

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

www.matobo.org

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

NEWSLETTER 78 / APRIL 2012

1 – EDITORIAL

Our migratory birds have left us – following the sun to the north, and the Kirkia's are already losing their leaves. Autumn is upon us – and at the time of writing it feels that winter has already arrived with an early cool spell! Summer has come and gone, but this period is always lovely in the hills. As the vegetation dies back so more of the landscape opens up, and the various tree species can be identified from amongst the back-ground green as their leaves change colour. So we hope our members will get out into the hills and enjoy our special place before the chilly winds blow in marking the onset of winter.

2 - HONOURS

MR TREVOR HEMANS

Mr Trevor Hemans had been a member of the committee since the inception of the Society – indeed he was part of the interim committee that saw the establishment of the MCS in 1993 and stood down from the committee after serving as secretary for five years. He played a significant role in the establishment, and subsequent smooth running of the Society, and his contributions at Committee meetings were always valuable – bring a great deal of history and knowledge to the discussions. Trevor was elected as an Honorary Life member of the MCS at the November 2011 AGM.

DR VIV WILSON

Dr Viv Wilson probably does not require an introduction. Viv worked in many African countries, carrying out Wildlife Research and Surveys, but Zimbabwe has been his home for many years now. At various times he has held positions in the National Parks in Zambia, in Zululand, and in Zimbabwe, and for some time was the Chairman of the Parks & Wildlife Board, Zimbabwe. He was Curator of Mammals and Director of the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo. Viv was also founder and director of Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage outside Bulawayo. He has had 60 years' experience in Wildlife and Conservation, and still pursues his research interests in the Matobo Hills. Viv was elected as an Honorary Life member of the MCS at the November 2011 AGM.

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

The annual three-day mountain bike event (The Matopos Heritage Ride) was successfully hosted from 14th to 18 March 2012. In 2010, 20 riders participated, in 2011, 40 riders and this year 60 participants took part so the event is growing in popularity. This year 7 riders from SA participated (4 from Cape Town and 3 from Johannesburg) and 2 travelled up from Botswana. There was again a big contingent from Harare. The route changes were well received, and the event has maintained its position as the top MTB event in Zimbabwe! More importantly it is achieving its objective of increasing knowledge of, and interest in, the Matobo Hills. Once again riders were provided with a booklet detailing all the places of interest en route. As luck would have it, the weeks of unending heat gave way to some rain, but this did not impact negatively on the event.

4 - RAINFALL

Whilst Bulawayo has received about 80% of its normal rainfall, the position is not so rosy in the Matopos, where the total is less than 60% of average. So whilst the hills look green and attractive, the seeps and streams are dry, the rivers are empty, and water shortages are already being noted. What the figures don't show is that good rains fell in December – and very little since then, with our second and third wettest months being total write-offs. Bulawayo 505mm (Burnside), Eastern Matopos 454mm, Western Matopos 400mm.

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	20 May 2012
Venue	Shashani Lodge
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Hotel
Travel	All vehicles but trucks preferred
Details	Details Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We will be visiting Shashani Lodge which will entail a drive out along the Plumtree road before turning south and into the north western hills. The lodge is situated in the upper reaches of the Shashani valley, a part of the hills that we have not previously visited. (Members are advised that there may be \$5 charge per person).

6 – REPORT BACK

A smaller convoy than usual set on out 12th February for Mtshabezi Dam. In the weeks before the outing we had enjoyed clear sky – on this morning clouds quite quickly built up, and indeed soon after arriving the rain came down! It did not stop some members from having a swim from the wall – with the clear water being surprisingly warm. The group picnicked above the spillway – as the wind picked up so water started to trickle over the top – and after our traditional cup of tea, walked to the Dam wall returning to lunch after a shower had passed over. In the afternoon some members went for a walk through the magnificent *Brachystegia* forests – with dark clouds gathering up the gorge at the far end of the lake.

A collection of photo's and newspaper articles from the time of the building of the dam were available, and as promised the day was relaxed and fun filled!

We had 7 of our youngest members present – ranging from 1 to 7 years old!

7 – CALENDAR 2012

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

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 -

Matopos Clean-up Day	Sunday 03 June 2012
Matobo Classic MTB	August 2012

8 – WORLD HERITAGE SIGN

The World Heritage sign on the main Matopos / Kezi road has not yet been restored. The matter has now been taken up with the Governor to see if this issue can be resolved. National Parks have advised that the sign can be erected on their property, off the road servitude and this option may also be followed.

9 – *Lantana camara*: DISTRIBUTION, SEED BANK DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF SMOKE IN SEEDLING EMERGENCE AT DAMBARI FIELD STATION.

(with appreciation to Buckley Omar-Yazid Dzamara, a student at Dambari Wildlife Trust)

Regarded as the second greatest threat to global biodiversity, invasive alien plants (IAP) have become a focal interest in ecology, owing not only to the tremendous destruction that they can cause, but also because it is not yet fully understood how they change from being minor components of their native communities to dominant components of invaded communities. Moreover, soil seed banks are poorly quantified and the effects of smoke on seed germination of these IAP are not fully understood and *Lantana camara*, one of the world's worst weeds, is no exception. This study aimed to assess the aerial cover and density, quantify soil seed banks of *L. camara* in three physiognomic vegetation types. A greenhouse trial was also conducted to determine the seedling emergence of this species in response to smoke. Cover and density increased with invasion age, from the vlei, acacia and lantana stand, whilst seed bank densities varied considerably at depths of 5 and 10cm and within the vegetation types. High densities were obtained within the 0-5cm depth with lower densities at a depth of 5-10cm. Also higher seed numbers were obtained in the lantana stand, intermediate in the acacia stand and less in the vlei. Smoke fumigated seeds started germinating earlier than non-fumigated seeds. The proportion of seeds

that germinated, and values of the Germination Velocity Index (GVI) and Vigor Index (VI) were also higher in the smoke treatment compared to the control treatment. Further, Seedling Mortality (SM) was lower in the case of smoked seeds as compared to untreated seeds. The results showed that there is an urgent need to control the plant due to the number of seeds contained within that cover. And it is these seeds present within the canopy that have the potential to be stored in the seed bank for plant recruitment. Also, a persistent seed bank buffers *L. camara* populations and because of the contributions of the seed bank to the long-term persistence of *L. camara* populations, conservation efforts should concentrate on maintaining the long-term conditions required to suppress *L. camara* survival and germination from the seed bank. The germination experiment indicated that fire could enhance *L. camara* seed germination and that burning should be discouraged as it could promote, rather than control the spread of *L. camara*.

10 – HIDDEN BY GRASS. CAMERA TRAPPING IN MATOBO NATIONAL PARK

(with appreciation to Nicky Pegg; Dambari Wildlife Trust)

People ask me, fairly frequently, what I think about wildlife populations in Matobo National Park, given that I've been doing research there for a few years. My answer: there's much more there than meets the eye! Tall thatching grass and rugged terrain don't facilitate game viewing, but don't be misled into thinking that wildlife is absent. Go out there when there's a green flush after a burn, or when a vlei has been mowed, and you'll be pleasantly surprised. As an example, on 1st November last year, the Chairman of Dambari Wildlife Trust's board and I experienced a jaw-dropping "Serengeti moment" when we stumbled upon 33 sable, 21 wildebeest, 9 zebra and 2 white rhinos in the reed bed near the Gordon Park gate: most would fit into a single wide-angle camera view! Granted, such incidents are a rarity – but they would be anywhere.

In mid-2011, Dambari Wildlife Trust and Parks and Wildlife Management Authority embarked on a camera-trap survey of the Matobo National Park's Game Park section. The primary aim is to assist with rhino monitoring, but it's a great way to record other species in the Park, too. The study is funded by Save Foundation – Australia, which provided the cameras and supports running costs.

Motion-triggered cameras (often called "camera traps") have been around for several decades, but have become more widely used in recent years, once trigger delays on digital cameras were reduced to a second or less and developing film (a costly exercise) became unnecessary. We use Bushnell Trophycam ® cameras: they're small, light and have an infrared flash which makes the flash invisible to wildlife and people at night. When something moves in front of the camera, a built-in motion sensor detects it and triggers the camera to take a photo.

We have 45 sites that we sample for two weeks each over a 10-week period, so we've done the circuit of the Park three times so far. Since we're focusing on rhinos and therefore put the cameras about a metre above ground, smaller species are less likely to be detected, but we have images of a startling array of species: 47 mammals, several birds (from spotted flycatcher to ground hornbill size) and a few reptiles (terrapins, plated lizards, a water monitor and a cobra).

About 8% of the 87,500 photos I've sifted through have animals in; the rest are of waving grass, moving trees or photos of us setting up or taking down the cameras (a disturbing way to discover what strange facial expressions one pulls!). It's a small return for quite a lot of effort... but quality trumps quantity and the anticipation of seeing what's been photographed has me glued to my computer screen well into the night! We have photos of "special" species like Meller's mongoose, caracal, serval and (once) a blurry night-time image of a cheetah; great time-lapse sequences of warthog dung being fashioned into balls by dung beetles (and birds hawking for beetles and flies); fantastic "candid" shots of animals that don't know they're on camera and some up-close-and-personal images of animals having a *really* good look at the camera.

So what have we learnt? Firstly, there's more wildlife there – and it's more widespread – than you may initially believe. As you'd expect, most animals are active in the early morning and evening (so don't start game viewing at midday!) – and there's a lot of activity at night too. Brown hyaenas are the most frequently photographed carnivore (50 photo sequences), and have been recorded at more than a third of the sites sampled. Leopards are more elusive by comparison and have only been photographed 18

times. Aardvark wander over relatively large distances at night – we have images of one recognisable individual (missing half an ear) at sites separated by 1.3 km of rugged terrain... and it covered the distance in about 5 hours. Giraffes are fascinated by padlocks and young brown hyaenas are inquisitive enough to investigate cameras and play with the straps used to tie them to trees. And not forgetting rhinos... there're some supermodel wannabes out there that spend minutes posing in front of cameras!

Where to next? We're continuing the survey for at least a few months more and will be extending the survey into the Recreational section of the Park, so hope to record more species. Plus we're developing ID files for animals with unique, obvious markings – leopard, hyaena, zebra and giraffe for example – so that we can start to get an estimate of population sizes. On that note, we'd be delighted to receive any photos of animals so that we can build good ID files for Parks management.

So, next time you go the Park, get there early or stay a bit later than 4 pm; spend some time on the platforms, or look for the early-burn areas (Parks do management burns early in the dry season), and you might just see something really special!

11 – CARNOVORE LECTURES

A reminder of the last two presentations on the 2012 Music Festival theme of “Songs of the Carnivores” at the Zimbabwe Academy of Music;

Thurs 19 April	Leopard
Thurs 17 May	Spotted Hyaena

12 – HERITAGE UNDER THREAT

A - NJELELE

Matobo villagers on Sunday confronted Chief Malaki Masuku following reports that a group of about 600 former Zanla combatants invaded the sacred Njelele Shrine, performed illegal cleansing ceremonies and later dumped human remains at the site. According to the villagers the incident occurred last month (February 2012) and they wanted to know whether the chief had authorised the war vets to enter the shrine, which is traditionally reserved for rain making ceremonies – *NewsDay, March 20, 2012*.

(Editor – This kind of action could have a severe impact on the World Heritage Status of the Matopos as the unique position of Njelele was a key component of the application. There has previously been controversy over the identity of the Oracle at Njelele, but the site has not been “invaded” like this before so this report is quite unusual and very unexpected).

B - WORLDS VIEW

A group of about 50 Zanla war veterans last week allegedly stormed Matopo Hills in Mat South Province, but were blocked by Chief Masuku after they attempted to dig up the remains of Cecil John Rhodes from the tourist resort area. The incident occurred on Monday at Matopo Hills, 30km outside Bulawayo. Sources said the former freedom fighters claimed they wanted to create space for reburial of their fallen heroes lying at Chimoio shrine in Mozambique – *NewsDay, February 21, 2012*.

(Editor – This issue keeps bubbling up, solely to divert attention from the real issues that face us as a country. The matter has been previously addressed at Cabinet level)

C – RHODES GRAVE

Zimbabwe Monuments Officials Block Removal of Cecil Rhodes Gravesite

War veterans blame Rhodes's remains for the lack of rains in recent years, and say they should be sent to Britain, but President Robert Mugabe is said to have issued a directive against disturbing the gravesite

Zimbabwe's National Museums and Monuments Department has blocked a proposal by some Matabeleland war veterans to exhume the remains of Cecil John Rhodes, founder of colonial Rhodesia, saying Rhodes is a part of Zimbabwean history.

War veterans have for some time been targeting the small stone crypt atop of one of the largest formations in the rugged Matopo Hills. They blame Rhodes's remains for the lack of rains in recent years, and say they should be sent to Britain. But President Robert Mugabe is said to have issued a directive against disturbing the gravesite.

Rhodes is said to have asked to be buried on the granite outcropping called Malindidzimu Hill or World's View. Nearby is the grave of Dr Leander Starr Jameson, leader of a bungled raid on Johannesburg just before the 1900 Boer War.

A large monument to colonial settlers also stands on the granite formation. Godfrey Mahachi, director of Zimbabwe's National Museums and Monuments Department, told VOA reporter Sandra Nyaira that Zimbabwe is safeguarding Rhodes's grave because it is a tangible element of the country's history.

Mahachi said funds generated by tourism at the grave site are being used to develop and maintain other national monuments in the country.

"That's the way that Rhodes is paying us back as a country, through the money being generated through his grave through tourism and that's a lot." Mahachi said.

Cultural activist Cont Mhlanga said the war veterans should leave Rhode's grave alone adding that if they really wish to address the plight of the people in the area and the country in general, they should target Rhode's continuing legacy in terms of businesses that continue to rake in millions at the expense of the ordinary poor. Sandra Nyaira | Washington

13 – MCS APPAREL

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

14 - MATOBO HILLS LODGE

RTG hotel Group is in the process of disposing of its non-performing assets, comprising of 6 lodges, valued at about \$2.5 mln. Outgoing chief executive Chipso Mtasa is believed to have successfully bid for one of the properties, Lodge at the Ancient City, which is located near the Great Zimbabwe Monument and falls under Touch the Wild Lodges. She is, however, yet to assume the lease of the property. Part of the businesses to be disposed of by the group include Tourism Services Zimbabwe, Touch the Wild Ancient City, Matetsi Water, Harare Safari Lodge, Matobo Hills lodge and Sable Lodge – *Sunday Mail, April 1, 2012.*

15 - LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government minister Ignatius Chombo has been dragged to the Bulawayo High Court by Matobo villagers for appointing 5 Zanu-PF activists as special interest councillors to their local authority. The 6 villagers are challenging the appointments, which they describe as illegal – *NewsDay, April 13, 2012, Daily News.*

16 – SUBSCRIPTIONS

This year our members have not been as prompt in settling their subscriptions for the year 1 October 2011 to 30 September 2012 and so you are reminded:

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

We are now removing from our data base all members with subs outstanding for more than one year.

At the same time ,you are encouraged to invite potential members to join the Society. Friends are always welcome at our quarterly events – and hopefully will join the Society thereafter.

17 – 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. Monitoring our site shows increasing activity from around the world, so this medium is achieving an important objective.

18 – CONVOY TRAVELLING

(with appreciation to Elton Lightfoot)

Our quarterly outings are always preceded by a convoy of cars (of varying length) that is seen winding its way out to the Hills. Normally the little column reaches its destination without any mishap – but at times we have had break downs and even nearly lost some members! As a result, we thought it a good opportunity to remind our participating members of some basic “rules” for travelling in convoy.

- 1) Ensure that your vehicle is roadworthy, has had a recent service and is carrying all the necessary spares and tools in the event of a breakdown where spares are not available. You should ensure you have a full tank of fuel as there are no fuel stations in the Matopos!

- 2) The Leader Vehicle must be the pace setter – sometimes it is the slowest or under powered vehicle. However, the driver must know the route, and if on 4 x 4 off road terrain ensure that there are vehicles with winches to assist.
- 3) Travel at a safe distance between vehicles; this will depend on the speed, road conditions and common sense. On many of our roads there is a lot of dust so the convoy needs to spread out.
- 4) The drivers of each vehicle must check regularly the vehicle behind them to ensure that they are keeping up the pace and not missing.
- 5) At any turn off the road being used, stop to ensure that the car behind you has seen the change in direction.
- 6) Have a form of communication, cellphone or satellite phones should there be a breakdown or an emergency and the lead vehicle can advise. (Large parts of the Hills are not served by cell phones, so clause 4 and 5 above are very important).
- 7) If you do stop to take a photo (or for any other reason) pull well off the road, and let the convoy pass – but inform the last car that you will now fall behind them so they need to look out for you!
- 8) Travel at a safe speed for all vehicles:
 - i. Open Road 80 – 100kph
 - ii. Off Road depending on the terrain
- 9) On a long journey stop at least every two (2) hours to stretch legs, regroup or even a cup of tea. Preferably well off the road so as to avoid the dust of other road users.
- 10) Ensure that traveling is complete in daylight hours.

19 – NATIONAL PARK UNDER THREAT?

Reports in the local press indicate that villages living well south of the Matopos are driving their cattle northwards to find grazing as the drought has rendered their pastures exhausted even before the start of winter. The target of this migration is the Rhodes Estate, with some moving their animals as much as 80km's. Given that the Park already suffers from cattle incursions, and that villagers around the Park will also face grazing shortages in the next few months, we can be sure that there will be significant incursions of cattle into the Park, placing the environment under threat.