

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famaona. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

www.matobo.org

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NEWSLETTER 89 / NOVEMBER 2014

1 – SUMMER TIME

As always, we seemed to swing in a day or two from winter to summer. Just when the last leaves have fallen, and the veldt looks grey and exceedingly dry, the sudden rise in temperatures sees the sap rising, and fresh foliage begins to break through. The first out were the *Brachystegia* in their multitude of colours, and the brilliant fresh green mahogany's, followed by the *Acacia* (with *A. robusta* being the first to flower), and then there is steady profusion of both foliage and flowers. It seems impossible that such abundance should spring forth as the temperatures continue to rise into October, and the dry winds still blow across the land. But nature has followed this same routine year in and year out, and the vegetation stands ready to receive the rains when they arrive in November. Insects begin to fill the night sky, cicada's start their shrill cry in the forests, and a few brave frogs start their evening calls. The night jars start their calls, as our summer migrant's return. It all continues to build until it reaches a crescendo with the first rains, when the evening air literally comes alive. But for now in October we have to endure the hot temperatures and the annoying Mopane Bees as we watch the north-western horizon for the first rains.

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.

Unfortunately, whilst initial repairs to the roads have been undertaken, this area remains a significant challenge for the Park. Nsvatuke and Bambata remain essentially closed to the average visitor.

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 26th October Trees with Meg Coates-Palgrave

Sun 30th November Rhodes Stables

Other dates

11th – 15th March Matopos Heritage MTB

As we approach the New Year let us have your suggestions and requests for outings in 2015.

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date 26th October 2014

Venue Trees with Meg Coates-Palgrave

Meet 8:00am to leave by 8:00am, Churchill Arms

Travel All vehicles, trucks preferred

Details Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We have been given the opportunity to have a field trip with Meg Coates-Palgrave, and so your committee has changed the date of our next outing from early November to 26th October. Those who wish leave earlier and so avoid the dust of the Old Gwanda Road can find their way to Camp Dwala on the Sunday morning. This is a great opportunity to learn more about our wonderful botanical heritage. Last October we held a field trip that was devoted to trees and it proved rewarding. Now we will have the chance to walk and talk with the one of the region's experts. On her last visit to the Matopos Meg was able to confirm some interesting finds, so we may yet discover something new on this outing.

For those who want to enjoy a full week-end out, accommodation is available at Camp Dwala on Saturday 25th with a society braai in the evening. There will be an afternoon walk on the Saturday, and an early walk on the Sunday, before the main body of folk arrive. Please contact the Chairman for accommodation details, which includes the option to camp.

6 – REPORT BACK

Around thirty members assembled at the Matopo Mission on Sunday 17th August to go in search of the Sabafu Hill Ruins. A further drive down the Old Gwanda road, and then an abrupt turn onto a small track. Members clambered out of their cars, and then set off to climb the nearby Sabafu Hill, with the ruins located about half way up. Some members stuck to the dwala, enjoying the fine views, others ploughed into the undergrowth to seek out any new walls and treasures! The real treasure came later, when sitting on the rock adjacent to the ruins, Paul Hubbard was able to share his insights about the site.

We then journeyed down to Gulubaghwe cave, and again Paul shared his knowledge. Thereafter, under the shade of the Mnondo (*Julbanardia globiflora*) forest we enjoyed our picnic lunch in superb weather. After lunch a third walk was arranged for the fit, this time to visit the little-known Cave of the Fish, also situated on Gulubaghwe hill. The paintings were rewarding, and provoked further debate. And then it was time to wind our way home.

7 – NEW RHODES MATOBO COMMITTEE APPOINTED

The Parks and Wildlife Management Authority board of directors has constituted a new committee for the Rhodes Matobo region, mandated to ensure effective wildlife management in the protected areas of the Matopos and other surrounding areas.

The committee will be chaired by prominent businessman Mr Wilson Mutinhima. Other members include Zimbabwe Institute of Management and Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce Matabeleland region past President Mr Charles Chiponda, former Zanu-PF Bulawayo Province spokesman Mr Effort Nkomo and the wife of Zanu-PF Matabeleland South provincial chairman Mr Andrew Langa, Mrs Clara Langa.

A letter of appointment, signed by Parks and Wildlife Authority board chairman Mr Alvin Dumisani Ncube to one of the committee members said the new members were appointed following the reconstruction of the main board.

“I am pleased to inform you in terms of Section 11 of the 12th Schedule of the Parks and Wildlife Act, Cap 20:14, you have been appointed with immediate effect as Member of Rhodes Matobo Committee for the next four years. This comes pursuant to the recent reconstruction of the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority board of directors,” read a letter by Mr Ncube.

A spokesman of the board said their main aim was to protect wildlife in the Matopos National Park especially the rhinos. "We will continue to work towards protecting wildlife in our areas of jurisdiction," said the spokesperson

8 – THE MATOPOS GAME PARK FENCE

The new fence that has been erected around the Game Park is now proceeding down the Kezi Road, with as little as 15km's to go before being completed.

It is hoped that the project will not end there, but can then be directed to the remainder of the National Park. Admittedly this is a much bigger task, but fencing in some key valleys will produce fast and effective results.

9 – MATOPOS CLASSIC

The annual Matopos Classic MTB event was successfully held between 5th to 7th September. Riders were attracted from Natal, Harare and Francistown. The routes again proved to be challenging and scenic, but the highlight was the burst of fresh foliage on the *Brachystegia tamarindoides*. Whole hillsides became a painter's pallet with colours ranging from deep ruby red through bronze, orange to lime and yellow, and a few fresh green trees in between. Even the most determined rider had to stop to feast on the outstanding painted scenery.

A cyclist lost a cell phone on the one day, but within a week it had been found by local children and handed in to the Police, and so recovered!

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.

11 – WORLD RHINO DAY

World Rhino Day was celebrated on 22 September. A special musical gala was arranged by Girls College at the Zimbabwe Academy of Music to celebrate the event, and a member of National Parks, Mr Samuel Nkomo started a "Walk for Rhino" from the Matopos to Victoria Falls to draw attention to the plight of the animals.

SOUTH AFRICAN RHINOS TO BE EVACUATED FROM KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

In recent years Kruger National Park has had to recruit more guards to protect rhinos against illegal poaching

Hundreds of rhinos are to be evacuated from South Africa's Kruger National Park to save them from poachers.

The move, which is part of a plan to curb illegal hunts for rhino horn, was announced by the Environment Minister. Park authorities said they could relocate up to 500 rhinos, which can each weigh more than a tonne.

South Africa is home to more than 80% of Africa's rhinos. Illegal poaching has risen sharply from 13 in 2007 to 1,004 in 2013. Environment Minister Edna Molewa said the relocations from the Kruger National Park, coupled with the creation of "rhino strongholds", could "allow the total rhino population size of South Africa to continue to grow."

"South Africa, with its large rhino populations, has borne the brunt of rhino poaching. We remain confident that our efforts in implementing the integrated strategic approach will build on our successful track record of conserving rhino," she said. The rhinos may be moved to other areas of lower poaching rates such as state-owned or private nature parks, areas within the Kruger Park closer to the Mozambique border, or even to neighbouring countries, according to the minister.

The new initiative will be supported by the South African government's Security Cluster to work on tougher penalties for those caught hunting rhinos illegally. The famed Kruger National Park, which is of a similar size to Wales or Israel, is thought to be home to as few as 8,400 white rhinos. Park authorities said Kruger was the biggest target for poaching in the region, with more rhinos killed there each year than anywhere else in South Africa. Although international trade in rhino horn has been illegal since 1977, demand remains high in some Asian countries, where it is used both in traditional medicine and as a symbol of wealth.

12 - CAN DRONES HELP TACKLE AFRICA'S WILDLIFE POACHING?

By Matthew Wall Business reporter, BBC News 21 July 2014

An eye in the sky that can help catch wildlife poachers is the dream of many conservationists in Africa. That dream is closer to becoming a reality thanks to rapid advances in Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), or drone, technology. Ol Pejeta Conservancy, a Kenyan 90,000-acre reserve specialising in protecting white and black rhinos, has teamed up with San Francisco-based tech company Airware, which specialises in drone autopilot systems. "With the blessing of the Kenya Wildlife Service we did 10 days of testing," Robert Breare, Ol Pejeta's chief commercial officer, told the BBC.

Rangers at the base could operate the drone via two laptops, one showing a map tracking the flight path, the other showing the UAV's point of view through a high-definition camera. Thermal imaging cameras meant the drone could also fly at night, with the operators clearly differentiating the shapes of animals. They could even see how the elephants' trunks changed temperature as they sucked up water from a trough. With a wingspan of less than a metre, the catapult-launched drone flew at an altitude of about 500 feet. "You hardly see or notice it," he says. "We don't want to startle the wildlife or the tourists." Jonathan Downey, Airware's chief executive, says: "At one point during testing a tractor severed the ethernet cable so we lost all communications with the aircraft. "It was able to work this out then fly back to base. When it didn't receive any further instructions, it landed by itself." Mr Breare envisages drones complementing, rather than replacing, the sniffer dogs and teams of armed, GPS-tagged rangers connected by a digital radio system. But while this trial was deemed a success, both parties acknowledge that much more work needs to be done.

"The operating and autopilot systems worked flawlessly and were easy to operate," says Mr Breare, "but finding an airframe that was robust enough for the environment proved difficult."

Lucrative business

Rangers need all the help they can get in the fight against poachers. Killing elephants for their tusks and rhinos for their horns has become an illicit multi-million-dollar business, with demand particularly high in Asia.

And the trade is threatening Africa's lucrative wildlife tourism industry. "South Africa's Kruger National Park is ground zero for poachers," says Crawford Allan, spokesman for the World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) crime technology project. "There are 12 gangs in there at any time. It's almost like a war zone." "With a kilo of rhino horn selling for around \$60,000 (£35,000), a big specimen can fetch \$250,000," says Mr Breare. "Security is a very significant part of our operating budget and this has escalated over the last two years because of increases in the price of ivory and rhino horn. "We estimate we've had to spend an additional \$2m to protect the rhino that we have," he told the BBC.

'No silver bullet'

But drones are not the whole answer, most experts agree. "They're not a silver bullet," says Mr Breare. "Trying to find the small shape of a poacher in a 90,000-acre park is still difficult, even with high-spec night time and thermal imaging." Mr Downey also admits that developing an airframe that is both light and strong enough to withstand Africa's rugged landscapes is still a challenge, especially when cost will be an issue for many game reserves. While the "brains" of the drone weigh just 100g, the batteries required to power it for long-duration surveillance missions are heavy, meaning the airframe has to be bigger, and therefore more costly.

Smaller, cheaper drones come with a typical battery life of 30-90 minutes, but large game reserves "really need drones that can fly for six to eight hours," says Mr Breare. Airware's Mr Downey estimates that drones for anti-poaching will ultimately cost \$50,000-\$70,000. Higher-specification long-range drones can cost upwards of \$250,000. There is also further development needed around software that can automatically detect different animal species and count them, Mr Downey says.

'Cyber canopy'

On an African plain in the dead of night, poachers can remain invisible to rangers just 100m away. So hand-launched drones with night vision can provide a very useful extra pair of eyes, says Scott "LB" Williams, founder and director of the Reserve Protection Agency (RPA), a not-for-profit technology consultancy.

But even when the poachers have been located, GPS-tracked rangers still have the dangerous task of arresting or seeing off the gangs who are often heavily armed and funded by organised crime syndicates. About 1,000 rangers have been killed over the last 10 years trying to protect wildlife, the Game Rangers Association of Africa estimates. So, the RPA has been experimenting with integrating a range of technologies on the Amakhala game reserve in South Africa's Eastern Cape. "We've designed our own tracking tag incorporating RFID [radio-frequency identification] technology and attached it to animals, rangers, vehicles, weapons and trees," says Mr Williams. "We're putting up three large towers to pick

up the tag signals and creating a kind of cyber canopy. The UAV is just one layer of the onion, not the whole solution."

The WWF's crime technology project has also been trying out this approach after receiving \$5m (£3m) of funding from technology giant Google.

"Our ultimate finding was that UAVs by themselves were pointless," says WWF's Crawford Allan.

"The first thing you do need on the ground is well-equipped, well-trained rangers to react to the data coming in. Other systems - such as tagging and tracking of animals - used in combination with UAV tech makes much more sense."

The WWF, like the RPA, believes that linking all these ground and air sensors and cameras over a secure radio network is crucial in the fight against poaching.

Census taking

As well as spotting, tracking and deterring poachers, drones could also play a wider conservation role. Mr Williams believes that longer-range drones equipped with multiple sensors and cameras will be used strategically for surveillance, data collection, and flora and fauna censuses. Ol Pejeta's Robert Breare agrees, saying: "Currently counting animals has to be done manually from the air, which is expensive and not terribly accurate. If this could be done automatically using drones it would save us a lot of time and money."

While image recognition software that can differentiate between species at night is being developed, "we're not there yet," says Airware's Mr Downey.

But the pace of development is rapid and interest in anti-poacher drones is global. For example, the Wildlife Conservation UAV Challenge, founded by Princess Aliyah Pandolfi of Kashmir-Robotics and supported by the RPA, has received nearly 140 entries for its low-cost drone competition. The winners, to be announced in November, will see their designs tested in South Africa's Kruger National Park. So drone technology is likely to play a significant part in the fight against poaching, but only as part of an integrated, ground-to-air tracking and surveillance system. Until then, as Crawford Allan says: "Nothing beats a real dog."

13 – ELEPHANT POACHING DEATH REACH TIPPING POINT IN AFRICA

Africa's elephants have reached a tipping point: more are being killed each year than are being born, a study suggests. Researchers believe that since 2010 an average of nearly 35,000 elephants have been killed annually on the continent.

They warn that if the rate of poaching continues, the animals could be wiped out in 100 years.

The work is published in *the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Lead author George Wittemyer, from Colorado State University, said: "We are shredding the fabric of elephant society and exterminating populations across the continent."

Dramatic loss

The illegal trade in elephant tusks has soared in recent years, and a kilogram of ivory is now worth thousands of dollars. Much of the demand has been driven by a rapidly growing market in Asia. "If this is sustained, then we will see significant declines over time," said Julian Blanc (Cites). While conservationists have long said the outlook was bleak, this study provides a detailed assessment of the impact this is having on Africa's elephants.

The researchers have found that between 2010 and 2013, Africa lost an average of 7% of its entire elephant population each year. Because elephant births boost the population by about 5% annually, this means that overall more of the animals are being killed than are being born. Julian Blanc, who also worked on the study, from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites), said: "If this is sustained, then we will see significant declines over time."

"The other thing to bear in mind is that different areas are affected differently. "There are still healthy growing populations in parts of Africa, Botswana for example. But in other places the poaching levels are devastatingly high, and that is particularly the case in Central Africa." In Central Africa it is estimated that elephant numbers have fallen by about 60% in a decade. Prof Wittemyer added: "We are talking about the removal of the oldest and biggest elephants. "The world needs to decide how much further effort it wants to put into the conservation of this magnificent species" says John Scanlon Cites. "That means removal of the primary breeding males and removal of family matriarchs and mothers. This leaves behind orphaned juveniles and broken elephant societies."

Conservationists said urgent action was needed. John Scanlon, secretary-general of Cites, said: "The world needs to decide how much further effort it wants to put into the conservation of this magnificent species and, if so, be prepared to mobilise the necessary human and financial resources to deliver - and we are seeing some encouraging signs in this regard. "In terms of concrete actions, we need to move

to focus on the front-line and tackle all links in the illegal ivory trade chain - improve local livelihoods (for those living with elephants), strengthen enforcement and governance and reduce demand for illegal ivory."

14 – DEFORESTATION

Zim losing 33 000ha natural forests annually: Zimbabwe is losing about 330 000 hectares of natural forests and woodlands every year, a rate that threatens the environment. This was disclosed at a stakeholders' workshop on Participatory Forestry Management last week. Experts in forestry and environmental management raised concern that if the cutting down of trees continues at the current rate, in two to three years, there would no forests left. Officiating at the workshop, Forestry Commission general manager Darlington Duwa said major drivers of deforestation include agricultural expansion, commercialisation of firewood, veld fires, brick-moulding and tobacco curing – *Herald*, Saturday September 20.

Helping Zimbabwe 2014 tree planting campaign:

Harare-With more trees being cut down than planted, what will be left for tomorrow? Yes we are encouraged to plant a tree and save the environment but how can we guarantee a sustainable tree planting project, one that is done out of necessity and passion? It is true that changing our behaviour and thinking proactively is not easy but in order to cultivate such values, I believe we need to answer these questions first:

- 1) Why plant trees? How will this benefit our everyday lives and the future?
- 2) How can I turn tree planting from just a once off event each year to a daily routine that I am passionate about and value each time?
- 3) How can we make tree planting projects a sustainable venture that not only provides shade and conserves the soil but also provides free food for the society?

Helping Zimbabwe analysed these questions which affect our willingness to be a tree planting ambassador. We found that an individual wants to be involved in something they see a direct benefit from. Since the future has always depended on the younger generation, the best route to take would be educating and encouraging today's child of the importance of such an initiative. To better make the project beneficial, the conclusion to a long discussion was simple, let us plant indigenous fruit trees and teach a child to adopt a tree while having a feel of the fruit their ancestors grew up eating.

It is often said that as you go into the future, do not forget the past and as such our culture and background shape how successful we will become tomorrow. Due to rural to urban migration, we see over 60 % of children growing up not knowing where they came from. Even worse, some do not know how to behave in an honourable manner, something their cultural values could have solved. Some look at the "Mutamba" (the monkey orange indigenous fruit) and have no idea that it is food. Instead, it is seen a plant thrown at others in an act of bullying.

We say this has to change and we must start introducing our offspring to the beauty and values of our culture as this endeavour will help provide a brighter future. We must start with encouraging each child to adopt an indigenous fruit tree, nurture it and see it bear fruit that benefits the entire society. Not only would we have ensured a sense of responsibility but also a good heart that cares for the community the child resides in.

We welcome you to the 2014 tree planting campaign where we say, encourage the young to adopt an indigenous fruit tree and help save a life tomorrow. It begins with us, taking a stand and preserving our culture. Do not ask, "What can Zimbabwe do for me?" Rather ask, "What can I do for Zimbabwe?"
The Zimbabwean, Wednesday September 17, 2014

15 - WORLD WILDLIFE POPULATIONS HALVED IN 40 YEARS – CLAIM.

By Roger Harrabin BBC environment analyst

The global loss of species is even worse than previously thought, the London Zoological Society (ZSL) says in its new [Living Planet Index](#).

The report suggests populations have halved in 40 years, as new methodology gives more alarming results than in a report two years ago.

The report says populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish have declined by an average of 52%.

Populations of freshwater species have suffered an even worse fall of 76%.

Severe impact

Compiling a global average of species decline involves tricky statistics, often comparing disparate data sets - and some critics say the exercise is not statistically valid.

The Living Planet Index tracks more than 10,000 vertebrate species populations from 1970 to 2010

The team at the zoological society say they've improved their methodology since their last report two years ago - but the results are even more alarming.

Then they estimated that wildlife was down "only" around 30%. Whatever the numbers, it seems clear that wildlife is continuing to be driven out by human activity.

The society's report, in conjunction with the pressure group WWF, says humans are cutting down trees more quickly than they can re-grow, harvesting more fish than the oceans can re-stock, pumping water from rivers and aquifers faster than rainfall can replenish them, and emitting more carbon than oceans and forests can absorb.

It catalogues areas of severe impact - in Ghana, the lion population in one reserve is down 90% in 40 years.

In West Africa, forest felling has restricted forest elephants to 6-7% of their historic range.

Globally, habitat loss and hunting have reduced tigers from 100,000 a century ago to just 3,000.

In the UK, the government promised to halt wildlife decline - but bird numbers continue to fall.

The index tracks more than 10,000 vertebrate species populations from 1970 to 2010. It reveals a continued decline in these populations. The global trend is not slowing down.

'New method'

The report shows that the biggest recorded threat to biodiversity comes from the combined impacts of habitat loss and degradation, driven by what WWF calls unsustainable human consumption.

The report notes that the impacts of climate change are becoming of increasing concern - although the effect of climate change on species until now is disputed.

WWF is keen to avoid despair. It points to conservation efforts to save species like:

A Gorilla Conservation Programme in Rwanda, promoting gorilla tourism

A scheme to incentivise small-scale farmers to move away from slash and burn agriculture in Acre, Brazil

A project to cut the amount of water withdrawn from the wildlife-rich River Itchen in the UK.

Previously, the Living Planet Index was calculated using the average decline in all of the species populations measured. The new weighted methodology analyses the data to provide what ZSL says is a much more accurate calculation of the collective status of populations in all species and regions.

A ZSL spokesman explained to BBC News: "For example, if most measurements in a particular region are of bird populations, but the greatest actual number of vertebrates in the region are fish, then it is necessary to give a greater weighting to measurements of fish populations if we are to have an accurate picture of the rate of population decline for species in that region.

"Different weightings are applied between regions, and between marine, terrestrial and freshwater environments. We are simply being more sophisticated with the way we use the data."

"Applying the new method to the 2008 dataset we find that things were considerably worse than what we thought at the time. It is clear that we are seeing a significant long-term trend in declining species populations."

Stephen Buckland, co-director of the National Centre for Statistical Ecology in the UK, told BBC News: "It is clear that declines are occurring, and at a more rapid rate in tropical areas with high diversity than in temperate areas where much of our diversity was lost long ago.

"But there is the question in the Living Planet Index of why some populations are monitored when others are not. Those in decline are perhaps of greater interest, and hence more likely to be monitored, than those that are stable or increasing. For practical reasons, populations that are more impacted by man are more easily monitored.

"Further, the quality of the data is highly variable from one population to another, and some population trends are likely to be biased. So is there a decline? Certainly. Are animal numbers around 52% lower than 40 years ago? Probably not."

16 – WORLD HERITAGE NEWS

The Draft management plan for the Matopos World heritage Site is under review, with the second draft having been completed.

In the meantime, your Society continues to make visitors aware of the site with increased road signage. New signs will soon be erected at Silozwane cave, Gulubaghwe cave and Lumane Falls, all sites that are visited regularly within the World Heritage area, but outside the National Park

17 - RAINFALL

The first rains of the new season fell in parts of the Matopos in the early morning of 4th October. In the eastern Matopos, up to 18mm was recorded. The rain appeared to be widespread across the hills, giving a spurt to the new growth, though in the west no rain was recorded.

SADC to receive normal rainfall: SADC climate experts have forecast a normal to above normal rainfall season for the bulk of the region as Government targets to plant above 1, 5 million hectares of maize during the 2014/15 season. A statement from the 18th Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (Sarcof 18) held in Namibia last week says the bulk of SADC will receive normal to above normal rainfall from October 2014 to February 2015 – *Herald*, Tuesday September 2.

Normal rainfall season forecast: Zimbabwe is likely to receive normal rainfall throughout the 2014-15 cropping season, though some areas will experience dry spells towards the end of the season. Meteorological Services Department forecaster Linia Mashawi Gopo said on Friday that Zimbabwe will receive normal rainfall in most parts of the country from next month to March next year – *Herald*, Saturday September 6.

18 – 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 that was included in the prior two newsletters, and submitting it to Dr Nicky Pegg (or the Secretary).

19 – 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.

20 – SUBSCRIPTIONS

You are reminded that subscriptions for the year 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015 are now due and payable, and must be paid before the AGM, on 30th November. There has been no change from last year.

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

21 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Date	30 th November 2014
Venue	Annual General Meeting
Meet	8:00am to leave by 8:00am, Churchill Arms
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

The Annual general Meeting will be held at Rhodes Stables, adjacent to REPS School, on Sunday 30th November at 10:00 am. We have been given permission by National Museums to use this building. Members may be aware that National Museums are looking for ideas on how to develop or utilise this fine Victorian building, and so by meeting here we can share our ideas.

We will have a short visit to the site of Rhodes Summer House, which was destroyed in a veld fire some years ago. After lunch it is hoped to visit some stone ruins close to the Sandy Spruit gate. So the day promises to be both interesting and varied.

As always, we call on members to consider making themselves available to join the Committee. Not all committee members have to labour in the hills – we need help in maintaining web-sites, our Facebook page, newsletters and a variety of “in-town” chores. The committee is hoping that in the year ahead we will be able to:

- 1) participate more fully with the Matobo National Park management plan and World Heritage management plan

- 2) establish a working group to look into lantana and its eradication (along with other exotics)
- 3) have the Matopos recognised as a Ramsar Wetland site.

If any members would like to be involved with just these smaller working groups please let either the Chairman or Secretary know.

And of course there will be our usual events;

- 1) Matopos Heritage bike ride; our largest fund raiser, but it always promotes work within the Park
- 2) The Matopos 33 Miler
- 3) The annual clean-up on World Environment Day
- 4) The quarterly field trips

We look forward to another full and busy year ahead, and thank-you for your support in the past year.

PS: DON'T FORGET TO PAY YOUR SUB'S!