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## **NEWSLETTER 100 / JULY 2017**

### **1 – NEWSLETTER ONE HUNDRED**

This edition of our Newsletter is edition 100 – quite a milestone. It marks nearly 25 years since the first Newsletter was issued – that’s a long time indeed to look back and reflect. Our first newsletter was just two sides of a single page, and titled “Newsletter 1/1993”. It updated prospective members on the formation of an Interim Committee whose members were Gavin Stephens (Chairman), Richard Mirtle (Vice-Chair and Treasurer), Val Fielder (Secretary), Gail Amyot, Ken Blake, Peter Dunjey, Trevor Hemans and John Moger. Co-opted members were Mr Albert Kumirai (NMM) and Mark Ncube (National Archives). The Governor of Matabeleland South, and the Minister of Tourism and Environment had both been updated, and the Chairmen of the RDC’s were invited to attend meetings (which they did).

The Constitution had been drafted, and plans were underway to hold the first General Meeting to adopt the Constitution and form the Society. In the meantime, the Committee was busy with Conservation Education, an article for a Zimbabwe Wildlife supplement in the Sunday News, and Protection of Mhlahlandhlela, Ntumbane and other Ndebele Sacred and Historical Sites. A plan was underway to assist with protecting the Rock Art, and liaison with tour operators had commenced. Gold panning was noted, along with an offer to assist in the conservation of the “to be built” Mtshabezi Dam. Finally, members were invited to a launch of the Society which featured a slide show entitled “The Magnificent Matobo Hills” presented by Richard Mirtle.

The Second Newsletter called for the General Meeting to be held at the Natural History Museum on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1993 – our Birthday!

The first three editions were drafted by Peter Dunjey and printed. Editions four to seven were drafted by John Bishop, typed and photocopied. Edition eight to nineteen were produced by Gavin Stephens using Lotus123, and photocopied, and from edition twenty onwards Microsoft Word was used. From edition eight, the now familiar layout with the next event on the top of page two, followed by the report back, was adopted. Some Newsletters have run to as many as ten pages, and several accolades have been received for the quality and content, albeit we have never been able to reproduce photos, in order to keep files sizes small enough to email. To meet this shortfall, we now post pictures on Facebook. Today all the newsletters bar ten printed copies, are distributed electronically – a far cry from 25 years ago when every newsletter was hand delivered or posted. The newsletter is also posted on the Society web-page under [www.matobo.org](http://www.matobo.org). A copy of every Newsletter has been lodged with the Bulawayo Reference Library.

Perhaps the most exciting Newsletter was edition 40 which carried the news that the Matopos had, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2003, been inscribed as a World Heritage Site, some ten years after the establishment of the Society.

Whilst we have received some valuable and interesting articles from members, contributions have always been called for, and are always welcome. The aim is to produce four Newsletters a year, but as our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary is only next year, we clearly got carried away some years and produced more than was expected!

## **2 – COMMITTEE**

Our long serving Committee member, Adele Edwards resigned from the committee and emigrated at the end of May. Adele has settled in the Natal Midlands, closer to family. Adele joined the committee in 2009 as treasurer which she relinquished in 2014 – as a result she enjoyed all the confusion of moving from Zim\$ to US! Since relinquishing her “Office” she remained as a committee member until April this year. Adele provided a must useful link between Dambari, Birdlife and WEZ, but more importantly as a member of the committee who could be relied upon to get things done! Adele was a regular at all our field trips, whilst her modest contributions to debate were not to be underestimated. She was also an invaluable member of the Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge Organising Committee, and will be sorely missed by, not just our Committee but, by many of our members. We wish Adele all the best in her new home.

## **3 - NEXT EVENT**

Date	20 <sup>th</sup> August 2017
Venue	Tuli Tendere dam, Nkantolo battlefield and King Lobengula’s Office
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Car Park
Travel	High Clearance Vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don’t forget your hat and umbrella! Don’t forget something warm as well!

This will be a day with a variety of activities. We will travel out on the Old Gwanda Road (recently graded) and turn off into the Tuli valley, to travel to the Tuli Tendere Dam. This marks the closing phase of the 1896 Battle of Nkantolo which was led by Lord Baden Powell. This battle was one of two which marked the first assault by Colonial forces on the Matobo Hills. We will then walk down the Tuli River to the site of King Lobengula's Office, or Nkantolo, where we will learn about this historic place.

No matter the weather report, be sure to pack something warm!

## **4 – REPORT BACK**

Despite the heavy rain associated with Cyclone Dineo, it was decided to proceed with our scheduled outing on the 26<sup>th</sup> February. That week had been a little drier, so we were sure we would reach our destination. In fact, it turned out to be a lovely day, which encouraged members to swim in the fast-flowing river, and magnificent pools. Debris high up the banks showed the impact of the rains associated with the cyclone.

First up was tea on arrival – why change a healthy tradition? Then a walk to the orbicular granite. This fascinating and very special site was examined, and discussed in detail. A leisurely amble back to the cars and lunch followed. After lunch Cathy Sharp spoke to us about the fungi in the area, and a short walk followed where various fungi was identified and discussed. It was a fascinating insight into the rich life of mushrooms. As Diana’s Pool is located within the Brachystegia belt, it is particularly rich in fungus.

As the afternoon drew on, large dark clouds gathered to the north, and so tea was called for, and folk began their journey home. Those who left slightly later ran into very heavy rains on the way home, and indeed some folk (though not with the MCS) were trapped at Diana’s Pool as the Nswezi river came down in flood and was impassable. (Read more on this in the article detailing rainfall that follows).

The Matopos wet, green and with plenty of water must be like the Garden of Eden. Throw into the mix sunshine and waterfalls, and then an afternoon storm, and you have the ingredients for a perfect Matopos outing. And so it was on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> February!

## **5 – WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY**

We held our annual “clean up” day to mark World Environment Day, all-be-it a month late! Sadly we only had three members attend, and about nine staff from National Parks. Despite this, a good effort was made to clean up litter around the Maleme Offices, and to tackle the cactus growth in that area. We have been focusing on Maleme Rest Camp for the past two years, largely due to the threat of the invasive cactus. However, whilst we believe we have been successful against one cactus species, we have made no progress with the other and so are earnestly seeking help in this project. We thank Parks for their support, and hope that this momentum will be maintained going forward. We also hope that our 2018 Clean Up day will be better supported by our members!

## **6 – 2017 ALREADY MARKED BY CLIMATE EXTREMES SAYS UN**

Geneva - Extreme weather and climate conditions, including Arctic "heatwaves", are continuing this year, after 2016 topped the global temperature charts and saw shrinking sea ice and surging sea levels. The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) warned on Tuesday that the drastic shifts seen in the global climate system that resulted in a range of alarming records last year appear to be continuing unabated.

"We are now in truly uncharted territory," David Carlson, head of the World Climate Research Programme, said in a release from the WMO.

He said that even without a strong El Nino - a phenomenon that brings generally warmer temperatures every four to five years - 2017 was "seeing other remarkable changes across the planet that are challenging our understanding of the climate system".

### 2016 warmest year on record

The warning came as the WMO published on Tuesday its annual report on the state of the global climate, confirming previously released figures showing that 2016 was the warmest year on record.

Last year, global average temperatures were about 1.1 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial period, and about 0.06 degrees Celsius above the previous record set in 2015, the WMO said.

Globally, average sea surface temperatures were also the highest on record last year; sea levels continued to rise; and Arctic sea ice levels were far below average, it found, warning that greenhouse gas emissions were the main driver behind the warming trend.

"With levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere consistently breaking new records, the influence of human activities on the climate system has become more and more evident," WMO chief Petteri Taalas said in the statement.

The UN agency said that increasingly powerful computers and the availability of long-term climate data had made it possible to "demonstrate clearly the existence of links between man-made climate change and many cases of high-impact extreme events, in particular heat waves".

### Arctic "heat waves"

Even more alarming than the 2016 figures is perhaps the fact that the trends all appear to be continuing. The WMO noted that at least three times so far this winter, "the Arctic has witnessed the Polar equivalent of a heat wave, with powerful Atlantic storms driving an influx of warm, moist air".

"This meant that at the height of the Arctic winter and the sea ice refreezing period, there were days which were actually close to the melting point," the statement said, adding that Antarctic sea-ice had also been at "a record low".

The agency pointed to research showing that changes in the Arctic and melting sea ice were leading to a shift in wider oceanic and atmospheric circulation patterns.

This in turn is affecting weather elsewhere in the world, since it impacts the waves in the jet stream - a fast-moving band of air that helps regulate temperature.

This has led some areas, like the United States and Canada, to experience unusually balmy temperatures, while others, including the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, have experienced an unusually cold first few months this year.

The WMO also pointed to newly released studies indicating that ocean heat content may have increased even more than reported.

"Provisional data also indicates that there has been no easing in the rate of increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations," it said.

## **7 – EVENTS**

- A. Matopos World Heritage MTB Challenge. The annual Matopos Heritage Bike ride had to be postponed due to the inaccessibility of the route, water points and camps. The tremendous rains enjoyed this year literally washed the event out, and so it has been postponed to 30 August.
- B. Matopos Trail Run. This event was originally scheduled for 17-19 March, but like the bike ride it had to be postponed. It was held from 19 – 21 May, attracting 14 runners – double the number from 2016. But the reports received were very positive, so it is hoped the event will continue to grow. This year competitors came from Harare, Victoria Falls, and Bulawayo – sadly the Maun entrants for the original dates could not make it in May, but we hope to see them next year.
- C. Matopos 33 Miler (1 April). The fifth edition of the revised Matopos 33 Miler was held as scheduled. This year the relay was abandoned, and a 10km run introduced instead. The event attracted record numbers in all divisions, with over 1,100 entrants all told!

D. Ironwill 2017 (6-10 April). The Zimbabwe Ironwill returned to the Matopos once again, some three years after it was last hosted here. Hiking, cycling, orienteering, kloofing and so much more made the event another success. 41 competitors took part this year, which saw the race hiking to, and overnighing at the magnificent Mtshashasha Falls, which were still flowing well. Despite all the rain, the event was able to proceed, and the route was very wet, but especially attractive with so much water flowing.

## 8 – ORCHIDS

The season just ended produced an abundance of orchids, though not all species flowered. Of particular interest was the sighting of *Bonatea specioca*, which whilst recorded at Camp Dwala, has not been seen in flower for about 15 years. Subsequent visits located a few more of this rather large orchid.

Of interest is that the *Eulophia angolensis* started to flower before Christmas, unusually early, and even now in mid-June some are in full bloom. That is a remarkable six months of flower. This species was again seen in abundance across the wet undisturbed parts of the hills.

## 9 – RAINFALL

The 2016/2017 season will be long remembered for it was an exceptional year. It started late, but made up for it! Of course, the heavy rains have wreaked havoc on the infrastructure, but road repairs are being carried out.

Apart from all the good storms, three in particular stand out (measurements taken at Camp Dwala).

On 17<sup>th</sup> January, storms in the eastern Matopos dumped 125mm during the course of a day. That resulted in rainfall of approximately 5mm per hour.

Then in mid-February (16<sup>th</sup>) the remnants of Cyclone Dineo passed directly over the Matopos. Some 212mm fell in just ten hours, at an approximate rate of 21,5mm per hour. The floods started! Some parts of the eastern Matopos reached 250mm before rain gauges overflowed, so that area may have received considerably more.

Finally on the night of 26<sup>th</sup> February, 128mm fell in just three hours. That gave a rate of about 42mm per hour. The flood gates were open, and the rivers roared out of the Hills. Flood marks were many meters above the normal high level marks, floods that have not been seen in many, many years. And this storm swept away any hope of hosting the 2017 Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge! The Old Gwanda Road was severely damaged, and remained closed for some weeks, whilst the Fort Usher road ceased to exist!

A wonderful season, but not our wettest! In the 1999 / 2000 season we recorded 1577mm. It's worth noting our lowest rainfall was in 1992 / 1992 when only 298mm was received.

Finally ,the season came to an end, with the following measures –

Eastern Matopos 1,357mm, Central Matopos 905mm, Western Matopos 1,250mm, Bulawayo 1,006mm.

## 10 – WINTER MONTHS

Winter seemed to arrive early this year. The trees are losing their leaves; the grass has turned to yellow, whilst the sedges on the dwala have gone white. The dry and brittle resurrection plant stands stiff and dark, and the lichen has lost its shine. This year the vleis are still wet, so some green grass persists, and as yet, there has been no frost. The aloes have started to bloom – earlier than usual. The *Aloe chabaudii* was, as always, first off, but was in full bloom in May. The *Aloe excelsa*, which normally flowers in July, is already in bud, whilst the *Aloe aculeata* is about to explode with its red hot poker flowers. The *Aloe greatheadii* has thrust its pale pink flowers above the dry grass whilst the red flowers of the *Aloe cryptopoda* have started to appear. The clear blue sky days provide a wonderful opportunity for log walks across the dwalas where so many of the aloes can be found and enjoyed.

## 11 – CALENDAR 2017

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

20 <sup>th</sup> August	Tuli Tendere Dam, and the upper Tuli valley
September	TBC
26 November	AGM, venue tba

Other dates

30 Aug – 3 Sep 2017 Matopos Heritage MTB

3 – 5 November, 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](http://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 – RAMSAR**

The Matobo Conservation Society is to spearhead an initiative to have the Matopos declared a “Wetland of International Importance” under the Ramsar Convention. This was the resolution that followed a two day visit by RESILIM (Resilience in the Limpopo River Basin) and USAID in March, which included a one day stakeholder conference held at the Maleme Conference Centre. The Matobo Conservation Society was represented and was asked to deliver a paper supporting the proposal. This was of course a great year to debate wetlands given the saturated nature of the hills! The field visit was able to visit three types of wetland in the Hills – undisturbed, used for grazing, and cultivated.

What is the Ramsar Convention?

The RAMSAR Convention is a UNESCO Treaty that recognises areas of importance for the protection of wetlands. It's a bit like a scaled down World Heritage Site. The convention was signed at a UNESCO Conference held at Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. Zimbabwe signed up to the convention two years ago. In the initial euphoria Zimbabwe registered seven sites, and surprisingly none are in western Zimbabwe. Having seen this anomaly, some correction is now required.

Why do we want this recognition?

In terms of our constitution we seek to have the Matopos recognised as widely as possible. This status will conform to this position.

The Matobo Hills is the second most important source of water in the Limpopo river basin, and is the only high altitude catchment area on the northern watershed. There is growing focus on the Limpopo river basin as the water resource in this area is now exhausted – despite the basin accounting for over 80% of South Africa's energy, and a significant portion of their GDP. At the same time, most of the water that flows in Matabeleland South comes from the Matopos – so protection of the headwaters will directly impact on the livelihoods of nearly a million folk downstream.

For many, the Matopos does not appear to be a true wetland (in the “Okavango style”), and yet almost every valley is a sponge, holding water trapped during the rains, and slowly leaking it out during the remainder of the year. Stream bank cultivation and poor vleis management is turning many of the streams and rivers into avenues of sand, and fewer run all year round – as they once did. The local community are looking to better preserve their wetlands now – but do have a very desperate economic position to manage.

We also believe that the RAMSAR recognition will provide a good “Natural site” balance to the World heritage Cultural Landscape – i.e. ensure that we don't lose sight of the landscape!

The original RAMSAR convention was focused on the preservation of wetlands for water fowl – this specific focus has been changed to a broader definition – but Birdlife International remain as International Organisation Partners in the RAMSAR convention. We hope to work closely with Birdlife Zimbabwe in this project.

There is a possibility that the word “Matobo” is derived from “Matepi” – place of water, and there is a “creation story” that places the Matopos as the source of the first rivers that ever flowed. Reason enough for us to justify a RAMSAR site!

Who will manage the site?

If we are successful, then the RAMSAR site will have the same boundaries as the World Heritage Site, and it is intended to provide for Management under the same structure. After all, the stakeholders will be pretty much the same. The government department that manages RAMSAR sites is the Environmental Management Authority (EMA), with whom we will be working closely.

What's next?

There will be intensive work through a technical committee. The next session for deliberation of Wetlands of International Importance is in 2018 – the clock is ticking!

In due course the Matobo Hills would be a prime candidate to become a UNESCO Bio Reserve – that's for a later date, but certainly worth our consideration.

### **16 – 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.

### **17 - COMMITTEE**

With the resignation of Paul Hubbard, a month earlier, and the departure of Adele Edwards, we have lost two valuable committee members. So we are asking our members to look inwards and see if they can find the time to serve on our committee. If we spread the load, we each carry that much less. We meet once a month, with the meeting being no more than 90 minutes. So please contact either the Secretary or the Chairman if you are able to assist.

### **18 – HONORARY MEMBER**

At the AGM, three honorary members were elected. In our Last Newsletter we carried the citation for Mrs Mary Friend, in this Newsletter the Citation for Roy Stephens.

#### **CITATION**

#### **HONORARY MEMBER**

#### **ROY STEPHENS**

Roy Stephens was born in Bulawayo in 1935 and lived his entire life in this city, and in the adjacent Matopo Hills. Indeed in 1936 his father, Gerald, was instrumental in the establishment of Gordon Park and so the young Roy grew up in Cubs, Scouts and then Rovers – all at Gordon Park. It was here under Skipper Knapman that he was introduced to not only scouting, but to botany, culture and the history of the hills. It was from his scouting days that Roy became interested in botany, a lifetime hobby that was immensely rewarding and resulted in some significant work done in the Matobo Hills. He assisted in drafting the first Tree Society checklist, and then again the updated tree, orchid and aloe list for the Matobo Conservation Society in mid-2005. He, and his wife Joan, found and had declared as a National Monument, the rare tree ferns of the Lumane valley, and he identified *Cussonia spicata* for the first time in the Matopos.

Roy's great passion was the Matobo Hills. Apart from his depth of knowledge and love of all that the hills have to offer, he was prepared to give back and enthusiastically shared his passion. In this way he introduced many people, both local and foreign, to the mysteries and wonder of these old Hills. He was a member of the Rhodes Estate Matobo Committee for a number of years in the 1980's and early 1990's. He chaired the Rock Art Research Institute, which was in many ways a precursor to the Matobo Conservation Society, which was established in 1993. He was elected onto the Committee at the AGM in 1996, and became our second Chairman, a position he served for two years. He remained on the committee, and took over the reins again in 2002 for a year. He was a strong proponent of our initiative to have the Matobo Hills declared a World Heritage Site, and was a useful editor of our various submissions. For many years he assisted with the Newsletter. His walking difficulties in later life prevented him from attending as many field trips as he would have liked, but he still anticipated the reports back and keenly identified botanic specimens collected in the field.

Later he was fortunate to own a small piece of the Matobo Hills, and how fitting that it should turn out to have such a diversity of flora.

Your committee proposes the election of Roy Stephens as an Honorary Member of the Society in recognition of his service to the Matobo Hills, and has voted to erect a small memorial in his honour.

To you who pass this way,  
Pause a moment,  
Look about you and, as I did,  
Enjoy the beauty that is the Matopos.  
Roy Stephens