

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 66 / MAY 2009

1 – WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY / MATOPOS CLEAN UP

World Environment Day is celebrated on 5th June, and to mark the day, the MCS will be travelling to the Matobo National Park on Saturday 6th June to carry out a “clean up” day at the various picnic sites. Entry to the National Park will be free, and members will meet at the Churchill Arms at 8:30am. Bring your packed lunch, drinks and hat. We also ask if members can bring their own protective clothing, equipment and bin bags! This is a chance for us to do something constructive, and to show that we do care! Hope to see you all there on Saturday 6th June!

2 – ACCIDENT AT DIANA’S POOL

The just past rainy season saw all the rivers and waterfalls of the Matopos flowing strongly throughout the summer period. Various groups and individuals made the most of this period (including the MCS with its visits to both Lumane and Tuli Gorge falls). Unfortunately, we learnt in February that a party visiting Diana’s Pool met with a serious accident, when two members slipped and fell just below the pool, crashing into the rocks below. We understand that one of the victims suffered broken legs. This story is related just as a reminder to our members to exercise caution when visiting the waterfalls of the Matopos as deaths and accidents occur almost annually.

3 – RAINFALL

The rainy season has come to an end - and records show that the Matopos enjoyed one of its better seasons – though interestingly not quite as good as last year. As at time of writing the eastern Matopos had recorded 994mm whilst the western hills had recorded around 750mm. Bulawayo had recorded 921mm.

4 – BOOK RAFFLE

A year ago, the Society was presented with two generous donations of books; Albizia Southern Africa by Martinus Steyn (donated by Brian Kalshoven) and Legacy on the Rocks by Elspeth Parry (donated and signed by the author) At the time, the Society could only raffle these books for Zimbabwe Dollars, and in the environment, this was tantamount to giving the books away, with no benefit to the society. Now that forex is legal, your committee has arranged that the books be raffled and this is being organised. The raffle sheets will become available shortly, and the draw will take place at the AGM in November. The proceeds will go towards the establishment of a suitable web-site.

5 - MEMBERS COMMENT FROM FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER

Comment received following the February Newsletter. With the end of the rains, we believe that the condition of the roads has improved.

“FYI and for your MCS members, the roads in the Whovi side of the Park are deteriorating more and more rapidly every week, with all the rain and in many places are impassable in a sedan and some parts need low range as well. Maleme and Mpopoma are still spilling and Chitampa dam is full. The grass is taller than the Mazda twin cab roof and game viewing is very limited!”

6 – CALENDAR

For your long-term planning;

21 June 2009	Cyrene Mission and Railway terminus;	Topic - Historic
20 September 2009	Fort Mangwe;	Topic – Historic
29 November 2009	Gordon Park;	Topic – AGM, and Zimbabwe Scouting Centenary

7 - NEXT EVENT

Date	21 June 2009
Venue	Cyrene Mission and the Railway terminus
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Hotel
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We will be accompanied by Rob Burrett who will give us a discussion on the role of Cyrene Mission, the missionaries and their involvement with the Matopos. In the afternoon we hope to travel to the Matopos Railway Terminus where Rob will share his knowledge of the site. This promises to be an interesting outing.

8 – REPORT BACK

Members met at the Churchill Arms on a lovely summer's morning, and the convoy wound its way out along the Old Gwanda Rd, missing potholes and avoiding the thickest mud! After turning down the Sotcha Rd, the party stopped to admire the balancing rock, and then the Sotcha Dam which was spilling across its arched wall. Then the convoy left the road, and following their leader, turned down donkey cart tracks, crossed dwalas and wound their way down. There was a challenging river crossing – but all the vehicles made it, and then a temporary delay as one vehicle got pulled across a soggy vlei. The parking was in a field recently harvested, and so after the customary cup of tea the team was let loose on the river! The group split into various teams based on age, fitness or enthusiasm and spent the morning up and down the river and waterfall. The weather was terrific, the river in good flow, and the scenery wonderful. Some members took to swimming in the pools and rapids. Only a small handful made it right the way to the bottom of the Tuli Gorge, where the waterfall tumbles down across a wide expanse of dwala. Of course, the further one climbed down, the more one had to climb back to return to the cars, so the 1:30pm rendezvous was slightly delayed!

The Convoy wound back out of the valley and across to Camp Dwala, where everyone fell on their lunch.

After lunch Jon Kaypenne spoke to the membership on the Matopos Ecology – a fascinating talk that was enjoyed by all. Late afternoon saw the weary members return home.

9 – PRESS STORY

Sacred Zimbabwe Game Park falls prey to vandals, neglect

MATOPOS NATIONAL PARK, Zimbabwe, May 27 (AFP, Zimbabwe Independent, Mail & Guardian)

Ancient Bushman art peels off rock surfaces and endangered rhinos wander through derelict fences as neglect threatens to rob Zimbabwe's Matopos game park of its world heritage status. Shillah Nyakudzi, wildlife manager of the UNESCO site, cannot suppress her dejection as she points out a gap in the boundary fence between the Matopos National Park and a neighbouring village. "Not only is the boundary fence being stolen, but ancient paintings are not spared either by lack of care and maintenance," Nyakudzi, area manager for the 435 square kilometre (168 square mile) park, said. "Matopos has now become porous as people are stealing the fence which is supposed to provide a boundary."

The mystical Matopos Hills is a revered site where the Shona and Ndebele, Zimbabwe's two main ethnic groups, have long held religious rituals amid imposing ancient granite rock formations. The San Bushmen also found their home among the precariously balancing boulders and lifelike rock formations weathered by two billion years of erosion, leaving some of the best rock art in Africa. Zimbabwe's famous settler leader Cecil John Rhodes chose the silent grandeur of the park as his final resting place. It is rhino country, home to the endangered black and white rhino, while some 200 rare black eagles make their home in the craggy rock outcrops. However, government neglect due to an ongoing economic and political crisis, community and cattle encroachment, staff shortages, dwindling tourist numbers and a lack of funds have hamstrung the national park. "The rock paintings are fast deteriorating, they are peeling off. There is need to preserve these otherwise we will lose that world heritage status," said Nyakudzi. Bits of fence are stolen for scrap metal, and cattle from neighbouring villages have wandered into the park for grazing. Nyakudzi said some black and white rhinos "strayed 25 kilometres after finding their way out through the broken fence. Last year we lost one black rhino outside the park while two died inside the park because of the fencing problem," the parks manager said. A new security fence around Matopos -- home to 17 black rhinos and 45 white -- will cost eight

million dollars, she says, bemoaning the lack of funding from both UNESCO and other aid organisations. "Although we were listed as a UNESCO heritage site in 2003 there is nothing we are getting from UNESCO," Nyakudzi said. The area, listed as an intensified protection zone, has only 32 game rangers, less than half the number needed. "In a proper environment, a ranger must cover one to 10 kilometres yet right now a ranger is covering 32 kilometres." The creation of a government of national unity between long-time President Robert Mugabe and his rival Morgan Tsvangirai has instilled hope that the country's wildlife conservation will get some much-needed attention. "Now that things have changed politically, I think that things will improve," said Nyakudzi. Environment minister Francis Nhema said the government planned to raise money to repair the vandalised fence. "We are trying to address the problem of fencing," Nhema told AFP. "The major problem we have is that locals always want to herd their animals inside the park as they are saying they have run out of grazing land. We just have to raise monies on our own, because organisations like UNESCO are just voluntary organisation; they just provide funds when they have some." He said the shortage was being addressed, adding that government had ordered that people who had abandoned their parks jobs due to low pay be re-employed provided they do not have any criminal record. –AFP

COMMENT

The story quoted above has been given wide coverage in the local and regional press. However, the MCS would like to note some corrections:

- A. The article paints a dire picture of the Matopos National Park, but much the same can be expressed on any of the Parks in Zimbabwe today. In many areas the Matopos is slightly better off!
- B. The rock paintings are contained on surfaces that are subject to natural erosion. Yes, in time they will all disappear as the process continues to its logical conclusion. But this will not be in our life time and is not quite as dramatic as the article above describes it. What can occur in our lifetime and needs to be addressed are fires within rock art sites, destruction of forests at the mouths of caves, unauthorised excavation and the damage inflicted by visitors such as graffiti and scratching. If steps are not taken to protect this heritage, then indeed the Matopos could be listed as endangered – the first step towards losing its World Heritage Status.
- C. UNESCO will not contribute to the upkeep of the National Park. Firstly, the National Park is not essential to the World Heritage Status, (the World Heritage Site is approximately 3,000 square kilometres whilst the park is only 435 square kilometres) and secondly, it is very clear in the World Heritage Convention (signed by the Government of Zimbabwe) that the host nation has full responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of its World Heritage Sites. The condition of the Matopos (National Park and World Heritage Site) is the responsibility of the Government of Zimbabwe.
- D. UNESCO would support research and special projects within a World Heritage Site, but not day to day costs. UNESCO is not a voluntary organisation but a part of the United Nations.
- E. The management committee of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site has not been re-appointed following the expiry of its 3-year term of office in 2007, and it has not met in over 2 years. This factor could well threaten the status of this particular site, and UNESCO could place the Matopos on the Endangered Site list. At the same time, Government has taken no action to resolve the ambiguous legal status of the management committee, and noting has been done towards realizing the original management plan.
- F. Until the year 2000 the Dept of National Parks treated theft of fencing, and grazing of cattle in the Park as a serious matter. All thefts were investigated and prosecuted. In recent years the approach has not been as vigorous. There may be many reasons for this – but what is needed now is a commitment to uphold the law! Persons who break the law and steal either fencing or grazing from the Matobo National Park should be pursued and prosecuted with vigour if there is to be any hope of retrieving the situation. There is plenty of grazing in the communal areas this year after the good rains we enjoyed, so this is a good opportunity to make an impact.

10 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2009

FAMILY / INDIVIDUAL	R 50
SPECIAL / PENSION	R 15
CORPORATE	R 150

These new subs were agreed at the AGM and are due by 31st July 2009.

11 – MCS CONSTITUTION

Members who would like a copy of the MCS Constitution should contact the Secretary, Jean Whiley (at jwhiley@ppc.co.zw) or call into her office at Portland Holdings Ltd, Main St / 13th Ave.

12 - UNDP GRANT FOR MATOBO HILLS WHS MANAGEMENT

Our Chairman met with Dr Mawanza at NUST's department of National Resources & Forest Management in connection with a grant given by the UNDP Global Environments Facility Small Grants Programme (UNDP GEF-SGP). The project partners are NUST, ORAP and CADEC and the project summary is

“Matobo World Heritage Site Strategic Programme: Restoration of Degraded Lands in the Matobo World Heritage Site Through Integrated Catchment Management, Documentation of Project Activities for Knowledge Generation and Sharing”

The project document includes a budget of USD 754,650 and the title is *“Integrated Management of Biological, Historical and Cultural Diversity for Improved Livelihoods : Community Participation in the Management of Protected Areas in the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site, Zimbabwe”*. The five core project areas are:

- Awareness Raising
- Improvement of Livelihood of Local Communities
- Strengthening of community institutions and eco-tourism development
- Policy review and Establishment of WHS management system
- Documentation of Project processes and activities

Points noted in subsequent discussions:

- The project was launched 2 months ago
- NUST are responsible for the project documentation process, and the awareness raising aspect
- Whilst the MCS has not been listed in the project stake-holders or project partners, the omission is recognised and the Society has been asked to become involved. The Chairman has written to Dr Mawanza asking that MCS, WEZ and Birdlife are included in the list of Matobo Hills stake holders
- MCS would support most of the aims of the project, and could offer guidance on aspects related to the World Heritage Site status. Members of the Committee will be meeting with Dr Mawanza for further discussion.

13 – MTB RIDES

The National Mountain Bike Series returns to the Matopos again in June this year. The race route will be the same as that run last year, with the 3 lap start at the Matopo Mission, and passing around (and over) Mwazi, the highest point in the Matopos. The race starts at 1:30 pm on 6th June, and promises to be as exciting as last year.

There are a number of two-day rides scheduled for June and July, and regular monthly social outings as well.

14– UN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY

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

15 - CONTACT

Members pass on, change address (physical or electronic) or leave the country. Please keep the Society updated on your changes (or those of colleagues and friends) so that we can maintain contact with you – especially your e-mail address!

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16 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2008/9

Due by 31 July 2009. Changed Address? Please update our records if you have changes

NAME	ADDRESS
MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY	
AMOUNT Cheque / Cash	
EMAIL	

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