



PO Box FM 648, Famona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

www.matobo.org

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NEWSLETTER 88 / AUGUST 2014

1 – WINTER IS HERE

Cold but clear nights characterise our Highveld winters, and the Matopos is no different. Whilst we mostly think of hot fires, warm soup and thick blankets, for those who manage to venture out doors after dark, they will be rewarded by the extraordinary night sky full of stars. Somehow, the crisp air makes them all the brighter, and if the moon is down, then the Milky Way and all the constellations, appear in their brilliance.

Come early morning, when the temperatures are at their lowest, the clear sun streams across the golden grasslands, and illuminates the orange and yellow lichens of the hills, giving the morning the illusion of a warm golden day. Many days that illusion becomes a reality with those glorious pale blue skies, and not a cloud in sight. Then of courses there are always those days when it just gets colder, and grey clouds get swept in, and light guti descends upon the hills. It is this moisture that settles more heavily in the eastern hills that contributes to the variety of vegetation found there.

The aloes have put on a spectacular blaze of colour this year, but are now fading away. The last of the red excelsior flowers are reaching their end of their life, but are being replaced by the scarlet of the Erythrina which is now coming into bloom. The trees, without leaves are dry and grey – but soon it will be spring.

2 – MATOBO PARK NEWS

Your Society has been busy having new signage made, for both Parks and Museums, and these have been erected in the Park. The major signs are done, and the project is ongoing. We especially thank Paul who has erected the signs in the park. The new signs all follow a set design, featuring the logos of UNESCO, World Heritage, National Museums and Monuments, National Parks and the Matobo Conservation Society. We hope that they will contribute to a cleaner and more respected Park!

PPC Zimbabwe has donated old conveyor belts to the Park to be made into fire beaters. The Park is gearing up for the fire season, which if not controlled, will be severe due to all the growth in the grass and other vegetation following the good rains.

Work on the Game Park fence is ongoing with steady progress. The damage from the rains has been repaired, and the fence is “marching on”. Your Society has made a further donation to this worthy cause, as is recognised on the sponsors’ panel at the Sandy Spruit gate.

At Toghwana dam, new pipes are being laid to service the ablution block.

There was an incident involving horses at Maleme. Parks attended to the matter in a professional manner, and the horses have been removed. However, visitors are frequently asked not to feed animals in the Park, but still do so. The result is always an accident! The same problem is now developing with monkeys and baboons at Maleme. So, please, don’t feed the animals!

3 – MUSEUM NOTES

The NMMZ has restored and re-erected the display panels at World’s View. This was made possible through various donations, and the 13 panels are both informative and professional.

4 – CALENDAR 2014

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

Sun 17 th August	Sabafu Hill Ruins
Sun 2 nd November	TBA
Sun 30 th November	AGM

Other dates

5 th – 7 th September	Matopos Classic MTB
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5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	17 August 2014
Venue	Sabafu Hill Ruins
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles, trucks preferred
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

For those who want to leave earlier and so avoid the dust of the Old Gwanda Road, we will assemble at Matopo Mission at 9:15am. Please note the change of date for this event, which is now on Sunday 17th August.

We will be driving beyond the Matopo Mission down the Old Gwanda Road. The ruins are located close to the road, and require a short walk up a dwala. We should have our resident experts with us to reconnoitre the site, and exchange ideas, before we return to the cars for lunch. We will have lunch off the road, in amongst the *Brachystegia* trees. See the short article below “The Search for Sabafu Hill Ruins.”

6 – REPORT BACK

May 18th started with a cold South-Easterly wind, with grey clouds scudding across the sky. As the little band of enthusiast headed south and over the Blue Hills, the sky got progressively more gloomy, and we all felt we were in for a rough day. But as always with the Matopos, the hills break up the clouds, and the in the valleys you can get out of the wind, so that by lunch time, sitting in the sun it was quite warm. But, back to the journey – we were very impressed to see that the bridge over the Mavondo River that had caused us such concern on our last outing had been repaired (we believe entirely by the local community with no help from Council or Roads) and we reached our destination in good time. The first call was for tea, and then off the intrepid band set for the cave of the Turning Stork on Manyenyedzi hill. The walk was delightful, the climb to the cave pretty steep, but all arrived without mishap. The view into the Mtshabezi Gorge must be one of the most spectacular in the whole hills – and some-how the grey clouds just seemed to add to the atmosphere. As the cave is virtually at the summit, we ventured to the top – and almost got blown straight off! But it was worthwhile to see the thickly wooded valleys rolling across to Wambeza, and down into the Gorge.

After lunch Dr Moira Fitzpatrick spoke to us about spiders. The talk was punctuated with the exchange of specimens and stories of bites from those present. It was a truly insightful discussion, and a great pity there were not more members (especially children) present to learn about the incredible world of spiders in the Matopos, and Zimbabwe in general. We appreciate the time and effort that Moira took for discussing a subject on which she is so knowledgeable.

After tea, the party made its way back to Bulawayo in dribs and drabs – as always a full and interesting day drew to a close. We were unable to get to the Cave of the White Leopard – so that stays as an option for next year!

7 – WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

On a crisp winter morning with the wind blowing and clouds scudding across the sky members made their way to Maleme Rest Camp for the commemoration of World Environment Day. This year the target was to clear the invasive cactus species namely *Cylindropuntia fulgida* (Cactus Rosa), Teddy Bear Cactus and others that have become established at Maleme Rest Camp. On arrival the sun was shining and it soon became a lovely winters day. The immediate areas that required cleaning were discussed with Colum Zhuwau, the Ecologist at Maleme. Whilst having our well-deserved cup of tea and a biscuit before the task began, the local inhabitants (vervet monkeys) come to visit to see what was available. National Parks supplied a team of labourers to cut, chop and removed the cactus. Members teamed up with forks, shovels, black plastic bags and a wise member had gloves; but this would not deter these evil thorns from penetrating the glove. The team was soon in full swing clearing. Time

ticked by and before long it was well over lunchtime and work was complete. We believe that all the *Cylindropuntia fulgida* has been removed – this was the most serious of the invasive species. It is planned to release the cochineal / mealy bug (*Dactylopius tomentosus*) bug into the area (subject to review) to tackle the large swaths of Teddy Bear cactus, and perhaps another field trip will be required to complete the task.

8 – THE SEARCH FOR SABAFU HILL RUINS

Armed with a description from Tredgold written over 60 years ago, and a vague description from Roy Stephens, who had been to the ruins 50 years ago, I set out to rediscover the site. The site was not known and no one could offer directions, nor are they recorded on any map, despite Tredgold claiming that they are the most extensive ruins in the Matopos. The first attempt took me as far as Gulabaghwe cave, with no luck. The second attempt saw me travel well south of Impu – and again no joy. Surrender accompanied me to act as interpreter and from the exchange of words I could see we were not making progress. We did however meet some interesting old folk, visited some new areas, and learnt about the local hills – but no ruins. Then on Saturday 28th June, we tried once more. This time we had better distances to work on, and met an old lady in the approximate area. I could vaguely follow the discussion, but when she started talking about Mambo people, I knew we were getting hot. And indeed we were, as soon we were shown both the Sabafu Hill Ruins, and the Sabafu protected area. The ruins were overgrown, but quite visible. I could not match up to Tredgold's description, partly due to lantana that would not have been there when he described them, and felt it was best to leave them for further study to our local experts, Rob and Paul.

9 – MATOPOS CLASSIC

The annual Matopos Classic MTB event is scheduled for 5th to 7th September. This challenging event is proving to be most popular with the local Zimbabwe MTB riders, so if you are interested in participating, get in touch with the Chairman.

10 – MCS APPAREL

You are reminded that the Society has a stock of fleece sleeveless jackets, in olive green with orange MCS logo. They are ideal for the cool mornings and evenings. These are available at \$20 each. We still have stocks of hats and caps (at \$10 each). CD's are also available. We also have fine colour maps of the Park (and Game Park) for visitors.

11 - EXPONENTIAL ESCALATION IN ILLEGAL INTERNATIONAL PANGOLIN TRADE

On 28 May 2014, Hong Kong Customs officials intercepted and inspected a cargo container originating from South Africa. Hidden among the contents of the container were 1,000 kg of pangolin scales, believed to originate from Timmin's Ground Pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*). This is the largest pangolin seizure at this port in the past five years, and the largest ever worldwide involving an African pangolin species.

This most recent seizure comes amidst growing levels of illegal international trade in pangolins and other threatened wildlife species. On 12 May 2014 Chinese officials confiscated 956 frozen Sunda Pangolin (*Manis javanica*) carcasses at Guangdong Province, China. According to Annamiticus, an international NGO monitoring the illegal trade in wild animals, an estimated 8,000 pangolins were traded last year alone while estimated 117,000–234,000 pangolins have been illegally traded between January 2011 and December 2013.

This trade is having catastrophic effects on the populations of all eight pangolin species, with the Asian pangolin populations showing dramatic declines in recent years. The decrease in Asian pangolin densities has resulted in an increasing reliance on the African pangolin species to supply this insatiable demand. Illegal trade is rife in Central and West Africa, and was known to occur at low levels in southern Africa prior to this incident. This most recent seizure indicates that illegal trade is widespread in South Africa as well, and is far from being sustainable.

Temminck's Ground Pangolins are listed as a Specially Protected species in Zimbabwe according to the Parks and Wild Life Act of 1975 (with 2012 statutory instruments). As such it is illegal to hunt or disturb them in any way. Persons contravening this act may be liable to imprisonment for a term of not

less than 9 years and a fine equal to four times the economic value of the pangolin. Repeat offenders are liable to a prison term of not less than 11 years.

We urge authorities in all range states to take a strong stand against all cases of pangolin poaching and to send a strong message that their country's natural heritage is not there to be plundered. We also urge all pangolin range states worldwide to re-evaluate the trade listing and laws pertaining to pangolins. We applaud the Hong Kong customs officials for their outstanding work and trust that the full weight of the law will be brought to bear on the perpetrators.

The African Pangolin Working Group (APWG) and Tikki Hywood Trust will continue to monitor trade levels in Africa and engage with the relevant authorities to find workable solutions to combat this growing scourge. Please report any observed or suspected cases of pangolin trafficking to the APWG. For more information on pangolins and the research being done to conserve this iconic species please visit the APWG website pangolin.org.za or our Facebook page www.facebook.com/pages/African-Pangolin-Working-Group/513407302073363.

Darren Pietersen
Chairman: African Pangolin Working Group
pietersen.darren@gmail.com
+27 82 937 6052 / +27 76 651 5101
tikkihywoodtrust@gmail.com
+ 263 772 256 490 / +263 488 5156
www.tikkihywoodtrust.org

Lisa Hywood
Founder & Managing Trustee
Tikki Hywood Trust
Harare

12 – DEFORESTATION

Farmer sues Govt over deforestation: A farmer has taken government to the High Court seeking to compel it to stop deforestation that is threatening extinction of indigenous trees, especially in prime tobacco growing areas. Never Gasho, a farmer in Karoi, said the alarming rate of deforestation in tobacco farming areas prompted him to sue Government. In an application he filed in the High Court on Tuesday, Gasho listed the Parliament of Zimbabwe, Ministers for Agriculture, Mechanisation and Irrigation Development, Environment, Water and Climate, Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, Environment Management Agency and the Chiefs Council of Zimbabwe as respondents – *Herald, Friday June 13*.

13 – WORLD HERITAGE NEWS

A. Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Plan

The first draft of the updated Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Plan has been prepared by staff at the Natural History Museum, and has been circulated to stakeholders for comment. Your society has been, and will continue to be, engaged in this process.

B. Okavango Delta Voted 1,000th UNESCO World Heritage Site

Botswana's Okavango Delta was voted in as the planet's 1,000th UNESCO World Heritage Site at the Biannual Congress held in Doha, in June 2014. The official UNESCO press release can be found on : <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1159>

The human experience in this wilderness is nothing short of exhilarating and life-giving, showing us our path to a better future. (Paul Steyn)

C. "Prehistoric Sistine Chapel" gets World Heritage status

A cave in southern France dubbed the "prehistoric Sistine Chapel" has been added to Unesco's World Heritage list. The 1,000 drawings carved in the walls of the Decorated Cave of Pont d'Arc, or Grotte Chauvet, are 36,000 years old and include mammoths and hand prints. Cave experts only discovered it in 1994 as the entrance had been concealed by a rockfall 23,000 years earlier.

UN cultural agency UNESCO said the cave, located in the Ardeche region of France, featured "the earliest and best-preserved expressions of artistic creation of the Aurignacian people", who were believed to be the first modern human culture in Europe. "The large number of over 1,000 drawings covering over 8,500 square metres (90,000 square feet), as well as their high artistic and aesthetic quality, make Grotte Chauvet an exceptional testimony of prehistoric cave art," said Unesco. "It's state of preservation and authenticity is exceptional as a result of its concealment over 23 millennia."

The entrance was found 25 metres underground, with the cave stretching into several branches covering around 800 metres. Fewer than 200 researchers a year are allowed inside the cave and the more remote parts remain unexplored. The painted images, which are the oldest known human drawings, include dozens of animals such as wild cats, rhinos, bison and bears. Remnants and prints of real ancient animals have also been found, including the remains of large cave bears which are believed to have hibernated at the site.

It is the oldest cultural property classified as a World Heritage site by UNESCO. "The inscription of the Cave as a World Heritage site is a wonderful tribute to the first artists in history," said Pascal Terrasse, president of the Cavern of Pont-d'Arc Grand Project. "It guarantees the conservation of the cave and allows us to understand and explain its significance as heritage."

Researchers believe the cave was never permanently inhabited by humans "but was instead of a sacred character" and "used for shamanist ritual practice". "It is our whole human and artistic history which is summarized in what has been rightly called, the prehistoric Sistine Chapel," said Jean-Jack Queyranne, the president of the Rhône-Alpes Region. "Everything is there: profile, perspective, movement, but also a desire to communicate a message of humanity and creation, which is also that which we bear through our proposal as a World Heritage List nomination or through the creation of The Cavern Pont-d'Arc."

14 – PROTECTING ENDANGERED SPECIES A "GREAT MORAL CAUSE", SAYS HAGUE

With acknowledgement to the BBC, 12 February 2014

"The human race and everything in the world will be poorer for ever" if elephants, rhinos or tigers become extinct, William Hague has said. The foreign secretary was speaking to BBC Radio 5 live ahead of a conference in London aiming to boost enforcement of the law and curb demand in the trade of endangered species products.

The summit could be a "turning point" in this "great moral cause", he said. But ultimately an "African-led solution" was needed, Mr Hague added. The government says the aim of the conference, which will focus on elephants, rhinos and tigers, is to secure a commitment from world leaders to take urgent action to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. It will also seek ways to support "sustainable livelihoods" for people who stand to lose out financially if the fight against poaching is successful.

The conference follows a record year for the seizure of endangered animal items at the UK border. Mr Hague said: "It matters to many human beings, including me, that these endangered species are protected, are saved, for the world. It will matter for future generations. This conference is very important, and I hope it will be a turning point. But if it's a turning point, there's still going to be a lot more work needed after it. This has to be an African-led solution that is owned by African states, which we support. They do need Western countries, because Western countries are the best at raising finance and we have very active NGOs [non-governmental organisations], we have private individuals who will put money into it, and we have a lot of expertise in conservation. This is not the West dictating to anybody, and I think you'll find when the African heads of state and other ministers arrive here they're not seeing it in that light at all."

Asked about consumption in China of products derived from endangered species, Mr Hague said he was pleased that a "senior Chinese delegation" would attend, since there was a "mind-set that needs to change" in the country.

The UK was exploiting its "convening power" in calling the conference, he added. "Because we are in the EU, in the Commonwealth, in the UN Security Council, have a big development budget, and are the sixth biggest economy in the world, Britain is one of those countries, and I find this on other issues as well, where - whatever else - we can bring people together," he said.

In response to a question on whether species such as elephants might one day only be safe within militarised zones, he said that "would be a sad world. This is something that you can't put into financial terms or anything else. We know that if that was the case, the human race and everything in the world would be poorer, for ever. But it would also be a world in which crime has succeeded, in which corruption has succeeded, so it would be a doubly sad world. We're not just going to stand by and let that happen." He said the UK was "setting a good example with the money we're putting in and all the effort we're putting in".

"Somebody has to take the lead," the foreign secretary said. "Somebody has to get all these people together and create the turning point. And, well OK, that's us. Let's take on that responsibility; that leadership."

15 – RESEARCH

Don't forget that you can assist in the research work being carried out in the Matopos by Dambari Wildlife Trust by completing the table below and submitting it to Dr Nicky Pegg.

This will also support the Conservation Across Boundaries research work, that contributes to our increased knowledge and understanding of the Hills.

Dambari Wildlife Trust
Small Carnivore Survey of the Matobo Hills
Information / sighting sheet

If you have any details of carnivores in the Matobo Hills area, particularly within the past 5 years, please email them to me (antelope@dambari.com). The following information would be of great assistance – please provide as much detail as you can. I've filled in one row as an example.

SPECIES	RECORD TYPE (Visual, heard, spoor, other sign)	WHEN SEEN (Date or Month and year)	LOCALITY (GPS or map grid reference or description)	HABITAT (e.g. woodland / riverine / vlei / dam / grassland, etc)	TIME SEEN (actual time or dawn, morning, midday, afternoon, dusk, night)	NUMBER SEEN	AGE & SEX (if known)	COMMENTS
Slender mongoose	Visual	19 June 2013	GPS (dec deg): 20.502429 °S 28.282558 °E	Dense woodland	2 pm	1	Adult	Ran across road.

16 – www.matobo.org

The Matobo Conservation Society also has a Facebook page. So, go to <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Matobo-Conservation-Society/234544749928841> and see what's happening – and share your contributions! Let us have any pictures that you may have from past outings, or of interest.