



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

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www.matobo.org

NEWSLETTER 115 / JULY 2021

1 – EDITORIAL

Once again, we are thrown into lockdown as the third Covid wave sweeps across the country. This time it appears far worse, and whilst the rural Matopo community seemed to escape the first and second waves, this time the virus is running wild, with reports of deaths across Gulati, Matopo and Khumalo Communal Lands. Whilst there have been vaccination drives in the area, we don't know how well it was taken up, but in a recent ride within the hills it was noticeable how quiet the area is – no bars open, stores empty, houses shut. Within the rural areas a real fear is now prevalent, and there are little, if any, medical facilities. So, whilst we curse the lockdown, spare a thought for our rural folk who stand alone against this onslaught.

Against this backdrop, the recent warm weather has been a delight, and the aloes have exploded in brilliant colours against the oranges, yellows, and greys of the Matopos landscape. The good rains must have helped, but it seems the flowers are especially abundant this year. At the time of writing the first of the erythema are coming into flower as well, with their splashes of scarlet matching the aloe excelsa. Travel into the Park is still permitted, so take a break and enjoy the glory of a warm winter's day in our favourite place. And our visit supports Parks who need all the help they can get.

2 – MCS LEADS THE WAY WITH TELEPHONE WIRE REMOVAL PROJECT

The MCS took the lead in motivating TelOne to clear unused telephone wires in the area of the Matobo National Park. The project was led by GAP (Guides Against Poaching) and supported most enthusiastically by the Matopos Tour Operators Association, and 50 volunteers from the Learner Guides and Hunters. In a five-week period, over 500kms of wire was removed along the Kezi road, and outlying areas, of which about 400kms was removed by the volunteer's groups. This represents a valuable asset for TelOne, but more importantly removes the copper wire from both poachers and thieves. Wire of this size would be capable of wreaking havoc with our larger animals, including rhino. This was the motivation for the project. We thank all those who contributed so much to the success of this project – it is our hope that TelOne will continue with the project south of the Game Park, and in other areas in the vicinity of the Matobo Hills.

3 – MATOBO HERITAGE MTB CHALLENGE

We again hosted a hugely successful annual Challenge, with our maximum entry level of 100 entrants. Starting at Maleme and finishing at Camp Dwala, the route covered 215 km's over three days, and this year, the rivers were full, the vleis muddy and the streams tinkled down the mountain sides. There was an exceptionally strong field, which included a former SA Champion, (but the first two places went to Zimbabweans!) so the top end of the ride was hard and fast, but equally challenging to all the participants.

We record our sincere appreciation to those members who responded to our appeal and assisted at water points, or in driving vehicles. Without you we could not host this event.

4 – MATOBO HERITAGE TRAIL RUN.

This event has attracted a record field of 55 runners. With such a big field, we are calling on MCS members to assist with water-points. The event runs from Friday 27th to Sunday 29th August, based at Camp Dwala, with the route covering 30km's on Saturday, and 20kms on Sunday. There is still room for late entrants!

5 – NEXT EVENT

Date	1 st August 2021
Venue	Bambata Cave
Meet	08:30am, Cresta Churchill Hotel
Travel	Trucks are preferred but not essential

We will travel out to Bambata Cave, one of the most important archaeological sites in sub-Saharan Africa. Due to the condition of the road, we will travel the “long way” around, but as this is in the Game Park there won’t be too many objections. We will stop for tea at Lushongwe Platform, and probably go to Mpopoma Dam for lunch. So, bring your tea, picnic lunch and hats! Park entry fees will be payable at Whitewaters.

The great cave of Bambata, a major archaeological site was discovered by Neville Jones in 1917, and has fine paintings including elephants, giraffes, warthogs, tsessebe and mongoose. Excavations in 1918, 1929, 1938 and 1939 revealed a great variety of implements and stone tools from the deep floor suggesting it has a long history of human occupation from the Middle Stone Age; a 1980 excavation of the upper layers revealed sheep bones and teeth and a distinctive form of pottery now called Bambata ware. The stratified Stone Age remains from Bambata Cave form a database against which other historical sites can be measured and compared.

The name is said to come from an occasion when the Matabele king Mzilikazi was obliged to climb down the hill on all fours, the name Bambata is the Zulu verb “ugubambata” meaning to caress, or stroke with the hands.

NOTE. At the time of “going to print” the National Lockdown is in force. Under these regulations visits to National Monuments are permitted subject to health controls. Unless these regulations change, we will proceed with the outing.

6 – REPORT BACK

February is a wet month, and when you choose an outing in February, in one of our wettest years, well, you are bound to get wet! And that’s what happened on our February field trip to Amadzimba. After sliding down the Old Gwanda Road, and surviving the potholes, we turned off down the Sotcha Loop road. The road was in poor condition, but the slow going simply meant that one could enjoy the lovely scenery en-route. Then we left the road and followed a track that wound up to the valleys below the Amadzima cave. And then the fun began! Sections were pure bog, with vehicles slipping and sliding. But we managed to get to the “parking area” in a relatively dry field and the customary tea was had. The plan was to walk to the cave and then press onto swimming pools beyond the cave, but a northwest wind and heavy cloud, coupled with the bog that had to be crossed to get home, made us change plans to just a cave visit. The walk was delightful, and the cave as always impressive. Paul Hubbard was on hand to give us an introduction to the site, which proved interesting and informative. When we emerged from the cave, dark clouds were bearing down fast on us, so there was a dash to the cars in the hope that we could get out before the rain fell and turned the bog into impassable quagmire. Even so, a number of vehicles did get stuck, and those with 4x4 vehicles had a busy spell helping folk out – and then it began to rain! Part of the group went onto some rockslides which they enjoyed, and after the rain had a picnic lunch. Others ate their sandwiches in the cars! In drips and drabs the group made their way home, with the last vehicle just beating the 6pm curfew!

7 – RAINFALL

As alluded to above, we enjoyed a wonderful rainy season, and the Hills were just magnificent. Unusually, the western hills recorded more rain than the eastern hills – but then the western areas sorely needed the rain after three years of drought. We can only hope that the next season is as good – but then this is Matabeleland!

Rainfall totals for the end of the rainy season (30 June 2021) – Eastern Matopos 917mm; Central Matopos 674mm; Western Matopos 1056mm; Bulawayo 845mm.

8 – MINING SYNDICATE INVADES MATOBO HILLS AGAIN

A mining syndicate that was forcibly evicted from Domboshaba village in Matobo district by locals last year after they invaded a World Heritage Site to prospect for gold has been reportedly returned to the area and have resumed operations.

The area falls within the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site and is protected under UNESCO.

In mid-September last year, Mazinahue Syndicate armed with a prospecting license from the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development moved into Domboshaba village to prospect for gold but were evicted by locals.

The eviction of the syndicate caused trouble for the locals who were severely brutalized by anti-riot police forcing them to flee their homes and seek refuge in the mountains.

An all-stakeholder's meeting was convened last year where it was made clear that they won't be any mining operations taking place in the area.

However, sources in the area told CITE that the mining syndicate has returned to the area.

"On Monday when some parents were accompanying children to school, the mining company's employees were already digging up as they came with all their equipment and the soldiers have been threatening villagers passing by in that area that they are going to shoot anyone who is going to report their presence."

The source said villagers are now scared to alert the responsible authorities.

"Last time the museum told us that no mining activities should take place as it is a heritage site but now villagers are even scared to go to report their presence as they fear being attacked."

Contacted for a comment, Chief Nyangazonke Ndiweni of Matobo district said he is not aware of the development.

"I am not aware, I am in Harare at the moment," said Chief Nyangazonke.

Meanwhile, Matobo North Member of Parliament Edgar Moyo said he was also alerted that the miners had returned to the village.

"I have just received a call from someone about an hour ago telling me also that those miners are back but I am in Harare now. We spoke about that issue, and it was agreed that the area is a United Nations secured place under UNESCO as a world heritage site therefore it cannot be disturbed," said Moyo.

"Secondly there was no environmental impact assessment that accompanied their application. Thirdly, the community was livid they cannot have mining activity amongst them as that is going to disturb a lot of things, their animals, their children, the community, and everything else. So that thing was seriously objected to."

He added, "As leadership, we said no to that kind of thing and that they are now back I am surprised. Even the council said no, the District Administrator said No."

"I spoke to the Ministry of mines and we agreed that the mining thing must not go on, so I am surprised to what is happening because when I spoke to senior guys I can't remember their names from the Ministry of mines, they indicated that those people were just given a prospecting license which was subject to consent with different departments when they have identified the area," Moyo said.

"I have asked the sources to do certain things to confirm their presence before I move the matter further because at times when you do not have evidence about certain things people can come back and say we do not know anything about that."

"We very much object to that kind of thing. After that community meeting that was held last year, we also had discussions after that meeting with different stakeholders and the consensus was that no mining activity must go on in that area," said MP Moyo.

Meanwhile, the Matabeleland South Mining director Khumbulani Mlangeni said, "we are not sure" when asked for a comment.

Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP) also condemned the move vowing to block the miners from carrying out any mining activities.

"We condemn such acts of intimidation of locals in the strongest terms and we will do everything in our power to help the locals and to stop this nonsense. MRP is a party that is here to defend, protect and promote our people and our resources, we will not accept that," said an official from the party.

9 – SCIENCE+ CELEBRITY FOR CONSERVATION. A CALL FOR PARTNERSHIP BASED ON KNOWLEDGE, NOT OPPOSITION DRIVEN BY EMOTION

By Amy Dickman

This moving essay is a response to criticism that wildlife scientists don't seem aware that "science isn't enough."

I have spent more nights in my tent crying over lion deaths than I wish to count. Given my lifelong passion for this incredible wild cat, each death cuts me to the core, but some stand out more than others: The lioness whose hind legs were cut off, and whose swollen teats suggested she had only recently given birth. I spent days agonizing about what was happening to those new-born cubs, almost certainly starving wherever she had carefully hidden them. Three other tiny lion cubs speared and piled up in the bush with a wooden stake through their fragile bodies. A young lion, perhaps only two or three years old, whose ravaged paw showed the agony of hours in a wire snare before it died from multiple spear wounds.

A big lioness in the prime of life—one of our collared study females—whose poisoning led to utter carnage, with the carcasses of five other lions and more than 70 critically endangered vultures scattered around her in an orgy of appalling, indiscriminate death. A heavily pregnant poisoned lioness, who we cut open in some vague hope that we might be in time to save the cubs. But no—we found the still bodies of three perfect, full-term cubs, never able to play their role in the continuation of the species.

And it goes far beyond lions. The horror of a leopard who died in agony, its right paw trapped in the unforgiving steel of a gin trap. The hyena we found decapitated in the bush, the beautiful tawny eagles sprawled lifeless on the ground after being poisoned.

We see countless such deaths, but they still impact me emotionally every time. None of those animals was named or globally celebrated, like “Cecil” the lion, but their deaths count at least as much, if not more, because their very anonymity shows they lived in wild areas that receive little media attention. They died because they had no perceived value to people in those areas, and the sadness I feel for every one of these deaths is awful.

Without a shadow of a doubt, I am deeply, passionately, and emotionally committed to the conservation of these incredible animals and the landscapes they live in. The same goes for all of our team, who work tirelessly to protect them, and for every field conservation scientist I know.

This is why it always surprises me when—as in a recent Science+Story post—we wildlife scientists are portrayed somewhat robotically, as though we are surprised that mere data does not outweigh emotional or moral considerations in debates over, say, trophy hunting. This fits a wider narrative that portrays us—those who warn about the risks of banning trophy hunting without viable alternatives—as heartless and uncaring about the killing of wild animals. Literally nothing could be further from the truth.

There is good scientific evidence that banning trophy hunting without better options to protect wildlife, habitat and livelihoods risks amplifying major threats such as land conversion and poaching. But my colleagues and I, as we engage in these debates, are very aware that science is not enough to win hearts and minds. And we have no problem with people getting emotional about killing wild animals; we want that passion. The world would be appalling without it. We feel it ourselves, strongly.

This passion makes us deeply fearful that hasty action against hunting could lead to far more terrible wildlife deaths like those described above, as local communities kill wild animals that no longer deliver value.

Harnessing public passion

We are often at odds with celebrities, mostly from the entertainment business, who criticize hunting. Yet we would love to have them involved in conservation. If they were well-informed as well as outspoken, they could raise public awareness of threats to conservation far more effectively than we scientists can and mobilize positive action on a global scale.

But we are frustrated when complex conservation topics are presented as simple soundbites and fragmented snapshots of reality, out of context and with no awareness of extremely serious unintended consequences. We all know that simplistic narratives do very well on social media—it is easy to generate global outrage against a pampered trophy hunter grinning over a dead lion, or a woman holding up a giraffe heart on Valentine’s Day. These images are extremely powerful and, crucially, have a clear “villain” who can be used for campaigning and fund-raising. But conservation is immensely more complicated than this.

The Science+Story post suggests that we scientists “might be able to connect with the emotions, morality and aspirations of millions by telling the full story of how conservation fails and might succeed.” This is the core of the challenge: How do we, as conservationists, tell “the full story” when it is complicated and messy? How can we reach people, and are they prepared to listen to that full story, especially if it goes against their preconceptions?

The fact that trophy hunting—even if it turns our stomachs—can help protect vast areas of habitat against land conversion, poaching and terrible conflict-related wildlife killings simply does not have immediate power on social media. Facts and statistics, as we all know, usually don’t change minds. Even when we post photos of these illegal killings of lions (which are usually far more damaging to

conservation than killings by legal trophy hunters), there is a startling lack of public interest or concern, as if those deaths somehow don't count in the same way. And lions are one of the most beloved species on the planet.

Generating public passion on social media for entire, healthy ecosystems, or for conserving the myriads of less-appealing species such as invertebrates or reptiles, seems impossibly difficult. Most true conservation threats just don't lend themselves to campaigning. It can even backfire. For example, when conflict-related wildlife killings do hit the headlines, the backlash against the local people who did the killings can actually intensify the conflict, not reduce it.

The reality is that field conservation is complicated, with dizzying minefields of unintended consequences. But no one wants to hear this—it just isn't sexy, simple, or compelling, unlike the clear-cut (albeit usually false) narrative that banning trophy hunting will make things better. Oh, how I wish it were that simple.

In the field, we see the very real consequences of well-meant but poorly considered actions. More trophy hunting blocks in parts of Southern Africa are lying vacant. This might be a success for some campaigners, but if you actually spend time there, and see the degree of poaching, habitat loss (to crops, charcoal production and logging) and wildlife killing in these vacant blocks, you realise that this is often a terrible loss for wildlife, not a win. Yet the pressure is only growing to ban hunting, although I know of no viable alternatives ready to protect and conserve former hunting blocks.

It takes more than mere facts.

We know that evidence is not winning this battle. This is painfully clear to us conservation scientists—and to millions of rural people who get virtually no voice in these debates. So, what to do? I'm not sure, but I know what could be an important step in the right direction:

Let's leave aside the alleged "disdain" of scientists for emotion, marketing campaigns and celebrity—we should instead use these things to safeguard habitat and to fight real conservation threats such as prey loss, poaching and conflict with vulnerable local people. I want all of us, at the very least, to agree that our aim should be to work with local people to reduce overall wildlife killings—rather than caring only about a few animals killed by trophy hunters.

To do otherwise risks hugely increasing the accelerating silent loss of habitat and wildlife. Most people on Earth, those outraged Facebook, Instagram and Twitter users, will never see these impacts—and wild lands will continue to be cleared, the savannahs will continue to fall silent and many more unnamed but vital wild animals will die appalling deaths or simply fade away with their habitat.

This is an unashamedly emotional plea to all, including celebrities: If you truly care about protecting wildlife, then please make space for the full, messy story of real conservation challenges. Listen to the field conservation scientists and the local communities, and then work with us. Together we can take action and reduce the despair we all feel about the destruction of our natural world.

Dr Amy Dickman is a prominent conservation biologist and National Geographic Explorer who directs the Ruaha Carnivore Project in Tanzania. She is also joint CEO of Lion Landscapes, an independent Kenya-based non-profit research organization. A version of this essay first appeared on March 12 in Science+Story.

10 – THE RHODES BROTHERS, SONS OF FRANCIS WILLIAM RHODES

Of Francis William's children, Herbert (1845-1879) was involved with his brother Cecil in prospecting for diamonds in Kimberley, Cape Colony early in his career, but was accidentally killed while pioneering the anti-slave trade in the Lake Nyasa area. Francis William (1850-1905) joined the 1st Royal Dragoons as 2nd Lieutenant in 1873, rising to the rank of Colonel in 1889. He fought in Egypt, 1884, the Sudan, 1884-1885, 1888, in the Ndebele War, 1896 and the South African War, 1899-1900. Ernest Frederick (1852-1901) joined the Royal Engineers as Lieutenant in 1872 and retired as Captain in 1884 (his wife, Helen Irving, leased Hildersham Hall, Cambridge in 1939). Cecil John (1853-1902) was father of the De Beers Consolidated Mining Company and the British South Africa Company, as well as a major architect of British policy in southern Africa, founder of a university at Salisbury, Rhodesia, and a benefactor to Oxford University, and an educational legacy of great import, the Rhodes Scholarships. Elmhurst (b 1858) entered the army in 1878 as an Ensign in the 49th Foot, rose to Captain of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, and retired as Major in 1903. He fought in Egypt, 1882, the Sudan, 1885, 1885-1886, and in the South African War, 1899-1902. Arthur Montagu (1859-1935) fought in the 2nd Ndebele War. Bernard Maitland (1861-1935) entered the Royal Artillery in 1880 as Lieutenant and retired in 1897 as Captain. During the mid-19th century Cecil came into possession of Dalham Hall, Suffolk, as well as the Groote Schuur estate in Cape Colony. After his death, Dalham passed eventually to the eldest son of Cecil's brother Ernest Frederick.

11 – AN ANCIENT SAN ROCK ART MURAL IN SOUTH AFRICA REVEALS NEW MEANING

March 31, 2021, with acknowledgement to D Witelson, S Challis, D Pearce, D Lewis-Willaims and published by Wits University.

The indigenous San communities of southern Africa were originally hunting and gathering peoples. One of the greatest testaments to San history is the rock art found throughout the subcontinent. The oldest rock art in southern Africa is around 30,000 years old and is found on painted stone slabs from the Apollo 11 rock shelter in Namibia. Where our study took place – the Maloti-Drakensberg mountain massif of South Africa and Lesotho – rock paintings were made from about 3,000 years ago right into the 1800s.

For decades, people thought that one guess about the art's meaning was as good as another. However, this ignored the San themselves. We can deepen our understanding if we try to view rock art in terms of San shamanistic beliefs and experiences. Advances in ethnography (literature produced by anthropologists who work with San people) help convey San worldview to rock art researchers. By locating new sites – thousands are still to be found – and revisiting known ones in the light of developing insights, we can go much further than guessing.

New insights from old images

We re-investigated such a site in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountains. It was first described in the 1950s and is recorded as RSA CHI1. At first glance, the ceiling panel seems a confusing collection of paintings of antelopes and human figures, some of which are painted on top of others, in shades of earthy reds, yellow ochres and white. In 2009 and working under challenging circumstances, South African artist, and author Stephen Townley Bassett produced a documentary copy of the ceiling panel. It shows the art's beauty and mystery. When we looked at his copy, we found that the significance of some images on the site's ceiling panel had been missed by other researchers. This allowed us to examine the meaning of these images more closely.

Importantly, our realisation was not a technological or methodological advance. Instead, it was a conceptual development that occurred by turning our attention to a well-known site and viewing it again in the light of everything we have learned so far about San rock art. Our re-investigation allowed us to arrive at a new understanding of specific elements of San belief.



Detail of the ceiling painting.

Deeply religious art

Two sources of San ethnography are especially important in rock art research and our understanding of the ceiling panel. In the 1870s, the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek and his co-worker and sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd interviewed a series of |Xam San people, some of whom had been brought from the Northern Cape to Cape Town as convicts.

Remarkably, Bleek and Lloyd recorded over 12,000 pages of texts in the |Xam language, which is no longer spoken, and transliterated most of it, line-by-line, into English. Much of this material remains relevant to our understanding of the art.

More recently, in the twentieth century, a number of anthropologists worked with San groups in Namibia and Botswana with a focus on a range of topics from hunting and gathering to folklore and childcare. The Kalahari ethnography complements the Bleek and Lloyd archive.

We know from the ethnography that the San believe in a universe with spiritual realms above and below the level on which people live. Decades of research has shown that the rock art is deeply religious and situated conceptually in the same multi-level universe.

Re-reading the ceiling.

In San rock art, the eland is a connecting element. It is the most commonly depicted antelope in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg paintings. It features in several San rituals and was believed to be the creature with the most *!gi:* – the |Xam word for the invisible essence that lies at the heart of San belief and ritual.

At RSA CHI1, there are many depictions of eland, but we focused on the one with its head sharply raised.

Depictions of this posture, though not common, recur in other sites. The eland's raised head suggests that it is smelling something, most probably rain. Both smell and rain are supernaturally powerful in San thought.

The unique feature in this painting is, however, the way in which a line runs up from an area of rough rock, breaking at the eland's front legs, and then on to another area of rough rock. The painter, or painters, must have depicted the eland first and then added the line to develop the significance of its raised head. We argue that both the raised head and the line emphasise contact with the spirit realm, though in different ways.

The way in which the painted line emerges from and continues into areas of rough rock is comparable to the way in which numerous San images were painted to give the impression that they are entering and leaving the rock face via cracks, steps, and other inequalities. But what lay behind the rock face?

Behind the rock face

We have noted already that the San universe is divided into different realms. Contact between these often-interacting realms is sometimes depicted in the art by long lines that link images or sometimes appear to pass through the rock face. San shamans or medicine people (called *!gi:ten* in |Xam) move along or climb these 'threads of light' as they journey between realms to heal the sick, make rain and perform other tasks. The |Xam called these out-of-body journeys *|xãũ*. They obtained the power needed to accomplish them by summoning potency from strong things, such as the eland.

The inter-realm nature of the line is further evidenced by the three creatures depicted moving along it. The two moving upward are quadrupeds or four-legged animals: one is non-specific and one has a tail and human arms. These images may depict the sort of bodily changes that *!gi:ten* say they experience during out-of-body journeys.

The faint white creature moving down the line was for us the climax of our work. It is clearly birdlike (*!gi:ten* often speak of flying). But closer inspection revealed that, though faint, it has a rhebok antelope head with two straight black horns, a black nose and mouth.




Photograph of the rhebok-headed image moving down the line.

It also has two 'wings' emanating from its shoulders. In short, it is a hybrid form – part bird and part buck. In addition, it has two white lines coming out of the back of its neck. It was from this spot that *!gi:ten* expelled the sickness that they drew out of the bodies of sick people.

For many people, the detail, and the complexity of the images at this site come as a surprise. Yet they are typical. San rock art ranks among the best in the world if we consider its beauty, its intricacy, and the rich sources of explanation on which we can draw.

12 - PROFILE – HONORARY MEMBER

We featured our first of three new Honorary members in the last Newsletter. This edition introduces Dr Moira Fitzpatrick.

<p>Dr Moira Fitzpatrick</p> 	<p>Dr. Moira FitzPatrick joined the Natural History Museum as Curator of Arachnids in 1991. She started her career undertaking research on Scorpions as they were of great medical importance with a number of deaths from scorpion stings occurring each year. After describing a new scorpion species for Zimbabwe and revising most of the scorpion species she moved on to study the Zimbabwe spider fauna. She completed her DPhil, studying an African Spider genus <i>Zelotes</i>, in 2004 where she described 50 species new to science. Over the years, Dr FitzPatrick has published many scientific and popular articles and given many talks on the arachnid fauna. She has promoted to Regional Director of the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe in 2012. Under her directorship is the Natural History Museum, the Cultural aspects of the Matobo Hills, Khami World Heritage, Old Bulawayo, Heroes Acres and all Monuments and Historical Buildings in Matabeleland. She continues with her research and is currently working on the Arachnid Biodiversity of the Matobo Hills. Moira has been a member of the MCS Committee since XXX and is Secretary to the Matobo Hills World Heritage Management Committee. She has a passion for the Matobo Hills, which is elaborated upon in her scientific work carried out in the Hills.</p>
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13 – MINISTER CHALLENGES FORESTRY COMMISSION, ZIMPARK CHAIRS

With acknowledgement to The Herald, Thursday 18 February 2021

Environment, Climate Change, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Minister, Manalise Ndlovu yesterday announced the names of the new board chairpersons for the Forestry Commission and Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks). Mrs Veronica Gundu Jakarasi and Dr Agrippa Sora are the new chairpersons of the Forestry Commission and ZimParks boards.

Minister Ndlovu announced the appointments during a media briefing. “I want to acknowledge and appreciate the boards and management of the two parastatals for progress made in improving the operations and performance,” he said. “To further strengthen the corporate Governance structures of the two parastatals, it is my honour to announce the appointment of the chairpersons of the two parastatals.”

Mrs Jakarasi is a banker with vast experience in environmental and climate change areas. She holds a masters degree in environmental policy and planning and is currently studying towards a doctorate.

Dr Agrippa Sora is an academic and educator. Minister Ndlovu encouraged the new board chairpersons to work as a team and address the challenges that are currently faced by the parastatals. “Mrs Jakarasi, I want you to redouble your efforts in afforestation program.”

“While in prior years National Tree Planting efforts led by the Forestry Commission would plant 10 million trees or less annually and I am pleased to note that the figure almost doubled this year,” he said. Minister Ndlovu urged Mrs Jakarasi to strengthen the management and deployment of the afforestation fund so that the rate of planting trees for tobacco curing exceeds the rate of harvesting on an annual basis.

He advised Dr Sora to institute a skills and placement audit and review the lease conditions of the various conservatories and make appropriate recommendations to government. “One of your board’s main challenge now is research and being scientific research institution you need skilled personnel,” he said. Minister Ndlovu urged Dr Sora to engage the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and various member states for financial assistance to assist Zimbabwe in conservation efforts and also in dealing with human wildlife conflict.

The board members were tasked to design and execute projects that are meaningful and are in line with NDS 1 and vision 2030.

14 – LUMENE FALLS: LITTLE-KNOWN BUT MAGNIFICENT TOURIST DRAW CARD



Lumene Falls.

With acknowledgement to Mashudu Netsianda, Senior Reporter, Sunday News

LUMENE Falls is a little-known, yet magnificent tourist attraction tucked away in Umzingwane District and visitors to this scenic place will be treated to a spectacular scenery as the sun is enveloped by two adjoined mountains as it steadily recedes into the horizon, creating a golden glow.

Zimbabwe is indisputably endowed with many natural and man-made resources that continue to attract hordes of both local and international tourists.

Tourist attractions that quickly come to mind are the Mighty Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, Matobo Hills, Khami Ruins, the Eastern Highlands, and Great Zimbabwe, among others. When it comes to a waterfall as a tourist attraction, most people think of Victoria Falls or Nyachowa Falls in Vumba, Manicaland.

There is, however, little-known Lumene Falls.

The tourist attraction in Bezha Village in Umzingwane District is a beautiful cascading waterfall that comes from an underground spring.

Visitors to the falls include mountain bikers, students on education tours, backpackers, and cultural tourists but there has been a decline in numbers due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

Situated in beautiful mountains and forests, Lumene Falls is a charming natural wonder with many rock outcrops featuring boulders of all shapes and sizes.

It is strategically located close to Bulawayo, and as one drives down along the Bulawayo-Beitbridge Road, they branch off at Mtshabezi Dam.

The dusty road leading to Lumene Falls is about 20km along the Mawabeni-Mtshabezi Road. Due to the incessant heavy rains recorded throughout the country, the road is in a bad state and difficult to negotiate. The 2km pathway to the site is a rough terrain, which is only suitable for off-road vehicles.

Lumene Falls is located within the geographical confines of Mtshabezi Dam, a fisherman's paradise.

Locals have turned the place into a community-based tourism destination where tourists pay a minimal entry fee of US\$2 per person.

When Chronicle visited Lumene Falls on Thursday some tourists were leaving the area.

15 - WHY THE FIRE ON CAPE TOWN'S ICONIC TABLE MOUNTAIN WAS PARTICULARLY DEVASTATING

Alanna Rebelo, Karen Joan Esler, Stellenbosch University, April 20, 2021

The devastating fire that ran its course across the side of Table Mountain in Cape Town this week has put the spotlight back on the management of an iconic range that's home to some of the most biodiverse

vegetation in the world. And what should – and could – have been done to reduce the risk of a catastrophe that destroyed priceless cultural heritage.

Table Mountain National Park is clothed in fynbos – a distinctive type of vegetation found only in South Africa – and is surrounded by the city of Cape Town. Fynbos is a highly flammable shrubland, which has evolved over millennia to become dependent on fire for survival. It burns. Science tells us that we can expect most fynbos to burn on average every 12 to 15 years in natural conditions.

Therefore, managing fynbos means managing fires

Fire hazard is influenced by three factors: the weather, an ignition source and fuel loads.

The weather can affect fires by increasing spread through high wind speeds or resulting in dry vegetation after a period of warm weather. Ignition sources may be a result of lightning or arson.

Both weather and ignition sources are hard to control and prevent, and yet often receive the most media attention. But the one factor that is possible to manage, is fuel loads. Fuel loads in fynbos can be kept down through ecological burns and keeping the mountain clear of invasive alien trees.

The recent out-of-control wildfire on Table Mountain may be linked to several key issues: fire suppression, alien trees, constrained budgets, and unsupportive policies, together creating a wicked problem. Climate change may also have played a role in the high temperatures and fierce winds around the time of the fire, though attribution studies will need to confirm this.

Fire suppression

Recent research has shown that urban expansion of Cape Town has created anthropogenic fire shadows which are changing the fire regime, often causing a decline in fire activity. For example, the fires that used to sweep the slopes of Newlands and Kirstenbosch from the flats below have been blocked by the suburbs of Newlands and Rondebosch, meaning that the fynbos on these slopes has not burnt in decades. Scientists are calling this process a “hidden collapse”, that desperately requires management intervention. They also predicted two years ago that this would lead to extreme fires in ecosystems globally where there was no ecological restoration and where fuels were allowed to accumulate.

Further evidence of a decline in fire activity in Table Mountain National Park is presented in a study on indigenous forests which showed that they had been expanding on Table Mountain due to fire suppression policies.

Invasion of alien trees

Invasion of alien trees also contributes to increased fuel loads, and therefore more dangerous fires. Fynbos is made up mainly of shrubs and therefore when alien trees invade or are planted in fynbos, they tower several meters above fynbos, carrying considerably more fuel. A change from fynbos to pines and gum trees can increase fuel loads from 4 to 20 tonnes per hectare.

One study found that the 2017 Knysna wildfire had a significantly higher severity in plantations of invasive alien trees and fynbos invaded by these trees, compared to areas with just fynbos.

Unfortunately, invasive alien plant species are proliferating faster than authorities can remove or manage them. This is also despite the efforts of Working for Water Teams working in the park, as well as over 20 volunteer groups working hard to clear invasive alien plants on the Cape Peninsula and beyond.

In an article in 2019, scientists warned of the areas of highest risk at the urban-fynbos fringe, and gave clear steps that could be taken to mitigate this risk. But these issues were identified as early as 1995.

Could Cape Town have been better prepared to deal with this disaster?

Why is this a wicked problem?

Although we have the ecological knowledge to undertake prescribed burns and alien clearing, unsupportive policies, constrained budgets, and a complex social setting make implementation challenging.

In the 1970s and 1980s, regular prescribed burns were practised in some parts of the park with the dual goals of rejuvenating the fynbos, and reducing fuel loads (and hence risk). However, this was halted at the end of the 1980s, and fire management shifted to fire suppression to protect plantations and residential developments.

The current National Veld and Forest Fire Act 101 of 1998 does not adequately cater for prescribed burning, as it only allows burning for the purposes of preparing firebreaks. This makes it extremely difficult to obtain permission to conduct fires that would maintain the fynbos, assist with the control of alien plants, and reduce fuel loads.

Another issue is the social resistance to prescribed ecological burns in Cape Town. The public have raised concerns around lack of communication, while the authorities past communications around prescribed and alien clearing has resulted in public efforts to block the planned management actions. This has resulted in a lack of trust between authorities and residents.

These challenges result in a management stalemate.

Recommendations

What should the priorities be in the short-term? Will funds for basic needs, such as recovering buildings and capacity, compete with disaster risk reduction needs, such as ecological restoration and clearing invasive alien trees?

Alien plant management needs to compete with all other budgetary pressures, which perpetuates a complex, wicked problem.

What can be done better going forward?

Firstly, the policy framework needs to be addressed. Although prescribed burns are dangerous and inconvenient, out-of-control wildfires are disastrous and could threaten many people's lives.

Secondly, citizens of Cape Town need to be more supportive of prescribed ecological burns and alien clearing. The relationship with managing authorities also needs to be restored and trust rebuilt.

Thirdly, Cape Town needs to improve the management of its natural and cultural heritage. This should include both prescribed ecological burns and keeping the mountain clear of alien trees.

Given the huge interest from the public in alien tree clearing, apparent from the many active volunteer hacking groups, there is a need to integrate efforts by the South African National Parks, the City of Cape Town, and landowners (such as the University of Cape Town) with those of the public to develop a more strategic, standardised approach to clearing invasive alien trees.

EDITOR – As we approach our fire season, there may be some lessons for us to consider.

16 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

1 st August 2021	MCS Field Trip in August
27 th – 29 th August 2021	Matopos Heritage Trail Run
TBA	MCS Field Trip in September
TBA	MCS Annual General Meeting in November
26 th – 28 th November 2021	Matopos Classic

17 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022 fall due on 30 September 2021. Please ensure that your subs are up to date. There has been no increase in rates.

US\$ 20 Individual/Family

US\$ 5 Pensioner/Student

US\$100 Corporate

The AGM resolved that 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.

NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MATOBO HILLS

This MCS publication is available both at the Natural History Museum, or from the Secretary.

18 – CONDOLENCES

Denis Paul

We are saddened to report the passing of Denis Paul, a life-member of the Society, and extend our deepest sympathy to his wife Sandy and daughter Kayla. Denis was best known for his lodge in the eastern Matopos, Shumba Shaba Lodge, on Broadlees farm, with magnificent views over the Mtshabezi Gorge. Denis was very active in church groups, in Rotary, and in tourism marketing and he introduced many visitors to Zimbabwe, and especially to our Hills.

Fergus Blackie

We also record the passing in April of Justice Fergus Blackie in Johannesburg, who was a great supporter of the Society during the time he was based at the High Court in Bulawayo and assisted in the drafting of our Constitution. Fergus and family enjoyed many outings, walks and hikes in the hills, which challenged his botanical interest! We extend our sympathy to his wife Adrienne and family.