

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Fomona, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

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www.matobo.org

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1 – EDITORIAL

I have recently had the pleasure of spending some lengthy periods in the Matopos, and on my trusty steed, have travelled across a sizable portion of the hills. As always, there has been something new to learn. The aloes this winter were again spectacular, if a little late, and some interesting hybrids were found. There are still crystal-clear springs, and some rivers and streams still flowing. Considerable amounts of water are being pumped from water systems to sustain the lucrative and extensive Chamollio fields.

But whilst new fences are being erected using wire and gum poles, there remain a number of brush fences, representing the destruction of considerable number of trees. It's not just the cutting down of the trees that is of concern, but the dragging of poles that damages the veld; removing the grass cover and leaving the sandy soil open to erosion.

Fires have started once again, and will no doubt continue until the rains come.

The environmental destruction seems particularly serious this year – perhaps the impact of the drought. It serves as a reminder of the work that is still needed to maintain this special cultural landscape that we call the Matopos.

2 – BULAWAYO TOURISM SLUMPS

Tourism in Bulawayo has rapidly declined, in sympathy with industrial activity which has slumped due to a worsening national economy. Despite its proximity to several World Heritage sites, such as the Matobo National Park and Khami Ruins, among many others, Bulawayo's tourism sector is struggling. The untenable situation comes as the city hosts the Sanganai/Hlanganani World Tourism Expo this month. Indications from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, organisers of the tourism expo, are that room occupancy is 15% across the city's lodges and hotels, signifying extremely low tourism activity in the city – *Fingaz, June 9, 2016*.

EDITOR: Tourism in Bulawayo has declined severely, but this has been an ongoing trend. The City's largest market is the self-drive tourist from South Africa, but they do not want to face the horrors of Beitbridge, and the innumerable road blocks between Beitbridge and Victoria Falls. So, they travel north through Botswana, bypassing not just Bulawayo, but Zimbabwe itself to just visit the falls from Kasane in Botswana.

Furthermore, Air Zimbabwe has cut the City off from the Falls, with only one flight a week, whilst train services are unreliable. Buses do not ply the route on a daily basis either. There are some days of the week when it is simply not possible to travel between Bulawayo and the Victoria Falls – cutting the City off from the most significant tourist attraction in Africa!

3 - WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Sadly, only three members participated in this event, but were supported by a large number of National Park Staff. Once again, we tackled the regrowth of the cactus rosa (*Cylindropuntia fulgida*) – despite two years of attack, small fingers were being pushed up through the sandy soil which required some folk to get down on their knees! The work was painstaking at this scale, but crucial if we are going to succeed. Some larger cactus was also attacked and removed.

We would like to try to identify a cochineal bug to attack the Teddy Bear cactus *Opuntia robusta* or *Opuntia spinulifera*. Any-one who can help?

We believe that the bug *Dactylopius tomentosus* may not be suitable for this specific cactus. Mr Colum Zhuwau, the Ecologist at Maleme will be endeavouring to do some research into this matter.

4 – NEW FORESTRY POLICY ON THE CARDS

Government is in the process of developing a forest policy aimed at mitigating climate change effects and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programmes, a Cabinet Minister has said. Addressing journalists and delegates yesterday at the belated World Environment Day Press conference, Environment, Water and Climate Minister Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri, said the programmes would allow the country to participate in the global carbon markets and generate revenue for conservation and communities – *Herald, Thursday June 9, 2016.*

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	11 th September 2016
Venue	Shale School and Matantila valley
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Ascot Car Park
Travel	All vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

Every year the *Brachystegia tamarandoides* burst into fresh leaf in a blaze of colour. We frequently read about the Masasa's in Mashonaland, but their cousins in the Matopos, the *Brachystegia tamarandoides* can be just as impressive. The trees are normally in leaf by the end of August – this year, with the later winter they have been delayed, but we expect that they will be at the best by the time of the visit.

We will travel into the eastern Matopos, by way of the Gwanda Rd, and via Esibomvu, to visit Shale school, set amongst some of the best *Brachystegia tamarandoides* forest. In the afternoon we will endeavour to explore the Matantila valley, which contains a magnificent forest of *Brachystegia tamarandoides*.

6 – REPORT BACK

The weather forecast had predicted a bitterly cold grey Sunday, but undeterred 17 members gathered at Churchill Arms for our regular field trip. Setting off down the Matopos Road towards Kezi the sky grew darker and once into the hills it started to rain slightly. But once through, the weather lifted slightly, and we arrived without mishap at our destination to be greeted by the Coetzers and their staff. Hot tea was arranged pronto! We were then taken on a walk around the camp, looking at the facilities, and admiring the magnificent view northwards towards the main Matobo Range. To the right the skyline was dominated by the massive Silozwe – at times its summit was wreathed in mist. To the left of that, the lower Silozwane hill was visible, and then the tall Tedzi mountain. Slightly further back was Hambushamba and Madombo. Left of that the smaller Shumbashaba Nyoni and the low Tshangula hill, followed by the Maleme valley. Far to our left we could see the huge dome of Njelele, whilst off to the east we could see Tovi, Kozi, Senungu and even Wambeza. A most interesting view of the “giants” of the Matopos.

We climbed to the little chapel behind the camp – again spectacular views, but the biting cold wind soon drove us back down to a warm lunch.

After lunch we drove a short way, and then walked to the dam on the Maleme river, before winding our way northwards through Ebenezer College and then up through the hills, stopping for tea near Hambushamba where we followed in our minds eye the climbing route pioneered last year up the massive face. We had no “sticky fingers” with us, and so no volunteers to attempt the climb. Finally, home via Silozwane business centre, no doubt to fires in the hearth and hot dinners!

Once again, despite the weather, we enjoyed an interesting and informative visit to a little-known part of the hills, and we extend our appreciation to the folk at Shalom for hosting us.

For those wanting to make enquiries regarding staying at Shalom, you can visit their office at 47b Fife Street, between 3rd and 4th Ave (next to Higrow) or call Daphne on 0772 775 441. No alcohol is permitted on the premises, and there are a range of activities available. Accommodation varies, and can be either full board or self-catering.

7 – BOOK REVIEW

Nyathi, Pathisa. 2016. *Rock Art in the Matobo Hills. Seeking to understand the mind of the San artist. Bulawayo: Amagugu Publishers. 94 pages. ISBN 978-0-797497-433. US\$15.*

The Matobo Hills World Heritage Site is home to one of the greatest concentrations of rock art anywhere in the world. There are thousands of sites in the National Archaeological Survey database and many more thousands await discovery and recording. This incredible heritage has enticed and excited researchers for decades which is why it is a surprise that comparatively little has ever been published on the art of the Matobo Hills. The last guidebook to the art, written by Elspeth Parry appeared in 2002. This book is therefore to be welcomed as an attempt to rectify this gap and, one suspects from its contents, provoke some in-depth debate on this wonderful art.

The book begins rather oddly with a preface that discusses the need for local craftspeople's to create souvenirs that reflect the varied and deep heritage of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site. The link between this astute observation and the book's contents is not made clear except perhaps for promoting the book as a souvenir.

The Introduction and Chapter 1 set the scene for Nyathi's theoretical viewpoints, expanding on his previous works on African symbolism and worldview (e.g. Nyathi & Chikomo 2016). I personally have problems with such approaches (see below) but it does help to explain the way arguments are presented in this book. Information on World Heritage status is also provided in the first chapter. The second chapter presents an alternative view as to the origin and meaning of "Matobo" that rejects the established story. I do not agree with the author that "there can only be one version which is correct" (p.21). Many different cultures have made the hills their home and left evidence of their existence through the names they used for the area.

Chapters 3 and 4 (p.26-40) focus on setting the scene, reviewing the environmental attributes of the World Heritage Site. There is some repetition in the discussion but some interesting points are made and some startling nuggets of information are strewn throughout the text. The fact that certain hills are solely intimately associated with concepts as varied as war, healing and rainmaking (p.34) demands further research. Some of the statistics given regarding the biodiversity are incorrect: for example, there are at least 347 species of birds recorded in the hills (Mundy 2001), not 175 as claimed (p.33). There are other minor factual errors throughout the book. The chapter on land tenure (p.36-40) does not fit with the rest of the book. The history of the struggles over the ownership of land in the area has been covered in great detail elsewhere (cf. Ranger 1999).

The content of Chapters 6 to 14 (p.42-89) is a spirited attempt to link hunter-gatherer ritual practices with those in Iron Age societies. In a simple and clear manner Nyathi focuses on belief systems linked to the eland in both cultures and draws out some threads in possible continuity of beliefs from the Stone Age into the Iron Age and even historical times. This is not anything new as similar work was done in the Drakensberg and Limpopo Valley in South Africa (e.g. Eastwood & Eastwood 2006; Jolly 2000) and elsewhere but this may be a first published attempt for Zimbabwe.

I am not convinced by Nyathi's attempts to argue for a universal African worldview in which the circle and chevron motifs carried specific meanings of fertility, sexuality and spirituality. His admirable attempt to delve inside the minds of the ancient artists by examining more recent Iron Age belief systems is, in my opinion, untenable simply because of the great deal of time that separates these cultures and the fact that the hunter-gatherers were of a completely different culture. Their being "Africans" is not enough of a reason to link the two. That does not deny the real influence of the hunter-gatherers on religious and cultural beliefs of Iron Age farming communities, some of which have lasted to this day. However, where does Bushmen/San influence begin in relation to beliefs that the Iron Age migrants might have already had when they arrived in southern Africa some 2000 years ago? How could such beliefs have changed over the centuries? Can we find hunter-gatherer influences on all Bantu cultural groups in southern Africa?

Nyathi's attempts to link such theories with hunter-gatherer rock art is deeply flawed not least because he does not engage with the ethnography and anthropology of the Bushmen/San people from the last 150 years. This body of evidence, combined with archaeological data, itself also flawed and subjective,

is nonetheless the best source of information on the hunter-gatherer communities that existed in southern Africa in Stone Age times when the art was being created, and used. In mitigation of this criticism, I will observe that locating much of the relevant information is a difficult and expensive process, especially if one is not in a university environment. There is a crying need for archaeologists and rock art researchers to better communicate the results of their findings for use by the general public and other researchers in their exploration of such concepts.

The last chapter of the book discusses data from recent interviews done by Nyathi in the Matopos on the possible origins of the names of some of the hills. For me, this was interesting as much of what he presents contradicts the established, published meanings. The most arresting was his claim (p.94) that Pomongwe refers to a *pomo* (bush/thicket) that attracts the *ingwe* (leopard) contrary to Walker's (1995) assertion that the shape of the hill refers to a wild watermelon. Whichever one believes, it is clear that more interviews need to be done and the information collated and published to produce a more nuanced local history of the Matobo Hills.

In common with other titles released by Amagugu Publishers, it is clear that not enough effort is spent proofreading the manuscript once it has been typeset. There are spaces missing between words on nearly every page. The lack of references for much of the information presented is a little troubling and it makes it difficult to follow up on the interesting concepts and information presented. More care should have been taken with adapting Nyathi's newspaper columns into this book as it is jarring to read phrases such as "next week we shall go further" (p.52) or "in the last instalment (p.60). Additionally it would have avoided much of the repetition of information in the book.

Nyathi has an easy writing style that is a pleasure to read. As with all of his previous publications, I learnt a great deal from reading this book, my criticisms and queries presented here notwithstanding. Those hoping for a book that gets to grips with the modern research into the origins and development of the hunter-gatherer rock art in the Matobo Hills will be disappointed by this volume. It is nothing like its title suggests. However, for what it is - a love letter to the Matobo Hills and the fascinating Iron Age and historical cultural practices within its boundaries, it is a worthwhile read.

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Article contributed by PAUL HUBBARD

Independent Researcher, Fortune's Gate, Bulawayo

8 – CALENDAR 2016

Herewith the proposed dates for the 2016/7 events – make a note in your diary!

11 th September	Brachystegia outing
November, 2016	AGM

Other dates

8 – 12 March 2017	Matopos Heritage MTB
17 – 19 March, 2017	Heritage Trail Run
2 April 2017	Matopos 33 Miler
6 – 10 April, 2017	Zimbabwe Ironwill (in the Matopos)
25 – 27 August, 2017	Matopos Classic MTB

9 – MATOPOS CLASSIC MTB

The annual Matopos Classic MTB was held over the week-end of 26 – 28 August. Once again, the field of riders enjoyed superlative single track, and the magnificent autumn colours of the Matopos.

The veld is particularly dry, but pockets of water were found along the way. The *Brachystegia tamarandoides* had not yet come into fresh leaf – a disappointment for those who remembered the past two years.

Thirty five riders participated, coming from South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and across Zimbabwe. For some, it was their first experience of the Matopos and they have promised to be back!

10 – ROCK ART NEWS

Rocky future for Somalia's ancient cave art – News 24

Laas Geel, Somalia - Centuries have passed since Neolithic artists swirled red and white colour on the cliffs of northern Somalia, painting antelopes, cattle, giraffes and hunters carrying bows and arrows. Today, the paintings at Laas Geel in the self-declared state of Somaliland retain their fresh brilliance, providing vivid depictions of a pastoralist history dating back some 5 000 years or more. "These paintings are unique. This style cannot be found anywhere in Africa," said Abdisalam Shabelleh, the site manager from Somaliland's Ministry of Tourism.

Then he points to a corner, where the paint fades and peels off the rocks. "If nothing is done now, in 20 years it could all have disappeared," he added. The site is in dire need of protection. "We don't have the knowledge, the experience or the financial resources. We need support," Shabelleh said.

The paintings, some 50km from Hargeisa, capital of Somaliland, are considered among the oldest and best preserved rock art sites in Africa but are protected only by a few guards who ask visitors not to touch the paintings.

Diplomatic donor legal limbo

Applications for assistance by Somaliland's government have gone unheeded. A former British protectorate, Somaliland declared independence from the rest of Somalia when war erupted following the overthrow of president Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991, but it is not recognised by the international community. The "lack of recognition" of the country blocks the cave's protection, said Xavier Guthertz, the former head of the French archaeology team that discovered the site in 2002. Amazed by the remarkable condition of the paintings as well as their previously unknown style, the archaeologist asked for the cave's listing as a Unesco world heritage site.

But that request was refused because Somaliland is not recognised as a separate nation. "Only state parties to the World Heritage Convention can nominate sites for World Heritage status," said a Unesco spokesperson. Requests for funding from donor countries face the same legal and diplomatic headache. Centuries of isolation and local beliefs that the site was haunted and the art the work of evil spirits may have contributed to Laas Geel's protection. But since their discovery, the cave paintings have become one of the main attractions for visitors to Somaliland.

'Part of our blood'

Around a thousand visitors each year endure long stretches of rugged terrain and travel with armed escorts to reach Laas Geel, and numbers are growing. "The concerns of Somaliland are legitimate," said Guthertz, who has identified key areas to tackle to help protect the site. "We have to secure the site, arrange access paths, strengthen the rocks that could collapse, divert rainwater runoff and improve the training of guards," he said.

With a major development planned for Somaliland's main port at Berbera, the number of visitors is expected to increase. Ahmed Ibrahim Awale, who heads local environmental group Candlelight, said that dust is adding to the damage at the caves. "The increased human activity in the area, trampling on the bare gravelly soil, does not allow the natural regeneration of plants," Awale said. "The resulting dust particles may contribute to the fading of the paintings."

Archaeologists say that Laas Geel may only be one of many treasures awaiting discovery in the vast rocky plains stretching towards the tip of the Horn of Africa. Musa Abdi Jama, one of the guardians of the site, sees in the ancient site of Laas Geel the hope of a new nation to be, flying the flag for the cultural identity and uniqueness of Somaliland. "Here, it was once known as the home of djinn (spirits) by the local nomadic people, who used to slaughter domestic animals for sacrifice in order to live there in peace," Jama said. "Now it is part of our blood. Tomorrow, God willing, it will be the first place in Somaliland to be internationally recognised.

11 – RHINO NEWS

6 000 rhino poached in Africa in last decade – report (*Kaveel Singh, News24*)

Johannesburg - More than 6 000 rhino have been killed in Africa over the last decade and about 25 000 remain on the continent, according to a new report. The Kruger National Park (KNP) is “the eye of the storm, accounting for roughly 60% of poaching incidents over the past seven years”, the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime said in its report released on Monday.

The park holds 8 875 southern white rhino and 384 south-eastern black rhino. These account for around 48.2% and 7.3% of the world’s white and black rhino. Most of the animals were clustered in an “Intensive Protection Zone” in the south of the KNP. “The park has lost more than 3 189 rhino to poachers in the last decade and the population now appears to be declining,” the report said.

The document is entitled “Tipping Point: Transnational Organised Crime and the War on Rhino Poaching”. The first part was released on Monday. The second part is set for release on Wednesday. Written by Julian Rademeyer, who authored the best-selling book *Killing For Profit - Exposing the illegal rhino horn trade*, it is the result of a year-long investigation into criminal networks involved in the illicit wildlife trade.

Asian demand

Driven by demand in Southeast Asia and China, rhino horns have become a black market commodity rivalling gold and platinum in value.

“Borders, bureaucracy and a tangle of vastly different laws and legal jurisdictions are a boon to virulent and versatile transnational criminal networks and a bane to the law enforcement agencies rallied against them,” the report says. Nearly 80% of poaching in recent years had been concentrated on the south of the KNP. In 2015, officials recorded a 43% increase in poaching in the park compared to the previous year.

There were 137 armed “contacts” between poachers and rangers in 2015, compared to 111 in 2014. A total of 202 arrests were made in 2015. KNP officials “conservatively estimate” that at least 7 500 poachers entered the park in 2015, compared to 4 300 in 2014. There were an estimated 1 038 incursions in the first four months of 2016, compared to 808 in the same period in 2015. According to official statistics, 826 rhino were killed in the park in 2015 - three fewer than the previous year.

12 – RAINFALL

After drought, southern Africa threatened by floods - *News 24*

Johannesburg - UN agencies warned on Thursday that southern African countries were at risk of another year of food shortages as the drought-hit region is expected to be hit by above-average rainfall likely to trigger floods. The region is still reeling from the effects of the El Nino weather phenomenon which devastated crops leaving about 18 million people in need of food aid, according to the World Food Programme.

Meteorologists forecast the region will this year experience more rainfall than normal due to an extreme weather pattern known as La Nina. "What La Nina brings is both good news and bad news," Lewis Hove, regional agricultural coordinator with the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation told AFP. "The good news is that we are going to get above average rainfall - which normally means good production from our farmers," said Hove. "But above average rainfall is going to bring with it floods and water logging in some areas of the region," said Hove, speaking on the side lines of a meeting on drought-resilient agriculture in Johannesburg.

To ensure farmers benefit from the rains, the UN officials said they needed to plant early to avoid the floods. But most farmers have little or no capital to buy farming inputs having been hit by two successive droughts. Their governments will struggle to bail them out with cash for seeds and fertilisers. Many of the regional economies are heavily dependent on commodities, prices for which have slumped on the international markets. "If you look at Zambia, they lost something like 47% of their income

because of the drop in copper [prices]... so the capacity of government is weakened," Chris Nikoi, WFP southern African director told AFP. "You take Zimbabwe for example, if the government is struggling to pay its civil servants - its ability to ensure that seeds are in the hands of rural farmers on time, obviously is going to be challenged."

"The international community needs to step in and help," said Nikoi. Humanitarian agencies including the UN's OCHA last month called for \$1.2bn in aid for seven drought-stricken countries in southern Africa, with Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique among the hardest-hit.

13 – CLIMATE CHANGE

Last month was hottest June on record, US scientists say – News 24

Washington - Last month was the hottest June in modern history, marking the 14th consecutive month that global heat records have been broken, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said on Tuesday. "The globally averaged temperature over land and ocean surfaces for June 2016 was the highest for the month of June in the NOAA global temperature dataset record, which dates back to 1880," the agency said in a statement. "This marks the 14th consecutive month the monthly global temperature record has been broken, the longest such streak in the 137-year record."

The report, issued each month by NOAA, also said the global temperature for the first six months of 2016 was the hottest on record. The combined average temperature over global land and ocean surfaces for June was 0.9°C above the 20th century average of 15.5°C. "June 2016 marks the 40th consecutive June with temperatures at least nominally above the 20th-century average," NOAA said.

NOAA also spoke about what it calls the "monthly temperature departure" or record spikes in heat. It said 14 of 15 of these spikes have occurred since February 2015, signalling that global warming is accelerating. The planet's average land temperature in June was 1.24°C higher than the 20th-century monthly average, tied at an all-time record for June that was struck last year. The land temperature also hit a record high for the first six months of the year. The average sea surface temperature was 0.77°C above last century's monthly average. That marked the hottest June and the hottest January-June period on record.

'Trend will continue'

Experts say global warming is at least partially to blame for a number of environmental disasters around the world, from the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef off Australia to wildfires raging across Canada. Last year marked the hottest on record, beating 2014, which previously held the title. With 14 months in a row now setting records for heat, 2016 - now half over - is on track to be another scorching year. Nasa climatologist Gavin Schmidt said that while the high temperatures are in part tied to the El Niño weather pattern - related to warm waters in the Pacific Ocean - around 60% comes from "other factors, including the very strong Arctic warming."

As El Niño ends this year, the Pacific cooling trend known as La Niña is set to begin, and 2017 will likely not break records as this year has so far, Schmidt said. But year-to-year ups and downs are less important for climate scientists than overall trends, he emphasised. "One year being warmer and one year being cooler is not really relevant, because the big impact from increased temperatures is from a sustained increase of temperatures," the climatologist said. "The trend will continue."

14 – CLIMATE CHANGE

ZIMBABWEAN farmers, facing some of the greatest climate risks in Africa, can look forward to more rain in the summer — hoping that will help boost food production — but no one knows really how widely it will be distributed. Jeffrey Gogo Climate Story

This means some regions could thrive while others starve. Local farmers are still smarting from a bruising 2015 /16 farming season, marked by a serious shortage of rain due to El Nino, with harvests falling by more than half. As a result, more than 4 million people risk going hungry this year, say authorities, who have since appealed to donors for \$1,6 billion in aid.

Now, with El Nino — a naturally occurring weather cycle caused by warmer temperatures in the Pacific Ocean — gradually being replaced by its opposite, La Nina, which produces a cooling effect, local climate scientists are predicting more rainfall in the 2016 /17 farming season, but are uncertain over its distribution.

According to Linia Mashawi Gopo, principal meteorologist at the Meteorological Services Department, there are strong signs for higher rainfall this year. And one of those signs is the unusually cold spells which have swept through the country in recent weeks, with daytime temperatures in Harare dropping to as low as 18 degrees Celsius. The predictions are premised on an analysis of historical trends following an El Nino year, she cautioned. Nothing conclusive, as yet, because there are several other factors to consider.

“Research has shown that the prevalence of cool moist south easterlies (wind type) during the winter season is normally associated with a good upcoming rainy season,” Gopo told The Herald Business, by email. “The relationship is not one to one, however. Most of the years that cool and moist south easterlies prevailed over Zimbabwe during winter, the coming season had good rains (normal to above normal in most cases).”

Rainfall is very important to Zimbabwe. Not only does it define seasons, but nearly three quarters of the 13, 1 million Zimbabweans are dependent on it, through agriculture, says the national statistics agency, ZimStats. In good times, precipitation averages between 300mm and 1 000mm, with regions in the south-west receiving the least amount of rain, and those in the east along the border with Mozambique, the highest. However, changes in climates have seen rainfall decline by between 5 and 15 percent countrywide since the 1960s, say experts.

With agriculture accounting for up to a fifth of GDP, and 60 percent of the manufacturing industry raw materials needs, further changes in the climate will hurt Zimbabwe badly. This is what happened during the 2015/16 summer cropping season, precisely. El Nino, which alters rainfall and temperature patterns worldwide, hit hard, leaving most of Zimbabwe dry, crops failing and forcing a series of heat waves that saw daytime temperatures breaking 60-year records. Areas like Kariba reported maximum temperatures above 44 degrees Celsius.

Enter La Nina

El Nino’s opposite — La Nina, is now beginning to step in to reverse the damage. The true impact of the cooling phase called La Nina on rainfall will only become clearer in the summer, said Mrs Gopo, but current wind patterns, yielding the frequent unusually chilli days, nights and mornings, are a good indicator. The Meteorological Services Department’s forecasts will likely deepen the theoretical feud that has long existed between science and indigenous knowledge, as the latter tends to associate very cold winters with low rainfall.

Native traditions are currently fighting to find space within the scientific discourse, as tried and tested methods that can be relied upon to provide accurate weather and climate predictions, and to combat climate change. “Prevalence of cool and moist south easterlies and presence of La Nina all point towards more rainfall over Zimbabwe,” said Mrs Gopo, before warning “but no one knows the distribution, more rainfall might be received with very poor distribution.”

Zimbabwe’s rainfall season lasts up to six months, with the main season occurring between December and February. But the on-set periods, usually occurring around October, are longer certain and dry spells within a single season are becoming frequent due to climate change, according to the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate. It is not uncommon for droughts to occur in back to back seasons.

Mrs Gopo is worried that frequent El Nino events will ravage Zimbabwe’s rain fed agriculture in the future. “As the climate is changing there is significant increase in the global temperatures and research is showing there are high chances of reduced return periods of El Nino and less rainfall over Zimbabwe during most years,” she said. “El Nino is associated with extremely high temperatures and Zimbabwe has been experiencing less rainfall, longer and more frequent dry spells during the rainfall season.”

New studies suggest that climate change will result in frequent, very strong El Nino events in the future, possibly occurring once every decade. El Nino usually strikes once every 7 years but the most extreme occur in 20 years, say scientists. These changes, and others, could see Zimbabwe's production of the maize staple fall by between 30 and 50 percent through 2030, as temperatures soar two degrees Celsius by 2080, according to the UN's expert panel on climate change.

Probability of years in which growing season is likely to fail in future due to drought is projected to be as high as 100 percent in some parts in the south, says the panel. With more people in Zimbabwe directly reliant on rain fed agriculture – meaning increased vulnerability to climate extremes like floods, hailstorms and drought — authorities are not leaving anything to chance.

“Climate change adaptation in the agricultural sector is a national priority, demanding policy direction at the highest level,” said the Climate Ministry in its submissions to the UN last September. The submissions represent Zimbabwe's contribution to the global efforts of halting climate change's dangerous impacts.

“Rainfall is, therefore, the most critical climate component for Zimbabwe as already small changes can affect ecosystems, and all key socio-economic sectors,” it said.

15 – THREAT TO FORESTS

Tedious Manyepo

After years of toil in subsistence farming with hardly any surplus to sell, 45-year old Peter Chiwara of Wedza finally decides to try his hand in tobacco in the 2015-2016 agricultural season. A natural hard worker himself and religiously following expert guidance from agricultural extension officers, Chiwara suddenly starts to sniff a fortune from the tobacco sales floors as his healthy crop, spread on a single hectare, nears maturity. But not without first having to contend with the rigorous process needed to cure it.

The nearby bushy area swiftly disappears as fellow villagers jostle to gather firewood to be used in the curing of the tobacco on the request of Chiwara who promises to pay them upon selling the crop.

As soon as the tobacco marketing season opened in late March, Chiwara was one of the early birds and as a first time tobacco farmer he is thankful that he did not labour in vain. As the father of three currently enjoys the rich pickings with his family, inspired village colleagues work round the clock preparing their land for tobacco growing in the next farming season.

But they do not have any workable plan on the source of fuel they will use to cure the crop. Such has been the trend on which more and more people have become interested in growing the golden leaf, unfortunately without due consideration to what their activities would do to the environment. And who can blame them?

Most of them have tremendously improved their living standards. In fact, these tobacco farmers have helped the country improve its export earnings. This tobacco marketing season alone, the country has earned over \$600 million from exporting the crop. Yet it is the country which could actually lose more than what it is gaining from tobacco farming if the environmental question associated with the venture is not adequately addressed.

Out of the 80 987 registered tobacco farmers in the country, it is estimated that less than 10 percent of them use other energy sources like coal to cure their crop. The rest use firewood.

According to the Forestry Commission, tobacco farmers alone destroy about 50 000 hectares of forests across the country every year, representing 15 percent of the 330 000 hectares of forests the country is losing annually. “We have found that more people are joining the bandwagon of tobacco farming, obviously due to all the lucrative rewards it offers.

“While the practice is worthwhile due to the fact that it is reaping a lot of benefits to the country, it should also be noted that due consideration is not being taken to protect the environment,” said Mr Stephen Zingwena, Forestry Commission's operations manager. Mr Zingwena said his organisation was working with other private players to see to it that tobacco farmers embarked on programmes to grow fast maturing tree species to be used in curing their crop.

He said the Forestry Commission had partnered with a private player, Sustainable Aforestation Association to ensure that the plan was effectively implemented without necessarily strangling tobacco farming which has hitherto proved to be one of the key pillars of the country's economy. "We are saying all farmers who wish to grow tobacco should demonstrate that they are able to grow at least 0,3 hectares of fast-growing tree species for every 1 ha they wish to put under tobacco," he said.

Mr Zingwena said he was happy though that most of the tobacco farmers were very much cooperative when it came to programmes which help reduce deforestation. "I should say I am very much impressed by most of the tobacco farmers' cooperation. They do value all these programmes and most of them have actually started to grow these plantations," he said.

16 – AFRICA URGED TO QUIT CITES

July 16, 2016 [Costa Mano Local News](#); Tendai Mugabe, Herald Senior Reporter

Zimbabwe and other African countries have been urged to renounce their membership from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species because the club is not serving them any purpose. Internationally acclaimed wildlife expert Mr Ron Thomson said the international body had been hijacked by animal rights activists who do not have any knowledge on wildlife conservation. He said the animal rights activists through their non-governmental organisations were making outrageous decisions detrimental to countries engaging in sustainable wildlife business. Mr Thomson said the US paid Kenya to burn its ivory stock as a way of setting the agenda for the September COP17.

Mr Thomson's remarks come in the wake of proposals submitted to COP17 to be held in South Africa in September seeking to up-list elephants and lions into Appendix I of endangered species. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and if the proposals succeeded, Zimbabwe will be banned from international hunting and trading of elephants and lions. Currently, elephants and lions are in Appendix II where hunting and trading is allowed under CITES regulations.

Zimbabwe had already rejected the proposals ahead of COP17. In his contribution made during the launch of Zimbabwe's roadmap to COP17, Mr Thomson, who is also the president of the South Africa-based True Green Alliance, said the destiny of African elephants now lies in the hands of foreigners who have no knowledge or interest in the in best practice elephant management programmes.

"My suggestion to Africa that it has to think very carefully about its continued membership in CITES," he said. "If I was a head of state in Africa, I will say let us get out of this club. When CITES was first formed, they said our purpose in CITES is to regulate the wildlife trade and to stop the illegal wildlife trade. "After 41 years, CITES has not regulated wildlife trade and it has not stopped the illegal trade. So what good is it to anybody? It has achieved nothing. What it has only achieved is to give animal rightists a weapon to fight people like Zimbabwe, South and Namibia and these other countries of Africa who want to utilise their wildlife resources on a sustainable basis.

"What good has it (CITES) done us? No good at all. Foreign people who know nothing about Africa and its wildlife are telling Africa what it can do with its elephants, rhinos and all these animals." Mr Thomson dismissed the notion of endangered species touted by America and a host of its NGOs said wildlife is managed by population and not at species level. He said wildlife rules applied in West Africa could not be applicable in Southern Africa.

"You can only manage it at the population level. Rules have to be applied population by population. If there is a problem in West Africa there should be a rule that applies in that particular region and the whole of Africa. "Nobody is thinking about the habitats and that is very wrong. We must have independence of thought and accountability. We are accountable of what happens to animals here and not CITES," he said. On the burnt Kenyan ivory stock, Mr Thomson said: "Kenya was given an outright grant of \$150 million to restructure Kenya's tourism industry. That was followed by another \$150 million which is being spread over the next 10 years."

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 2016 to 30 September 2017. fall due on 30 September 2016. Please ensure that your subs for 2016 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 – 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.