

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 65 / FEBRUARY 2009

1 – A NEW ZIMBABWE

Finally in mid-February, a new Government of National Unity came into existence. Talk about the poisoned chalice! However, this brings real hope that things in Zimbabwe might finally turn around for the better. Dare we hope?

Our National Heritage has been decimated during the past few years, with a massive surge in the last 18 months. Valuable exhibits and artefacts have been stolen from our Museums; records from National Archives can be bought in the flea markets of Harare, whilst the level of poaching in our Parks has never been this bad. Not since the eighties, have we lost so many rhino, and zebra populations have been all but eliminated in Matabeleland South. With salaries so poor, there is a strong suggestion that it is the very keepers who are responsible for the destruction. How long will it take for the wildlife and vegetation to recover? Our cultural artefacts will sadly be lost forever. And it's not just our heritage – it's the enormous wealth that we had in our people that has been lost. Museums and Parks are running on skeleton crews, with their best resources working abroad. The damage is enormous, and so much of value has been lost. But now we have a chance to start again, build anew, and look forward to a brighter future.

This newsletter carries a mixture of stories, reflecting the changing environment in which we now find ourselves. Some positive and hopeful, some sad and depressing. Within the MCS we look forward to the new challenges in the hope that sound policies will emerge for the management of our Parks and Museums, ever mindful that such places are not just to preserve our heritage, but should also serve as places of recreation and learning, accessible to all Zimbabweans.

2 – APPRECIATION

At our last AGM, our faithful treasurer, Barbara Muchechetere, agreed to serve once more. However, early in 2009, Barbara asked if she could step down to manage her personal affairs. After serving the Society loyally for ten years, Barbara certainly earned a break. We will miss her faithful record keeping, her almost perfect attendance record at committee meetings, and her contributions. The Chairman, and members, extend their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Barbara, but look forward to her continued attendance at our events!

3 – RAINFALL

The Matopos has enjoyed lovely rains this season. Despite starting a little late, the hills enjoyed spells of up to ten days at a time with daily precipitation. There were generally fair falls, allowing the veldt to recover from the dry period. Then in early February some significant storms broke over the area, almost doubling the year-to-date readings in a single week, and sending floods down all the rivers. The heaviest falls were recorded at 103mm in a single night of rain, with some as heavy as 40mm in 15 minutes! As at 22 February the eastern Matopos had recorded 870mm whilst the western hills had recorded around 680mm. Bulawayo had recorded 690mm at that date. Good rains fell again at the end of February, but these have not been included in the numbers above.

For interest, the highest total for last season was 1,004mm in the eastern Matopos.

4 – PARK REFURBISHMENT

The National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority is upgrading its hospitality facilities countrywide in a move aimed at improving service delivery during the festive season, Director General Morris Mutsambiwa said. "We are currently servicing all the tourist facilities in all game reserves, with the ones at Victoria Falls at an advanced stage," he said – *Herald*, Thursday December 25

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	22 March 2009
Venue	Tuli Gorge Falls
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Hotel
Travel	Trucks preferred, subject to weather
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We will travel out on the Old Gwanda Rd (possibly via Fort Usher) - your favourite road - and then walk to the falls themselves. The Uglina River tumbles down the eastern side of the Tuli Gorge creating the third largest Falls in the Matopos. Swimming is at your own risk. This part of the Matopos has enjoyed good rain this year, so there will be plenty of water!

Mr Jon Kaypenne will be joining us to talk about ecology. This promises to be interesting.

6 – REPORT BACK

(With appreciation to Judy Ross.)

0825 - Sunday Morning 25th January Ascot Shopping Centre

Humm odd they are not usually this late - anyone seen our leader? 0835 - and ??? 0845 hey look guys here they come! Ok what is your excuse? Can you believe it they went to Churchill Arms!!! One may write the newsletter but one may not read it? Their excuse was they thought there might be folks waiting there!! After much leg-pulling we set off - the weather in its usual way was uncertain but from experience we realised that it would be totally different 50ks down the road. After the main road turn off there was an unscheduled detour along footpaths to circumvent 2 x 11KVA power lines which had decided they needed a rest and were languishing on the ground with their cables draped over the road. The rest of the road was like it usually is; the river crossings were running and children played and cattle drank. Lumene Falls were thunderous and the sides of the river showed signs of high water. The rock pools were suddenly a vision of colour as various bodies of all ages donned swim suits and had a wonderful time. There are none more sure footed as old goats and with no insult intended there were a couple of our more senior members who climbed beyond the pools to the upper reaches of the falls.

The walk to the falls was a Mycologist and a Cryptogamologist delight (take that for a mouthful! for those of us not versed in scientific jargon that's Mushrooms and Mosses) - there were yellow, orange, red, brown, white, pink, beige mushrooms shaped with cups, caps, plates, balls and cones. Smooth skinned, ragged edged, spotted, folded and frilly. Much discussion about them - the edible and poisonous but I did notice that no one ventured to try any.

There was moss in profusion of all shapes and colours from lime green to grey some like miniature forests, some like hair others like bark on a tree - much less discussion on these - in fact I don't recall anyone mentioning them at all - guess the mushrooms took the stage. The very beautiful *Streptocarpus eylesii* showed its delightful trumpets under a rock face - first time many of us had seen them, and one of the most rare and special plants of the Matobo Hills.

Once lunch was over John Minshull chatted about the ecology of the area and the nutrient levels of the rivers and streams and what lived in them. How the fish survived the droughts by burrowing under the sand and remaining there as much of the water is deep seated and keeps the fish moist. John pointed out that the brown foam we often see is actually loaded with nutrients and if you are desperate, you could eat it (yes John after you- thankyou). People remarked that when vleis flooded they had seen fish swimming against the flow - John said they were mainly barbell and provided food for birds, crabs and small carnivores.

The day wound down with folks drifting back to "stress-town" most more relaxed. and glad to have spent a few happy hours in the sun amongst good company. The sunset was spectacular lingering on for more than 20mins. Thanks to John Minshull and the committee, we look forward to the next outing.

7 – APPEAL

The MCS has assisted with the establishment of a Conservation Club at the Matopos Mission. They are appealing for copies of any relevant magazines, such as National Geographic, or any books that cover the environment, wildlife, birdlife etc. If any members are cleaning out their cupboards and need to find a good cause, then we would be happy to take them off your hands and donate them to the Matopo Mission.

A recent report from the Ground Hornbill Survey indicates that this is probably the only school still open and functioning in the whole eastern Matopos!

8 - NATIONAL PARKS FEES

Finally National Parks can quote their fees in a stable currency. We trust that there will be no further hikes in the fees! Payment can be made in US\$ or ZAR (presently at a rate of 1:10).

Entry \$3 Non-resident US\$15 (\$12 regional) Children under 12 half price

Vehicle \$2 Non-resident US \$5

Eagle \$64 Regional US\$64 Tourist US\$128 per lodge per night (4 persons)

Lodge \$55 Regional US\$55 Tourist US\$110 per lodge per night (4 persons)

Chalet \$37 Regional US\$37 Tourist US\$73 per lodge per night (2 persons)

Camping \$10 Regional US\$10 Tourist US\$10 per person per night

The National Museums and Monuments entry charges to Rhodes Grave and the San painted caves are also now set in US\$. Local Adult US\$2, and US\$1 children. Payment can be made in US\$ or ZAR.

Non-resident fees remain at US\$10, GBP6, Pula55 or ZAR70 (children half price)

Of some concern to us, once again, is the impact of the cumulative fee, on visitors to the Matopos. As a result, the Matopos is the most expensive place to visit in Zimbabwe. Whilst we will take this matter up with the new authorities, one wonders if it will ever get resolved!

We also note that entry fees to Nyanga National Park are 30% less than those of the Matopos. Once again we will ask the question why?

9 – POACHING UPDATE

The National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority has intensified anti-poaching activities following an increase in poaching in the country, Director General Morris Mutsambiwa said, noting the figures picked up following the opening of international ivory market in the last quarter of the year. "Poaching of the rhino is very bad at the moment ... Zimbabwe has also seen an increase in the poaching of the Zebra as its skin has suddenly become attractive to international buyers." Mutsambiwa said the authority had arrested a number of poachers and recovered some horns and tusks – *Herald*, Saturday December 27.

The Society has not received any more information from the Dept of National Parks regarding the poaching of rhino in the Matobo National Park in 2008.

10 – OUR WILDLIFE

An extract from the SAVE FOUNDATION Newsletter November 2008

Zimbabwe is unbelievably beautiful yet the rape and pillage of the farms and its people is confronting. Although the experience of sighting elephants and lions, and yes, black rhinos and approaching them within metres was exhilarating, it also highlighted the futility and trading of poaching these magnificent creatures. The futility is that Zimbabwe is home to some of Africa's most prolific and stunning wildlife yet the Government and its wildlife officers do not value it. Without abundant and unique wildlife, Zimbabwe will struggle to attract tourists and foreign currency that Zimbabwe so desperately needs. It is a tragedy that animals are being poached on the one hand for ill gotten gains based on myths about the medicinal properties of rhino horn, for instance, or their worth as adornments as dagger handles in Yemen: and equally tragic because much of the poaching is out of desperation of local Zimbabwe people as they struggle with starvation in a country which once exported food.

Black (and white) rhinos have been hunted to virtual extinction, but they are making a comeback. Unlike zoo programs, where off spring are carefully nurtured, the remaining black rhinos of Zimbabwe run the gauntlet of poaching and intrusion into their habitat (and in the case of elephants and lions licensed game hunting). The preservation of rhinos is very much a case of two steps forward and one step back – the brave and concerted efforts of the committed few farmers and conservationists are often snuffed out by the senseless slaughter of these mighty beasts and local indifference of their plight.

11– UN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY

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

12 – CALENDAR

For your long-term planning:

22 March 2009 Tuli Gorge waterfalls; Topic - Ecology

06 June 2009 World Environment Day, Clean-Up at NP Picnic Sites

21 June 2009 venue to be advised; Topic - Historic

20 September 2009 Fort Mangwe; Topic – Historic

29 November 2009 Gordon Park; Topic – AGM, and Zimbabwe Scouting Centenary

Other dates of interest:

- 02 February World Wetlands Day
- 22 March World Water Day
- 23 March World Meteorological Day
- 05 June World Environment Day
- 27 September World Tourism Day
- 06 October World Habitat Day

Your committee is looking into some additional outings that will be more specific to a particular topic, and run in conjunction with other societies. There is also the possibility of arranging specific lectures on certain topics, again in conjunction with other Societies. A further option involves some activities for the young (at heart and in age!) such as extended walks or hikes in the Matopos. Let us know what you the member would like to do.

19 March 2009 WEZ Evening talk

Gavin Stephens will be doing a presentation on "Matopos, with a difference" at the monthly WEZ talk, 7:00pm for 7; 30pm at Matopos Lion's Club, off Moray Rd, off 23rd Ave. All MCS members welcome.

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 – THOSE TERRIBLE TINS

For most of Zimbabwe's history, soft drinks were sold in refundable glass bottles. The result was that the country had very little rubbish, and many visitors remarked on how clean our country was. Even plastic packets had a value, and were rarely seen thrown away.

The collapse of our local beverage industry has seen the importation of canned drinks. The tin cans have no recycle value at this time, and so, they simply get tossed! All over the countryside, tins are piling up.

In time of course, when the sale of cans reaches a suitable level, it will become viable to recycle the cans, and so they will then attract a value. If we are like our neighbours, then in a period of a few months the cans will be collected up, and sold to the recycling plant, and we will clean our countryside. Until then we can only do our best to keep our hills clean, and encourage residents and visitors alike to dispose of their tins in an appropriate manner. Will we see you at our Park clean-up day in June to help there?