

MATOBO



SOCIETY

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

NEWSLETTER 110 / JANUARY 2020

1 – NEW COMMITTEE

Your committee was returned to office, along with Mr Neil Rix who joins our Executive. The office bearers also remain unchanged:

Chairman	Gavin Stephens
Treasurer	Jean Whiley
Secretary	Gaynor Lightfoot
Members	Verity Bowman, Moira Fitzpatrick, Neil Rix and Cindy Sellick

This is a small group for a lot of work in the year ahead, so any volunteers will be most welcome! We wish all our members all the best for 2020 – may we enjoy perfect vision!

2 – RAINFALL

At the time of writing rainfall has been very erratic. Isolated downpours have resulted in some significant variations. The lengthy periods of intense heat between showers have had a debilitating effect. As at 15th January the totals are as follows – Eastern Hills 408mm, Central Areas 193mm, Eastern Hills 150mm, whilst Bulawayo is currently at 202 mm.

A consequence of this has been the drying up of Maleme Dam for just the second time – sadly it is dry in the middle of the rainy season! We can only hope for a cloud burst in its catchment area if there is to be any hope of the dam taking in meaningful water this year. Obviously, this poses a dire threat on the ongoing operation of Maleme Rest Camp, and the Parks administration based there, though boreholes are helping at the moment.

Mesilume Dam is very low as are all the other dams in the Park.

Across in the East, the Mtshabezi Dam is at its lowest level – although it is still pretty full and the Mtshabezi river has flowed on a few occasions. Water is drawn from this dam for the City of Bulawayo.

In the western hills we are facing the third consecutive year of drought. It has been devastating on the local community, with no crops expected (again) and cattle dying even during the “rainy season”.

3 – BRITISH TROOPS MOVE BLACK RHINOS TO MALAWI

26 December 2019

British troops have helped to move a group of critically endangered black rhinos from South Africa to Malawi to protect them against poaching.

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles moved 17 of the animals, which are hunted for their horns, in the hope they can be better protected.

They were transported by air and road from KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa to Liwonde National Park in Malawi.

The troops then spent three months training rangers to keep them safe.

Major Jez England, the officer commanding the British Army counter-poaching team in Liwonde, said the operation had been “hugely successful”.

“Not only do we share skills with the rangers, improving their efficiency and ability to patrol larger areas, but it also provides a unique opportunity for our soldiers to train in a challenging environment”, he said.

There are thought to be 5,500 black rhinos left in the wild

The UK government says it has committed more than £36m to tackle the illegal wildlife trade between 2014 and 2021.

Part of this is to help support trans-boundary work to allow animals to move more safely between areas and across national borders.

4 - NEXT EVENT

Date	16 th February 2020
Venue	Field Trip to Sotcha Cave
Meet	08:15am, Cresta Churchill Hotel
Travel	All Vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks Don't forget your hat, sunblock and plenty of water!

We have always tried to ensure that our February outing has a focus of water, and whilst this is a difficult task this year given the drought, we believe there will be water in the Eastern Hills. We will travel out to Sotcha, visit the cave (and discuss rock art conservation) and visit the sacred spring below the cave. We'll go onto Camp Dwala for lunch and a swim for those who feel the need!

5 – REPORT BACK

We held our Annual general Meeting at the Boy Scouts Gordon Park in mid-November. We were made most welcome by Norman Scott and his team, and whilst it was hot, a picnic under the trees was most enjoyable.

The formalities were carried through without incident, to be followed by tea, and various discussions. An early lunch, with braai fires provided, was followed by a walk through the Park, and an opportunity to visit the Kirkia tree planted at a previous MCS AGM held there (2007) that marked the Centenary of Scouting in Zimbabwe. Afternoon tea, and then we wound our way home. Despite the heat, and late rains, the trees were in wonderful leaf, and the Mtshelili vlei was full of water. Gordon Park is a special place in the Matopos – full of history and with an atmosphere of adventure. We greatly appreciated the privilege to meet at this special place.

6 – AFRICAN PARKS TAKES OVER MATUSADONHA

African Parks, in partnership with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (<https://zimparks.org/>) (Zimparks), signed a 20-year agreement to manage Matusadonha National Park on November 1st, 2019. At 1,470 square km, this stunning and unique landscape presents enormous potential for both wildlife and tourism.

7 – STAKEHOLDERS CHALLENGED TO TAKE PART IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The Herald, Nov 05,

Government has challenged stakeholders in the public and private sectors to take part in environmental management and conservation issues to safeguard human lives as well as attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The challenge was made by secretary in the Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Ministry Mr Munesuishe Munodawafa in a speech read on his behalf by the director of policy and research in the ministry, Dr Douglas Runyowa, during a sensitisation workshop of the Invasive Alien Species (*Vernonanthura polyanthes*) that have been noted in Manicaland Province. The invasive alien species are plants that cause irreversible ecological changes, major economic damage and significant impact on public health as they destroy indigenous vegetation.

8 – MASVINGO BANS FIREWOOD TRADE

Daily News, Oct 31

Masvingo Rural District Council has gazetted a strict environmental and natural resources conservation by-law that bans the trading and transportation of timber or firewood without a Forestry Commission licence. The law stipulates that no person shall sell or trade in firewood or timber except under the terms of firewood or timber trader's licences issued by the Forestry Commission.

EDITOR – we need to encourage both the MRDC and the URDC to follow the example set by Masvingo as our forests come under increasing pressure to provide fuel to ZESA-short Bulawayo!

9– ZIMPARKS OPAQUE WILDLIFE DEALS WORRISOME

Newsday - November 27, 2019

REPORTS that the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) is busy signing deals behind the scenes with foreign-based stakeholders without the knowledge of key local players in the tourism industry are a serious cause for concern.

ZimParks is the custodian of the country's most critical resources, chiefly wildlife and the forests, plains and mountains they inhabit; and it is quite curious that the State department has the unfettered liberty to sign contracts involving the country's national heritage behind closed doors.

While local tourism players are worried about the letter and spirit of the treaties and their implications to the survival and continued existence of mainly the hunting safari sector, many are wondering whether these arrangements are even being presented to Parliament for oversight.

Why is the nation not being fully informed about these arrangements which have a profound bearing on the State? Even more worrying are reports that government is bypassing Parliament and also fast-tracking other deals with foreigners without any due diligence.

The latest such move is government's decision to fast-track unclear business arrangements with investors from the United Arab Emirates.

ZimParks director-general Fulton Upenyu Mangwanya seems geared to place the country's wildlife in the hands of the greens – the animal-friendly organisations who have over the years tried and failed to get Zimbabwe to stop consumptive tourism or sport hunting. ZimParks as the regulator should know the impact of its unholy relationship with these so-called animal-friendly organisations. We have no doubt that in no time, with ZimParks advice, government will stop sport hunting industry in favour of filthy donations by the greens.

Yet Zimbabwe is endowed with a burgeoning population of elephants and other wildlife species. How can locals fail to sustainably utilise their animal resource? President Emmerson Mnangagwa during the Africa Wildlife Summit in Victoria Falls recently called for a mix of non-consumptive and consumptive tourism to allow communities to benefit. We believe that ZimParks has been infiltrated by money-mongers who have no idea what the mandate of the organisation is all about. We call for immediate action to investigate ZimParks top brass, otherwise Zimbabwe will soon burn its millions of dollars' worth of ivory stockpiles, yet this money could be used for development.

We call on new Environment minister Mangaliso Ndlovu to meet all stakeholders and hear what they have to say immediately. The ZimParks directorate must not be spared if found wanting!

While it is understandable that Mnangagwa's regime is desperate for Foreign Direct Investment to help meet its election promises, it would have been judicious for it to stitch these arrangements within the confines of the law and necessary oversight.

Hurriedly signing deals for political expediency will not augur well for a government that preaches good governance and does the opposite. It is things such as these that may seem small which, in the long run, can make or break the reputation of any government.

A government which is averse to abiding by its own rules cannot nurture trust in its subjects.

These secret arrangements outside the scrutiny of citizens through Parliament, are a serious indictment to any effort to rebuild the southern African nation's battered economy.

These dodgy deals give credence to conspiracy theories doing the rounds that the country is being mortgaged and by the time Zimbabweans wake up there will be no country to talk about. What will be left are curved out pieces of territory owned by powerful cartels, organisations and individuals.

It is, however, hoped that Mnangagwa is astute enough not to mortgage a country which was birthed through extreme sacrifice that involved the spilling of blood. Zimbabwe can still achieve its goal of becoming a middle-income economy by 2030 without cutting corners.

10 – WHY CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN IRRELEVANCE, ECONOMIC GROWTH IS A MYTH AND SUSTAINABILITY IS FORTY YEARS TOO LATE

By Kevin Casey Posted in Commentary Culture Affairs Environment Society, November 20, 2019

As someone who has been exploring the world's most isolated wilderness regions for nearly half a century, I have some insight into the state of the planet and the human race's current environmental

befuddlement. I've watched the condition of the earth plummet before my eyes within my own lifespan, to the extent that I no longer recognize it as the beautiful, diverse supporter of all life it once was. So, let me start by addressing a few key points of confusion that seem to affect both keen activists and head-in-the-sand deniers in equal measure:

Climate change is not the biggest threat to the world's environment – we are. The world's rivers and seas aren't choked with floating piles of rubbish, toxic chemicals and plastic waste because of climate change. They're that way because we have 7.7 billion people crammed onto a planet that's dying under the pressure of our greedy, selfish abuse. Two decades from now, the earth's oceans are on target to contain more plastic in them (by weight) than fish. Climate change didn't do that. Way too many people did that.

Climate change hasn't covered the world with concrete or replaced healthy ecosystems with canal estates and shopping malls – we and our ever-increasing numbers are the culprit. Climate change is only one of many symptoms of an out-of-control disease – human overpopulation. The irreversible environmental damage stemming from having too many people on a finite planet is already painfully evident. Our bloated population is diminishing our children's futures in ways that have very little to do with the planet's temperature.

I keep hearing people say “Humans have always found a way to solve difficult problems, so don't worry – it'll all work itself out”. Alas, the problem the earth faces now is one it has never dealt with before – a plague of nearly 8 billion humans. It can't cope anymore.

We've been so distracted making money, embracing our agendas and spreading myths about 'growth' and 'progress' that we forgot to notice we've turned our only viable planetary home into a spherical garbage dump. Humans may be impressively intelligent, but they're also profoundly self-focused and short-sighted.

No politician talks about our population epidemic. All you hear from them is 'jobs, jobs, jobs' and 'more growth'. You don't hear climate change activists talking about overpopulation, either. It's too dangerous a subject, too painful a reality. It permanently occupies the 'too hard' basket.

Instead, we've all jumped on the global warming bandwagon. We stridently blame governments for lack of action on climate change – while secretly hoping that whatever they decide to do doesn't adversely affect our consumer lifestyle.

Let's not confuse activism with action – they're not the same. One is about social inclusion and feeling good about your outrage; the other is about doing something tangible to make things better.

I hate to burst this old-school bubble, but there's no longer such a thing as economic growth – not in this century. There's no true sustainability, either – not any more. The 'environmental tipping point' everyone loves to talk about was actually reached around 1980, when science tells us that humanity began to consume more of the earth's resources than the planet could possibly regenerate. We've gobbled up more of our planet's resources in the past fifty years than in all previous human history combined and polluted our way to prosperity in the process. Climate change had nothing to do with any of that – and still doesn't.

Economic growth needs population growth to sustain itself. But when a depleted planet can no longer carry the burden of an existing population and its endless demands, growth is nothing but a dangerous illusion. Today's 'healthy economy' is tomorrow's dystopian misery.

In this century, what we still mistakenly call economic growth is environmental destruction, pure and simple. Nothing we do today can be called sustainable on a planet that has already endured four solid decades of irreplaceable resource use. The 1970s were the last sustainable decade for mankind. Unfortunately, at the time, no one took notice that a tipping point had been reached and passed.

Our current environmental woes have almost nothing to do with the climate and everything to do with how we've been treating the earth – not just recently but for many centuries. We've always abused the earth horribly and managed to get away with it because our numbers weren't significant enough to cause lasting damage. Now our numbers are out of control, and that presents us with limited options.

In hindsight, we should have addressed rampant overpopulation shortly after WW2, when the global population was still around 2.5 billion – less than a third of what it is today. But we were in the midst of jubilant post-war optimism and still believed in the delusion of 'nature's endless bounty'.

If you could go back in time to around 1604, to the spot where Manhattan now sits, you would see a tiny settlement of about 150 people enjoying a pristine coastal wilderness with superb growing soil, ample wildlife and rich timber forests – a genuine paradise on earth. Back then, whales would wander up the clean, fish-rich Hudson River and you could pull lobsters out of the sea half as long as a man. Huge flocks of passenger pigeons blackened the sky.

Today, that same place is wall-to-wall concrete, with one of the highest human population densities on earth. We've been so busy 'improving' things that we've destroyed practically everything. In the end, our legacy as a species won't be about all the wonderful things we've created while we've occupied the earth. It will be about all the wonderful things we've destroyed.

The most astounding explosion of human population in history happened on my generation's watch, so we need to take ownership of that lack of foresight. Our own children are now paying the price for our blunders and have every right to be worried about the earth's future – and theirs. But let's not heap all the blame on baby boomers. Previous generations helped the planet's degradation along just as blindly, and today's young people still expect the sort of prosperous lifestyle that a dying planet can now only provide in the very short term.

So, I would patiently urge all climate-change activists to direct their environmental concerns at those who really deserve it. They can start with the economists, developers and politicians who blissfully believe that the status quo of 'perpetual growth' still works. They can then move on to the religious zealots who still spout the mantra of 'man's dominion over nature' and abhor the idea of contraceptives. After that, they can apportion a hefty dose of blame to the world leaders who purposefully sidestep the overpopulation issue like the political hot potato it is, despite the fact that it's killing our planet and robbing future generations of the spectacular biodiversity and viable ecosystems that older generations took for granted. And finally, they can look in the mirror and ask themselves what *they* are personally doing (besides protesting in the streets) to make their planet a better place for all the life that dwells on it.

What are the solutions to an overcrowded planet? Firstly, to stop getting side-tracked by the climate change industry and recognize that the problem is our sheer numbers and blatant disregard for the planet's health – not the climate. We must replace political and economic agendas and warped ideologies with better education (especially in science). We need more global promotion of family planning, more female empowerment and government incentives to have fewer children – not more. And sadly, we should have been proactive about all this stuff at least 60 years ago, instead of just waking up to our self-inflicted predicament now.

While it's reassuring that today's young people are increasingly aware of the seriousness of their environmental plight, they are protesting up the wrong tree. They should direct their passionate attention to the real enemy – a greedy, arrogant, two-legged species that's in furious denial and has become far too adept at making excuses for the inexcusable.

11 – CHARCOAL THREAT: LET US ALL BE AGENTS OF CHANGE

November 18, 2019 9:45 AM

This year's National Tree Planting Day should provide an opportunity to reflect on, and audit current and previous strategies at re-greening the countryside in the wake of a new threat from charcoal merchants.

Driving the demand for fuel wood are power cuts, some lasting for periods of up to 18 hours a day. Power is available to most consumers, but only at times when the majority are asleep. Consequently, this has seen an increase in demand for charcoal as a new alternative source of energy requirements for urban dwellers.

Forests lost to veld fires stand at 330 000 hectares annually nation-wide. Now, added to this environmental destruction is deforestation resulting from an escalating demand for fuel wood.

While veld fires are a perennial threat, the question arising from this is the measurable/evidential impacts of national campaigns designed to counter the threat from deforestation and the environmental wastelands they leave in their wake.

The National Tree Planting Day is meant to amplify the importance of maintaining a balance in the ecosystems and for communities to preserve and protect.

While an average of five million trees were being planted annually up to the first decade of the millennium, Zimbabwe lost more than 20 percent of its forest cover during the first decade and half of the new millennium. But this was before the emergence of the threat from charcoal merchants. Forests areas in Chiredzi, Chirundu, Hwange, Mt Darwin, Mudzi and Muzarabani are being decimated by charcoal trading syndicates, who then transport the charcoal into urban centres in the dead of the night.

The tragedy is that the people being lured to decimate the forests are the same communities who will bear the brunt of deforestation, environmental degradation, soil erosion and other unintended consequences of the pillage and plunder of their natural resources.

A villager, abetting the destruction of forests in his community/district earns \$12 a bag, but once the same bag of charcoal lands in Harare, it fetches as much as six times more than the amount paid to the villager.

The police and the Environmental Management Agency should work together to effectively deal with, and put an end to the threat.

Their responses so far are far from reassuring.

A multi-faceted approach is required to address and arrest this threat. It could begin with the 2019 National Tree Planting Day programme of activities.

The first approach could involve a blitz awareness campaign initially targeting the six areas in the country where the problem has become rampant.

The second approach could seek to engage village heads and other traditional leaders, such as chiefs, on this new threat to the environment, because they must surely be aware of the activities being conducted in areas under their jurisdiction.

The same campaign could be rolled out to communities and schools in the affected areas.

A schools campaign would be an investment ensuring school-going children are fully aware of the need to protect and preserve their natural forest resources for posterity.

One of the reasons villagers are being lured to destroy forests in their districts is because of the monetary reward.

But if there were public works programmes/food-for-work schemes in the affected areas, it is possible the villagers would not be unwitting accomplices in the destruction of forests in areas they inhabit.

Therefore, this year's National Tree Planting Day is an opportunity for climate change organisations and campaigners to move into the six affected areas and become champion change agents.

This would be a worthwhile investment, one that contributes to international efforts against global warming and desertification.

While reclaiming the lost dividends by re-greening areas that have been deforested as a result of the trade fuelled by charcoal merchants, among others, the Government, the Environmental Management Agency, the Forest Commission, non-governmental organisations and international agencies should seize the opportunity presented by this year's National Tree Planting Day to focus on planting indigenous trees, particularly fruit trees as they contribute to household food security.

Always, these efforts should be accompanied by a campaign drawing the attention of all communities affected to the short-term benefits against the threat. Significantly though, the campaigns should offer alternative solutions.

This is an opportunity that should not be missed because as has become evident from gold panning, the lure of money wreaks environmental degradation that is costly to rectify.

12 – BILHARZIA RISK GOES DOWN

November 17, 2019 The Herald, Paidamoyo Chipunza Senior Health Reporter

Prevalence of bilharzia in Zimbabwe has gone down by almost 80 percent following six successive years of mass drug administration (MDA), the Ministry of Health and Child Care has revealed.

In an interview with The Herald following release of the national impact assessment survey of mass drug administration against bilharzia results, also known as schistosomiasis recently, National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) director Professor Nicholas Midzi said the national programme impacted positively in reducing the burden of bilharzia in the country.

Prof Midzi said before Government started the mass drug administration in 2010, prevalence of bilharzia stood at 23 percent. He said following six years of drug administration, which was targeting school pupils, prevalence dropped to 5 percent.

Similarly, Prof Midzi said, prevalence of soil-transmitted infections among children have also gone down by nearly 90 percent.

Before commencement of the campaign in 2010, prevalence of these infections stood at 5,5 percent and following six years of mass drug administration, soil transmitted infections went down to 0,7 percent, thereby marking an 83,7 percent reduction.

Soil transmitted infections also known as soil transmitted helminth are worms that normally affect poorest and deprived communities. Most common species are ringworms, hookworms and whipworm.

13 – NEW MODEL PREDICTS EL NINO ONE YEAR AHEAD

November 11, 2019 The Herald; Jeffrey Gogo

An international team of researchers has developed a model that can predict El Nino a year in advance, and their latest forecast points to an 80 percent chance of the disruptive weather pattern occurring late 2020.

“Conventional methods are unable to make a reliable ‘El Nino’ forecast more than six months in advance,” physicist Armin Bunde of Germany’s Justus Liebig University Giessen, was quoted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) as saying.

“With our method, we have roughly doubled the previous warning time,” said Bunde, who co-developed the model.

“The method “uses an algorithm that draws on analysis of links between changing air temperatures at a network of grid points across the Pacific region.”

El Nino is a naturally occurring weather cycle caused by warming waters in the Pacific Ocean.

Striking every two to seven years, and lasting for upto 12 months, the phenomenon alters rainfall patterns worldwide, leaving some areas soaked.

But in Zimbabwe, it is predominantly linked with a severe shortage of rain.

For example, the 2015/16 El Nino resulted in Zimbabwe’s worst drought in 25 years, killing more than 19 000 cattle and left 4 million people hungry. The one that hit between 1982 and 1983 resulted in a severe drought, leaving families mired in poverty and hunger.

Effects of the 2018/19 El Nino are still evident, with a drought that’s left seven million people in need of food aid.

The team of researchers, whose new method has been tested since 2013, was, however, unsure of the impact of the predicted El Nino on seasonal climates – meaning they are still uncertain whether it will be a weak, moderate, or strong.

TRF reported that “the team is now adapting the algorithm to be able to predict the timing and strength of El Nino.” It added, “in the future, a similar method could be used to improve forecasts of Asia’s monsoon.”

First published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences six years ago, the new prediction model is expected to help Government authorities prepare better for the impacts of El Nino. Scientists have been checking its accuracy since then. They say the model correctly forecast the onset of the El Nino that started in 2014 and ended in 2016 and the most recent event in 2018, as well as absences in other years.

“The next expected El Nino, due to peak in late 2020, could push global average annual temperature rise to a new record in 2021,” said the researchers. 2016 became the warmest year on record thanks to the devastating El Nino of 2015/16, according to the World Meteorological Organisation.

Now, it is not yet clear what sort of impact the predicted 2020 El Nino could have on Zimbabwe. But based on events in recent decades, the periodic weather pattern is slowly becoming the norm, rather than the exception, evoking painful memories of shattered lives and livelihoods. It’s biggest impact locally is on how it influences precipitation and temperatures, often resulting in drought and heatwaves. Not only does it define seasons, but about two thirds of the 13 million Zimbabweans are dependent on it, through agriculture, according to the national statistics agency, ZimStats.

In good times, precipitation averages between 400mm and 1 000mm, with regions in the south-west of the country receiving the least amount of rain, and those in the east along the border with Mozambique, the highest.

However, changes in climates have seen rainfall decline by between 5 and 15 percent countrywide since the 1960s, experts say.

Emerging research point towards a spike in deadly El Nino events in the future. They are likely to increase in frequency and strength, possibly occurring once every decade, due to climate change. Historically, the most extreme El Nino happens once in 20 years.

These change – and other – could see Zimbabwe’s production of the maize staple fall by between 30 and 50 percent through 2030, as temperatures soar two degrees Celsius by 2080, according to the UN’s expert panel on climate change.

Probability of years in which growing season is likely to fail in future due to drought is projected to be as high as 100 percent in some parts in the south, the panel says.

But the immediate concern is how a drought induced by El Nino will be expected to hit agriculture — a sector that accounts for up to a fifth of GDP, and 60 percent of the manufacturing industry raw materials need – again. And with it the rest of the economy, an economy reliant on rain-fed agriculture. This is what happened during the 2015 /16 summer cropping season, precisely. El Nino left much of Zimbabwe dry, forcing a series of heat waves that saw daytime temperatures breaking 60-year records. Crops failed and Government had to appeal for \$1,6 billion in aid to undo the damage.

14 – MATOPO PRIMARY SCHOOL CONSERVATION CLUB

Matopo Mission Conservation Club qualified for the WEZ Wildlife Quiz finals, held in Kadoma. Having come third in Matabeleland they did not fare as well in the “Big Event”. Nevertheless, they participated, they learnt and they have vowed to be back! We received the following note from their teacher, Mr Patson Mpofu

“On behalf of Matopo Primary school Quiz team, I hereby take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to MCS for the support we received for the National Quiz competitions held in Kwekwe on 2/11/2019. We received \$500.00 from MCS.”

15 – MATOBO FARMERS IN QUINOA PROJECT

December 17, 2019; Acknowledgment Newday; Praisemore Sithole

MATOBO district has begun a quinoa pilot project with 54 farmers planting the drought tolerant crop to help improve food security in the drought ravaged district.

The Organisation of Rural Association for Progress (ORAP) is supporting and sponsoring the project. Matobo ORAP district field coordinator Sibongukuhle Siziba told journalists during a tour of its projects that the district was the first in Zimbabwe to grow the crop.

“We are the first in Zimbabwe to have been given the go ahead to plant quinoa and we have 54 farmers who have planted the crop in the district,” Siziba said.

“The plant was tried by Midlands State University and was seen to be successful.”

Siziba said the plant has edible brown or white seeds.

“It is a member of the Amaranthaceae family. Quinoa is not a true cereal. Its seeds are high in protein and fibre, and its young leaves are also nutritious and can be eaten as a vegetable, similar to spinach,” she said.

“Quinoa is now grown in a number of countries around the world, including the United States, Canada, Italy and China.”

Siziba said the crop was drought tolerant and could be planted thrice annually. Matobo has successively suffered the effects of drought, which has been blamed on climate change.

16 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

16 th February 2020	Field Trip to Sotcha Cave
25 th – 29 th March 2020	Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge
4 th April 2020	Matopos 33 Miler (rebranded as PPC Matobo Marathon)
14 th – 16 th May 2020	Matopos Heritage Trail Run
5 th June 2020	World Environment day
29 th August 2020	Matopos Mountain Trail Run
4 th – 6 th September 2020	Matopos Classic MTB

17 – GULATI LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The MCS has been able to draw the attention of the World Heritage Management Committee to the ongoing unlicensed desecration of rock surfaces in the Gulati Communal Lands. Slabs of rock are being peeled from the dwalas and loaded into 30 tonne trucks for commercial building purposes in Bulawayo. Clearly this is not the way to protect a World Heritage Landscape. We understand that both the ZRP and National Museums have taken action to prevent this ongoing activity.

18 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020 fell due on 30 September 2019. Please ensure that your subs for 2019 are up to date. There has been no increase in rates.

US\$ 5	Pensioner Individual/Couple
US\$ 20	Individual/Family
US\$100	Corporate

The AGM resolved that from 2019 we will accept only US\$ but we will accept Zimbabwe Dollars at the bank rate on the day of payment. We would prefer the former if you are able to pay in US\$. However, we appreciate that the extraordinary rate of inflation may challenge many of our members and so we would ask you to please consult with the Treasurer if necessary. If you need any information, please contact the Chairman on matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

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 and shopping bags are also available at \$5 each.

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.

19 - THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MATOBO HILLS

Book Review by Paul Hubbard: Cotterill, F.P.D., Fitzpatrick, M.J. & Duprée, J. (eds) 2018. The Natural History of the Matobo Hills. Bulawayo: The Matobo Conservation Society & The Biodiversity Foundation for Africa. iv+272 pages. ISBN: 978-0-7974-9815-0.

The Matobo Hills are the spiritual heart of Matabeleland, and arguably the nation of Zimbabwe. Home to humans for millennia, the archaeological and historical aspects of this rugged area have been well studied, with at least 20 books detailing aspects from the Stone Age to modern politics. It is the human history that holds an intense, personal fascination for me, albeit within the setting of one of the most incredible environmental backdrops in the world. Until now, if one wanted to know about the plants, wildlife, lichens, arachnid and insect world, one had to consult a plethora of journal articles or own a substantial library of identification guides, none specific to the area. The appearance of this book, over a decade in production limbo, is to be warmly welcomed by all who know and love the magic of the Matobo Hills. The sponsors of the production of this book, the Matobo Conservation Society, need to be lauded for bringing the information within to light.

After a brief introduction, the book begins with a chapter on the physical extent of the Matobo Hills area, making a case for a more generous definition than most people would appreciate. Rejecting man-made boundaries, Cotterill uses the extent of the drainage system to show the Matobo Hills "unit" covers a massive area, one ably covered by the generous boundaries of the World Heritage Site definition in 2003. The two chapters on the geology and geomorphology of the Matobo area, one by Cotterill, the other by Cotterill & Hartley, give useful background to the evolution of this outstanding landscape while aiding the amateur geologist to locate and appreciate many features within the granite.

In 10 chapters, most penned (or revised) by leaders in their fields, the book introduces us to the wonders of the natural world, so often taken for granted by visitors: lichens, fungi, plants, flowers, birds, insects, arachnids, mammals, fish, butterflies, and herpetofauna. As a specialist guide in the area, this is all very useful to me simply because the area lacks the large mammals so beloved of visitors; one has to learn to focus on the smaller creatures and plants to entertain and educate our guests and this book will be a wonderful tool in this regard. Each of the chapters on a particular category includes a handy species checklist that will prove invaluable to researchers as a measure of biodiversity; I am convinced that more remains to be discovered. The coverage is variable, partially due to uneven research activities in the past, and perhaps also to the author's personal proclivities and space limitations. Parts of several chapters read like run of the mill identification guides, reproducible anywhere in southern Africa, and as such should have been made more specific to the Matobo Hills area.

The chapter covering lichens by Becker & Sharp is to be warmly welcomed as one of the only pieces of literature on the topic in English; this is one of the strongest contributions in the book. There is much to be learnt about lichens and their role in the Matobo ecosystem, only hinted at in this fine contribution. McCausland & Timberlake's review of the flora of the Matobo Hills area is easily among the best in the book, not least because they repeatedly refer to specific locations or general biomes where the plants they discuss can be found. This makes for a much more relatable read. The only flaw in this chapter is the repetition of the myth relating to the pines planted near the MOTH shrine: these were merely another experimental plantation, not in any way related to the memorialisation of dead soldiers from WWI.

Minshull's chapter on the fish was a favourite to read, largely because his words capture some passion for the hills, while his research into aspects of piscine ecology shines through in fascinating ways, from notes on the water temperatures at certain dams to the erratic distribution of various species in local rivers. The same can be said of the late Ron Hartley's poetic take on the avifauna of the Matobo Hills, updated by Marshall and Mundy. Being immersed in the landscape as a researcher helps to expose the nuances in the behaviour and occurrence of the subject at hand, which can throw up anomalies or peculiarities unique to the area. This is certainly true for the brief sections on the Ground Hornbill, Verreaux Eagle, Oxpeckers and the Black Stork.

As an archaeologist, I personally would have liked to see the inclusion of a chapter tying together the natural and human worlds. The use of many plants, birds, animals, insects, etc, by humans throughout the history of the Matobo Hills is remarkable and diverse yet is barely mentioned in any of the chapters within this fine book. In addition, the deleterious impact of an increasing human and domestic animal population on the fragile ecosystems within the hills is of serious concern. While the editors note that "this book has deliberately skirted the rich details of human history and archaeology" (p.1) as a sop to this sort of criticism, it is unavoidable that treating each in isolation is limiting in any attempt to create productive discussions around the conservation and appreciation of our natural heritage. Walker's (1995) ground-breaking thesis, apparently never mentioned in this book, is an excellent example of the interpretive, educative power of integrating ecological approaches to human history. The last chapter, "Ecology, Biodiversity and Conservation" by Cotterill does discuss the impact and role of human stakeholders in the "Greater Matobo Ecosystem" but briefly and without much reference to current concerns and practices for the preservation of the hills.

As is common practice in books of this kind, it would have been helpful to include notes on the contributors; sadly, several have passed away between submitting their chapters and the appearance of the book, hinting at the difficult production process. The tone of the book is difficult to assess since it alternates between dense, dry scientific writing to that aimed at a non-specialist. A glossary of some of the more technical terms would have been a welcome addition. There are a few typos throughout the book while a few of the colour plates are unclear. Overall, the production quality is very good.

What is superbly revealed by this book is that the Matobo Hills are one of the most important biodiversity regions in southern Africa. A recent bibliography of publications about all aspects of the Matobo Hills, which I compiled in 2015, but which not yet been published, had over 1,400 entries — only about 40% were to do with natural history. What I hope is that this book will inspire is more research. More research into the natural history by people within Zimbabwe and from abroad. The legacy of previous researchers is a magnificent one, and future generations have an amazing foundation on which to build. This book provides a fine map to what has been achieved and hints at all that remains to be discovered.

20 – DUMPING ON THE OLD GWANDA ROAD

Following many reports made by your Society, ZRP was finally able to follow up on some leads after massive, industrial scale dumping took place along the road. Investigations revealed that at least two companies had contracted with a Mr Dominic Simbarashe Nyadore to remove waste to the BCC Dumpsite – but he chose to keep the BCC fees and dump the material on the road. He was ordered to clean up – which he did by burning the rubbish! We hope that our members will take note of the offender's name and avoid allocating work to him.

So far, no response has been received from either the BCC or the EMA, but full credit to the ZRP!

21 – MISSING ZIMPARKS RANGERS FOUND DEAD

Newsday, Jan 08

The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) has announced that two of its rangers, who went missing over a week ago following clashes with suspected Zambian poachers, were found dead in Lake Kariba on Monday. The rangers were identified as Chidhumo Mabharani and Timothy Tembo. ZimParks spokesperson Tinashe Farawo said the rangers went missing after an encounter with four suspected poachers believed to be from Zambia while patrolling the lake.

We convey our very sincere condolences to the families of these heroes.