

MATOBO



SOCIETY

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Welfare No: W/O 30/94
www.matobo.org

NEWSLETTER 96 / MAY 2016

1 – EDITORIAL

The 2015/6 rainy season has now come to an end. It has been an unusual season, not just because of the severity of the drought, but because the rain when it did fall was substantial and out of season. For example, March was about double average, after almost nothing from October to February. The summary is contained elsewhere in the newsletter.

For the Committee there has been a busy start to the year, with much activity taking place. We look forward to our members support as we go ahead. We welcome your suggestions and ideas. We especially look forward to support on Saturday 4th June as we commemorate World Environment Day and help clean up Maleme Rest Camp. This is a good cause, supported and assisted by National Parks, and allows us to demonstrate our commitment. Our main target is the exotic plants, but we will also clean up the litter scattered by the baboons.

2 – MATOBO PARK NEWS

The central Government has further reduced financial support to the Matobo National Park, which is a very sad development. Consequently, the Matobo National Park will have to meet more of its recurrent expenditure, probably leaving little for refurbishment, maintenance or new development – just as progress was being made. As a result, Parks have had to review their entry rates, and these are now:

		NEW \$	PREVIOUS \$	
ENTRY	Conservation fee	4	3	
	Cars & trailers	3	3	
ACCOMMODATION	Camping	15 per site	5 per person	Max 3 people/site
	Imbila	180	80	
	White Rhino	110	100	
	Black Eagle	150	80	
	Double lodge	120	65	
	Single lodge	70	50	

The rate of increase is considerable, given the USD economy in which we operate, and the Society is concerned that at these levels, the net income may in fact be less, as folk cannot afford these fees. Meanwhile the severe drought has left all the Park dams severely depleted, with Maleme the lowest we have ever seen it. Fishing has been suspended at Maleme to preserve the fauna there.

4 - WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

World Environment Day is celebrated on the 6th June. We will show our solidarity on Saturday 4th.

Date Saturday 4th June 2016

Venue Maleme Rest Camp

Meet Meet at 9:00am at Maleme

Travel All vehicles

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

You will need gardening tools – and thick gloves!

You may be asked to pay entry fees at Sandy Spruit.

It's a donation to a good cause!

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	12 th June 2016
Venue	Shalom Centre, Maleme Ranch
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Car Park
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We apologise for the delay in organising this outing. Shalom has been in the news last year, and our visit is to allow our members to visit the centre, and hear about the good work that is being done in that area. There is as always lovely scenery, and lots to do.

This requires travel down the Kezi Road, and then about 15km's of dirt road to the farm.

6 – REPORT BACK

Our “rainy season” outing was expected to be anything but rainy. The long hot summer dragged on with no chance of rain. The streams and rivers were drying up fast. But the Matopos is nothing if not surprising. The day before our outing a south-easter brought in low heavy drizzle and light rain. On the Sunday morning the eastern Matopos was enveloped in thick mist, and light rain, but still a hardy group of members braved the elements and ventured south down the Old Gwanda Road. After passing Sotcha, and so dropping below the higher ground, the mist effectively lifted, and we parked near Kelembeghwe cave on Ntolowose Hill. A not too difficult climb up the dwala brought us to the cave, and what a treat. Kelembeghwe cave is one of the largest in the Matopos, and possesses some superb rock art. Chamber followed chamber as we scrambled around admiring the artwork – chasing a few “mountain goats” from their shelter. Back to the cars and we continued south to meet up with the Old Gwanda Road, before turning north for lunch at Camp Dwala.

7 – NEW EUROPEAN ROCK ART SITE FOUND

Madrid. Spanish cave art trove found 300m underground.

Spanish archaeologists say they have discovered an exceptional set of Paleolithic-era cave drawings that could rank among the best in a country that already boasts some of the world's most important cave art.

The pity is that almost no one is going to get to see them. Chief site archaeologist Diego Garate said on Friday that an estimated 70 drawings were found on ledges 300m underground in the Atxurra cave in the northern Basque region. He described the site as being in "the Champions' League" of cave art, among the top 10 sites in Europe. The engravings and paintings feature horses, buffalo, goats and deer, dating 12 500-14 500 years ago. But, Garate said, access to the area is so dangerous it's not likely to be open to the public.

8 – CALENDAR 2016

Herewith the proposed dates for the 2016 field trips – make a note in your diary!

04 th June	World Environment Day clean up
12 th June	Shalom Centre, Maleme Ranch, along Kezi Road
July	TBA
4 th September	Brachystegia outing
November	AGM

Other dates

26 – 28 August 2016	Matopos Classic MTB
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9 – www.matobo.org

The web-site for the Society has been updated, so make some time to visit the site. Contributions are welcome. We are also in the process of revamping our Facebook page.

10 – MATOPOS 33 MILER

The annual Matopos 33 Miler was run on Sunday 3rd April, with a field that was larger than that of 2015. Once again, the event was sponsored by PPC Zimbabwe, and was a great success. This year the early morning start was not as chilly as previous years, and the rising sun over the Circular Drive was again spectacular, making this one of the most attractive ultra-marathons in the region. (It is the only ultra-marathon in Zimbabwe, and is accepted as a qualifier for the Comrades marathon).

The event was screened on DSTV's Supersport channel which provided great coverage for Bulawayo, the Matopos and the Hills themselves.

11 – MATOPOS HERITAGE CHALLENGE

Edition 7 of the Matopos Heritage Challenge will go down as the best yet held. Entries were again restricted to 100 riders (and 96 finally took part). The route was little changed from prior years, just a few modifications. In the weeks leading up to the event, the hills were dry, and the teams checking the route crossed dry river bed after dry river bed. There was no water in any part of the hills. It was going to be a hot dry ride!

Then just weeks before the start the drought finally broke, and the heavens opened. So the ride suddenly became one under the threat of storms. Indeed, dry river beds were now waist deep and many meters wide, streams tumbled down the valleys, and off the dwalas, water leaked from the sides of the dwalas, and massive black-purple storm clouds hovered threatening over the whole event. What an atmosphere to ride in – chasing storm fronts to the summit mountain tops, catching rays of sun between clouds, listening to the thunder roll, and anxiously keeping an eye on the lightning. But whilst riders were caught in the edges of storms, the big storms missed both the riders and the camps. And the rain had not yet fully soaked into the ground so the paths were still firm, giving the route superb riding conditions.

The race itself was exciting – the front runners quickly established an unassailable position, but three teams then battled it out for places 2 to 4. The more social riders enjoyed the rivers and scenery! After three days of cycling fun, with a few injuries to contend with, the riders gathered on the dwala behind Camp Dwala for the traditional closing. The large ring of folk were treated to a setting sun blazing through storm clouds, before going back to camp for a formal candle-lit closing dinner.

The refurbished Nswatugi Site Museum was opened just days before the event. The refurbishment was made possible by funds generated from the event, and was a water point on day one of the ride, so that riders could see where their efforts had been channelled.

Articles covering the event were included in the local Zikhuphani magazine, (May / June issue) and the largest cycling magazine in South Africa, "Ride" (May issue). Apart from positive stories about the event, they described the attraction of the Matobo Hills, which is one of the objectives of the event.

12 – RHINO NEWS

Sadly, two of our precious rhino were attacked in the Lake Matopos Recreational Park, opposite REPS School, in April. Neither was killed outright, but the female had to be put down as her injuries were too severe. Her calf was adopted by another female in the area, and seems to be doing well with its new sibling and surrogate mother! The male rhino suffered injuries to a leg. After examination, it was agreed that the injuries were not significant, and the rhino is back on his feet – indeed must be well enough as he was last seen doing his duty to increase the size of his herd!

Parks guards had been in attendance at the time of the incident, but had briefly returned to their camp for supplies. They were however close enough to respond quickly, and so probably saved the male rhino from further attack.

This is a sad development – the last rhino shot was in the same area, about 18 months ago.

13 – RAINFALL

The March rains saved the day, and brought some much-needed relief to the Hills. However, the wet spell was too brief to bring significant recovery, and already the pastures are grazed flat, whilst the maize crop was a total write off. There is widespread hunger in the Matopos, and Government response has been slow and inadequate – supplying only about 10% of the needs. This is going to result in increased poaching pressure on the park and private lands.

Rainfall as at the end of May, with percentage of normal in brackets, is as follows –

Eastern Matopos at 524mm (65%), Western Matopos 365 (60%), and Bulawayo 375mm (62,5%)

14 – LANTANA IN THE NEWS

The Herald April 4, 2016

At least 770 hectares of pastures in Matabeleland South Province have been invaded by a poisonous shrub - *Lantana camara* - that is threatening the existence of livestock in the drought ravaged area. Land owners can be compelled legally to destroy the shrub and a major eradication programme in the 1960s pushed back the threat for decades. This comes amid reports that over 500 cattle have already

succumbed to El Nino-induced drought in the province, threatening the livelihood of many villagers. It is reported that the cattle died between October last year and January, while 588 240 are also at the risk of dying in the province due to the combination of drought and the effects of the aggressive shrub.

Lantana camara is a toxic much-branched, upright, arching or scrambling shrub that usually grows to between two and four meters tall and forms dense thickets that affect agriculture land and pastures. It can occasionally grow like a vine (as a scandent shrub) due to its patterns of short branches and if there is support by other vegetation, in which case it can reach up to 15m in height. In an interview recently, Environmental Management Agency (EMA) provincial spokesperson, Mrs Sithembokuhle Moyo, said Umzingwane, Matobo, Insiza, Bulilima and Mangwe were the worst affected districts. “The shrub is very harmful to livestock and also choking the growth of indigenous species. This type of shrub is originally from South America. Umzingwane district is the worst affected district in the province and we have started mobilising communities with the assistance of traditional leaders,” she said.

Mrs Moyo said EMA was also supplying the communities with tools to cut the shrub manually in the worst affected areas. She said they were also urging members of the community to cut the plant before it covered a lot of grazing land. She said the plant was also spreading to the villagers’ farming fields. “We are continuously holding awareness campaigns to educate people of the effects of this weed/shrub and how best they can reduce or stop its rapid spread,” she said.

Matabeleland South Provincial Administrator, Mr Mildard Khumalo, said though pastures had improved in the area, the rapid spreading of *lantana camara* remained a cause for concern. “The plant has devastating effects to the existence of grazing lands especially now that we have been hit by perennial droughts. “We are very hopeful that researches which are being conducted by the Chinhoyi and National Universities of Technology and EMA will come up with solutions to the complete eradication of these plant,” said Mr Khumalo. He said there was also a need for Government to invest a lot of resources in addressing the spread of the invasive species.

The Matobo Conservation Society has done extensive work on the *Lantana* scourge, and in conjunction with NUST and Dambari Wildlife Trust is seeking to arrange a national symposium later this year to establish a firm program for eradication. It is hoped that this time around, Government will join in the efforts. *Lantana* threatens four of Zimbabwe’s World heritage Sites, a number of National Monuments and many of our National Parks.

15 – DOCTORS EXPLAIN HOW HIKING ACTUALLY CHANGES OUR BRAINS

Alanna Ketler, April 8, 2016

While it may seem obvious that a good hike through a forest or up a mountain can cleanse your mind, body, and soul, science is now discovering that hiking can actually change your brain... for the better!

Hiking In Nature Can Stop Negative, Obsessive Thoughts

Aside from the almost instant feeling of calm and contentment that accompanies time outdoors, hiking in nature can reduce rumination. Many of us often find ourselves consumed by negative thoughts, which takes us out of the enjoyment of the moment at best and leads us down a path to depression and anxiety at worst. But a recent study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that spending time in nature decreases these obsessive, negative thoughts by a significant margin.

To conduct this study, researchers compared the reported rumination of participants who hiked through either an urban or a natural environment. They found those who walked for 90 minutes in a natural environment reported lower levels of rumination and they also had reduced neural activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain related to mental illness. Those who walked through the urban environment, however, did not report decreased rumination.

The researchers noted that increased urbanization closely correlates with increased instances of depression and other mental illness. Taking the time to regularly remove ourselves from urban settings and spend more time in nature can greatly benefit our psychological (and physical) well-being.

Hiking While Disconnected from Technology Boosts Creative Problem Solving

A study conducted by psychologists Ruth Ann Atchley and David L. Strayer found that creative problem solving can be drastically improved by both disconnecting from technology and reconnecting with nature. Participants in this study went backpacking through nature for about 4 days, during which time they were not allowed to use any technology whatsoever. They were asked to perform tasks which

required creative thinking and complex problem solving, and researchers found that performance on problem solving tasks improved by 50% for those who took part in this tech-free hiking excursion.

The researchers of this study noted that both technology and urban noise are incredibly disruptive, constantly demanding our attention and preventing us from focusing, all of which can be taxing to our cognitive functions. A nice long hike, sans technology, can reduce mental fatigue, soothe the mind, and boost creative thinking.

Hiking Outdoors Can Improve ADHD In Children

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is becoming more and more common among children. Children who have ADHD have a difficult time with impulse control and staying focused; they get distracted easily, and exhibit excessive hyperactivity.

While raising children who have ADHD can be difficult for parents, the usual solution — opting for prescription medication — may be doing more harm than good, particularly when natural solutions can work just as well. A study conducted by Frances E Kup, PhD, and Andrea Faber Taylor, PhD, found that exposing children with ADHD to “green outdoor activities” reduces symptoms significantly. The results of this study suggest nature exposure can benefit anyone who has a difficult time paying attention and/or exhibits impulsive behaviour.

Hiking In Nature Is Great Exercise and Therefore Boosts Brainpower

We already know that exercising is fantastic for our overall well-being. Hiking is an excellent way to burn between 400 – 700 calories per hour, depending on your size and the hike difficulty, and it is easier on the joints than other activities like running. It has also been proven that people who exercise outside are more likely to keep at it and stick to their programs, making hiking an excellent choice for those wishing to become more active on a regular basis.

Researchers from the University of British Columbia found that aerobic exercise increases hippocampal volume — the part of the brain associated with spatial and episodic memory — in women over the age of 70. Such exercise not only improves memory loss, but helps prevent it as well. Researchers also found that it can also reduce stress and anxiety, boost self-esteem, and release endorphins. Many people take medication to solve each and every one of these issues, but the solution to these ills may be a lot simpler than you think!

How Can You Begin to Start Hiking?

Luckily, hiking is one of the easiest and least expensive sports to get involved in, and it can have great benefits for the whole family, including grandma! Start out small and test your abilities. Do what works for you — if that means just walking through trails in a park, that’s fine. Any exercise outdoors is better than none. You can easily find maps of trails around your home online, and there are plenty of smartphone apps to map them out, too. I recommend turning off your signal and your phone while hiking though, so you can reap the most benefits of the hike (though it may be wise to at least carry it with you in case of emergency).

Make sure you have some good sturdy hiking shoes, a hat, and a water bottle, and be sure to layer your clothing so you can take things on or off easily as you warm up and cool down. You may want to consider using trekking poles as well, which can increase your speed and take some of the pressure off your knees. Now, can you just do one thing for me?

Go take a hike!

16 – GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUE SELLING LIVE ANIMALS

May 11, 2016 Musah Gwaunza, Mr Prince Mupazviriho, Samantha Chigogo Herald Correspondent

Government is selling off live wild animals to capable breeders in a new de-stocking scheme aimed at protecting the country’s wildlife from dire drought consequences. This comes as one of the several initiatives that the Government of Zimbabwe has been working on to preserve its wildlife from one of the worst droughts induced by the El Nino weather pattern that has affected the Southern Africa region. In an interview with The Herald yesterday, Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate permanent secretary Mr Prince Mupazviriho said drought impact had to be tackled head on for the survival of most

wild animals. "We have drought and there is no secret to that. Our animals are at a major risk if we do not find a solution earlier," he said. "Most of the areas across the country are dry and semi-arid areas which are not good for the survival of our animals and here we are putting a huge effort to ensure that we look after the animals carefully." Mr Mupazviriho said it was unfair for the international community to criticise the sale of live animals saying instead of criticising Zimbabwe, the country should be lauded for its good initiatives to protect its wildlife. "It is a fact that we have a serious drought in the country. In fact, the whole region is suffering drought impact," he said. "We are surprised that some people are only out there to condemn what we are doing but ignoring the danger posed to our wildlife if the issue of drought is not dealt with head on."

In a statement, the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority said the scheme would help ease drought impact on the country's wildlife system. "In light of the drought that was induced by the El Nino phenomenon, Parks and Wildlife Management Authority intends to de-stock its parks estates through selling some of the wildlife," read part of the statement. "The authority is therefore inviting members of the public with the capacity to acquire and manage wildlife to submit their Expression of Interest."

Zimparks said the process to sell live animals was being handled delicately to ensure that potential buyers were in a safer and good position to cater for the animals. The authority said only legible buyers would be entertained hence prices of the animal varieties available would only be revealed to committed buyers who would have submitted the required documents.

Elephants, wildebeests, lions, impalas, zebras are amongst some of the animals up for sale. Zimparks has also put in several other measures to fight against drought impact on wildlife with efforts in the pipeline to drill a number of boreholes across several national parks countrywide. In February, President Mugabe declared the 2015-16 agricultural season a national disaster due to the dire effects of the El Nino weather phenomenon that has seen the country receiving below normal rainfall.

EDITORIAL – Destocking of the Matobo National Park took place during the mid-1980's droughts and the wildlife has never fully recovered. This has had a significant impact on the ecology of the park, in particular the upper Mtshelili valley, and the migration of the rhino northwards out of the Park. We also wonder how much of this project is driven by scientific needs, and how much is a desperate measure to fund our Parks?

17 – 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.

18 – HAVE YOU PAID YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

You are reminded that subscriptions for the year 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016 fell due on 30 September 2015. Please ensure that your subs are up to date. There has been no increase in rates.

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

19 – CHIEF MASUKU DIES

Chief Masuku of Matobo passed away on 25th May. The Chief, who lived near Matopos dam, was regarded as the senior Chief within the Matobo Area, and so his death is significant. He had been vocal in his opposition to unjustified land grabs, and endeavoured to highlight the plight of his people suffering under the current drought.

Chief Malaki Masuku of Matobo District died on Wednesday 25th May after ruling for 23 years. He was 81.

Matobo District Administrator Robert Muzezewa said the Chief died yesterday morning due to cardiac arrest. "He died today (yesterday) in the morning. He died due to cardiac arrest. The Chief had been unwell for quite some time," said Muzezewa. Masuku took over the chieftainship following the death of his father, Chief Gareth Nzula Masuku. "His father had served in that position since 1988. Chief Masuku is survived by a son, Nkulumane," he said. He is survived by his wife Jester and seven children. He was buried at his rural home at Nzulu, Nathisa in the Matobo District. In his graveside eulogy, Chief Chirumbira, President of the Chiefs Council, described the late Chief Masuku as one of their great advisors in cultural and traditional matters.

The MCS marks the passing of a great Matopos Leader, and conveys its condolences to the family and greater Matopos Community at this sad time.

20 - OBITUARY

Don Broadly passed away in March this year. A quiet and modest man not known much outside the rarefied halls of the natural History Museum, he was in fact a giant in the scientific community, and a renowned expert in Africa and globally. His loss to the natural History Museum and Bulawayo will be immense.

He was born on 29 May 1932 in Stamford, Lincolnshire, and from 1937, when his parents moved to Boston (UK), his interest in natural history developed, initially with the collection of butterflies and moths. After leaving Stamford School, he did two years National Service in the RAF, then joined the Ordnance Survey as a cartographical draughtsman at Southampton in 1953. He spent every weekend for the next two summers hunting reptiles in the New Forest and Dorset. After keeping all six British reptiles in captivity, he craved more variety. To get himself to Africa, in 1954 he took up a post as draughtsman in the Town Planning Department in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. After six months he transferred to the Roads Department as a Materials Officer ('mud doctor').

Early in 1956 he was posted to a construction unit at Esigodini, and as the National Museum in Bulawayo had never had a herpetologist, Reay Smithers, the Director of Museums, appointed him Honorary Keeper of Herpetology to take over the collection of reptiles and amphibians, then totalling less than 1000 specimens. In July 1958 he was elected a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London. In December 1959 Don resigned from the Roads Department to take up an appointment as Director of the Salisbury Snake Park. Here he experienced two serious snake bites from a puffadder (which cost him a finger) and a boomslang. As running the snake park left him no time for field work or research, Don leapt at the opportunity offered by Reay Smithers to take up one of the zoologist appointments to the Harare and Mutare Museums. Don finally joined the museum service as Assistant Keeper of Zoology on 1st June 1961, and moved the herpetological collections of 6000 specimens to Mutare.

On the advice of Prof. John Poynton, he applied for registration as a mature M.Sc. student at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and was accepted. He spent three months there in 1962, also collecting in the Drakensberg at weekends. In 1963 he completed his M.Sc. thesis, a monographic study of the cordylid lizard genus *Platysaurus*, and was awarded the degree (*cum laude*) the following year. 1964 was largely taken up with planning and installing the displays in the new Mutare Museum building, which was opened to the public in September. Much of 1965 was spent writing up his Ph.D. thesis, entitled 'The Herpetology of south-central Africa', and the degree was awarded in 1967.

Don was transferred to the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo at the beginning of 1981, together with the herpetological collections (now 40 000 specimens), and was elected a Fellow of the Scientific Association of Zimbabwe later that year. In November 1984 he was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London. In 1985 Don was invited to visit the California Academy of Sciences spending a month in San Francisco, and was then able to obtain funding to visit all the American museums with important collections of African reptiles during the following two months.

Don officially retired from the museum service at the end of May 1995 but continued to work and publish on the collections as a Research Associate from 1997 until June 2010, when he was appointed Curator Emeritus. During 2013 many long-term research projects were concluded, and at the time of his death Don was writing up further research findings.

Don leaves his wife Shelagh, to whom we convey our condolences.