

MATOBO



SOCIETY

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

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

NEWSLETTER 106 / JANUARY 2019

1 – NEW COMMITTEE

At our AGM in November the following members were elected to the Committee and have assumed positions as follows- Chairman, Gavin Stephens, Vice Chair and Treasurer, Jean Whiley, Secretary Gaynor Lightfoot, Members, Verity Bowman, Moira Fitzpatrick and Cindy Sellick. This is a small group for a lot of work in the year ahead, so any volunteers will be most welcome!

At the same time, we thank Rob Burrett and Daryl Friend for their contributions over the past few years. Both were unavailable for further service.

2 – OUR NEW ORCHID

We have previously reported on the finding of a new recording of an arboreal orchid, *Cyrorchis arcuate*. Members will be pleased to know that in follow work carried out, healthy populations of the orchid were found in other Paranari trees. Searches in other parts of the Matopos have not been as successful – and we believe that this is due to veld fires that would destroy the orchid growing on the branches of the trees. More searching is planned south of Diana's Pool. We also came across a tree covered in the orchid that was in the process of being cut down to make way for a field. Plants on felled limbs were recovered to replant elsewhere. But this underscores the work that is needed – we may have just recorded this rare orchid to watch it disappear.

We have also received reports of folk cutting *Ancelia africana* from trees, no doubt to sell in Bulawayo. We ask members to please report either the collection, or the sale of any such specimens to the Society, or to the ZRP.

3 – RAINFALL

As forecast, the season has not been good with totals below average across the Bulawayo / Matopos region. Whilst there have been some heavy falls, the rain is patchy and short lived.

Totals as at 20 January 2019 – Bulawayo 176mm (2018 275mm), Western Hills 257mm (2018 - 286mm), Eastern Hills 324mm (2018 - 380mm). January is our wettest month, but after a false start, little rain has fallen during the remainder of the month. By contrast, last year the rains started late, and in earnest in the second half of January. No such luck this year!

4 – DROUGHT

The hills are turning yellow. as the grass both turns to seed and shrivels in the endless heat. Week after week the relentless south- easter blows away all chances of rain, and the blue skies just suck the moisture out of the wetlands. The patchy rain has also left some areas particularly dry, and others still green, but nowhere are the wetlands wet, streams or rivers are drying up fast and the dams are dropping each week. Following two good seasons there is a marked increase in the number of snakes being seen in the Hills. Mambas, cobras and boomslang appear to particularly common at the moment. At the time of writing there is little hope of rain in the foreseeable forecast period.

5 – THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MATOBO HILLS

This book, edited by “Woody” Cotterill, Moira FitzPatrick and Julia Dupree has been published by the MCS to celebrate our 25th Anniversary. The book was launched at the Natural History Museum in December in a well-attended function. Our Chairman, speaking at the event not only congratulated the authors, but also showed how the book matched the various objectives of the Society. It is a fitting tribute to 25 years of conservation in the Matobo Hills by the MCS.

The book, with colour plates and detailed up-to-date information is a must for every member of the Society, and for all those interested in the natural history of our hills.

The book is on sale at the Natural History Museum, or contact matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com. Selling price US\$30 (sorry, only real money)

6 - NEXT EVENT

Date	17 th February 2019
Venue	Tshangula Cave
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Car Park
Travel	All Vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat and sunblock!

We travel out through the National Park to the Silozwane area, located in the Southern Hills. This cave is a National Monument, one of the finest in the Hills, and is one of the few to have been excavated. Local folk are likely to have curio for sale. We are not expected to pay an entry fee for the Park, but we suggest you bring adequate cash just in case. If we are exempt from fees, you may not venture off the direct route through the Park to the Cave. There will be a good walk to the cave, and for those who are keen we can climb to the summit afterwards. There are a number of great domes in this area that can be climbed in the afternoon.

7 – REPORT BACK

An advance party descended on Maleme Rest came on Friday, 16th November for our 25th Anniversary weekend. Once settled into our accommodation we gathered near the tennis courts for a group braai. For some the revelry went well into the night! For others a more modest retirement was in order.

On Saturday morning, joined by fresh members, we set out to visit the Ringing Rocks, located down the Maleme valley. At first the track was pretty good, then it began to deteriorate, and finally we came to a halt, about 2,5kms from our destination. For those who were keen to carry on, a walking party was arranged; whilst for others a mid-morning picnic site in some good deep shade was found. The walking party found the rocks without any difficulty, banged away at them, and played a tune! After a short sketch of the site, we turned back for the cars. Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noon-day sun – and so it was that we staggered along with rapidly dwindling water supplies in a pretty hot mid-day sun. Back at the cars, refreshment was had by all, and then a drive home, stopping to examine and admire the lion paintings near Whitewaters. The afternoon was spent largely recovering and finding refuge from the hot afternoon.

In the evening we reconvened at the tennis court, where tables had been laid out and decorated (thanks to Linda Lawrie) and a fine dinner was served. Thanks to Lee and his faithful team, we enjoyed a sumptuous meal. Our after-dinner speaker was Dr Nicky Pegg who shared with us the Dambari Wildlife Trust work carried out with Camera traps in the hills. The pictures were interesting and in many cases surprising showing a surprising diversity of wildlife! A real treat.

On Sunday 18th our AGM was held at Maleme Rest Camp. We welcomed Mr Simon Tonge, Chairman of Dambari Wildlife Trust who was visiting from the UK, Dr Moira Fitzpatrick, Director of National Museums, and a good number of members. As always there was some good debate, largely around the future of the Parks estate, and in particular the funding of the Matobo National Park. There was some concern raised about the intrusion of cattle deep into the park, and the seeming acceptance of this by Parks – even Maleme Dam seems to have a resident herd! These and other matters will be taken up with Parks in due course. Following lunch, members drifted off home, some enjoying interesting drives home (like running into rhino)!

All in all, it was a successful social weekend for our members, and a fitting way to mark our silver anniversary.

8 – ZIM WARMING RAPIDLY - EXPERTS

Zimbabwe is one of the countries in the SADC region that are warming up more rapidly than the rest of world, with temperatures expected to rise by between two to four degrees Celsius by 2050, a climate change expert has said. Speaking at a climate change symposium held in Harare last week, United Nations climate change researcher Pious Ncube said the rate at which Zimbabwe is warming up was

‘scary.’ “The world has warmed by an average of 0.76 degrees Celsius since, period of pre-industrial times and temperature is projected to further increase warmth up to a maximum of four degrees Celsius if no action is taken. Global action is urgent, but local action is even more urgent – *NewsDay*, Tuesday November 27”.

9 – CHAMISA CALLS FOR STIFFER PENALTIES

HARARE, Dec 02 (The Standard)

MDC leader Nelson Chamisa yesterday called on Parliament to enact legislation to criminalise the destruction of wetlands and the indiscriminate cutting-down of trees. Speaking in Norton where he planted a tree to mark the national tree planting day, Chamisa said the tobacco industry must recover, but not at the cost of the environment. He urged farmers to invest in solar energy to preserve vegetation.

10 – HOW ZIMBABWE HAS BECOME THE WORLD’S TOP TOURIST DESTINATION

(With acknowledgement to Jealousy Dutiro; 01 Jan 2019)

A few weeks ago, Lonely Planet, perhaps the number one travel publication in the world, released their top 10 countries to visit in 2019. Zimbabwe was number three. A few days later, National Geographic released their own 2019 ‘cool list’ of must-visit destinations. Again, Zimbabwe featured highly, coming ninth in the world, and the top destination in Africa.

Soon after, Vanity Fair, another top magazine, featured a lengthy article on Zimbabwe in its travel section entitled "Zimbabwe: Fresh Winds A-Blowing", detailing in depth why Zimbabwe is perhaps the hottest destination in global tourism today. And to cap it off, just a few days ago, the Financial Times, possibly the world's top financial newspaper, led its travel section with a full-page article from ex-Zimbabwean Graham Boynton, who returned to the country of his birth for the first time with his daughter.

One month, four of the world's most influential publications, four glowing reviews of Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. And all four pieces had one thing in common - recognition that in the post-Mugabe era, Zimbabwe is now open again.

National Geographic wrote how "With Mugabe gone, Zimbabwe's new president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, seems keen to invest in tourism;" Lonely Planet wrote how post-Mugabe there is a new sense of hope across the country; the Financial Times writes of the ‘buzz’ of the new Zimbabwe; and Vanity Fair led their article with the sentence, "A year after Robert Mugabe stood down, Zimbabwe is ready to be discovered again."

We Zimbabweans can be our own harshest critics. And rightly so. Things are tough today, and for a people who have been let down so many times, it is prudent to be sceptical of our leaders.

But perhaps, as we enter a New Year, for once we should look on the positive side. The world seems to be sitting up and taking notice of the changes underway in Zimbabwe. The world's tourists are being actively encouraged to come and see for themselves, and for a country lacking foreign currency, this is a crucial step.

Let nobody be under any illusions – this sort of thing would have been unthinkable under Mugabe. Nobody was encouraged to come to Zimbabwe then. But now, things are changing.

Our leaders may not be perfect, but they have created the conditions for Zimbabwe to be talked of once again as one of the world's leading tourism destinations. And that is a hugely positive step.

11 – GIRAFFES ARE IN TROUBLE, SAYS IUCN STATUS UPDATE

Press release from Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF)

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species is once again drawing attention to the plight of giraffe. The IUCN Red List reveals that they are in serious trouble, with some now being considered as ‘Critically Endangered’. Many people first became aware of the declining numbers of the iconic giraffe when they were up listed to ‘Vulnerable’ on the IUCN Red List in 2016. Today’s IUCN update comes as a further reminder that some of the currently IUCN-recognised giraffe subspecies are in real trouble.

The conservation status of seven of the currently IUCN-recognised nine giraffe subspecies has been assessed, five of these subspecies for the first time ever. For many, it comes as a shock that three of the giraffe subspecies are now listed as ‘Critically Endangered’ (Kordofan and Nubian giraffe) and ‘Endangered’ (Reticulated giraffe), while others range from ‘Vulnerable’ (Thornicroft’s and West African giraffe) to ‘Near Threatened’ (Rothschild’s giraffe). Only Angolan giraffe – with their stronghold in Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe – seem to be out of trouble and are listed as ‘Least Concern’. Only the South African and Masai giraffe are yet to be assessed. While South African giraffe

appear to be doing well, Masai giraffe have plummeted and will most likely be placed within one of the threatened categories of the IUCN Red List.

The updated assessments of these giraffe subspecies were undertaken by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Giraffe & Okapi Specialist Group (GOSG), which is hosted by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF), and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) – who already, two years ago, sounded the alarm for the ‘silent extinction’ of giraffe.

“Whilst giraffe are commonly seen on safari, in the media, and in zoos, people – including conservationists – are unaware that these majestic animals are undergoing a silent extinction. While giraffe populations in southern Africa are doing just fine, the world’s tallest animal is under severe pressure in some of its core ranges across East, Central and West Africa. It may come as a shock that three of the currently recognised nine subspecies are now considered ‘Critically Endangered’ or ‘Endangered’, but we have been sounding the alarm for a few years now.” – says Dr Julian Fennessy, co-chair of the IUCN SSC GOSG, and Director of the Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF).

In spite of this, there is also positive news in this latest IUCN announcement. Two subspecies that were previously considered ‘Endangered’ (West African and Rothschild’s giraffe) have since improved their conservation status. Concerted efforts by African governments and conservation organisations, under the guidance and support of GCF, have resulted in increasing numbers of both subspecies, and as a result have been down listed to ‘Vulnerable’ and ‘Near Threatened’, respectively.

“This is a conservation success story and highlights the value of making proactive giraffe conservation and management efforts in critical populations across the continent. Working collaboratively with governments and other partners, we feel that our proactive measures are saving giraffe in some areas before it is too late. It is now timely to increase our efforts, especially for those listed as ‘Critically Endangered’ and ‘Endangered’.” – says Arthur Muneza, East-Africa Coordinator of the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, and member of the IUCN SSC GOSG.

While IUCN still recognises giraffe as one species with nine subspecies, detailed collaborative genetic-based research carried out by GCF and its partners, and Senckenberg BiK highlights that there are four distinct species of giraffe – elevating some of the newly assessed subspecies to species level. While this might appear an academic exercise, the conservation implications are immense and they need to be reviewed as a matter of urgency. The Northern giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) – which includes the ‘Critically Endangered’ Kordofan and Nubian giraffe, and the ‘Vulnerable’ West African giraffe – and Reticulated giraffe (*Giraffa reticulata*) can be considered some of the most threatened large mammals in the wild, showing less than 5,200 and 15,785 individuals remaining in the wild, respectively.

Common name	Previous Red List status	Updated Red List status
Kordofan giraffe	Not assessed	Critically Endangered
Nubian giraffe	Not assessed	Critically Endangered
Reticulated giraffe	Not assessed	Endangered
Thornicroft’s giraffe	Not assessed	Vulnerable
West African giraffe	Endangered (2008)	Vulnerable
Rothschild’s giraffe	Endangered (2010)	Near Threatened
Angolan giraffe	Not assessed	Least Concern
Masai giraffe	Not assessed	Not assessed
South African giraffe	Not assessed	Not assessed

Human population growth poses the largest threat to giraffe in Africa today. Habitat loss and changes through expanding agriculture and mining, illegal hunting, increasing human-wildlife conflict, and civil unrest are all factors that are pushing giraffe towards extinction. However, with GCF giraffe have a strong advocate.

Steph Fennessy, Director of GCF and member of the IUCN SSC GOSG, points out that *“the updated IUCN Red List assessment highlights what we have been saying for years: giraffe are in trouble and there is no one solution to giraffe conservation in Africa. Different scenarios require different approaches. As a small but impactful organisation, GCF works with partners throughout Africa to enhance giraffe conservation on the ground and, at the same time, collaborates internationally to rally support and awareness for giraffe, which will ultimately help to save them in the wild.”*

About The Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF)

The Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF) is the only organisation in the world that concentrates solely on the conservation and management of giraffe in the wild, throughout Africa. Currently working in twelve African countries, GCF is dedicated to a sustainable future for all giraffe populations in the wild, and seeks to provide a range of appropriate technical and financial support to partners, including several African governments, to help save giraffe before it is too late. For more information, visit our website: <https://giraffeconservation.org/>

12 – TWO RHINO POACHERS JAILED FOR TEN YEARS

(Acknowledgement to Thupeyo Muleya of the Herald, December 13, 2018, Thupeyo Muleya

Two poachers have been jailed 10 years each for hunting rhinoceroses in Buby Valley Conservancy under Beitbridge District.

Celestino Shate (35) of Bulawayo and Faso Moyo (42) of Victoria Falls denied the charges when their trial opened before Mr Langton Mukwengi on charges of contravening a section of the Parks and Wildlife Act, but were convicted on overwhelming evidence. Charges against their other accomplice Godfrey Makechemu of Gokwe were withdrawn at the close of the State's case for lack of incriminating evidence.

Prosecuting, Mr Manyonga Kuvarega told the court that on August 28 this year, the duo went to Buby Valley Conservancy armed with .375 mm rifle in the company of Makechemu to hunt and kill rhinos. He said the accused persons also carried with them foodstuffs in two satchels to consume during their "adventure". The court heard that their luck ran out when one game ranger at the conservancy observed their spoor entering the conservancy, who in turn informed his superiors.

They then organised a team of rangers to trek the spoor of the accused persons who were also following a fresh spoor of a rhino. The rangers trekked the trio for three hours and later caught up with them.

Mr Kuvarega said when the rangers spotted the armed poachers; they fired three warning shots and ordered them to surrender. He said the poachers ran away, with the rangers in pursuit. The rangers, he said, managed to apprehend Shate and Moyo. Before his arrest, Shate, who had been holding a rifle, gave it to Makechemu, who fled from the scene. The matter was reported to the police, who arrested him two days later at his home in Gokwe.

Another poacher Bakali Khumalo of Bulawayo, who was arrested in November after he was arrested in the same conservancy hunting for rhinos, also appeared before the same magistrate.

Khumalo was arrested on November 11 when he was hunting with three others who are still at large.

The accused person was armed with a Bruno.375 rifle fixed with telescope device and a silencer.

Three black satchels, ammunition and the rifle were recovered from Khumalo.

Incidents of poaching of rhinos and other wildlife animals are rife in conservancies in Beitbridge District.

In January last year, two poachers were shot and killed during an exchange of fire with a team of Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority rangers working together with the police in Hwange National Park.

The pair was from Nkayi and they were shot during contact with the police and the Zimparks rangers. Police recovered; 1x450 rifle, 2x live cartridges, 1x empty cartridge, 3 pairs of elephant tusks, 1x adult bull elephant, 1x axe, 1x stone file, 2x elephant tails, 5 kilogrammes mealie-meal, salt, 1x pot, 4x cell phones, from the poachers.

Later in April (2017), police arrested a 41-year-old suspected poacher after he shot and killed a game ranger at Nottingham Estate some 40km south-west of Beitbridge Town.

13 – SEVEN CHINESE CAUGHT WITH \$1MILLION RHINO HORN PIECES

HARARE, December 27 (Herald). Seven Chinese were arrested in Victoria Falls in possession of more than 20kgs of rhino horn pieces valued at \$1 million. The Chinese were arrested following a search at their rented house in Aerodrome suburb on Sunday morning. The rhino pieces were allegedly hidden in plastics bags and boxes. The police received a tip-off that the 7 were in possession of rhino horns.

14 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

13 th February 2019	Tshangula Cave Field Trip, see page 2 above for details
6 th April 2019	Matopos 33 Miler Ultra Marathon
20 th March 2019	Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge
17 th May 2019	Matopos Heritage Trail Run
8 th June 2019	World Environment Day; annual Matopos Clean-up

15 – 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

16 – ZNA COMMITTED TO PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

HARARE, Dec 13 (The Herald,) The Zimbabwe National Army is prepared to play its part in mitigating the effects of global warming, ZNA Commander Lieutenant-General Absolom Chimonyo has said. In a speech read on his behalf by Major-General Paul Chima to commemorate National Tree Planting Day at Good Hope Farm on Tuesday, Lt-Gen Chimonyo said the military will do everything in its capacity to protect the environment.

17 – MEMBERSHIP LIST CLEAN-OUT

The incoming committee agreed that members who have not re-registered via the on-line form or have not paid subscriptions for the past four years should be removed from our mailing list. These members will be contacted individually. If you have not re-registered on-line or are unsure of your subscription obligations, please contact matoboconservatiosociety@gmail.com

18 – MEMBERS NOTE BOOK

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 fell 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

The AGM resolved that from 2019 we will accept only US\$ but for the subs that have fallen due, we will accept both local and US\$. We would prefer the later if you are able to pay in US\$. If you need any information, please contact the Vice-Chairman on matoboconservatiosociety@gmail.com

19 - 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, caps and shopping bags for sale. CD's are also available.

20 – WEB SITE & FACEBOOK

The web-site for the Society 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. Over 1,000 people are following us on Facebook.

21 – CONDOLENCES

Elsbeth Parry passed away on 9th January in Switzerland. Elsbeth, known for her book “Legacy on the Rocks – the Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers of the Matopo Hills, Zimbabwe” (published in 2000) had a deep interest in the rock art of our hills and collated a vast store of information on various sites. Apart from her book, she also contributed to a number of Rock Art research journals in the region. She is one of a tiny handful of people who truly know the wealth of the rock art in the hills. As an amateur in the Rock Art world, she was always proud to be associated with a long line of amateurs who had come before her. She will be sorely missed by those working on rock art. We send our sincere condolences to the family.