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NEWSLETTER 107 / JUNE 2019

1 – A CHILL WIND

A chill wind blows across the landscape, and it's not just the onset of winter. The Zimbabwe economy blighted by drought is once again spinning out of control. Inflation is soaring; cost of living rising. Employees are facing real hardship and companies battle to manage increasing costs and foreign exchange shortages. Deja-vu; we have been here before and it is simply incomprehensible that we are returning to hyper-inflation once more, savings wiped out and ruin staring everyone in the face. We can only find solace in our last remaining places of wilderness.

2 – NATIONAL PARKS INCREASE FEES

In a not unexpected move National Parks have increased their fees applicable in the Matobo National Park. We can expect this to be an ongoing occurrence given the inflation in the country, and we will endeavour to keep members updated.

DAILY CONSERVATION FEES					
Day-Visitors Locals	Accommodated Locals	Day-Visitors SADC	Accommodated SADC	Day-Visitors International	Accommodated International
RTGS\$	RTGS\$	US\$	US\$	US\$	US\$
12	6	12	6	15	8

ACCOMMODATION - NO OF ROOMS (BEDS)	NON-RESIDENTS	LOCALS	
	US\$	Local USD\$	Local RTGS\$
Executive Lodges Black Eagle & Imbila (2 bedrooms)	250	135	405
D Lodge 2 bedrooms (Fish Eagle 3 beds)	200	113	340
D Lodge 2 bedrooms (3 beds) Non-Renovated	103	65	195
D Lodge 2 bedroom (3 beds) Renovated	175	90	270
S Lodge 1 bedroom (Double bed) Renovated	120	70	210
S Lodge 1 bedroom 2 beds Non-Renovated	86	50	150
D Chalet 2 bedrooms (3 beds)	69	40	120
S Chalet 1 bedroom (2 beds)	40	20	60
Camping/Caravan /person	10	5	15

3 - WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

The United Nations World Environment Day was on 5th June. Plans to recognise this day in conjunction with National Parks on Saturday 8th June were shelved following the recent shocking increases in the cost of fuel. However, we should not just mark World Environment Day once a year - it should be a part of our everyday lives.

4 - NEXT EVENT

Date	21 st July 2019
Venue	Ntaba Nyama
Meet	08:45am, Cresta Churchill for 09:00 departure
Travel	All Vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat, sunblock

Mindful of the current conditions, we have selected a site of interest on the northern side of the Matopos, that is not too far from Bulawayo. Ntaba Nyama is the site where King Mzilikazi finally defeated Hendrick Potgieter in 1847

The Matabele leader, Mzilikazi, was threatened by the white incursion into what he saw as his sphere of influence, (the north eastern Free State, Southern Transvaal area) which led to the Matabele's attack on the Potgieter laager in October 1836, at Vegkop, near the present-day town of Heilbron. The attack was beaten off, but the Matabele made off with most of the trekker oxen, crucial draught animals for the wagons. The combined trek groups of Piet Retief and Gerrit Maritz came to Potgieter's rescue. Moroka also helped with oxen. His group joined up with Retief and Maritz at Thaba Nchu, where they formed a Voortrekker government and decided to move to Natal. Potgieter was not in favour of this plan and stayed behind in the Free State, later moving to the Northern Transvaal.

In 1847 Potgieter decided on raiding Mzilikazi once more, in Matabeleland. Leaving his wagons under guard near the Shashi river, Potgieter beat off the first attack at a place since called Mafubantu (where the people died). The Boers proceeded through a valley now called Ndaleka's Pass towards the Royal Kraal where the King was in residence. They resolved to take Mzilikazi unawares, to recapture the cattle and sheep still owing to them and to find the Liebenberg children. Reports of the approach of 'Ndaleka' (Hendrick Potgieter) swept through the Matabele country and reached Mzilikazi on the Ingwigwisi river, where he had recently arrived at the kraal of his Inyati or Buffalo regiment. Meanwhile Mbigo, commander of the newly conscripted Zwangendaba regiment, set out immediately with his warriors to investigate the movements of the Boers. They came upon the Boer commando whilst it was pillaging cattle-posts and sending herds of Matabele beasts back to the wagons on the Shashi. A skirmish took place during which the Matabele were compelled to retreat rapidly into the bush. Night fell, and with the Boers bivouacked on a hill (Ntaba Nyama) beside the Khami river the Zwangendaba regiment crept out of its hiding-place to massacre the Bapedi herdsmen, who with hundreds of Matabele cattle in their charge had lain down to sleep in the open. At dawn the Boers found the mangled corpses of their servants, but not a single head of cattle looted on the previous day. Potgieter's commando had to retreat due to the loss of their cattle, and they lacked the protection of their wagons in laager. So Potgieter retraced his tracks into the Makalanga regions, through the Mangwe pass and back to the Shashi river. The Boers proceeded to Ohrigstad, and peace returned to Matabeleland.

The discovery of his new kingdom by Potgieter caused Mzilikazi grave concern, but as events were to prove, this recent incident heralded an era of comparative peace and friendship between the Matabele and the Boers. This change in the relationships between Mzilikazi and the Boers was indirectly due to the aspirations of David Livingstone, resident missionary among the Bakwena, the Crocodile people of Bechuanaland. A staunch partisan of the black man of South Africa, Livingstone criticised and opposed the Boers' claim to authority over the peoples Mzilikazi had subjugated. Emissaries exchanged between Mzilikazi and Potgieter eventually settled on the Limpopo river being their common boundary - a situation that has remained to this day.

We know this is the middle winter, so we are leaving later in the morning and limiting our activities, so we hope for a sunny, if cool picnic!

5 – REPORT BACK

On a rare wet morning this past February, a small group of dedicated members set out for the southern hills to climb to Tshangula Cave. The drive out may be long, but it passes almost right through the hills; through the National Park and into the Khumalo Communal Lands. We managed to drive almost to the foot of the hill, and immediately shared our tea. Dark clouds were gathering to the south of us, but undeterred we set off for the cave. Taking a detour, we arrived on the top of the hill, deciding to avoid any future climbing in the rain, and so enjoyed a fine view of the Maleme valley to the north of us, and the giant dwalas around us - Hambushamba, Madombo, Tedzi and Silozwe. Not forgetting Silozwane and Shumbashaba Nyoni.

Then down to the cave; the climb proving too technical for a number of members who returned down the dwala and back to the cars for drinks lunch. For those who made it to the cave, we were rewarded with the sight of the high dome and some intricate rock art, before forcing our way through the undergrowth to get back to base. And then as lunch was prepared the first squall hit us - some taking shelter in their cars, others under umbrellas. After the rain, we emerged from our places of shelter to enjoy the afternoon with a walk down to the Maleme valley.

Some lucky members had the real pleasure of seeing a pair of white rhino on their way home. A real treat and fine end to a superb outing.

6 – THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MATOBO HILLS

Selling price US\$30. The book is on sale at the Natural History Museum, or via contact on matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com.

7 – RAINFALL

The 2018/2019 season has come to a disappointing end. Not only was rainfall poor, but very erratic which meant that the wetlands never got topped up, and the rivers never really flowed. In the western Matopos this is the second consecutive season below average.

Totals as at end of April 2019 – Bulawayo 330mm (2018 575mm), Western Hills 344mm (2018 - 505mm), Eastern Hills 524mm (2018 - 859mm).

8 – ICRISAT TO INJECT US\$30M IN MATOPOS RESEARCH CENTRE

The Indian-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) which runs the Matopos Research Station in Matabeleland South Province, Zimbabwe is injecting US\$30 million to establish a hub for small grains research for southern, eastern and central African regions.

The implementation of the project is with immediate effect and is a show of confidence in the country at a time Zimbabwe is implementing the re-engagement policy.

Grains have been part of African peoples' lives from time immemorial, but their consumption had been reduced due to the advent of the white man on the continent as people acquired exotic tastes brought in by the settlers.

However, with the advent of climate change and growing awareness on the advantages of traditional foods, Zimbabweans are going back to their roots and consuming healthy traditional foods which comprise mainly small grains.

ICRISAT Director General, Mr Peter Carberry informed President Emmerson Mnangagwa that they want to modernise Matopos and make it a world leading facility to breed improved varieties of pearl millet, sorghum, ground nuts and chick peas, and use the facility to support farmers not only from Zimbabwe but the whole region for crop improvement.

The project is being funded by a number of sources including the Bill Gates Foundation.

Country representative, Dr Kizito Mazvimavi said the development is a boost the Matopos Research Station which has not been active for some time, resulting in its activities migrating to Ethiopia and Malawi.

President Mnangagwa said small grains have always been the backbone of African cultures, adding that it is crucial for researchers to look at ways of increasing yields and productivity of the crops.

The Zimbabwean government has sought to incentivise small grain producers by ensuring the small grains are put in the same bracket as the highly lucrative cash crops grown in the country.

9 – ZIMPARKS ANTI-POACHING DRIVE CONTINUES TO GAIN TRACTION

Zimbabwe's anti-poaching drive continues to gain traction after the country recovered 1 000 kilogrammes of ivory and 27 rhino horns with authorities stressing that the war against wild crimes will be intensified this year.

Effective patrols by the wildlife protection authority have resulted to a significant decline of poaching activities with figures from last year reflecting a sharp decline of poached elephants from a high of 100 elephants poached annually to below 20 killed.

The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Zimparks) states that heightened inter-agency anti-poaching patrols have been important in fighting the scourge of poaching leading to enhanced recoveries on poached ivory, rhino horns and pangolins in 2018.

Zimbabwe has one the strictest laws against pangolin poaching in Africa.

The animals are specially protected under the country's Parks and Wildlife Act, and illegally possessing or dealing in them attracts a prison sentence of up to 12 years, according to Zimparks.

Despite this penalty traffickers continue to target the mammals to satisfy the illegal international market raising fears that this could lead to the extinction of this species.

At an estimated elephant population of 84 000, Zimbabwe has a healthy stock which makes it a target for syndicated crime.

10 – POACHERS KILL 750 RHINOS SINCE 2000

With acknowledgement to Jeffry Gogo; The Herald

More than 750 rhinos have been killed by commercial poachers in Zimbabwe since 2000, according to data from the International Rhino Federation (IRT).

The rhino is targeted for its horn, which sells for tens of thousands of dollars in the underground, illegal wildlife markets, particularly in Asia, where dubious cultural beliefs drive demand.

In an article published in the African Conservation Telegraph, local wildlife conservationists Susie Ellis and Kelly Russo detail the history of rhino conservation in Zimbabwe, narrating the see-saw in rhino figures over the years and how the IRT has helped protect one of the most critically endangered animal species in the world.

By 1993, runaway poaching had left the black rhino population in Zimbabwe at just 370, the authors say. After intensive anti-poaching efforts commenced in 1996, populations began to recover, reaching 435 individuals.

Black rhinos now number around 475 animals, a remarkable recovery considering Zimbabwe's erstwhile political and economic crises, Ellis and Russo said. But since the turn of the millennium, things have taken a turn for the worse. The authors stated: "As Zimbabwe declined in the early 2000s, poaching was initially a matter of survival and subsistence.

Later, however, poaching became a high-stakes, organised endeavour, implicating Government officials, foreign workers and diplomats, and criminal networks." It is a sweeping statement, but we have seen how in recent years' poachers have switched on to tightly controlled substances such as cyanide (used to poison watering holes) as a new method for killing both the rhino and elephant. By resorting to cyanide, poachers avoid the risk of a gunshot being overheard by rangers, attracting unsolicited attention.

Founded in 1991 "by a group of dedicated people outraged by the black rhino killing taking place in Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe," the International Rhino Foundation has worked to bolster rhino protection in the country through a variety of anti-poaching activities.

Ellis and Russo explained that through the efforts of the IRF, "poaching levels (have) dramatically declined and black rhino populations began to stabilise and eventually increase." IRF's longest-running Africa programme focuses on rhino protection and monitoring through Zimbabwe's Lowveld Rhino Trust (LRT), led by Raoul du Toit. Zimbabwe holds the world's fourth largest black rhino population after South Africa, Namibia, and Kenya. The LRT, founded in 1991, safeguards wildlife on private and communal lands in Zimbabwe's southeast, the authors detailed.

Du Toit has since the 1980s worked with other rhino lovers, creating in the parched lowveld private conservancies (Save Valley, Buby Valley and Malilangwe), which were populated with the rhino according to Ellis and Russo, the project built up the black rhino population in that region from four percent of the national total in 1990 to 89 percent at the end of 2017 (about 8 percent of the continental total).

"While unplanned occupancy that commenced during Zimbabwe's "fast-track" resettlement programme continues to destroy rhino habitat in Save Valley, the available range in lowveld conservancies remains enough to carry more than twice the current populations of black and white rhino," the article stated.

"The LRT's activities help maintain the growth of large populations of both species of rhinos, while also tackling immediate species conservation needs (monitoring, management, protection, and community engagement, strategic translocations, and support for anti-poaching, informer systems, legal actions against poachers, etc)," it added.

Without community buy-in, conservation will barely make it across the finishing line. So, the Lowveld Rhino Trust has in the past 15 years operated a Rhino Conservation Awareness Program in 145 primary schools within the Save and Buby Valley Conservancies' buffer zones.

Students engage into competitive animal quiz. In return for a community's successfully conserving rhinos, each school receives supplies, including textbooks.

Going forward, the LRT is to continue "bringing together experts in anti-poaching and law enforcement, habitat protection, population genetics, animal translocation, rhino breeding, and veterinary care . . .

creating a worldwide collaborative network with the knowledge and resources needed to safeguard these magnificent species.”

Wildlife trafficking is now a multi-billion-dollar industry. Worldwide, \$10 billion worth of wildlife and wildlife products are traded illegally each year.

The major source markets of illegal ivory in Africa are South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania.

11 – WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE STILL DYING FROM SNAKE BITES?

By Dr Nick Casewell & Dr Stuart Ainsworth; Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine; 21 January 2019

Tens of thousands of people die from snake bites worldwide every year. Lack of treatment and even the wrong medicine mean many of these deaths are preventable. Snake bites may not strike you as being a major public health problem. But in some parts of the world, they are a daily risk and can be lethal or life changing. Victims often do not get the treatment they need in time, if at all. In other cases, they are given medicine to treat an injury caused by a different snake.

About 11,000 people a month are thought to die from venomous snakebites - similar to the number that died during the whole of the 2014-16 West Africa Ebola crises. A further 450,000 people a year are thought to suffer life-changing injuries such as amputation and permanent disability. The scale of the problem means snake bites are now classed as a priority neglected tropical disease.

Who gets bitten?

In developed regions - such as Europe, Australia and North America - snake bites kill only a handful of people each year, despite there being many venomous species. That is compared with 32,000 deaths in sub-Saharan Africa, and twice as many in South Asia. Many rural communities in the tropics are at almost constant risk of snake bites, whether working in the field, travelling at dusk or even sleeping in their homes at night. Young male farmers are the most at-risk group, followed by children.

While a large rural population is a factor, health systems in some parts of Africa and Asia are often ill-prepared for coping with snake bites. Clinical training, emergency transport and affordable medicine are often in short supply, with tragic consequences.

Expensive medicine

Venomous snake bites typically cause three main types of life-threatening symptoms: uncontrollable bleeding, paralysis and irreversible tissue destruction. It is essential for snakebite victims to get the correct medicine as soon as possible following a snake bite. Antivenom is the medicine of choice for treating snake bites.

It is made using the venom of the snake it is designed to treat. This means that many different versions are needed, because there are so many venomous snakes found throughout the world - cobras, mambas, kraits, vipers and pit vipers, to name just a few.

The toxins found in their venom differ from one group of snakes to the next, or even between the same group of snakes in a different region. This means the correct antivenom is often hard to identify and can be very expensive.

How antivenoms are made

A tiny non-harmful amount of snake venom is injected into an animal - usually a horse, or sheep. This stimulates the animal's immune system to create antibodies that neutralise the venom. These antibodies are extracted from the animal's blood, purified and made into antivenom.

Antivenoms must be used in hospital because of patients suffering a high rate of adverse reactions to the medicine

In Latin America, antivenom is often produced in the country and subsidised by the government.

Death rates are significantly higher in sub-Saharan Africa, where the best antivenom costs \$140 to \$300 (£108 to £233) per vial, with three to 10 vials usually required to save a victim's life.

As the typical Swazi farmer earns \$600 a year, this medicine out of reach for most.

The wrong antivenom

This situation has allowed weak or inappropriate medicine to flood the market over the past decade, particularly in Africa. These antivenoms often cost about \$30 per vial - a fraction of the cost of proven products. Some African health ministry's understandably saw this as a win-win situation, with more drugs available and at a lower cost. These products started being used in hospitals throughout much of the continent. However, there are now several reports that some of these medicines may be dangerously ineffective.

Small-scale case studies from hospitals in both Ghana and Central African Republic have suggested that when these cheaper medicines were used, fatality rates increased from 2% or fewer, to more than 10%.

Often, these antivenoms are made using snake venoms from a different region to where the product is being sold - for example an antivenom made with Indian snake venom being used in Africa. Others are made with the right venoms, but with a low concentration of antibodies per dose - resulting in very weak medicines.

This means the number of vials needed to successfully treat the patient shoots up from three to 10, to as many as 20 or 30. Ironically, this situation has prompted some established manufacturers to cut supply of their much-needed products as they became priced out of the market.

Lack of testing

These problems have been made worse by the lack of antivenom testing.

Most drugs must be thoroughly independently tested, with clinical trials to prove their effectiveness. But this often is not the case with antivenom. National drug agencies sometimes approve products without strong evidence of their effectiveness, or comparison with existing treatments.

To tackle this, the World Health Organization has launched a pre-market testing scheme, with the results due to be published later this year. This should allow health ministries, pharmacists and clinicians to better understand which antivenoms are suitable for their region, while identifying responsible manufacturers of affordable antivenoms.

However, manufacturers do not have to take part in the scheme, and countries are not obliged to remove products from the market based on the results. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this World Health Organization seal of approval will strongly influence antivenom purchasing decisions throughout Africa.

Looking to the future

Effective antivenom is one part of solving the snake bite puzzle, but many other challenges remain.

More work needs to be done to identify the communities most at risk and to ensure a sustainable flow of affordable medicine is sent there. Meanwhile, training more clinicians and healthcare workers in how to effectively treat snake bite victims would reduce the number of deaths.

Finally, educating local communities about snake bites would help lower the risk of being bitten, and mean appropriate action was more likely to be taken after a bite.

12 – GOVT PONDERING TAKING OVER WETLANDS

Newsday, March 25, 2019

Government is considering taking over all wetlands and classifying them as State land in a bid to promote their sustainable use and management. The southern African nation has approximately 1 271 wetlands, covering 3% of the total land area, but they are fast depleting because of massive uncontrolled commercial and housing construction projects. Unsustainable agricultural activities, resource extraction and veld fires have contributed to the rapid destruction of wetlands in urban and rural areas across the country.

13 – REPORT BACK ON RECENT EVENTS

Matobo Hills World Heritage Mountain Bike Challenge

For the first time numbers of riders dropped, most likely a result of the harsh economic conditions and the prevailing fuel crises. But the 65 riders who did participate in this our tenth edition in March enjoyed another three days of first class cycling and great camaraderie.

Heading west on day one, the full impact of the drought was visible with great sandy rivers, poor crops, and no water. As the group went east on day two, patches of green gave way to struggling streams - but at least there was some water! Day three saw the group heading across the Mtshabezi gorge to enjoy some of the best riding ever. And then finally it was all over too soon - with sundowners on the Dwala, prizes and speeches, and then the final dinner.

Great appreciation to all those MCS members and friends who assisted with water-points, driving and various support activities.

Five riders earned their gold jerseys - earned from riding in all ten events. Congratulations to them! We also recognised those support folks who had assisted every year over the past ten years - a terrific act of selflessness and support not only to the ride, but to the MCS.

Matobo Hills World Heritage Trail Run

Entries were also down for the staging of this event in May, but it did not detract from the weekend of 17 - 19 May. With the formal start taking place at Gulabahwe Cave, the actual race got going at 8:00am. Running south down the Old Gwanda Road for a short distance, the route then swung west and across to the Mazhowe valley where it picked up the Heritage MTB route and turned north. From here on its

steady climbing all the way to Mwazi, with two water points en route. Then down to Matopo Mission and finish at Camp Dwala; 30km's complete. Day two, which is 20km's long, sees a circular route starting and ending at Camp Dwala, and this year the route was modified to make it even more attractive. Once again, a successful event but we plan to move this to August in future years so as to attract more competitors

Ironwill Charity Ecochallenge

At the last moment, this the 20th Ironwill event, was moved from Chimanimani to the Matopos, and the 55 competitors enjoyed three tough days of cycling, hiking, orienteering and swimming in the eastern hills. This was the fourth time this event has been staged in the Matobo Hills, and once again the competitors learned something about our landscape and were introduced to this special place.

14 – HISTORY

The month of June saw the 125th anniversary of the formal proclamation of the town of Bulawayo. Amahlope!

15 – DEFORESTATION A THREAT TO ECONOMY- VP

The Herald, April 08, 2019.

Vice President Kembo Mohadi said police should arrest anyone found illegally cutting down trees. Addressing tourism players in Victoria Falls last Friday, VP Mohadi said deforestation is a threat to the economy as the country is losing thousands of hectares of forests every year. “There are concerns pertaining to environment, conservation and deforestation. Over the past two decades deforestation has been so high in the country reaching a peak of 330 000 hectares of land that were destroyed between 2010 and 2014,” said VP Mohadi. This is attributable to the opening of land for agriculture expansion, tobacco curing, infrastructure development and household use compounded by electricity challenges, he said. VP Mohadi said through Government efforts, the rate of deforestation fell to between 100 000 and 150 000 hectares per year after 2015.

16 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

21 st July 2019	Field trip to Ntaba Nyama
8 th September 2019	Field trip to see spectacular spring tree flush, with dendrologist supreme Meg Coates-Palgrave
13 th - 15 th September 2019	Matopos Classic MTB
8 th June 2020	World Environment Day; annual Matopos clean-up

17 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK

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 matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com.

18 - 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) and khaki shopping bags (at \$5 each). CD's are also available.

19 – WEB SITE & FACEBOOK

The website 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.

20 – CONDOLENCES

Colin Randell passed away on Thursday 4th April. We send our sincere condolences to Ann and the family. A gentleman who will be sorely missed by all who knew him.