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www.matobo.org

Welfare No: W/0 30/94

#### NEWSLETTER 118 / JUNE 2022

## **1 – MATOPOS RHINO PROJECT**

Visitors to the National Park will have noticed a nearly 8km long, 1.8m high field fence that has been erected alongside the main Kezi Road from approximately Three Sisters to the ZRP Police station. This ambitious project has been made possible through the generous donations from:

## EDUCASA FOUNDATION BRIGHT LIGHT FOUNDATION, and THE BEIT TRUST

Your Society has contributed to firebreaks along the fence line, the engagement of the local community in clearing the fence line, and the management of the project. The fencing was undertaken by **Fence Africa**, who have continued to support us with repairs and maintenance.

There is a large rhino population in this area, as well as substantial herds of plains game. In establishing this secure fence, we have managed to enlarge the area available for these animals by bringing the Parks Boundary up to the main road, create more viable corridors for animal movement, and establish a boundary which can be patrolled. Any person within the area no longer has an excuse of not knowing where the boundary was.

The new fence has been handed over to the Parks Authority, whom we trust will maintain the fence in its current state. We have a 3,5km length left to complete the project. It is also our hope to provide improved facilities and quarters for the Game Scouts who are currently housed in dilapidated tents.



# 2 - NEXT EVENT

Date	Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> June, 2022
Venue	The Farmhouse
Meet	08:00am, Cresta Churchill Hotel
Travel	All vehicles.
	We hope for a warm winters day so we can enjoy the views and setting of
	The Farmhouse, not too far from Bulawayo given the recent fuel price
	increases. We are sure we'll be rewarded with wildlife and of course the
	lovely winter scenery.
	Don't forget your picnic lunch (hot soup!) and drinks!

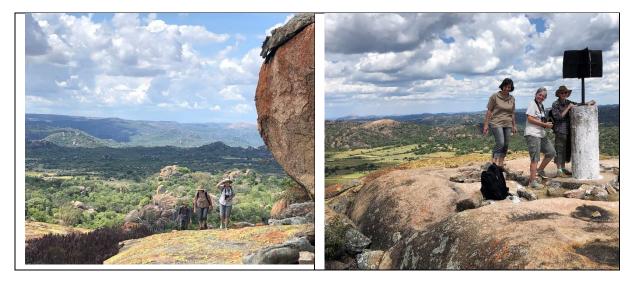
# 3 - REPORT BACK

A smaller party than usual party gathered for the visit to Gulati. The roads out necessitated a slow drive, and whilst on only a track within the Communal Land, it is a lovely area and so very pleasant. After scouting around we settled for tea on the banks of the upper reaches of the Toghwe valley. Large pools, laced with waterlilies and the occasional acacia made for a beautiful setting, even if we had churned up a small wetland in getting there!

We relocated closer to Gulati hill after tea, finding an ideal picnic site for a lunch.

But first, we had to climb the mountain. A path took us to the north-eastern edge of the broken dome, and we found an easy access after that, however there was a little scrambling up the first section. Only four brave members made it to the summit, which was a pity as the views were wonderful. Gulati is not only in the centre of the Communal Land that bears its name, but at 1,550.4 meters, it is one of the highest points in the Matopos and is fairly central. Yielding up views in every direction, it was truly spectacular and well worth the effort.

Lunch was enjoyed in due course, along with a lazy afternoon before the trek home got underway. Definitely a hill worth visiting.



# 4 – RAINFALL

The hills enjoyed a wonderful start to the season, but cyclonic activity in February disrupted the moist NW air flow and no rain had fallen since the 7 February. We are now looking at a season that could fall below 75% of normal, and crops are looking very stressed! Then we enjoyed unusual rains in April. Western Matopos 540mm and Eastern Matopos 647mm as at 30 April 2022. Bulawayo 659mm (110% average). As a result, the hills are remarkably green still, and the vleis very wet.

# **5 – MATOBO HERITAGE MTB CHALLENGE**

Our annual Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge was hosted at the end of March, and whilst numbers were slightly lower, it was again well received. We are once again appreciative of the members who volunteered their time to manage water points, drive vehicles, or assist in many different ways. Without you this event would be a massive task!

The weather played a significant part in this year's event, there were near perfect conditions on day one and two, though by the afternoon of day two storm clouds were building across the hills, providing a perfect backdrop to cyclists coming over the high hills. The rain set in during the night, and day three started in heavy mist, and wet conditions. There was some debate as regards safety, but the show went ahead. Riders were reduced to walking long distances on slippery slopes, and partners lost one another in the swirling mist and rain of the far eastern hills. The day will be remembered as one of the toughest experienced in the history of the event, but still enjoyed by the riders.

For the first time the "Event Indaba" had to be held under the Bedouin tent as the rain kept us off the dwalas, but this did not prevent a party in the mud that evening after the formal dinner!

# 6 – STUDY SAYS INVASIVE SPECIES COST AFRICA \$3.5 TRILLION A YEAR

With acknowledgment to BBC World Service

New research says invasive species of weeds, insects and worms are costing Africa more than \$3.5trillion (£2.5trillion) every year. Researchers based in Ghana, Kenya, Britain, and Switzerland have highlighted the catastrophic effects of species introduced by human activity.

Nigeria, where losses are estimated at \$1trillion a year, is much the worst affected country.

The majority of the costs are from weeding - work primarily carried out by women and children - but damage caused by insects is estimated at almost \$40bn. The research authors noted that the findings may be underestimating the true cost of invasive species to Africa's agriculture - as they did not consider the costs of herbicides for disease and pest control.

Editorial – we are all too familiar with the invasion of lantana, eucalyptus, guava, cactus, and other species in the Matobo region. Efforts to get action from the authorities remain futile. However, we can play our part if on every visit we either remove exotics or report their location.

EDITORIAL – this topic is covered in different articles within this newsletter.

# 7 – ELEPHANT VISIT

A pair of elephants were again reported in the north-western Matopos in mid-May. Their progress was monitored by Parks, but it appears they did not enter the Park itself. This is the second visit this year of elephant to the Matopos.

# 8 – RHINO LOSS

A further rhino was poached recently, bringing to four the number lost this year to poaching. This extremely serious development is of major concern to all parties, and more so given the relative security that the Matopos has enjoyed to date.

# 9 - MATOBO VILLAGERS DEMAND CHIEF'S INSTALLATION

With acknowledgement to Irene Moyo, Newsday Zimbabwe, 12 March 2022

Villagers in Matobo, Matabeleland South province have expressed concern over delays in the installation of a new chief to replace Chief Leonard Mathe who died seven years ago.

The lack of a traditional leader had spiked criminal activities in the area, they said.

Ward 9 councillor Bekezela Moyo said the succession had taken too long.

"We need a new chief to take over where the late chief left. Now people are fighting over land, burning homes, and killing animals. The matter is really out of hand because the area has no proper leadership," Moyo said.

"We have individuals in areas like Magalani village who are allegedly selling land and community property. Our livestock are now losing their grazing land because of corrupt people," he added.

Matobo district development co-ordinator Obey Chaputsira confirmed the matter saying that family disputes had delayed the appointment of a new chief.

"There have been a lot of processes within the Mathe family. The family is normally given two years to mourn their loved one before a new chief is appointed and, in this case, the process has been delayed," he said.

# 10 – ZIMPARKS SEEKS TO INCREASE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

With acknowledgement to Nhau Mangirazi, Newsday, 7 March 2022

The Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) has said it will invite communities to take part in wildlife management in their respective areas to restore key species and ecosystems.

"As an authority, we are striving to restore key species and ecosystems. It's good to note that as a country, no key species has faced extinction, nor do we have a park that has been de-registered. We are doing this through community inclusion," ZimParks spokesperson Tinashe Farawo told *NewsDay* at the weekend.

Farawo said communities should be involved in wildlife management as stipulated in international treaties such as Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites), among others.

"We aim to provide the best sustainable services on wildlife and environmental awareness for the current and future generations," he said.

On March 3, the world commemorated World Wildlife Day to raise awareness of the world's wild fauna and flora, and to recognise the important role of Cites in ensuring that international trade does not threaten the survival of species.

# **11 – ZIMBABWE POLICE TAIL POACHING SYNDICATES**

Poaching syndicates have killed at least two rhinoceros this month and are suspected of moving around the country targeting the animals and cutting off their horns. The rhino is targeted for its horn in the underground, illegal wildlife markets, particularly in Asia, where dubious cultural beliefs drive demand. In the latest killing, police in Bikita discovered on Sunday a carcass of a white rhino buried in a pit in a bushy area with some body parts missing. The carcass had two gunshot wounds on its shoulder implying that a gun was used to kill it before being de-horned.

National police spokesperson Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi said police have launched a manhunt for the gang involved in the case. The carcass was found slightly buried in a pit approximately 1,5 metres deep covered with a black polythene plastic and some tree branches.

Last Monday, police in Matobo recovered a black rhinoceros' carcass at Makotama Resettlements believed to have been killed by another poaching syndicate. Police discovered that the animal had two wildlife sensors used to record the speed, acceleration, tilt angle, and direction of movement of an animal and they recovered a bullet head on the forehead.

The carcass which had its horns missing was scanned with a GPX 5000 metal detector leading to the recovery of two wildlife sensors and a bullet head on the forehead. Meanwhile police in Lupane have arrested Bhekhithemba Ndlovu (31) and Eshuet Sitsha (37) for unlawful possession of hazardous substances.

The suspects were apprehended by members of the community after they were seen loitering at the Elephant corridor in Zikungwa village. Searches were conducted on the suspects leading to the recovery of three syringes of a substance suspected to be cyanide and 10 oranges injected with the substance which they intended to dispose in the forest to poison elephants.

# 12 – ZANU PF YOUTHS 'INVADE' MATOBO GRAZING LAND

April 21, 2022, With acknowledgement to Nqobizitha Mangaliso Ndlovu, Newsday.

MATOBO villagers have accused some Zanu PF youths of "invading" Morning Glory Farm, which the community uses as grazing land for their livestock.

Matobo's ward 15 councillor, Dickson Nkomo confirmed the invasion, saying: "We vow to fight for what is ours because we do not know these invaders and their surnames are not even common to us. If it means that we have to die fighting for that land, surely, we will die.

"These people did not involve us when they invaded the land. They are now doing as they please. Everyone in the community, including our youth, are not aware of such an initiative."

Umzingwane ward 9 councillors Bekezela Moyo raised a similar concern over seizure of their grazing land by Zanu PF youths for their projects.

"We share similar concerns with the villagers from Matobo and we are worried because our cattle no longer have grazing land. We had engaged a donor to help us with the projects, but he has decided to pull out because there is conflict of interest on the farm," he said.

Matobo district development co-ordinator Obey Chaputsira said the farm belonged to government, adding that the alleged invaders were actually government officials.

"The land was partitioned under the land reform programme; hence it belongs to the government. The community had just been using the farm without authority. The people there are government officials and I do not know whether they belong to the Zanu PF party or not," he said.

Matabeleland South Zanu PF provincial chairman Nqobizitha Mangaliso Ndlovu said: "I am not aware of such invasions by party youths. I have never heard of such a farm, and I have not received such a report. But I will look into it. I know that no one is allowed to invade land without government permission. That is contravention of the law, and law enforcers must act on such things."

Ndlovu is also Environment, Climate Change, Tourism and Hospitality minister.

## **13 – PROTECTED AREAS: NATIONAL ASSETS OR SHARED HERITAGE?**

With acknowledgement to Zimbabweland, April 18, 2022

What are the roles of protected areas in national development? Are parks national, even global, assets preserved for posterity and for protecting biodiversity, or are they part of a shared, local heritage, where nature and human use must be seen as integrated?

This debate is a long-running one, ever since the establishment of the first 'national parks' in the US. Today, it is rising up the agenda again, as advocates for a  $30 \times 30$  commitment (protecting 30% of a country's land area for conservation by 2030) gains traction in debates around the ongoing COP15 discussions on the post-2020 global framework on biodiversity to be concluded in Kunming in China later this year.

The rehabilitation of Gonarezhou national park



These were themes that were central to discussions during our recent visit to the southeast Lowveld in Zimbabwe, including a visit to Gonarezhou National Park at the kind invitation of Hugo van der Westhuizen, Director of the Gonarezhou Conservation Trust. Thanks to financing through the Frankfurt Zoological Society from a number of philanthropic foundations, the park is undergoing a much-needed rehabilitation. After years of neglect, the basic infrastructure had declined and the management of what are crucially important ecosystems and biodiverse habitats had lapsed.

The Gonarezhou ConservationTrust is a joint venture between the government (through the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority) and the FZS, based on a 20-year agreement from 2017 to manage the huge 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> area. Already major changes have happened, including the recruitment and training of many armed guards and rangers, along with the improvement of roads, camping, and lodge sites. Although currently the park is receiving significant amounts of external funding as a contribution to its US\$3 million per annum running costs, the aim is to break even, boosting pre-COVID income of about \$500m per annum through major tourist investments.

Central to the park strategy is the securing of the boundary, especially on the Zimbabwe side. The erection of an electrified veterinary fence along the whole border has been recently completed, together

with the employment of guards to patrol. This investment has been facilitated by government, through the Department of Veterinary Services, although where the money originally came from remains obscure. Although the fence is aimed at stopping animals leaving the park and carrying disease to domestic herds outside, the fence is also part of the park strategy to contain animals and maintain a strong, secure boundary.

However, given that the area is endemic with Foot-and-Mouth and not part of an export zone where 'disease freedom' is required, the veterinary rationale for the fence is shaky to say the least. And, in any case, given that the fence is not continuous, as animals are allowed to move into hunting areas and can anyway move up rivers where the fence does not cross, buffaloes (the main FMD carrier) can easily move into the farming areas (and do).

Whatever the origins of the fence, it serves the park strategy well. As was explained to us, the aim is to reduce human-animal conflict, as well as encourage more regulated use of park resources by local people, overturning what was seen as a dangerous free-for-all that existed before. Today groups are allowed into cut grass and to collect non-timber forest products, but livestock are never allowed to graze inside the park boundary, no matter how bad the drought conditions. The aim then is to keep animals in and people out.

While Hugo and colleagues objected to the label of 'fortress conservation', there are clearly many parallels. The increased militarisation of park defences is also a clear trend, again very similar to elsewhere. While from inside the park, it looks like there are assaults from all sides that must be defended against (poachers from Mozambique, villagers seeking grazing from the Zimbabwe side and so on), from the other side of the fence, it looks like a well-defended fortress, and a big change from the more flexible, negotiated (others would say simply unregulated) arrangement that existed before.

#### **Community tensions**

The result has been heightened tension with local communities, which have been responded to by a range of outreach and community liaison activities, as well as intensified policing and arrests. The community outreach activities are pursued genuinely and with considerable resources and are led by committed staff from the Trust. There are investments in local infrastructure (roads, a proposed bridge, school rehabilitation), as well as attempts to address human-wildlife conflict (including growing chilli to create 'cakes' that can be burned to repel elephants). There is also a commitment to wider dialogue, with platforms created in villages around the park boundary, where grievances can be aired, and issues addressed by park officials.

However, there remain problems, as we found when we talked with community members. There is a deep resentment around the change of access, especially for grazing, and multiple complaints that wildlife conflicts are getting worse not better. Many complain that the park does nothing about it. While this is not strictly true, the scale of the challenge is huge. The fence does restrict some animals, but elephants, in particular, don't have much time for fences even electric ones, and regularly break through. None of the 'projects' offered by the park provide a genuine alternative to grazing. With increasing droughts and more pressure on land around the park, the need for relief grazing only gets bigger. While those with big herds (including absentees) are the most affected, it is the smaller livestock owner, who may have just a few cattle and goats, whose livelihoods are especially affected, as they depend on livestock provisioning through drought periods when crops fail.

While community outreach certainly helps open up channels of communication, the local liaison officers are at a bit of loss what to do, as they have no power to address the more fundamental questions around access to land (and crucially grass and water for animals). There is also a slightly naïve approach to 'community' involvement, with the assumption that co-opting some chiefs or headmen is sufficient. As was explained to us, sometimes the dialogue meetings are open fights as people rail against the park or – slightly bizarrely – against 'Hugo,' as the dispute with the new park arrangement has become oddly personalised as if the Trust director owns the place!

The problem is that there are very divided views; different narratives about what the park and the wider landscape are for and the role of people in them. For some, parks are the last vestiges of the wild, natural world, where globally important habitats and species can be protected from human depredation. As part of a core strategy for protecting biodiversity, they are therefore globally important and central to a country's national assets. Given their wider value as 'global public goods,' they can also attract funds from outside, including interest from tourists and others able to pay for access. For others, by contrast, parks are part of a wider natural heritage, which has co-evolved together with humans. The landscape is one that has been part of people's cultural histories, and where grave sites lie, and spirits reside. These

areas should be protected for use, but humans – through living with and from nature – are the natural guardians of it.

These views are not easy to resolve, although there is a growing recognition, including in on-going discussions about a post-2020 global framework for biodiversity, that the most protected areas for biodiversity are ones that used by 'indigenous' peoples and communities, and that management of ecosystems is always necessary for their protection (just look at what happens when 'protected', 'endangered' elephant populations explode).

## Ways forward?

So, what are the ways forward? Clearly the investment in Gonarezhou is much needed and welcome, but has the Trust adopted the right strategy? Is conflict bubbling away and will it explode at some point? Can the separation of wild nature and people really be sustainable?

As we saw in our own study areas neighbouring the park, land is currently highly constrained – particularly better watered grazing and arable land at the end of a dry season or during a drought (as now). Tensions between wildlife and people will always focus on these 'key resources.' This means shared use, within and outside the park boundaries is essential. People in the communities must find ways of allowing wildlife to co-exist in their areas, while parks managers must find ways of people using key resources in the park (in certain places, at certain times). It has to be a negotiated settlement, and one that benefits both (conflicting) objectives. Without this, damaging conflict will persist.

Creating 'alternative livelihoods' in these areas is very difficult, and no matter how many high-end tourist lodges are built this is not going to provide for the vast majority. Such people are not going to be bought off with the odd gardening project or infrastructure investment, no matter how welcome these may be. They need to make a living from the land – and that means livestock grazing and farming. Using aid and philanthropic money to invest in a national park is justified because of its importance for biodiversity protection, but this argument is difficult to sustain if over the fence poverty and even starvation reigns.

Development must emerge in the round – people, wildlife, ecosystems all need to be part of the picture. The alternative to the siloed approach, where nature conservation is separated from wider development (and attracts the big bucks), is to accept that (no matter what fence is put up), boundaries are flexible. A park such as Gonarezhou is a national (even global) asset, but it is also a shared heritage, amongst all those who value this landscape; not least those who lived inside the park for many generations before its establishment less than 50 years ago.

There is a need for what some call an 'inclusive' or a 'convivial' approach to conservation: shared use, negotiated goals and so less conflictual and violent. In the wider landscape, this must mean biodiversity conservation of critical habitats and species; tourism to allow the widest group of people to enjoy and appreciate these historically and ecologically important areas; hunting, revenue generation and benefit sharing; and shared use of resources, particularly those key resources vital for agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, as well as wildlife. Fences, guns, and guards are not the solution, and may even make matters worse.

# **14 – MATOBO VILLAGERS BUILD OWN SCHOOL**

With acknowledgement to Silisiwe Mabaleka, Newsday, 13 May 2022

VILLAGERS in ward 15, Matopo district have teamed up to construct a secondary school, which they named Lukadzi, to cut the long distances their children walked to school.

Matobo ward 15 councillor Dickson Moyo said learners were demotivated from attending school due to the more than 15km they were travelling to school.

"Since the 1980s learners have been walking long distances to access education at Toghwe and Silobi high schools, which are 15km and 10km away, respectively. As villagers we want to protect the learners, especially the girl child. Most of them don't finish their Ordinary-Level as they end up falling pregnant," Moyo said.

He said they would start by constructing a toilet block and then the classrooms.

"The Matobo Rural District Council promised to make this initiative a success through availing devolution funds. We also appeal to well-wishers to donate funds," said Moyo, adding that Matopo High School was a private school, and its fees were unaffordable to most villagers.

Matobo RDC chief executive Elvis Sibanda said council would assist the villagers to complete the project.

"We are planning to build a classroom block using devolution funds. As council, we are going to tender the project, but the community still holds a very strategic purpose of ownership. As soon as we receive devolution funds, we are going to construct a classroom block," Sibanda said.

# 15 - ZIM READY TO PULL OUT OF CITES

## With acknowledgement to The Herald, 18 May 2022, online edition

Zimbabwe, which is sitting on more than 136 tonnes of ivory and rhino horns worth about US\$600 million, is prepared to operate outside the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) if the organisation continues to make it impossible for the country to fully benefit from its wildlife resource. In a post-Cabinet briefing in Harare yesterday, Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Minister Mangaliso Ndlovu said conservation decisions should be scientifically based and not politically inclined. "We are clear that we are not going to CITES to beg them. We are going to CITES to present our strong position, a position which we are willing to defend, even if it means being outside CITES. We are there in CITES to share our success stories for the benefit of those countries who want to also experience the successes in the conservation that we have experienced; not to be lectured on how we conserve our wildlife," he said.

# 16 - KING MZILIKAZI'S "HEIRS" TUSSLE

With acknowledgment to Southern Eye, 24 May 2022

Two rivals to the Ndebele throne are at each other's throat over who is the rightful heir to the kingship. Ndebele throne claimant Bulelani Collins Khumalo has surfaced, urging people of Matabeleland to ignore another hopeful, Stanley Raphael Khumalo-Tshuma's call to invade Bulawayo State House. Last week, Khumalo-Tshuma, who calls himself Mzilikazi II, wrote to President Emmerson Mnangagwa saying he would lead a crusade of Ndebele people living in South Africa back to Zimbabwe to settle at the Bulawayo State House. But in an opposing statement dated May 22, Bulelani Khumalo urged the people of Matabeleland based in SA to disregard Khumalo-Tshumas' call, describing it as total madness. Bulelani is also based in South Africa.

## 18 – PARKS UPDATE

Diana Marewangepo, the Matobo Parks Ecologist, is leaving the Matopos to be posted to the Harare region. Whilst we wish Diana well in her new post, it goes without saying that we will miss her contribution to the management of the Matobo National Park, and surrounding region. It's been a pleasure to work with her and she has made an impact within the greater Matopos community.

# **19 - SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY**

26<sup>th</sup> June 2022 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022 Field Trip Matopos Heritage Trail Run

# **20 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK**

## Subscriptions

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022 are now overdue. 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

If you need any information, please contact matoboconservatiosociety@gmail.com

## MCS Branded Apparel

The Society has a small stock of sleeveless fleece jackets, in olive green with orange MCS logo, available at US\$20 each. They are ideal for the cool mornings and evenings. We also have stocks of hats and caps at \$10 each. CD's and shopping bags are also available at \$5 each. Additional branded apparel (such as khaki shirts, fleece jackets, golf shirts) can be ordered on request. Please contact the Secretary via WhatsApp +263 71 240 2341 for further details

## Website

The MCS website <u>www.matobo.org</u> is updated whenever new material is available. A recent innovation has been the "**Newsletter Archives**" page, which now has every newsletter since the Society's inception. The "**Resources**" page has the following available for download:

- MCS Constitution
- Matobo Bird Checklist
- Matobo Butterfly Checklist
- Matobo Aloe/Grass/Orchid Checklist
- Matobo Tree/Shrub C Checklist
- Matobo Herpetofauna Checklist
- Matobo Mammal Checklist
- Map of Rhodes Matopos National Park
- MCS Project List
- Bibliography of Matobo World Heritage Site (prepared by Paul Hubbard)

Member suggestions and contributions for the website are welcome.

Please email to matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

## Facebook

We have 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.

## The Natural History of the Matobo Hills

This MCS publication is available at the Natural History Museum, or from the Treasurer for US\$30. Arrangements can be made to send by registered mail anywhere in Zimbabwe for an additional US\$5, or outside Zimbabwe for an additional US\$10. Please email matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

