also being increased on a regular basis. Please contact the Natural History Museum on for confirmation of rates. Non-resident fees remain at US\$10, GBP6, Pula55 or ZAR70 (children half price)

11 – A NEW ZIMBABWE

In the last newsletter we dared to hope for a new Zimbabwe - alas our hopes were in vain! Along with all Zimbabweans we wait for a political settlement, and hope that in the interim period we don't lose what little is left of our much-neglected Heritage.

12 – RAINFALL

Whilst the rains were late this year, falls in the Matopos have been to date on average, and the hills, as at 22 December had recorded around 200mm.

13 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2008

Have you paid your subs due last July?

FAMILY / INDIVIDUAL R 15

SPECIAL / PENSION R 5

CORPORATE R 150

New subs were agreed at the AGM and these will be advised in due course. There will be no January fees.

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 heartbreaking 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 - WHERE HAVE ALL THE ANIMALS GONE?

The article below follows a theme that was introduced in our Newsletters 62 and 63.

(As reported by the THE ZIMBABWEAN, 25th September 2008, by Wilf Mbanga)

Poachers walk free as assault on Zimbabwe rhinos escalates - WWF

Harare, Zimbabwe - A breakdown in law enforcement against rhino poaching and horn smuggling in Zimbabwe is threatening the success of more than a decade's work bringing rhino populations back up to healthy levels. Typical of the problem is the recent release of a gang of four Zimbabwean rhino poachers who admitted to killing 18 rhinos in five different areas of central Zimbabwe, including a semi-tame group of black rhinos slaughtered in their pens at Imire Safari Ranch.

The poachers, also alleged to have been involved in a number of armed robberies and arrested with several illegal firearms, were initially denied bail and it was reported that the four had received lengthy jail sentences. However, WWF was recently informed by authorities that the poachers were subsequently granted bail, were freed and immediately absconded.

Rhino poaching has been increasing throughout Zimbabwe including in the Lowveld Conservancies in southern Zimbabwe, home to three-quarters of the country's surviving rhinos and host to a rhino conservation project involving WWF, the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority of Zimbabwe, the private sector and several other conservation agencies including the International Rhino Foundation.

Since January 2000, approximately 70 rhinos have been killed in the Lowveld conservancies, and the losses are now rapidly mounting," said Raoul du Toit, Lowveld rhino conservation project manager for the Lowveld Conservancies. "About 20 rhinos were shot in the Lowveld during 2008, which points to how this problem is escalating. Prior to 2000, for a period of seven years, there was no rhino poaching whatsoever."

When the poaching first flared up, it was linked to the unplanned occupations of sections of the Lowveld Conservancies by subsistence farmers and primarily involved rhinos getting caught in wire snares that were set out to catch wildlife for meat consumption. Now the poaching has reached commercial levels, with poachers not only killing rhinos in snares but also shooting them for their horns, without taking the meat.

"WWF and other non-government organisations involved in rhino conservation maintain very constructive relations with the Zimbabwean wildlife authorities," says du Toit, "But there is growing frustration over Zimbabwe's poor performance in law enforcement for rhino crimes, which inevitably gives rise to concerns about corruption." Although a few poachers from Zambia have been arrested and convicted after cross-border raids into National Parks in northern Zimbabwe, not a single Zimbabwean poacher has been convicted during the current wave of internal rhino poaching. The few Zimbabwean poachers arrested, have subsequently been released on bail, (equivalent to a few American cents), and have then absconded, or have evaded prosecution in the courts.

"The lack of enforcement and increased poaching pressure in Zimbabwe now threaten to reverse the excellent trends in rhino populations of recent years," said Dr Susan Lieberman, Director of WWF-International's Species Programme. "WWF calls on the authorities in Zimbabwe to take much stronger action against the internal poaching networks or the recent progress made in rhino conservation in Zimbabwe will be lost."

Tom Milliken, the Regional Director of TRAFFIC's programme in east and southern Africa, warns: "In terms of the CITES treaty on wildlife trade, Zimbabwe is now in the spotlight and an international task force will be visiting shortly to investigate its performance in rhino conservation. "TRAFFIC has sponsored initiatives to improve the country's law enforcement capabilities, but sadly most investigations appear to have collapsed without successful prosecutions."

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