

**MATOBO**



**SOCIETY**

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

[www.matobo.org](http://www.matobo.org)

Welfare No: W/0 30/94

## **NEWSLETTER 79 / JUNE 2012**

### **1 – EDITORIAL**

There have been some useful exchanges between National Parks, National Museums and other key stakeholders, initiated by Area Manager Norman Monks, on the current status of the Matobo National Park. Your Chairman and Secretary represented the Society at the preliminary meeting, and a broader based stakeholder meeting is now planned. It is greatly encouraging to see this initiative from Parks, and we are committed to making a positive contribution. It is therefore appropriate that our next field trip will be to the heart of the National Park.

Sadly however, this positive news has been overshadowed recently by more land invasions threatening the tourist industry in the Matopos, and the closure (possibly temporarily) of Matobo Hills Lodge.

### **2 – ROCK FALL**

A huge balancing rock weighing between 2-3 tones fell in the Matopos National Park on Monday, the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority has said adding that no one was hurt and no wildlife was exposed to any danger although some trees were damaged along the way as well as the tarred road where the rock finally landed – *Daily News, June 7, 2012*.

### **3 – FIRES**

The first fires of the season were recorded in May, and in June. Officials at the National Park have prepared for the 2012 season, and hope that local communities will assist by being more vigilant. We brace ourselves for the 2012 fire season – and can only hope it is not as severe as last year.

### **4 - RAINFALL**

With our dry winter months upon us there has been no rain. Surprisingly not even any guti! Frost has been recorded and the poor rainy season is reflected in the dry pools and dropping water levels in the dams.

### **5 – LITTER**

National Parks and Environment 2000 have launched a “*Carry in, carry out*” policy / campaign for our parks. So if you had the space to take cans, packets etc. into the Park, then you should have space to take it home with you! There is a concerted effort to keep our Parks clean.

If you observe any driver or passenger throwing litter out of a vehicle, please record the details of the vehicle and report it to the Parks authorities. This is our special park, and we can make a difference.

The MCS has previously provided litter bags at the Sandy Spruit gate. We are hoping to restart this campaign in support of the Parks policy.

### **6 – HERITAGE**

In our last newsletter we reported on the events taking place at Njelele. We carry a further update on this scandal. There is nothing sacred in this country anymore!

Zipra ex-combatants said they would seek a court order to bar the Zanla war veterans from conducting cleansing ceremonies at Njelele shrine in Matobo, Mat South. Zipra Veterans Trust spokesperson, Baster Magwizi, last week accused Zanla veterans of failing to respect the culture and values of the people of Matabeleland by sneaking into the shrine – *Standard, May 20, 2012*.

### **7 – MCS APPAREL**

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

## 8 - NEXT EVENT

Date	15 July 2012
Venue	Maleme Dam
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 visiting an old favourite, Maleme Dam, and the Maleme Rest Camp. Members will be able to see the work done at the Rest Camp, and get an update on the National Park.  
(Members are reminded of the National Parks entry fees - \$3 charge per person, plus car).

## 9 – REPORT BACK

Outing to Shashani Valley Lodge: Sunday 20 May 2012. *With Acknowledgement to Eleanor Shadwell*

The outing was to a new area, set near the north western edge of the Matobo Hills, the headwaters of the Shashani Valley. As the 'tourist' of the escapade (a short-term volunteer at Dambari Wildlife Trust) this is my interpretation of how the day went:

We met at the early hour of 8 o'clock at Churchill Arms hotel. After the awaited arrival of the esteemed leader, Gavin Stephens, car-hopping activities soon settled and the convoy of ~35 people was off. On the way to Shashani there is a fort from the 1896 Rebellion days, accessed from a lay-bye off the Plumtree road. Unfortunately crossed signals among those leading the convoy meant only one vehicle stopped off to see it on the way back, so you'll have to ask Judy Ross or Jean Whiley about the fort. Arrival at Shashani was a little delayed but consultation with the locals provided more concrete directions than 'drive out along the Plumtree road before turning south and head into the north western hills'. The destination was achieved through small clouds of dust and a winding, fairly steep uphill climb. Vehicles were exited and an inspection of the day's premises went underway.

Apart from some employees, we had the place to ourselves. From the patch of lawn set on top of rock where camp was set up, a spectacular view off the small sheer cliff could be seen. It made your heart expand and gave the strong urge to leap off and go soaring out across the valley. All the lodges look out over this splendid vista of *Acacia* and many other trees which were just starting to turn into their autumn colours. Patches of golden grass and strips of red roads, surrounded by hills of granite, some dwalas (a particularly good specimen close by is called Eagle's Rock) gracing the landscape with their well-rounded appearance, and off in the distance more of the characteristic hills of the Matopos that we love.

After a much-needed tea-break (still morning you see) most of the group trooped off on a (very) short walk across and down the hill a little way, to see some of the delicate bushman cave paintings and grain bins, with Gavin and Rod Tourle providing some background information on them. The open-ended steep-faced cave was made by huge granite boulders leaning against each other, with a view out across the valley. It was surrounded by trees, with a particularly large paper-bark tree growing right beside it and carpets of the fascinating resurrection plant covering the rocks nearby. Unfortunately, few of the paintings were well preserved and only one of the amazing grain bins was entire; the others are providing nesting holes for various small animals or acting as debris-collectors.

After admiring the site, back on the lawn a quiet lunch in the warm sun and dappled shade was enjoyed whilst overlooking the valley (antisocial behaviour was encouraged – with people turning their backs on each other to admire the view). Besides birds and a few lizards, there was no animal-life seen in the area. Not even dassies (probably as setting up residence right next to your predator's one is not such a good idea). A bird list made towards the end of the day showed that ~20 species of birds of all sizes were around, including the majestic Black Eagle.

After lunch, Gavin informed us about the history, geology and general interest items of the area, and the next plan of action was passed on to the troop(s). The more energetic of the troop included a range of ages; from the more advanced shall we say, to a few boyjies lucky enough to get shoulder lifts parts of the way! The great dwala nearby was the objective and conquered it was, through a relatively easy clamber with a few parts taken cautiously due to lose earth and stones. The view from the top –

beautiful! Camp was waved at, photos were taken, and time was spent in quiet contemplation. Patches of lichen in various colours, and empty natural pools made feet watching a good pastime.

When we had roamed to our hearts desire, more tea was asked for and home was calling. Altogether it was a fantastic day out, and I for one would go back to Shashani Valley in a heart-beat to discover more. The people were fabulous and very generous! These outings to various parts of the Matopos are a treat, and if you haven't gone yet, DO!

## 10 – CALENDAR 2012

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

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	Postponed – to be advised
Matobo Classic MTB	31 August – 2 September 2012
World Rhino Day	22 September 2012

## 11 – RHINO NEWS

We bring you further updates on the rhino crises. We need to value our rhino in the Matopos Park as they are under real threat.

A - RHINO RESOURCE CENTER – *NEWSLETTER 27, MAY 2012. Edited by Dr Kees Rookmaaker*  
[www.rhinosourcecentre.com](http://www.rhinosourcecentre.com)

All about rhinoceros conservation, research, education – in all languages – on all subjects.

The total number of references in the database and collection of the [RRC](#) now stands at 16,850.

There are over 15,520 references available as PDF on the [RRC](#) website.

Please send us your contributions – articles on rhinos, pictures of rhinos.

Contact Information: [www.rhinosourcecenter.com](http://www.rhinosourcecenter.com)

## B – ZIMBABWE LOSSES

11 black and white rhinoceros have been killed over the past few months, Parks and Wildlife Management Authority said yesterday – *NewsDay, Friday June 1, 2012.*

## C - SA RHINOS AT MERCY OF GLOBAL SMUGGLING NETWORK

*AFP, Wednesday May 9, 2012; Pretoria*

Petty hunters, corrupt wildlife officials and Asian traffickers have all been snared in South Africa's crackdown on rhino poaching as special prosecutors battle syndicates feeding the trade in horns. More than 160 people are currently before the courts, exposing the complex supply chain stretching from South African parks to Southeast Asian consumers, said Joanie Spies, a prosecutor with the Rhino Project.

*"Slowly but surely, we're moving upwards and getting higher people who did not pull the trigger,"* Spies told AFP. The National Prosecuting Authority set up the team to help combat the dramatic surge in poaching that has seen more than 200 rhinos killed so far this year. The cases have exposed corruption within the systems meant to protect the animals. Private game owners, national park rangers and veterinarians have been arrested. Authorities have also caught pilots who flew helicopters to spot and dart the rhinos, and both small-time and professional hunters who shot them. *"There is a great level of organisation involved,"* Spies said. Some rhinos are shot by small-time hunters hoping for a lucky break by capturing a horn that sells for more than its weight in gold in Asia, where it is used in traditional medicine. Not all of these hunters know what they're doing. One man in April sawed off a horn from a fiberglass rhino serving as decor at a safari lodge. Other rhinos are killed by professionals who have helicopter support in tracking and darting the animals before hunters shoot and de-horn them. Whoever does the shooting, the horns can end up in the hands of the same Asian kingpins, Spies said. Vietnamese and Thai nationals have been arrested for trying to smuggle horns abroad. In one case, Thai national Chumlong Lemtongthai faces trial for colluding with a South African game farm owner to stage legal trophy hunts. He is accused of hiring Thai strippers and prostitutes as hunters who posed with the massive beasts' carcasses to document the kills to obtain some of the handful of legitimate export

licenses for mounted rhino horns. Authorities say he bought horns at around 65,000 rand (\$8,400, 6,400 euros) a kilogramme and resold them for up to \$55,000 a kilo. Horns typically leave the country through Johannesburg's international airport, or through the port of Beira in neighbouring Mozambique, where oversight is lax. The horns may transit in shipping containers or air travellers' hand luggage in Asian cities like Hong Kong. Customs officials in Hong Kong say they have seized 52 horns over the past five years. Last November 33 horns were found in a single container marked as carrying "scrap plastic." It had come from Cape Town. The biggest market for the horns is currently Vietnam, watchdogs say. *"The resources that you would require to coordinate getting poached horns from South Africa to Vietnam means there is little doubt there are large, organised syndicates involved in that,"* Naomi Doak of conservation group TRAFFIC told AFP in Vietnam. So far, prosecuting the top levels of such syndicates has been an elusive goal. Cracking a syndicate requires piercing through three or four layers of crime, Spies said. Cases that have gone to trial in South Africa have landed stiff penalties. Three Mozambican poachers were handed 25-year sentences in January after they were detained with fresh horns, rifles and an axe in the world-famous Kruger National Park, where much of the poaching happens. Spies said South Africa is stepping up its efforts by creating a combined task force of police, military, prosecutors and environmentalists. *"You get better convictions, better sentences,"* Spies said.

## **12 – 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

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.

New subscriptions (1 October 2012) will be advised in the next Newsletter.

## **13 – [www.matobo.org](http://www.matobo.org)**

We continue to get "visitors" to our web-site from around the world. Have you checked in yet?

## **14 – ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT?**

Tourism and Hospitality minister Walter Mzembe has defended the construction of the controversial Chinese hotel on wetlands near the National Sports Stadium saying the country is making major strides in wooing the Chinese investors ahead of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation General Assembly next year – *NewsDay, May 8, 2012.*

## **15 – NATIONAL PARK UNDER THREAT?**

In our last newsletter we wrote about the movement of cattle from south of the Matopos and the potential threat this may pose to the Matobo National Park. Area Manager Norman Monks wrote to assure us that Parks do not anticipate an invasion of cattle, and that improved communication with local villagers is showing positive results.