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## **NEWSLETTER 105 / NOVEMBER 2018**

### **1 – TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF CONSERVATION WORK**

The Matobo Conservation Society celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this November. It also marks the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Matobo Hills being declared a World Heritage Site. These two important milestones are not unrelated. At the inception of the MCS it was resolved that the Society would seek to have the Hills recognised for their true value. To this end the MCS set out in 2003 to have the Hills recognised as a World heritage Site, and after ten years of lobbying, drafting and meetings, the Hills finally attained the recognition they deserve.

Over the past twenty-five years the MCS has come to be recognised as the premier NGO in the region. The MCS is currently campaigning for the Hills to be recognised as a Wetland of International Importance under the UNESCO Ramsar Convention. We are also trying to convene a regional workshop on the Eradication of Exotics in World Heritage Sites. We have worked with National Museums to attain the National Monuments Watch grant for 2018 and 2019. We have supported Dambari Wildlife Trust in its Conservation, Biodiversity studies and Education programmes in the Hills, and we continue to financially assist the most important Black Eagle Survey and annual Dassie Survey. The MCS has supported the Ground Hornbill programme and participated in the RESILIM work. We have recorded four new reports on tree species, and a host of orchids.

The Society has supported the conservation of the Matopos Rhino, and refurbished roads and facilities for National Parks. We have also refurbished museums and monuments for National Museums.

We have produced 105 Newsletter since our inception, and arranged 105 Field Trips, providing both a learning opportunity, and a social focus for the members of the Society. The Society has an up-to-date web site and regular posts on Facebook that is viewed by over 1,000 visitors. The MCS has spoken out for the rights of its members to enjoy the Matobo Hills, we have campaigned against practices that damage the environment, and we have erected signage across the hills at important sites.

The MCS has spearheaded the “Carry in – Carry Out” anti-litter campaign in the National Park, and published booklets on Conservation and Rock Art. We have produced check-lists, brochures, and visitor maps – all services to both members and visitors alike.

Through both the Matobo Hills Heritage MTB Challenge and the Matobo Hills Trail Run we have introduced hundreds of folk to the magic of the Matopos, placed our Hills on the Map, and raised valuable funds to support the work of the Society. We also played a part in reviving the Matopos 33 miler.

We can look back with pride – and look forward to the next 25 years.

### **2 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING/25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND**

There is a special weekend’s line-up of activities at Maleme Rest Camp, amongst which will be the Annual General Meeting. The programme is:

- |                          |       |  |
|--------------------------|-------|--|
| Fri 16 <sup>th</sup> Nov | 18:00 | Bring and Share Braai at Maleme tennis courts  |
| Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Nov | 09:00 | We will travel south to Wona Cave and then onto the ringing rocks, planning to be back by lunch time. In the afternoon, there will be a climb up Pomongwe, or a walk to Maleme Dam depending on your preference  |
| Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Nov | 18:00 | “Formal” anniversary dinner under the stars at Maleme tennis courts. We have engaged an outside caterer, and cost will be \$20 per head. Dambari will do a presentation on their Matobo camera traps. If you have not already booked for the dinner, please send a message to 0772-168-136 confirming the number in your party |

Sun 18<sup>th</sup> Nov 10:00 AGM at the Maleme tennis courts. Only PAID-UP members will have voting rights at the AGM. The remainder of the day is unplanned so folk can arrange their own activities.

The whole weekend will be self-catered, except for the Saturday dinner

We hope that we will enjoy the support of our members at this special occasion. You are welcome to attend just the AGM, or to make a weekend of it. Please make your own Maleme accommodation reservation if you want to stay at Maleme Rest Camp – or you may choose to camp at the Maleme Dam camping ground. Please contact the Vice-Chairman on [matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com](mailto:matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com) if you require more information

### 3 - NEXT EVENT

Date(s)	17 <sup>th</sup> & 18 <sup>th</sup> November 2018
Venue	Maleme Rest Camp
Meet	10:00am
Travel	All Vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat, sunblock

The end of November and it's time for our AGM. Details have been provided elsewhere in the newsletter, and we hope you'll join us on either the Saturday (17<sup>th</sup>) or Sunday (18<sup>th</sup>), or both!

### 4 – REPORT BACK

A relatively smaller group assembled at Ascot for a day out in the eastern Matopos with Meg Coates-Palgrave, and they were richly rewarded with not just a fine day out, splendid scenery and magnificent trees, but also with a fascinating day in the bush with an expert. To crown it all a new orchid species was recorded for the first time in the Matopos, and our mystery *Brachystegia* remained unnamed!

So, to the orchid first – found amongst the branches of a huge Paranari tree. *Cyrorchis arcuate* has not been recorded in the Matopos before, and is only the second arboreal orchid found here. It is common in the Kyle and Inyanga areas, so we guess not that surprising to find it in the eastern Matopos. It just goes to show that there is much to learn in these wonderful hills.

This area was particularly interesting as it boasted some enormous *Brachystegia*. The local folk are not permitting timber cutting in this special forest, and so local custom is preserving these magnificent trees, amongst which were a number of specimens of the unknown *Brachystegia*.

The visit of Meg was arranged to get an expert opinion on these remarkable *Brachystegia*, and at the end of three days, Meg concluded that they are not *spiciformis*, they are not *glaucesens*, they are not *utilis*, they are not a hybrid, and more work is needed! If these trees confounded Meg, then no wonder we have been left scratching our heads for the past few years. However this mystery unfolds, it has certainly been fascinating.

We were also able to visit the *Ficus sansibarica* which was only discovered last year, and determined that there are other specimens down the valley.

We were delighted to have Surrender Sibanda from Camp Dwala, Patson Mpofo from Matobo Mission, and three other teachers, join us on the day. We trust that they found it interesting – they were certainly kept busy with Meg! We were also able to briefly visit one of the major battle-sites of the eastern hills, and enjoyed the spectacular vistas from the high plateaux near Tshingengoma (Drum Kopjie). And, of course, there was time for plenty of tea, walks, picnic lunch and other socialising!

We especially thank Meg for giving up her time to be with us – it's always appreciated

### 5 – THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MATOBO HILLS

This book, edited by Woody Cotterill, Moira FitzPatrick and Julia Dupree is being published by the MCS to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The book will be out in December – just in time for Christmas sales. For the individual who wants to learn more about the bio-diversity of the hills, this book is a must. Illustrated with colour plates, and carefully brought up to date, it marks an important contribution to the understanding of the Matobo Hills.

### 6 – RAINFALL

The first rains fell in the western hills on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> November. As much as 10mm was recorded, and further more widespread rains were recorded on the 6 and 7 November; eastern Matopos 17mm, western Matopos 22mm and Bulawayo 5mm.

## **7 – PARKS CHARGING VISITORS IN USD**

*HARARE, Nov 06 (Daily News)* Government has resorted to charging United States Dollars for the payment for all goods and services paid by foreigners at selected ZimParks recreation facilities. This is despite the Government insisting that the United States dollar and the bond note remains at par.

## **8– RHINO DONATION RAISES EYEBROWS**

Fresh controversy has hit Zimbabwe's recent secretive capture and export of white rhinos to the Democratic Republic of Congo following reports that one was shot and killed for violent behaviour in a quarantine facility at the Hwange National Park.

*By Oscar Nkala*

The 10 rhinos were captured in the Matopos, Lake Kyle and Lake Chivero national parks late in August and held in a quarantine boma at the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Zimparks) Mtshibi Camp in Hwange.

The British-based Bring Back Our Rhinos group said one of the rhinos was shot in captivity late in September for aggressive behaviour after it attacked and injured a game ranger in a fit of rage.

Zimparks sources who spoke to The Standard in Hwange confirmed the attack saying the game ranger suffered a broken arm, upper torso as well as hand injuries that led to amputation of two fingers on one hand.

Bring Back Our Rhinos coordinator Sharon Hoole said Zimparks must come clean on the fate of the affected rhino and prove that the animals were donated to the DRC and not sold to China as widely reported.

"We know that the rhino, which attacked a game ranger, was shot and killed inside the quarantine facility," she said. "This means that the other rhinos witnessed, and were exported unhealed of the trauma of witnessing this killing. We want to know if this killing was legal, who sanctioned it and where the horns went."

Hoole said the Convention on International Trade In Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (Cites) should promote transparency in Zimbabwean live-animal exports by investigating the alleged rhino killing, and proving that the rhinos went to DR Congo and not China.

"Zimparks were secretive from the moment of capture, through the quarantine process to the eventual export of the rhinos," she said. "The public had a right to know, and a right to say if they agreed or not with this live animal sale. "We need to know where they were sold to, for how much and why because no one besides Zimparks knows the truth, we cannot believe the rhinos went to the DRC. We need to know who moved the rhinos from Hwange, and to which airport. "Which airline flew them out, and where? Why so much secrecy and refusal to account for public assets?"

UK-based elephant and rhino conservation activist Nomusa Dube said Cites should stop certifying Zimbabwean wildlife exports in the absence of clear national consensus and guarantees of transparency and accountability for the returns. She called on responsible governments and animals rights activists to pressure Zimbabwe to account for the 10 white rhinos and stop a new elephant capture programme targeting baby and sub-adult elephants at the Hwange National Park. Game rangers said at least 20 elephants were already in the quarantine bomas at Mtshibi. The programme has a target of up to 120 elephants. "The sub-adult animals will be relocated to restock other game parks within the country. We have only heard that the baby elephants are for export to zoos, but we don't know where," said a game ranger who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Zimparks spokesman Tinashe Farawo said to the best of his knowledge, Zimbabwe delivered all 10, and not nine white rhinos to the DRC.

However, he professed ignorance on new elephant captures and the killing of a rhino, which injured a game ranger. "It is true that we have delivered the rhinos to the DRC," he said. "I don't know if a game ranger was attacked, or if the rhino responsible was shot afterwards. "However, such incidents may happen because rhinos are very dangerous and aggressive animals. "I am also not aware of new elephant captures, but we have a programme to relocate elephants from Hwange to other game parks to restock. "I will check with the Hwange office and get back to you."

In the past five years, Zimbabwe has made several controversial and secretive exports of live animals to China. These include the delivery of baby elephants, lions, leopards, baboons, monkeys and several plain game animals to China.

*Editor:* The Matobo Conservation Society is both alarmed and saddened by this in-explicable action undertaken by the Government. We feel for the many men and women who have worked so hard to

protect this special herd in the Matobo Hills, only to have the animals snatched away without warning or explanation. We have called upon the Government and National Parks to provide an honest explanation and a commitment that there will be increased efforts to preserve the Matobo Rhino. These animals belong to Zimbabweans, who have sacrificed time and money to support them. They are not the private property of the Government to be treated as the authorities see fit.

## **9 – TIMBER POACHERS FINED**

*HARARE, Oct 18 (The Herald)*

At least 26 people from Chipinge district last week paid a cumulative \$2 800 in fines for breaching the Forests Act. The 26 offenders were nabbed during an operation code-named Osalama, which was led by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) supported by parastatals such as Zesa Holdings, Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (Zimra) and Environmental Management Agency (EMA). The operation was meant to curtail movement of timber, monitor commercial timber traders' activities and unsanctioned trade in products such as firewood and charcoal. District forestry officer Mr Classport Karimanzira confirmed the development saying such a blitz would be periodically done to protect the forests.

## **10 – GOVERNMENT TO CLAMP DOWN ON DEFORESTATION**

*By Fungai Lupande*

Government is tightening environmental laws to rein in people who cut down trees causing deforestation and contributing to climate change, Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement Deputy Minister Cde Douglas Karoro said.

Speaking at the commissioning of a biogas digester at Chitsungo Mission Hospital in Mbire district on Thursday last week, Cde Karoro said the hospital used to be a major consumer of firewood, immensely contributing to deforestation in Mbire but was now using biogas, which was clean energy. He added that deforestation was contributing immensely to climate change and Government had joined hands with other countries in enforcing laws that mitigate climate change.

"Government will impose stiffer penalties on people who cut down trees. The laws are there but they are not being enforced. Government is now committed to enforce these laws.

"Those caught cutting down trees will be arrested, fined up to \$1 000 or jailed for up to two years," said Cde Karoro.

"The Environmental Management Agency was being hindered from implementing some policies by people who protected those arrested for violating environmental laws. Under the new dispensation there will be nothing like that.

"The hospital owes the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority about \$60 000 and at one point electricity was cut off because of the arrears. Some of the patients who come here have no capacity to pay their bills, the biogas will help the hospital cut down on its electricity usage.

"I thank Carbon Green Africa for complimenting Government efforts through supporting sustainable and environmentally friendly livelihood initiatives such as conservation farming, nutritional gardens and bee keeping."

Carbon Green Africa (CGA) managing director Mr Charles Nondo said in assisting in the fight against climate change the company started the Kariba REDD+ Project in four districts along the Kariba belt, which are Mbire, Nyaminyami, Hurungwe and Binga.

"To date, the company has sold five million carbon credits to international buyers. The money is divided between the four districts. Mbire Rural District Council receives 40 percent direct cash payment while 30 percent goes to the community through implementing projects."

Acting Mbire district medical officer Dr Edwicks Chidziva said the total population in Mbire was 86 746 and Chitsungo is the referral centre for 13 clinics.

"There is a huge influx of people from other countries including Mozambique. There is no network connectivity at the hospital posing challenges during emergencies. We are appealing for a booster. Our monthly electricity bill was \$1 200 and the bulk of it was consumed by our electric stove. Now we are able to channel that money towards other needs."

## **11 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY**

17 <sup>th</sup> November 2018	Visit to Wona Cave and Ringing Rocks
	Departure 9:00 from Maleme Rest camp
17 <sup>th</sup> November 2018	25 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner, 18:00 at Maleme Rest Camp
18 <sup>th</sup> November 2018	26 <sup>th</sup> AGM, 10:00; Maleme Rest camp
6 <sup>th</sup> April 2019	Matopos 33 Miler Ultra Marathon

20<sup>th</sup> March 2019  
17<sup>th</sup> May 2019  
8<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge  
Matopos Heritage Trail Run  
World Environment Day; annual Matopos Clean-up

## 12 – WHAT TREE IS THAT?

Meg Coates-Palgrave has released an App that can be downloaded onto either an Apple or Android device. This is the Play Store link for the app

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.credencys.treeapp>

Based on keys the app enables people to identify trees of Southern Africa. Having done so, there is a full description of the tree including the origin of the name, a distribution map and photos. There is an illustrated glossary, easily accessible to explain terms. For further information, contact the administrator by email. The address is [info@treesofsouthernafrica.com](mailto:info@treesofsouthernafrica.com)

## 13 – THE SPREAD OF SHOTHOLE BORER BEETLE IN SOUTH AFRICA IS PROVING TOUGH TO CONTROL

November 2, 2018 SAST

A tiny tree-killing beetle with the awkwardly long name of Polyphagous Shothole Borer was detected in South Africa for the first time last year. It's now attacking and inserting its deadly fungal ally, *Fusarium euwallaceae*, in a wider array of tree species across a much wider geographical area.

The beetle was initially discovered in a Botanical Garden on the country's east coast. It has since been detected along the southern Cape coast line as well as in several inland urban areas. The number of tree species attacked in South Africa has also risen alarmingly. It currently stands at more than 80, 35 of which are native.

The shothole borer, which is native to Southeast Asia, has the potential to affect fruit, nut and wood production, but also to permanently change urban landscapes and natural forest ecosystems. This has happened on farms, in suburbs and in forests along river valleys in California.

The South African government has started to take steps to manage the problem. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has set up a steering committee to guide national efforts. It's made up of representatives from various government departments, the forestry and agriculture sectors, as well as academics, arborists, and nurserymen.

The major challenge with the beetle infestation is that the insect is crossing the boundaries between agriculture, commercial forestry, natural forests, and urban trees. Never in the country's history has any insect attacked and killed trees in all these sectors. The protection of trees in the different sectors is typically dealt with by different government departments, namely Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Department of Environmental Affairs, and municipalities. But given the beetle's unusual behaviour, routine action plans aren't enough to curb the problem.

### The threat to South Africa's trees

Of the 80 species of trees under attack in South Africa, about 20 are reproductive hosts in which the beetle inoculates its fungus and then multiplies. These trees pose a serious risk to the environment around them as they become a source of infestation.

In the remaining 60 host species the beetle also inserts the fungus, but it doesn't reproduce in them. Although some of these trees may eventually die, they don't pose a threat to the other trees around them. The species of ornamental and street trees most affected in South Africa's cities are the London plane, Boxelder, Japanese maple, Chinese maple, English oak and Liquid amber. Several streets of maples and liquid amber have died in some cities, and large, old English oaks and plane trees have been severely affected in some areas.

During countrywide surveys conducted by our team at FABI, we found several fruit trees (peach, olive, grapevine, guava, fig) infested in urban areas. However, the only commercial crop that's affected at present are pecan nut trees on farms in the Northern Cape.

In Israel and California the beetle caused substantial damage in avocado orchards, and although South African orchards are closely monitored by FABI team members, we have only detected it on a single backyard avocado tree in Johannesburg. Similarly, we found it on roadside wattle and eucalyptus trees, but so far the pest hasn't been detected in commercial Eucalyptus, wattle or pine plantations.

In our opinion the most significant threat, but also the most difficult to predict and manage, is to South Africa's native tree species such as coral trees, wild olives, yellow woods and Natal figs.

### Managing the problem

California has been battling the beetle problem for the last 10 years. A recent visit to the area helped us to establish what practical actions have been taken to bring the problem under control.

An effective public awareness campaign was launched, informing residents and local governments about the beetle and its impact. Municipalities removed reproductive host trees, most of which were going to die anyway. The state also introduced legislation preventing infested wood from being moved from one area to another. Although researchers there have shown that chemical control of the beetle and fungus on individual trees can protect them, this has not been applied widely, and is typically only used to protect high value individual trees.

The major challenge in South Africa is to connect different stakeholders and government bodies through effective communication. Roles and responsibilities (also financial) of all contingents, at national, regional and local levels, should be clearly defined to avoid a duplication of efforts, and to ensure appropriate management strategies are devolved to regional and local government.

Structures are in place at the national level to deal with pests like these. Most pest invasions affect agricultural or forestry crops, and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry then engages with relevant stakeholders with strategic guidelines for control. For its part, the Department of Environmental Affairs is responsible for protecting the country's natural forests and ecosystems. But it's focus is usually on things like climate change, pollution and alien invasive weeds or animals.

At the local level municipalities has never had to deal with a problem like this, are not equipped to deal with it, and need clear and practical guidance from the national departments.

A consolidated strategy and pragmatic action plan is urgently needed. Pest risk assessments and countrywide surveys need to be done for the different sectors. We can learn a lot from ongoing research efforts in California, but local research is needed to determine the impact of the pest on different tree hosts, especially native trees, and to evaluate possible control measures in different South African climatic regions.

Research results need to be translated in management strategies that can be rolled out to stakeholders like farmers, commercial foresters, nurseries, arborists, municipalities, and quarantine authorities. This implies that people need to be trained to recognise the problem in order to appropriately deal with it.

Special policy might need to be formulated by the different levels of government, but legislation is only as good as its enforcement. For any of the above to succeed, efficient communication channels and a public awareness campaign is needed. All of this needs leadership, dedicated and competent human resources, and funds.

One thing is sure, the little shothole borer is here to stay. Protecting the country's trees is everybody's responsibility, but our government needs to lead the way.

*Editor* – The story above is included as a dire warning to the potential threat this poses to Zimbabwe in general, and to the Matopos in particular. We call on our Government to mobilise to prevent this invasion.

### **14 – MEMBERS NOTE BOOK**

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 fall due on 30 September 2018. Please ensure that your subs for 2019 are up to date. There has been no increase in rates.

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

We have initiated an electronic register of members, and an electronic means of applying for membership. We have written to all our members asking them to complete the easy, and simple, application form! It takes a few minutes – and even if you are a member, you need to reapply so as to re-populate the data base. We ask you to please participate. If you think you are a member, and we have missed you out, please contact the Vice-Chairman on [matoboconservatiosociety@gmail.com](mailto:matoboconservatiosociety@gmail.com)

### **15 - 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.

## **16 – WEB SITE & FACEBOOK**

The web-site for the Society [www.matobo.org](http://www.matobo.org) has been updated, so make some time to visit the site. Contributions are welcome. We have also revamped our Facebook page “Matobo Conservation Society”. We continue to update our Facebook page; we welcome any contributions from Members. Go to “Matobo Conservation Society” on Facebook, and “like” the page to ensure you get regular updates. Nearly 1,000 people are following us on Facebook.

## **17 – CONDOLENCES**

We sadly heard of the departure of our former long serving Treasurer, Mrs Barbara Muchetere, on Saturday 27th October. Barbara managed our affairs during the difficult hyper-inflation years, and was a regular participant in our events at that time. She is survived by her two sons and daughter. We offer our sincere condolences to the family.