

**MATOBO**



**SOCIETY**

PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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

Welfare No: W/O 30/94

## **NEWSLETTER 86 / JANUARY 2014**

### **1 – SUMMER RAIN**

There is something special about thunder in the Matopos. It seems to roll on and on, echoing through the valleys, no doubt bouncing off the granite dwalas and boulders. And it means rain. As I write this edition of our newsletter, sitting at my desk in the Matopos, a good storm has just passed overhead, and the stream outside my room is in flood. Mid-afternoon and a large storm was developing over the Umzingwane valley, but it seemed to be pushed onto Bulawayo. Thinking little more of it I enjoyed the late afternoon sunshine, the orchids in bloom across the vlei, the incredibly green grass, and the stream gurgling at my feet.

But behind me, shielded by Mquilembenqwe the wind had changed, and the storm was returning. Seeing a change in the weather I lit my fire early – just as well as I finished my braai under an umbrella, just before the heavens really opened! And then the storm came – flashes of lightning, rolling thunder and rain so heavy you could see only a few hundred yards into the evening bush. And then it came down heavier, the stream rose and water gushed from the roof.

By seven o'clock the heaviest part had past, and I was able to get out to the stream – soon to be beaten back as the rain drops gathered once more.

The frogs are going, just audible above the roar of the stream, and still lightning flashes and thunder rolls. Its summer in the Matopos, and so far, it's been a great season – long may it rain!

### **2 – AGM 2013**

Our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations kicked off on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November with some keen cyclists riding out to Maleme to join with some Committee members, for what was a wet braai under heavy skies. But not daunted the programme began in earnest the following day. The weather had improved, and about 15 cyclists (including 4-year old, Daniel) set off to Nsvatuke Cave. Daniel soon found it faster to ride on the back of another cyclist than to pedal away at his small bike, but older brothers Jonty and Ross managed the whole route! The effort was rewarded with a trip to the cave, and then a return cycle back to Maleme – some opting for the back-up truck!

Members checked into Maleme during the afternoon – and we had a full house.

In the afternoon about a dozen members joined together for a tree walk, following the path from Black Eagle lodge down to Maleme. It was sad to see how litter had been discarded among what is otherwise a pretty and interesting pathway, but by focusing on the trees and views we managed to ignore the waste – though we have marked this for a future trip! Given the good rains the trees were all in foliage, and many in flower making it a rewarding walk.

At 6pm the Drums of Peace, sponsored by Forster Irrigation and PPC Zimbabwe, did an early show for the children, who were all soon pounding away at their drums. Dinner followed at about 7, and despite a threatening sky, the clouds parted and we enjoyed our three-course dinner under a starlight sky, scattered in groups on the old tennis court. Then after dinner, it was the adults turn at the drums, and this proved to be most entertaining.

Early on Sunday morning the “Twitters” were up for their bird walk around the camp and were well rewarded. Another group, with children, tackled the great dome of Pomongwe, and in due course we all convened at Pomongwe cave for our AGM. Moira FitzPatrick and Gavin Robinson had been busy there before us (see separate report in this newsletter) and the members were arranged in the cave. It was a superb and unique setting for our 20<sup>th</sup> AGM.

The proceedings began with a moment of silence in honour of those members no longer with us.

Our Chairman gave an address at the end of the meeting recalling the names and events of the past twenty years.

And then onto the “Picnic Competition” which proved to be great sport and fun. Some members were disqualified for trying to bribe the judges, others for being too vulgar in the presence of children. There was good old fashioned white linen and silver, some more contemporary safari, but the winning design was modern, colour coded in orange, and French! Well done to Cecile and John Knight!

In conclusion a big thank-you to the committee for superb arrangements and a programme that accommodated all our members to make this a truly memorable week-end.

### **3 - NEXT EVENT**

Date	16 February 2014
Venue	Diana’s Pool area
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Ascot Parking
Travel	All vehicles, trucks preferred
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don’t forget your hat!

We will venture out into the eastern Matopos to explore the rivers and streams that feed into Diana’s Pool – so bring your costumes and boots! We hope to make the most of the good rains and enjoy the *Brachystegia* forests and rolling dwalas.

Mr Dave Grant, from Falcon College, has agreed to join us and will speak about the historic sites in this area.

### **4 – REPORT BACK**

On Sunday 6 October 2013 we held an outing that was focused on trees. Our Chairman had selected an area down the Sotcha Rd, and along the Mazhowe River. The focus of the walk was to reach a huge old *Brachystegia tamarindoides* in this area, and the on the return to visit a grove of large specimens of the same trees. In between there was a wide range of trees and shrubs. The focus on trees made us really appreciate the variety available, and at the same time notice how many were coming into flower. On the drive there were some fine specimens of Pod Mahogany *Azelia quansensis*, and Rain Tree, *Lonchocarpus capasa* in flower. It was fascinating to see how some *Brachystegia tamarindoides* were in full green leaf, and others right next door had not a leaf to their name! And as for the old giant, it was worth the walk. We sat under its gnarled branches and looked skyward through the leafy canopy, branches that twisted, and merged again! A picture of natural beauty, and a relief from the hot October sun. How many other people had settled in its shade in the past hundreds of years? Did they respect its size and beauty – indeed was this tree sacred because of its age?

Over the picnic lunch, specimens were confirmed and studied, but we were unable to add to either the Matopos tree list, or to the Zambesi Flora guide!

### **5 – COMMITTEE**

We welcome Cindy Sellick our committee, who was co-opted after the AGM.

At our first committee meeting, the following Office Bearers were elected:

Chairman; Gavin Stephens, Secretary; Gaynor Lightfoot and Treasurer; Adele Edwards.

Shelagh Adams and Paul Hubbard remain as members.

We extend our appreciation to Jean Whiley who has served so admirably for many years as Secretary and to Duncan Purchase who is now located at Falcon School, but has promised to maintain our web-site!

### **6 – NEW RECORD OF A SPIDER FROM THE MATOBO HILLS**

*Dr Moira FitzPatrick*

During the preparations for the MCS AGM to be held inside Pomongwe Cave the floor of the cave was sprayed with water to dampen down the dust and this disturbed the spiders living in the sandy floor. These were duly caught and taken to the museum to reveal a pair what is considered one of the world’s most dangerously venomous spider, the Six-eyed Sand/Crab Spider. This spider (probably *Sicarius hahni*) belongs to the Family Sicariidae which also includes the Violin/Recluse spiders. While Violin spiders are common in the Matobo hills this is the first record of the Six-eyed Sand spider, previously only known in this country from Sentinal Ranch, Tuli Circle and Great Zimbabwe.

*Sicarius*, the Six-eyed Sand spider is not that commonly encountered as it occurs in the sand in the more arid parts of western half southern Africa and are rarely associated with people. It is a primitive spider with only six eyes (most spiders have 8) and these are arranged in three groups of two (diads) on the front of the carapace. The cuticle is leathery and has sickle-shaped setae (hairs). It is a robust, flattened

spider, usually 9-19mm in length and a leg span of about 50 mm. They are commonly called sand spiders in reference to their habit of quickly burying themselves under sand by tossing it over their bodies with their legs. The tufts of sickle-shaped body setae hold the sand covering in place helping to camouflage the spiders (which are usually yellow or reddish-brown in colour). Prey is caught using the front legs when the prey runs over a concealed spider, and appear to rely solely on chance encounters with prey rather than actively going hunting. They seldom leave their habitat, and can go for long periods (up to a year) lying beneath the soil without food and water. They live in the fine sand under rocks, rock overhangs and entrances to animal burrows, thus all the caves in Matobo Hills are ideal habitat for these spiders.

Silk cup-like egg sacs, usually covered with sand are buried in the sand (Sand spiders and Violin spiders are the only spiders that lay in soil) and spiderlings develop slowly. Sand spiders can live for 15 years making them among the longest living of the spiders. *Sicarius* is considered to be a living fossil that predates the Gondwanaland drift some 100 million years ago as its distribution is Southern Africa and Central and Southern America.

The bites of these spiders, which are extremely rare, results in massive tissue destruction causing extensive and severe ulcerating lesions and widespread haemorrhaging at the lesion and internally with systemic symptoms attributed to disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), leading to multiple organ failure resulting in death.

### **7 – MATOPOS HERITAGE MTB**

Plans are well under way for the annual Matobo Hills World Heritage Mountain Bike challenge (19-22 March), with unprecedented interest being shown from riders south of the border. Indeed the event was fully subscribed within ten days! It is now ranked as the top single-track event in southern Africa – so we have to maintain standards in 2014! We hope some members will get out in the saddle to join in! The excellent rainy season so far promises to make this a special edition and a few modifications to the route are being considered. For further information, contact the Chairman. Volunteers are always welcome!

The annual Bulawayo to Lumane Falls bike ride is scheduled for Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February. Contact the Chairman for details.

### **8 – IRONWILL**

The Zimbabwe Ironwill will be hosted for the second time in the Matopos from 2 – 6 April. This event is normally held in Chimanimani, but the event three years ago in the Matopos generated such interest that the organisers have decided to return to the “old Hills” for four days of cycling, hiking, orienteering, water sports and camping. Teams of two are required – so far we have one team representing our members – call the Chairman for more information.

### **9 – MATOPOS 33 MILER**

Following the successful revival of the Matopos 33 Miler in April last year, your Society has secured sponsorship to host the event again in 2014, and preparations are in full swing. The ultra-marathon will be held on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April – so plenty of time for members to get training! Once again there will be the full 33 miler (56km's), a half marathon and a 5km fun run, as well as the 33miler relay. We will be seeking volunteers to help with this event, so please support your Society and get in touch with the secretary!

### **10 – SUBSCRIPTIONS**

You are reminded that subscriptions for the year 2014 are now overdue. Please support your society by maintaining your subscriptions. There has been no change from the past year.

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

### **11 – CALENDAR 2014**

Herewith the proposed dates for the 2014 field trips –make a note in your diary!

Sun 16 <sup>th</sup> February	Diana's Pool
Sun 18 <sup>th</sup> May	Sabafu Hill Ruins
Sat 7 <sup>th</sup> June	World Environment day clean-up (proposed Maleme Rest Camp)

Sun 24 <sup>th</sup> August	TBA
Sun 2 <sup>nd</sup> November	TBA
Sun 30 <sup>th</sup> November	AGM
Other dates	
19 <sup>th</sup> -22 <sup>nd</sup> March	Matopos Heritage Challenge
2 <sup>nd</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> April	Ironwill
13 <sup>th</sup> April	Matopos 33 Miler
5 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> September	Matopos Classic MTB

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

Duncan is working on an upgraded web site. We hope you have been online to see the information on hand, check pictures from our last outing, and to see what is happening in the Matopos. We can also be found on Facebook. Let us have any pictures that may have from past outings.

## 13 – MCS APPAREL

The Society has a limited stock of fleece sleeveless jackets, in olive green with orange MCS logo. These are available at \$20 each and have proven to be popular – even if they have been made available in the height of summer! We still have stocks of hats and caps (at \$10 each). CD's are also available. These make ideal gifts.

## 14 – CLIMATE CHANGE **Tough climate**

In September, a UN panel of experts released its long-awaited report detailing the physical evidence behind climate change. The scientists working with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said they were 95% certain that humans had been the "dominant cause" of global warming since the 1950s.

Despite this, and projections suggesting 2013 could be among the warmest years on record, the political process to reduce emissions remained precarious. And the warming "pause" continued to stump climate scientists, with the ban on CFC gases and natural cooling in part of the Pacific Ocean among the reasons proposed.

## 15 – CHILDREN URGED TO PUT AWAY SCREENS AND PLAY OUTSIDE

*(With acknowledgement to the BBC) By Judith Burns BBC News education reporter*

Children have lost touch with nature and the outdoors in just one generation, argues the Wild Network campaign

Children are being urged to take back their "wild time", swapping 30 minutes of screen use for outdoor activities.

The call to renew a connection with nature comes from a collaboration of almost 400 organisations, from playgroups to the NHS.

The Wild Network wants children to take up activities like conkers and camping.

"The tragic truth is that kids have lost touch with nature and the outdoors in just one generation," said Chairman Andy Simpson.

The organisers argue that swapping 30 minutes of television and computer games each day for outdoor play would increase the levels of fitness and alertness and improve children's well-being

### Marketing Nature

"Time spent outdoors is down, roaming ranges have fallen drastically, activity levels are declining and the ability to identify common species has been lost," said Mr Simpson.

He referred to recent research by the RSPB which suggested only one in five children aged eight to 12 had a connection with nature.

We need to make more space for wild time in children's daily routine, freeing this generation of kids to have the sort of experiences that many of us took for granted" says David Bond of Project Wild Thing

"With many more parents becoming concerned about the dominance of screen time in their children's lives, and growing scientific evidence that a decline in active time is bad news for the health and happiness of our children, we all need to become marketing directors for nature," said Mr Simpson.

"An extra 30 minutes of wild time every day for all under 12-year-olds in the UK would be the equivalent of just three months of their childhood spent outdoors.

"We want parents to see what this magical wonder product does for their kids' development, independence and creativity, by giving wild time a go."

The campaign launches on Friday with the release of a documentary film, Project Wild Thing.

It tells the story of how, in a bid to get his daughter and son outside, film-maker David Bond appoints himself marketing director for nature, working with branding and outdoor experts to develop a campaign.

#### 'Misty-eyed Nostalgia'

"I wanted to understand why my children's childhood is so different from mine, whether this matters and, if it does, what I can do about it," said Mr Bond.

"The reasons why kids, whether they live in cities or the countryside, have become disconnected from nature and the outdoors are complex.

"Project Wild Thing isn't some misty-eyed nostalgia for the past. We need to make more space for wild time in children's daily routine, freeing this generation of kids to have the sort of experiences that many of us took for granted.

"It's all about finding wildness on your doorstep and discovering the sights, sounds and smells of nature, whether in a back garden, local park or green space at the end of the road."

The campaign, said to be the biggest ever aiming to reconnect children with the outdoors, includes the National Trust, the RSPB, Play England and the NHS, as well as playgroups, businesses and schools.

EDITOR; So here's a call to our members with families – we need to see you on our outings! Have you considered enrolling your children with Norman Scott, first Bulawayo Pioneer Scout Troop? The opportunities are there for our children – it's up to make them possible.

#### **16 – RHINO NEWS**

Hardly had the World Rhino day celebrations passed when we received the shocking news of the poaching of two rhino in the Matopos. The loss of Swazi, one of the first rhino to be re-introduced into the Matopos in the 1950's was like that of losing an old friend. It was a sombre and sad occasion, which just brings home how important it is to protect our Matopos rhino. We do not want the only rhino in the Matopos to be those painted on the cave walls.

Are we losing the rhino war?

*Tendai Chara (Sunday, 29 December 2013)*

Driving towards Kezi from Bulawayo can be a rare spectacle filled with pleasure. After only a few kilometres from the country's second biggest city, large herds of grazing livestock are usually seen munching grass as they seem unfazed by the noise emanating from the many vehicles from the busy highway.

Further down the road, the landscape becomes particularly spectacular with valleys that are surrounded by both huge and small granite outcrops. Balancing rocks hang precariously as if they might fall off any time.

It is in this vast conservation area that the Matopos National Park, a World Heritage site which is rich in both history and culture, is located.

Intertwined with this beautiful scenery is the abundant wildlife. From the squirrel to the giraffe to the endangered black rhino, the park is pregnant with a variety of reptiles, birds and several animal species. The park is home to the zebra, wildebeest, giraffe, eland, reedbuck, impala and sable among other animals. Apart from the popular game drives, the historical tours and the rock paintings, visitors can also visit the grave of Cecil John Rhodes. The Shangani Memorial, which chronicles the often bloody historical conflicts between the white colonial settlers and the Ndebele people, is situated some few kilometres from the highway.

To the visitors, the area surrounding the Matopos National Park is a haven of tranquillity and beauty. However, it is in these serene environs and many other animal conservancies across the country that a vicious "war" to save the rhino from extinction is being fought.

Officers from the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management, villagers living in areas surrounding the park and tourism and conservation organisations are engaged in a bitter struggle to stop poaching activities and save the endangered rhino from extinction.

There are growing concerns that if the rhinos are not protected, they will, like the pre-historic dinosaurs, soon become extinct. During the past five years, there has been an alarming increase in rhino poaching which is threatening the existence of the animal species.

Recently, two white rhinos were shot and dehorned by poachers in the park. The park's then oldest white rhino which was nicknamed "Gumboot" and was popular with tourists, was killed and dehorned recently. It is suspected that a South African poaching syndicate killed the 50-year-old rhino.

The other rhino that was also killed by the same syndicate was 10 years old. There are fears that wildlife poaching is not only widespread but increasing at an alarming rate in this country, especially following the tragic cyanide poisoning in Hwange National Park, which caused the deaths of an estimated 300 elephants.

The recent killing of the rhinos in Matopos came amid reports that 95 per cent of all the rhinos in the world have now been killed.

Stakeholders in the Matopo area are determined to put a stop to rhino poaching.

Paul Hubbard, the project manager of the Whovi Game Fence Project, which seeks to build a fence around the Matopos National Park to protect the rhinos, urged all Zimbabweans to come together and save the rhino from extinction.

"Action is required now to save the rhino from the on-going poaching, or else we will be the generation responsible for the complete extinction of the rhino from the wild," Hubbard said.

Hubbard is also the chairman of the Matobo Rhino Initiative Trust, a body that was established to save the Matopo rhino. The trust was established to assist in conserving, protecting and rehabilitating wildlife species in the Whovi Game Park, the Rhodes Matopos Estate and the Matobo area in general.

The trust is working with all the stakeholders and has so far constructed 20-kilometre stretch of fence at a cost of US\$80 000 with funds sourced from well-wishers, the trust engages the local communities. During a visit by The Sunday Mail In-Depth to the area, locals could be seen erecting the fence. The support that we are receiving from the local community is amazing. It is the locals that have been behind this project since it was started. We owe the community and the other stakeholders a lot," said Mr Hubbard.

Villagers living around the park vowed to save the rhino. Headman Pilisani Dube of Ward 6, Vulindlela in the Matopos area, is aware of the benefits that his subjects realise from saving the rhino.

"As a community, we are determined to save the rhino. The community benefits a lot from the animals and, as such, we are going to make sure that poachers are kept at bay by erecting the fence," Headman Dube said.

Apart from protecting the rhino, the fence will also keep domestic animals out of the park and therefore preserving the environment. In the past 15 years, the Matopo rhino has faced serious threats from the poachers and both black and white rhinos have been shot and their horns brutally removed.

Only 10 years ago, the Matopos National Park had large populations of both white and black rhinos. Poaching has reduced these iconic species to barely viable breeding numbers.

Rhino poaching is also rife in the Save Valley Conservancy where about 60 rhinos were killed by poachers in the past 10 years. The Save Conservancy is the biggest private sanctuary for the endangered species. Since the early 1990s, the sanctuary had become home to close to 90 per cent of the country's rhino population.

It is suspected that the poachers are coming from Zambia and South Africa, armed with automatic weapons. Lowveld conservancies have managed to build up from just 4 per cent of the national rhino herd in 1990 to the current 85 per cent.

In January this year, four white rhinos were killed by poachers at Thertford Estate in Mazowe. It takes two years for a baby rhino to be conceived and born and the beast takes another four years to become an adult and another year before it becomes an offspring-bearing adult.

According to Caroline Washaya- Moyo, the spokesperson for the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, 13 rhinos were poached this year and their horns were hacked off.

Several people, including police detectives, have since been arrested and others have been sentenced to lengthy jail terms of up to 16 years. Washaya-Moyo said the country lost 30 rhinos in private land in 2011 and five rhinos in State land to poaching.

In 2012, 14 rhinos were lost to poaching in private land and eight in State land. From January to June this year, eight rhinos were killed by poachers in private land.

The country has an estimated population of less than 1 000 black and white rhinos. Environment, Water and Climate Minister Saviour Kasukuwere recently set up a six-member Wildlife Ecological Trust as part of Government efforts to support conservation and anti-poaching mechanisms in the country.

On the international market, a rhino horn is currently fetching more than US\$65 000 per kilogramme. According to internet sources, the rhino horn holds huge value for poachers, who sell the horns to mainly Eastern buyers for tens of thousands of dollars. In countries like China, Vietnam and Laos, the rhino horn is believed to have healing or aphrodisiac properties. Sadly, all of them are under threat from poachers who supply the demand from Asia and the Middle East. Although there is no scientific proof of its medical value, the rhino horn is highly prized in traditional Asian medicine.

There has been an unprecedented upsurge in the poaching of rhinos in Africa. Rhino poaching is also rampant in South Africa where more than 800 rhinos were killed this year. Reports from South Africa indicate that two rhinos are killed in that country every day.

In West Africa, the wild black rhino has officially been listed as extinct. According to recent news reports, poachers killed and dehorned a 17-year old black rhino in the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya.

The rhino was suspected to have been heavily pregnant and also had a two-year-old calf. Reports indicate that the killings were done despite the fact that Lewa Conservancy is one of the most heavily protected wildlife refuges in that country, with armed rangers, dog patrols, aerial surveillance and 90 miles of electric fences surrounding the park.

The rhino was killed during a full moon, which is known as a prime time for rhino poaching due to the brighter light conditions. Poachers across Africa are said to be using sophisticated methods.

Internet sources claim that over 40 rhino (black and white) have been poached so far this year in Kenya, which has a population of 1 025 black and white rhinos.

This means that the East African country has lost 3.9 per cent of its rhinos in 2013. This is alarming considering that the average annual growth rate of any given rhino population is 5 per cent. Conservationists are worried that poaching deaths together with natural mortalities will overtake rhino births, leading to the extinction of the rare and imposing animal.

In a positive development, the British government recently announced that it will send troops to Kenya to help support the fight against wildlife poaching. The army personnel will provide patrolling and field training to members of the Kenyan Wildlife Service (KWS), Kenyan Forestry Service (KFS), and Mount Kenya Trust (MKT). In Namibia two white rhinos were killed in November at a farm near the city of Karibib.

It is believed that one of the rhinos killed was also pregnant. According to conservationists, there are five species of rhino left in the world.

In Africa, there are approximately 20 000 white rhinos and only 5 055 black rhinos left. Considering that there were almost 500 000 rhinos across Asia and Africa at the beginning of the 20th century, this is an alarming statistic that requires urgent attention.

## **16 – SIX HUNDRED PEOPLE BLOCKED FROM VISITING NJELELE**

*BULAWAYO, 7 October, 2013 (Byo24)* - At least 600 people comprising spirit mediums and war veterans were reportedly blocked by the police from entering Bulawayo on their way to Njelele Shrine in Matobo where they wanted to conduct some rituals on Saturday morning. The members of the group, which calls itself the National Traditional Inheritance Kingdom, Chieftainships and the Governance of Zimbabwe, wanted to visit Njelele shrine in defiance of an order by the Chiefs' Council, which instructed the group leaders to first consult the traditional leadership from Matabeleland South. The group's spokesperson, Joshua Kativhu, confirmed their convoy was ordered to turn back when it arrived at the 24 hour police roadblock near Mahatshula suburb along the Bulawayo-Harare Road. Chiefs from Matabeleland South have insisted that cleansing rituals were not allowed at this time of the year at Njelele and regard the visit as disrespect to their authority and culture.

## **17 – PLANT IDENTIFICATION / MAPPING HUNT**

Don't forget our drive to obtain records of plants found in the Matobo area, as detailed in our last Newsletter.

## **18 - DEFORESTATION**

Timber reserves face extinction: Environmental Management Agency director-general Mutsa Chasi has warned that the country's timber reserves faced extinction within the next five years given the rate at which they are being decimated by veld fires. Addressing legislators attending an environmental

workshop in Harare over the weekend, Chasi said veld fires were causing havoc to forests – *NewsDay*, Tuesday November 12, 2013.

Zimbos use 6 mln tonnes of wood fuel a year: Zimbabweans are using an average of 6 mln tonnes of wood fuel per year for domestic, agricultural and industrial use because of the power cuts being experienced throughout the country, Parliament heard last week. MDC-T Southerton MP Gift Chimankire made the startling remarks last Thursday while debating a motion by MDC-T Mabvuku–Tafara MP James Maridadi’s call for the House to set up a probe team to investigate power utility, Zesa Holdings, in the wake of the recent increase in power cuts. Chimankire said the power shortages needed to be urgently addressed to avert deforestation – *NewsDay*, Tuesday October 22, 2013.

### **19 – NEW SIGNS**

Finally, our new World Heritage sign was given approval by the Ministry of Transport, and so on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January, aided by Norman Scott and Chris McKenzie from Gordon Park, and supported by PPC Zimbabwe, our sign got re-erected on the Matopos Road, where it had stood previously. Having prepared for the day, we faced a small hiccup – the bolts did not arrive with the sign post! Fortunately local Ken Jerrard was passing by, and was able to step in with some bolts, and so finally by lunch time our new sign was secure. It is striking and meets all the requirements of UNESCO. Just as we were packing up, Moira Fitzpatrick, from National Museums, came by to give her nod of approval. It took a while – but it’s finally up!

We have a number of other signs, in the same design, and these will be erected in due course around the Park.

### **20 - RAINFALL**

As at 11<sup>th</sup> January 2014, rainfall in the Matopos;

Eastern hills, 512 mm, central hills 316 mm, and western hills 512 mm. Bulawayo 439 mm. The Matopos enjoyed particularly heavy rains on the night of 10<sup>th</sup> January, with widespread falls between 70 mm and 90 mm.

Whilst there has been good rain, with many wet consecutive days (which is perfect for fungi, orchids and the like), the low rainfall in the central northern part of the Hills (covering the north and central National Park) is unusual, and as a result neither Toghwana or Mtsheli were full at the time of writing, though the respective parts of the Park were saturated.

### **21 – APPRECIATION**

Dr Norman Monks retires from National Parks at the end of January after a long career with the Department/Authority. Consequently, he will be leaving Matobo National Park, though he has chosen to live in Bulawayo. During Norman’s all too short a stay at Matopos, there was a general improvement in communication and relationships with the various NGO’s and amongst Government bodies. At the same time slow but steady progress was made to improve the Park. We wish Norman and Nyasha all the best in the years ahead – and are sure to see them join us on our future outings.