

MATOBO



SOCIETY

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

Welfare No: W/0 30/94
www.matobo.org

NEWSLETTER 99 / FEBRUARY 2017

1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society held a well-attended AGM in late November. Some early rains had transformed the area, and the day was sunny, without being too hot. We had an ideal setting for the AGM of the Matobo Conservation Society, with a few zebra, reedbeek and kites trying to join us! Details of the outing are included below.

Your Committee was returned en bloc, and remains unchanged:

Chairman	Gavin Stephens
Vice-Chair	Jean Whiley
Treasurer	Darryl Friend
Secretary	Gaynor Lightfoot
Members	Adele Edwards, Rob Burrett, Cindy Sellick, Moira Fitzpatrick and Paul Hubbard

Regretfully Paul has subsequently resigned so as to concentrate on current projects and we are appreciative of the time and energy he has devoted to the Society over the past number of years. He will of course remain available as our “resident guide”. We wish Paul well in his endeavours.

2 – RAINFALL

The hills have enjoyed tremendous rain from mid-December 2016. As a result, streams and rivers are flowing, waterfalls gushing and dams filling up. The heaviest falls recorded occurred on Monday night, 16th January, with Camp Dwala receiving 126mm, and Dopi school rain gauges overflowing at 150mm. Needless to say, that part of the Matopos is really drenched. Heavy falls were recorded in the western hills on Monday 30th January, with gauges topping at 100mm.

At the end of January, the rainfall for the season was as follows:

Eastern 734mm, and Western 580mm.

At the time of going to press the eastern hills had surpassed 800mm, and the western hills 700mm – and it keeps on coming!

Of course, this comes at a price. Roads throughout the Matopos are now in a really bad condition, and one wonders when, if ever, they will get repaired. There has also been heavy erosion in some places, whilst stream bank fields are of course water-logged with crops dying. But for all that, it is a treat to see water oozing down the dwalas and green, wet valleys. The waterfalls are quite spectacular. The vegetation has grown tremendously making the whole place perfectly tropical.

At the time of writing a Cyclone is making its way across the Mozambique Channel (Cyclone Dineo) and is expected to travel up the Limpopo Valley, though its trajectory is not certain. By then it will be a Tropical Depression but should still bring substantial rain to the Matopos. Cyclones travel up the Limpopo on average once every 10 years and we are due another. The last major Cyclone caused considerable damage to homes and infrastructure in the Matopos, and roads were not necessarily repaired then.

3 – MALEME DAM FILLS UP!

In our last Newsletter we reported on the drying up of Maleme Dam. Following the good rains, members will be pleased to know that the dam has taken in plenty of water, and on Thursday 26th January it started to spill. At this time all the dams are full, with the exception of Chitamba dam in the Game Park.

4 – NATIONAL PARKS NEWS

Your Chairman and Vice-Chairman have been able to meet with the new Area Manager, Nomusa Moyo. It was a positive and useful meeting, and we look forward to building this relationship. There remain many projects that require attention, but over time these can be addressed. We were able to raise some of the matters and concerns that our members have written to us about.

Your Society was also represented at a meeting of Stakeholders held at National Parks in Hwange. We are still digesting the impact of the discussions held at that meeting.

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	26 th February 2017
Venue	Diana's Pool (and Eastern Matopos)
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Ascot Car Park
Travel	High clearance vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat and umbrella! Don't forget your costume as well!

After all the lovely rain, we will be heading off to the Eastern Matopos to enjoy the streams and waterfalls of this area. Needless to say, the *Brachystegia* forests are looking superb, so we may make a detour or two! Within the *Brachystegia* forests are found a great deal of fungi. We hope to have Cathy Sharp with us so that we can take the opportunity to learn a little more about these often-neglected plants. Cathy has recently released her third little book on mushrooms and fungi, and these would be available.

6 – REPORT BACK

Around forty members met at Madingazulu Dam, near Nswatugi Cave, for our Annual General Meeting.

Following the formalities, the Chairman introduced Dr Moira Fitzpatrick, Director, NMMZ Western Region who spoke about programmes and plans that the NMMZ had for the Matobo and Matabeleland area. As always, funding is an issue, but steadily the various goals are being met which is a real achievement in this environment. There are further plans for Nswatugi cave, and this is waiting donor funding.

Folk climbed into trucks for the drive to Nswatugi Cave, along the smart newly completed road! On arrival at the refurbished site museum, members were given the opportunity to inspect the work done by NMMZ, before setting off on the walk to the cave. When everyone had gathered in the cave, Rob gave an enthusiastic explanation of the site, rock art and lost culture represented in the cave. Finally, with everyone exhausted, the trek back to the cars got underway, and then the lift back to the dam where a great social picnic was held.

Thank-you to all the members who attended, and from the comments made, it was yet another interesting and successful outing. Both the road works and the refurbishment of the Site museum were projects undertaken by your Society.

7 – EARTH BREAKS HEAT RECORD IN 2016 FOR THIRD YEAR IN A ROW

On average, Earth will have four fewer days of mild and mostly dry weather by 2015, and ten fewer of them by the end of the century, according to a first-of-its-kind projection of nice weather.

Miami - Last year, the Earth sweltered under the hottest temperatures in modern times for the third year in a row, US scientists said on Wednesday, raising new concerns about the quickening pace of climate change.

Temperatures spiked to new national highs in parts of India, Kuwait and Iran, while sea ice melted faster than ever in the fragile Arctic, said the report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Taking a global average of the land and sea surface temperatures for the entire year, NOAA found the data for "2016 was the highest since record keeping began in 1880," said the announcement.

A separate analysis by the US space agency NASA also found that 2016 was the hottest on record.

The global average temperature last year was 0.94°C above the 20th century average, and 0.04°C warmer than in 2015, the last record-setting year.

Upward trend

Each of the first eight months of the year "had record high temperatures for their respective months," NOAA said.

The main reason for the rise is the burning of fossil fuels like oil and gas, which send carbon dioxide, methane and other pollutants known as greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere and warm the planet.

The mounting toll of industrialisation on the Earth's natural balance is increasingly apparent in the record books.

"Since the start of the 21st century, the annual global temperature record has been broken five times (2005, 2010, 2014, 2015 and 2016)," said NOAA.

Another factor has been the Pacific Ocean warming trend of El Nino, which experts say exacerbates the planet's already rising warmth.

El Nino comes and goes. The latest episode became particularly strong in 2015, and subsided about halfway through 2016.

But El Nino was responsible for just a small fraction of last year's warmth, according to Peter Stott, acting director of Britain's Met Office Hadley Centre.

"The main contributor to warming over the last 150 years is human influence on climate from increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere," he said.

Piers Forster, director of the Priestley International Centre for Climate at the University of Leeds, agreed.

"Even if you remove the extra warming due to El Nino, 2016 was the warmest year ever recorded," Forster said.

"2017 will likely be cooler. However, unless we have a major volcanic eruption, I expect the record to be broken again within a few years."

Scenes from a changing world

All of North America was the warmest since records began in 1910, breaking that region's last record set in 1998.

Europe and Asia each saw their third hottest years on record, while Australia marked its fourth warmest year since records began more than a century ago.

Unusual spikes in temperature were seen in Phalodi, India, which reached 51°C on May 19 - marking India's hottest temperature ever.

Dehloran, Iran hit 53°C on July 22, a new national record.

Meanwhile, Mitribah, Kuwait hit an all-time high of 53.8°C on July 21, which may be the highest temperature ever recorded in all of Asia, NOAA said.

Planet-wide, the heat led to more melting at the poles. In the Arctic, average annual sea ice extent was approximately 10.2 million square kilometres, the smallest annual average in the record, NOAA said.

"In the Antarctic, annual Antarctic sea ice extent was the second smallest on record, behind 1986, at 4.31 million square miles," it said.

"Both the November and December 2016 extents were record small."

Dangers

Unusually hot years wreak havoc on the planet by increasing heavy rainfall in some parts of the world while leading to drought in others, damaging crops.

Fish and birds must migrate farther than ever to find suitable temperatures.

Diseases can spread faster in the warming oceans, sickening marine life and killing corals.

Glaciers and polar ice caps melt, leading to sea level rise that will eventually swallow many of the globe's coastal communities, home to some one billion people.

Experts say the only solution is to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, in favour of Earth-friendly renewable energy such as wind and solar.

"Climate change is one of the great challenges of the twenty first century and shows no signs of slowing down," said Mark Maslin, professor of climatology at University College London.

"The decarbonisation of the global economy is the ultimate goal to prevent the worst effects of climate change."

8 – CHEETAHS HEADING TOWARDS EXTINCTION AS POPULATION CRASHES

The sleek, speedy cheetah is rapidly heading towards extinction according to a new study into declining numbers.

The report estimates that there are just 7,100 of the world's fastest mammals now left in the wild. Cheetahs are in trouble because they range far beyond protected areas and are coming increasingly into conflict with humans. The authors are calling for an urgent re-categorisation of the species from vulnerable to endangered. Wiped out

According to the study, more than half the world's surviving cheetahs live in one population that ranges across six countries in southern Africa. Cheetahs in Asia have been essentially wiped out. A group estimated to number fewer than 50 individuals clings on in Iran. Because the cheetah is one of the widest-ranging carnivores, it roams across lands far outside protected areas. Some 77% of their habitat falls outside these parks and reserves. As a result, the animal struggles because these lands are increasingly being developed by farmers and the cheetah's prey is declining because of bushmeat hunting.

In Zimbabwe, the cheetah population has fallen from around 1,200 to just 170 animals in 16 years, with the main cause being major changes in land tenure. Researchers involved with the study say that the threats facing the fabled predator have gone unnoticed for far too long. "Given the secretive nature of this elusive cat, it has been difficult to gather hard information on the species, leading to its plight being overlooked," said Dr Sarah Durant, from the Zoological Society of London, UK, and the report's lead author.

"Our findings show that the large space requirements for the cheetah, coupled with the complex range of threats faced by the species in the wild, mean that it is likely to be much more vulnerable to extinction than was previously thought."

Another of the big concerns about cheetahs has been the illegal trafficking of cubs, fuelled by demand from the Gulf States, as reported by the BBC earlier this year.

The young cats can fetch up to \$10,000 on the black market. According to the Cheetah Conservation Fund, some 1,200 cheetah cubs are known to have been trafficked out of Africa over the past 10 years but around 85% of them died during the journey.

At the recent CITES conference in South Africa, governments agreed to put new measures in place to tackle this issue, clamping down on the use of social media to advertise cheetahs for sale.

However, if the species is to survive long-term then urgent efforts must be made to tackle the wider question of protected areas and ranges. The new study argues for a "paradigm shift in conservation", moving away from the idea of just declaring an area to be protected and towards incorporating "incentive-based approaches". This, in essence, means paying local communities to protect a species that many see as a dangerous predator.

"The take-away from this pinnacle study is that securing protected areas alone is not enough," said Dr Kim Young-Overton from Panthera, another author on the report. "We must think bigger, conserving across the mosaic of protected and unprotected landscapes that these far-reaching cats inhabit, if we are to avert the otherwise certain loss of the cheetah forever."

To fully recognise the scale of the threat that the cheetah now faces, the report is calling on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to change the categorisation of the fastest animal on its Red List from vulnerable to endangered.

This would help focus international conservation support on a species that the authors fear is heading for extinction at an increasing pace.

The report has been published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

9 – 2017 IS THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FOR DEVELOPMENT

12 months to celebrate and promote the contribution of the tourism sector to building a better world. This is the major goal of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017 that will start in few days.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development recalling the potential of tourism to advance the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The International Year aims to support a change in policies, business practices and consumer behavior towards a more sustainable tourism sector than can contribute effectively to the SDGs.

"This is a unique opportunity to build a more responsible and committed tourism sector that can capitalize its immense potential in terms of economic prosperity, social inclusion, peace and

understanding, cultural and environmental preservation” said UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai. Accounting for 7% of worldwide exports, one in eleven jobs and 10% of the world’s GDP, the tourism sector if well managed can foster inclusive economic growth, social inclusiveness and the protection of cultural and natural assets.

The International Year will promote tourism’s role in the following five key areas:

- 1) Inclusive and sustainable economic growth;
- 2) Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction;
- 3) Resource efficiency, environmental protection and climate change;
- 4) Cultural values, diversity and heritage; and
- 5) Mutual understanding, peace and security.

The presentation of the International Year will take place in Madrid on 18 January 2017 on the occasion of the Spanish Tourism Fair, FITUR. UNWTO invites all partners to join the celebrations by sharing their activities and initiatives to advance sustainable tourism for development at www.tourism4development2017.org

10 – AFTER 50 YEARS, SCIENTISTS FINALLY FIND EXTINCT ZIMBABWE FROG

(Acknowledgement to News24 2017-01-21)

The cave squeaker (*Arthroleptis troglodytes*) hadn’t been seen for more than half a century in the rock-studded Chimanimani Mountains it was known to inhabit. The tiny frog only grows to around half the size of a thumb.

Robert Hopkins, an associate researcher with the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo, said he and fellow scientists Francois Becker from the University of Cape Town and Zimbabwean entomologist Scott Herbst, managed to find three cave squeakers during a research trip in early December.

The frogs were located through their unusual calls – but they weren’t at all where the researchers expected to find them, Hopkins told News24.

Conservation strategy

“Francois had done a great deal of work on (similar species) in South Africa, and had paid particular attention to their calls,” Hopkins said. “He heard a call which he recognised as that of an *Arthroleptis*, but did not or could not identify it, so he tracked that call and ultimately found the first specimen.”

Hopkins said researchers have been looking for the frog near water, which is where they were first (and last) seen in 1962. But in fact it turns out that that is not where they breed.

“Our (latest) finds place the breeding sites away from water, and certainly not at any time in caves or sink holes,” Hopkins said. The research trip to Chimanimani was supported by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund.

Hopkins says breeding the frogs in his laboratory in Bulawayo and releasing them back into alternative places in the wild is one conservation strategy he, together with Zimbabwe’s National Parks Authority, is considering.

Sadly, Don Broadley, the renowned Zimbabwean herpetologist who first discovered the cave squeaker in 1962 and had tried but failed to relocate it, died last year just months before this rediscovery. Broadley was “the greatest herpetologist in the world”, said Hopkins.

11 – CALENDAR 2017

Herewith the proposed dates for the 2017 events – make a note in your diary!

26 th February	Field Trip to Lumane Falls
May	TBC
September	TBC
26 th November	AGM

Other dates

8 – 12 March, 2017	Matopos Heritage MTB
17 – 19 March, 2017	Heritage Trail Run
1 April, 2017	Matopos 33 Miler
6 – 10 April, 2017	Zimbabwe Ironwill (in the Matopos)
1 – 3 September, 2017	Matopos Classic MTB

12 – 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.

13 – HAVE YOU PAID YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2017 fell due on 30 September 2016. Please ensure that your subs for 2017 are up to date. There has been no increase in rates.

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

14 – www.matobo.org

The web-site for the Society has been updated, so make some time to visit the site. Contributions are welcome. We have also revamped our Facebook page “Matobo Conservation Society”.

15 – LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

We continue to update our Facebook page, and have included some great pictures of the Matopos following the wonderful rain. Any interesting news or updates are of course welcome. So go to “Matobo Conservation Society” on Facebook, and “like” the page to ensure you get regular updates.

16 – OBITUARY

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the tragic passing of Mr Mike Gardner. Mike was an avid entomologist whose private Lepidoptera collection rivalled most museums. During his lifetime of collecting butterflies and moths he discovered a number of new species and had three named after him. He made an invaluable contribution to the Natural History Museum, and had an undying love for the Matobo hills and all it has to offer. He will be sorely missed.

The MCS extends its condolences to his wife Wendy, children Alan, Mike and Shirley, and families.

17 – HONORARY MEMBER

At the AGM, three honorary members were elected. We will include the respective citations in this and following Newsletters.

CITATION HONORARY MEMBER MARY FRIEND

Mary Friend was a founder member, for several years a committee member, and always a staunch supporter of the Matobo Conservation Society, attending many of the outings and events. Born in 1932, she passed away in 2013. She attended the Dominican Convent in Bulawayo, as a boarder, and as a child she spent much of her time in remote parts of Matabeleland where she developed a passion and enthusiasm for the bush and all its creatures, and an eye for beauty – characteristics that were to remain with her throughout her life and that she passed on, to many others

Mary was probably best known for her talent as an artist, and in particular for her paintings of the Matopos, where her love for the area shone through. On MCS outings she would often drop out of the convoy so as to take a photograph of a scene that had caught her fancy and that she thought she might want to paint. Her paintings adorn the homes of people around the world, who look at the scenes and remember a place they have known and loved. Mary also used her skill to illustrate the first MCS brochure to be produced, on the Matopos National Park, and also the one on Flora of the Matopos.

For part of the time on the Committee her role was to organise the regular MCS outings – a role she took very seriously usually going out to the chosen site in advance of the outing to check on the roads, find a suitable place to picnic, and so on. She would liaise with the invited speaker to ensure that everything went smoothly – which it invariably did until the Chairman upset the plans by extending the “short” walk! In later years, on MCS outings, Mary chose to come with her paints, or her bird book and binoculars, content to sit and absorb the beauty and tranquillity of the Matopos while others tackled more energetic pursuits. More often than not some-one would decide to stay and ‘keep Mary company’ – really an excuse not to tackle a two-hour hike and climb – and lively discussions and a few beers would follow.

Mary’s contributions to MCS will long be remembered; dedicated, loyal and enthusiastic.

The Committee recommends to the Members that Mary Friend be recognized as an Honorary Member of the Society.