

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

www.matobo.org

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 77 / FEBRUARY 2012

1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM, which was fairly well attended, was held in the afternoon of 27 November 2011 at Camp Dwala. This followed a morning at the Matopo Mission (which is described elsewhere in this newsletter). The shady lawn was most welcome as by the afternoon the light rain had given way to sunshine. Mr Mpfu from the Matopo Mission School Conservation Club spoke to members during the morning.

Your committee remains much the same, except with the departure of Heather Robinson, whom we thank for her contribution. The newly elected Committee therefore comprises office bearers Chairman Gavin Stephens, Vice-Chairman Gaynor Lightfoot, Secretary Jean Whiley and Treasurer Adele Edwards, and members, Duncan Purchase, Paul Hubbard and Shelagh Adams.

Whilst we are thankful to our regular committee stalwarts, we do need new blood with fresh ideas in the year ahead!

2 – MCS HONOURS

The members attending the AGM voted to recognise the contributions of two members to the Society and the Matopos in General. They are Mr Trevor Hemans and Dr Viv Wilson. We will bring your more information on both men in future newsletters.

3 – WELCOME

We welcome Dr Norman Monks who has been appointed as Area Manager, Matopos National Park. We look forward to a positive and mutually beneficial relationship during his tenure at Maleme.

4 – RHINO NEWS

At least 23 black and white rhinos were killed this year in national parks and conservancies, while 37 rhino poachers and illegal dealers in horns were arrested. Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority public relations manager Caroline Washaya-Moyo said the rhino remained the main target of big-time poachers and the authority was spending over \$4 mln to curb poaching – *Herald, December 5, 2012*.

5 - RAINFALL

After a promising, if late, start, a high-pressure anti-cyclone settled over Matabeleland and very little rain fell after Christmas. As a result, the country side is rapidly drying out, and reflecting autumn colours well before the end of summer. At the end of January 2012, the following amounts were recorded:

Bulawayo 350mm (Burnside), Eastern Matopos 347mm, Western Matopos 321mm.

We can only hope that the drought will break in the remaining two months so that adequate water will carry the hills through to the next rainy season.

6 – MTB EVENT; THE MATOBO HILLS WORLD HERITAGE MTB CHALLENGE

The annual three-day mountain bike event (across the Matopos, west to east) will be held from 14th to 18 March 2012. Both Stanbic bank and PPC Zimbabwe have pledged their support once again, along with a host of other sponsors. Some minor modifications to the route have been made, and judging from the interest shown thus far, it is expected that this year's event will be larger than that of 2011.

This has become our major fund-raising event of the year, and proceeds from 2011 went to the refurbishment of the Maleme Rest Camp ablution block, repairs to Fumugwe School, and conservation material donated to Matopo Mission – all schools along the race route. Any members who wish to assist, or watch part of the event should contact the Secretary.

7 - NEXT EVENT

Date	12 February 2012
Venue	Mtshabezi Dam
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Ascot Service Station
Travel	All vehicles but trucks preferred
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

As members will have read in the paper, the City of Bulawayo is presently constructing a pipeline that will connect Mtshabezi dam to the City's water supply. This work is expected to be finished by mid-year, after which we anticipate that the dam will be pumped dry! The plan for this outing is to enjoy the dam whilst it is still full, so bring your costumes and we'll have some fun! We will have a talk on the building of the dam, and a visit to the wall, spillway and places of interest.

8 – REPORT BACK

The morning of the 27th November saw the usual convoy wind its way down the Old Gwanda Road to Matopo Mission, which is about 48km's from the GPO. On arrival the team visited the pioneer mission cemetery, where the founders of the mission were laid to rest under the shade of a large Mbola Plum, within sight of the Church and school that they established. Thereafter, we journey down to the Dam which was built in 1976. It was far from spilling, but still provided a lovely setting for tea – even if we had to avoid the odd squall of rain! Believing that the morning service would now be over, we returned to the Mission and visited the Museum, which contained some interesting relics. Mr Mpofu spoke to us about the history of the Mission, its trials and tribulations over 110 years and its current position. We were then taken on a tour of the school before finally moving onto the primary School where the Matopo Mission Conservation Club had prepared posters and an excellent presentation. Mr Mpofu spoke about the conservation efforts of the school and the region – bringing home some grass roots reality to us “city slickers”.

We never quite got to the Church as the service was still going strong!
It was a visit full of interest and motivation.

9 – CALENDAR 2012

Proposed dates for the 2012 field trips are listed below, but as always, subject to alteration.

MCS <i>Summer</i> Field Trip	Sunday 12 February 2012
MCS <i>Autumn</i> Field Trip	Sunday 20 May 2012
MCS <i>Winter</i> Field Trip	Sunday 15 July 2012
MCS <i>Spring</i> Field Trip	Sunday 14 October 2012
MCS AGM	Sunday 25 November 2012

Other dates for your diary -

MWHS MTB Challenge	Wednesday 14 – Sunday 18 March 2012
Matopos Clean-up Day	Sunday 03 June 2012
Matobo Classic MTB	August 2012

International Conservation Dates, for information

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

10 – WORLD HERITAGE SIGN

The World Heritage sign on the main Matopos / Kezi road has been temporarily removed. We have been assured by the Ministry of Transport that it will be returned shortly. With the support of National

Museums, National Parks and Bulawayo Publicity we will be monitoring this closely! We have also offered material for extra signage around the Hills and hope this offer will be taken up.

11 – GOODBYE ACACIA?

Members will recall that a couple of years ago we wrote about a decision to reclassify *Acacia*, which would give the name to Australia. Your Society lobbied against this reclassification, but it would seem that “we” were outsmarted again with some questionable manoeuvrings at the Congress. We carry an update from the International Botanical Congress held in November 2011 in Melbourne, Australia

Basically, the Melbourne IBC confirmed the contentious decision made at the Vienna IBC that the type of *Acacia* will move from *Acacia scorpioides* (now *A. nilotica*) - a straight-thorn African species first described around 1760 - to an Australian thornless wattle. This means that as and when the genus *Acacia* is split into component genera the straight thorn African/Asian species will be called *Vachellia*, the hooked thorn species (Africa & S America) will become *Senegalia*, while the large number of Australian wattles will remain as *Acacia* instead of becoming *Racosperma*, the name that some have already been described under. Very few botanists disagree that the genus should be split into a number of smaller genera. Indeed, much of the available genetic evidence suggests the group at present is a mixture of taxa from different tribes. So what is in contention is NOT the splitting of the present genus *Acacia*, but the nomenclature associated with it.

Any ruling of the IBC is for guidance. We, or anyone, does not NEED to follow it. Indeed, there is a sort of unofficial position among a number of African botanists that we should ignore the IBC decision at present, and keep calling all our plants *Acacia*. If we do not split at this stage, then we do not need to call anything *Vachellia*. However, this is really only a stalling move, as eventually we will have to accept a splitting of the present *Acacia*.

Some folk, particularly from South Africa, are thinking of making a case to the International Court in the Hague revolving around "theft" of the African trade name "Acacia". One can hardly imagine "Vachellia Safaris". This would involve a lot of time and effort. Advice is being sought.

Another tack is to challenge the particular *Acacia* nomenclatural issue at the next IBC in Beijing in 2015 or whenever. Imagine the story dragging on, unresolved, that long.

Perhaps the best tack at present is just to continue with the name *Acacia* for ALL our African species. But we should not split ranks - in my view - by African botanist or botanists working on the African flora publishing new names under *Vachellia*. Unfortunately, what we may find is that someone from Australia or the US publishes the new combinations under *Vachellia* first. Double whammy - not only we lose our name, but we also lose the author of the name going forward into posterity being someone associated with Africa.

(with acknowledgment to Johnathan Timberlake). Please contact the Secretary if you require more information on this topic.

12 – ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

A – CLIMATE CHANGE HITS AFRICA'S POOREST FARMERS

As she surveys her small, bare plot in Zimbabwe's capital, farmer Janet Vambe knows something serious is happening, even if she has never heard of climate change. "Long ago, I could set my calendar with the date the rains started," the 72-year-old said. Nowadays, "we have to gamble with the rains. If you plant early you might lose and if you plant late you might win. We are at a loss of what to do."

Paramu Mafongoya, a University of Zimbabwe agronomist, says Vambe's worries and those of millions of other poor farmers - most of them women - across Africa are a clear sign of the impact of climate change on a continent already struggling to feed itself. Changes have been noted in the timing and the distribution of rainfall on the continent. Zimbabweans say the rainy season has become shorter and more unpredictable, Mafongoya said. Climate change "is a serious threat to human life," Mafongoya said. "It affects agriculture and food security everywhere."

International climate change negotiators meet in the South African coastal city of Durban starting Monday. Their agenda includes how to get African and other developing countries the technology and knowledge to ensure that people like Vambe can keep feeding their families without looking for emergency food aid.

A Green Climate Fund that would give \$100 billion a year by 2020 to developing countries to help them fight climate change and its effects was agreed on at last year's climate talks in Cancun, Mexico. Durban negotiators hope to make progress on addressing questions such as where the money will come from and how will it be managed.

Climate change specialist Rashmi Mistry said her anti-hunger group Oxfam will be in Durban lobbying to ensure that women have a voice in managing the Green Fund, and that their needs are addressed when its money is spent. Most small-scale farmers in Africa are women, and they also are the ones shopping for the family's food. But tradition often keeps them out of policymaking roles. Mistry said when yields are low and market prices are high, women are the first to suffer. "She's the one usually who will feed her husband first and feed her children first, and she will go hungry," Mistry said.

Across Africa, said Andrew Steer, the World Bank's special envoy on climate change, farmers need to triple production by 2050 to meet growing needs. "At the same time, you've got climate change lowering average yields by what's expected to be 28 percent," Steer said. He called for more investment in such areas as agricultural research and water management.

Experts already are working on solutions. For example, Africa Harvest, a think tank that uses science and technology to address poverty and improve livelihoods among some of the poorest people in Africa, is working with farmers in an arid stretch in eastern Kenya who were finding it harder and harder to grow their usual crops of corn and beans. Africa Harvest got farmers to switch to sorghum. They have seen bumper harvests as a result because they are focusing on the right crop and the right practices for the climate, said Moctar Toure, chairman of Africa Harvest, who will be in Durban for the talks. "The way we do agricultural development has to change," Toure told The Associated Press. "We need to balance the need to increase farm productivity with environmental conservation. We will also work towards broad policy changes in our target countries in order to address endemic problems (affecting women) such as land right security, access to credit and knowledge."

Experts worry that one consequence of resources becoming scarcer will be more frequent conflict. Already, Zimbabwe has seen aid used as a political weapon. Those who can prove their loyalty to longtime President Robert Mugabe's party have been seen to be favoured when it comes time to hand out seeds or food.

Modern techniques of growing drought-resistant crops like sorghum and millet, staggering planting programs, irrigation and harvesting rain and river water in dams help minimize the risk to farmers. But Zimbabwe's modern agricultural infrastructure has been disrupted by a decade of political and economic turmoil. Acute food shortages eased after Zimbabwe adopted the U.S. dollar to end world-record inflation in 2009, but local farm production continues to decline. This month, the U.N. food agency said more than 1 million Zimbabweans needed food aid and poor families, especially households with orphans and vulnerable children, can't afford much of the food that is available. Most of that food is imported. Climate change, like the political problems linked to poverty in Zimbabwe, is manmade, though over a longer term.

Scientists say the accumulation of carbon dioxide traps the Earth's heat, and is causing dramatic changes in weather patterns, agricultural conditions and heightened risks of devastating sea-level rise. Industrialized nations bear the bulk of the blame, since they have been pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere for 200 years. Africa emits only about 3 percent of the total greenhouse gases per year, but its fragile systems and impoverished people are hardest hit by the consequences.

Weather experts say Zimbabwe's average rainfall has decreased over the decade and October temperatures this year soared to above 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit), the highest since 1962.

Harare meteorologist Jephias Mugumbate said rains in January and February - crucial for the ripening of crops - can no longer be relied on. It was often said drought in southern Africa recurred every 10 years.

"But now it has become more frequent and intensified. Temperatures show an upward trend and instead of being cooler our nights are becoming hotter," Mugumbate said

Like Vambe, tens of millions of Africans rely on rain-fed agriculture. Vambe's corn crop has supported her family for more than five decades. But her yields have been steadily falling. She walks at daybreak to her nearly bare field 10 miles (15 kilometers) from her home in the impoverished western Harare township of Highfield. She has finished planting her seed with the help of her two grandchildren. The dusty brown soil beckons for rain. Maize, the nation's staple food, needs 60 days of moisture to reach maturity.

"The rains have become erratic. We can no longer rely on the seasons," Vambe said. She has had to replant on several occasions because of a "false start" to the rainy season. "This is what has been

affecting our yields since 2000. We are no longer getting good yields because the rain comes and goes away," she said.

In the past, the growing season ended in March and harvests were gathered through April. "Today, nothing is definite. You get rain in April then our maize rots in the fields," Vambe said. "If we are not respecting our spirits and if they are angry, there will be no rain." *AP, November 27, 2012.*

B - DESERIFICATION FEARS

Zimbabwe is on the brink of desertification with reports indicating that the deforestation rate in the country is around 330 000 hectares of land per year. Addressing journalists in Harare yesterday ahead of the national tree planting day tomorrow, Environment and Natural Resources Minister Francis Nhema singled out tobacco farmers as the "chief culprits". This year's main commemorations will be held in Mutare where President Mugabe is expected to officiate – *Herald, December 2, 2012.*

C – VELDT FIRES

EMA education and publicity officer Steady Kangata said there had been a 38% decline in losses of vegetation to veld fires over the past year with 713 770ha destroyed compared with 1.1 mln ha in 2010. Five people lost their lives compared with 25 last year – *Daily News, December 13, 2012.*

14 – HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Government has appointed a National Heritage Committee. However, with 50 members and no powers it is likely to be little more than a talk shop.

15 – CARNOVORE LECTURES

The theme for the 2012 Music Festival is "Songs of the Carnivores" and as a build up to this there will be a series of five lectures at 5.15pm at the Academy of Music on the following days -

Thurs 19 Jan	Cheetah
Thurs 16 Feb	Lion
Thurs 22 Mar	Wild Dog
Thurs 19 April	Leopard
Thurs 17 May	Spotted Hyena

16 – NATIONAL HERBARIUM FUMIGATION APPEAL

In September 2009, Tree Society members may recall that an appeal was launched for funds to enable Zimbabwe's National Herbarium to be fumigated.

The response was highly gratifying and the funds raised enabled them to carry out 4 fumigations at approximately 6 monthly intervals. The cost of a single fumigation is US\$ 350.

In the intervening period, the financial position of the Herbarium has remained weak and it appears that further support for continuing fumigation will be necessary.

The Tree Society is therefore re-opening the request for funds and would ask every member/friend to consider making a donation towards this important appeal, the purpose of which is to prevent the plant collections deteriorating through insect damage.

This appeal is not in any way limited to Tree Society members and I would ask you to spread the word to your friends and any potential donors.

Please contact MARK HYDE directly on mahyde@pentact.co.zw

(EDITOR – Similar appeals and work have been done at the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo to safe guard the valuable insect collection housed there. It is a very sad state of affairs when irreplaceable heritage is lost for want of such small grants)

17 – MCS APPAREL

The Society has received new stocks of hats (at \$10 each) and we are looking into shirts and other apparel.

18 – GREMLINS

A computer crash the day before our Newsletter was due to be issued resulted in the loss of the February issue. Sadly the backup system was found to be corrupt, and so the whole Newsletter had to be redone,

less one or two articles that can't be traced! We apologise for the late issue – but trust you received our news brief on the summer outing to Mtshabezi Dam on 12 February 2012.

19 – SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for next year (1 October 2011 to 30 September 2012) have been set as:

US\$ 20	Individual/Family
US\$ 5	Special Member (Pensioner/Student)
US\$100	Corporate

Consequently, subscriptions are due as from 1 October, and should be paid before the AGM on the 27 November 2011 (if you want to retain your right to vote!). We are updating our data base and have removed all members with subs outstanding for more than one year.

20 – www.matobo.org

We continue to upgrade our website, and are adding new material, so be sure to log in and follow the progress of the Society. Please give us news, views and links to other useful sites.

We have included some interesting new links to other sites.

Dr Peter Howard; African Heritage, Protected Areas & Wildlife Management, writes:

I am writing to introduce a new website showcasing Africa's world heritage sites at www.AfricanWorldHeritageSites.org. It is aimed at raising awareness of this continent's most precious places - and the conservation challenges they face – by providing maps, information and a slideshow of each site. There are 120 UNESCO world heritage sites across Africa – iconic places from the Pyramids of Egypt to the snow-capped peaks of Kilimanjaro, with some lesser-known sites such as the Stone Circles of Senegambia and the extraordinary fossilised whales of Egypt's Wadi Al Hiton.

The website is designed to complement the existing – highly informative - websites of the official agencies (UNESCO and WCMC) by using a wealth of photos to get a real 'sense of place', and present independent opinion on the values and conservation of each site. Your ideas and suggestions on further development of the website, particularly ways to make it 'work for conservation' would be most welcome. And, if you have photos of any of the places that are not yet covered which you would be willing to share, please let me know.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who contributed – in one way or another – to this website. I am especially grateful to those who provided hard-to-get photos of some of the more remote sites; and those who facilitated, hosted and guided me during my visits to most of the places featured on the website.