

MATOBO



SOCIETY

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www.matobo.org

Welfare No: W/0 30/94

NEWSLETTER 122 / MAY 2023

1 – MATOBO HILLS SHORT VIDEOS

Your committee has been busy working with Daniel Lasker to produce a series of short films on the Matopos to be included on our web site, and used for introduction and promotional purposes. The first video was an introduction to the Matopos, and can be viewed on the web site home page www.matobo.org. Two more videos based on the Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge have also been produced, and work has started on the Caves and Rock Art of the Matobo Hills. We hope to produce a final video on the Wetlands, Waterfalls and Forests of the Matopos, but that has to wait for the summer months. We believe that high quality of the work produced by Daniel will provide us with useful marketing videos.

2 – MATOPOS HERITAGE MTB CHALLENGE

The 14th annual edition of the Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge took place in late March with 94 riders. The cycling conditions were perfect this year, and the event was again a success. Modifications to the course enhanced the riding experience.

Tragically, a Botswana rider, Mr Cornel Reis, suffered a massive heart attack at the 29km peg, some 90 minutes into the ride, and died on the spot. The Organising Committee responded efficiently and extended every help and courtesy to the family during this sad time. The Matobo Conservation Society has sent its condolences to Leanna and family on this untimely loss. This was Cornel's favourite ride and he had grown to love the Matobo Hills.

3 – ZIM'S WORLD HERITAGE SITE TARGETED FOR OIL EXPLORATION

With acknowledgement to Newsday, 10th May 2023

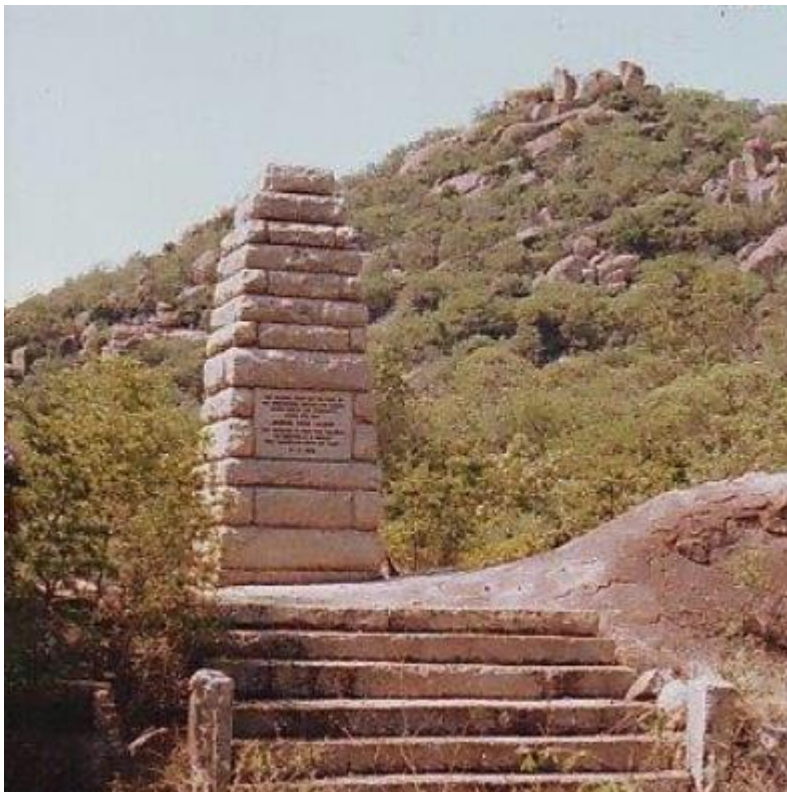
According to a notice in the Zimbabwean Government Gazette, one of Africa's premier wildlife areas has been targeted for oil exploration. Shalom Mining has applied for permits to explore for oil and gas in Mana Pools, which has been designated as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Mana Pools lies on the southern bank of the Zambezi River that serves as the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia. The river braids across a flood plain, attracting wildlife and has many luxury lodges on both the Zimbabwean and Zambian banks. The heritage site covers 676 600 hectares, spanning the Mana Pools National Park, Sapi and Chewore Safari areas.

Editor - This follows proposed developments within the Victoria Falls World Heritage Site, and quarrying near the Khami World Heritage Site. There is also ongoing illegal quarrying of granite slabs in the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site which, despite being reported to the authorities, continues unabated. This is a worrying trend and perhaps suggests that Government is not taking its responsibilities under the World Heritage Convention seriously enough. All the more need for conservation bodies to stand together and make a case to preserve our wilderness and heritage.

4 - NEXT EVENT

Date	Sunday 21 st May 2023
Venue	Mangwe Pass and Fort
Meet	08:00am, Cresta Churchill Hotel
Travel	Trucks are preferred but cars will certainly be suitable

Don't forget your picnic lunch and drinks! Might also need to come prepared for cool breeze. We will travel out to Mangwe Pass, south of Marula. This is a 90km drive so plan accordingly. We will also visit Mangwe Fort, Lee's House and Lee's cemetery before going onto Neville Rosenfel's home for a picnic lunch and a chance to see an original 1890's wagon, that would have come through the pass.



The Mangwe Pass was the formal route through the western Matopos through which most missionaries, hunters and traders entered Matabeleland between 1854 and 1894. Travellers were required to wait below the pass until permission was granted by the King to proceed to the appropriate Royal residence of the King. It was in effect the border post from the South. Interestingly, Hendrik Potgieter in 1849 did not use this passage through the hills when he attacked King Mzilikazi as it was unknown but used a far less practical route today known as Ndleka's Pass, further to the east. Famous explorers such as Bains, Selous and others, as well as Moffatt entered this country along this trail. The memorial, unveiled by Sir Robert Tredgold in 1954, marked the centenary of the Pass, and has survived undamaged.

Fort Mangwe (1896) lay at the foot of the Mangwe Pass. From the outbreak of the rebellion, 150 men, women, and children, both British and Afrikaner, formed a laager and enlarged and improved the fort built by the Southern Column in 1893.

John Lee first went to Matabeleland in 1858 where he obtained Mzilikazi's permission to hunt. His hunting was focused in the area of the Shashi River. His favourite campsite was near the Mangwe Pass. Lee obtained his grant of land from the Matabele in 1862. Lee and his wagon, with others, arrived at

Umganin from the south on 30th May. In 1863 John Lee established a farm and house, the ruins of which still stands some two km south of the fort. Mrs Lee and their infant son Hans and other children joined him there. Mrs Lee died in childbirth in 1870. Early in 1880, he invited the Jesuits to establish a station on his land, in order to have his children educated, but nothing came of this. Lee's house was an important waypoint and unofficial border to the Matabele kingdom. In March 1884; in the last-named month of his diaries, Lee fell ill, and he went to live at Zeerust. After the death of his first wife, Lee had a succession of housekeepers, one of whom he married, but she ran off with a transport rider. He married a third time. Lee refused to serve the Chartered Company as a guide and interpreter in the Matabele War of 1893 and his lands were confiscated by the BSAC.

5 – REPORT BACK

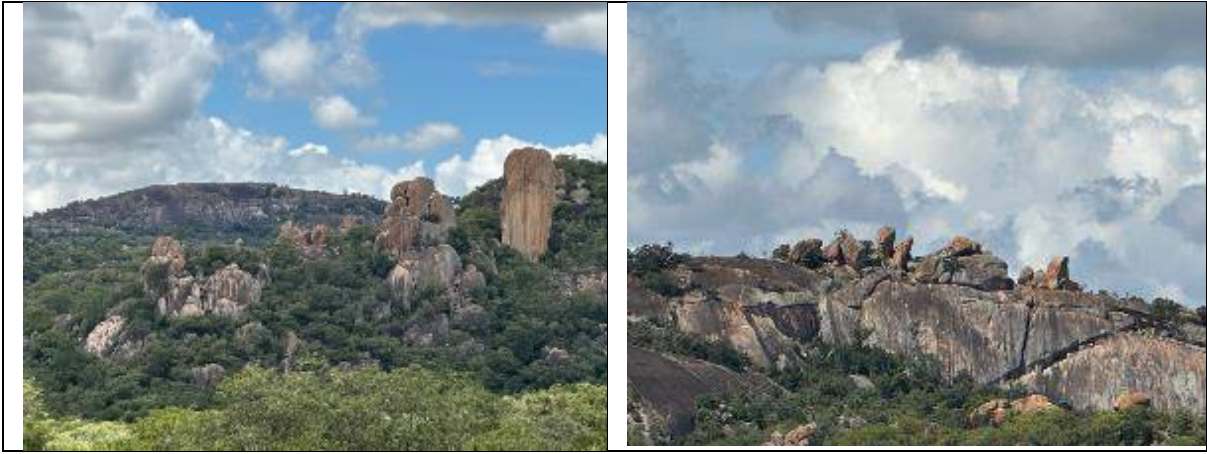
Members gathered as usual at Cresta Churchill on a fine Sunday morning and travelled out to the Inungu Battlefield, immediately west of World's View and below the impressive Mt Inungu. The gravel road was still damp from rains, and indeed in the area of the battlefield it was soggy and muddy with water flowing down the ruts. Fortunately, no one got stuck. First stop was at the memorial itself, and then retraced our steps a few hundred meters to the actual battlefield where Gavin gave us an outline of the fateful day in 1896. Whilst the history was interesting, and the military tactics dubious, the scenery was beautiful. Hard to think of battles in such a setting.

Thereafter we carried onto Matobo Hills Lodge where we were received by Mr Josh Elliot. Allowed to picnic in the shade on the lawn, we quickly arranged our standard tea, before embarking on a tour of the Lodge and rooms. No one was quite brave enough to swim. Thereafter Josh spoke to us about the history of the lodge, its survival through numerous tribulations and the hopes going forward. With 45 staff employed it's no mean achievement.

After lunch folk peeled off to return home, or went to climb the hill behind the lodge, enjoying the magnificent views of Efifi, Worlds View, Inungu and Pomongwe.

We thank Josh and his team for his kindly hosting us.





6 – FINAL RAINFALL FOR THE YEAR

The season started well, suffered a dry spell through January and recovered well in February. Then Cyclone Freddy appeared off the coast of Mozambique and hung around for 21 days. It may well have set the world record for the longest “living” cyclone (lasted 5 weeks and 2 days!) but it destroyed the rainy season for us, as is the usual case with cyclones over the Mozambique Channel. As a result, whilst we enjoyed slightly above normal rainfall, the season ended early and prematurely.

Western 687mm (Avg 600mm); Central 693mm (Avg 600mm); Eastern 724mm (Avg 830mm); Bulawayo 561mm (Avg 600mm).

Maleme 675.2mm, Toghwana 526.94mm, Whitewaters 561.1mm, Hazelside 381.5mm.

7 – RHINOS DOWN TO 400 AS POACHING INTENSIFIES IN BOTSWANA

Acknowledgment to Nature World News, Wednesday 22nd February 2023

Gaborone - Due to ongoing and increased poaching, the rhino population in Botswana has been reduced to just 400 individuals.

On Monday, Botswana disclosed that it had experienced a sharp increase in rhino poaching over the five years leading up to 2022, which amounted to about one-third of its population of the critically endangered species.

According to testimony given to parliament by Philda Kereng, minister of tourism, 138 rhinos were killed between 2018 and 2017.

In contrast, only two rhinos were poached in the previous five years, from 2012 to 2017.

According to statistics Kereng presented to the legislature, homicides spiked to seven in 2018 before falling to 30 the following year. The number of murders spiked once more in 2020 to 62, then dropped to six last year after halving to 33 in 2021.

She attributed the increase in killings to poachers being driven out of other southern African states as well as an increase in the demand for rhino horn on the global market.

Increased patrols in national parks have made it necessary for hunters looking for rhino horns to turn their attention elsewhere, which has resulted in a steady decline in the number of animals killed in neighbouring nations in South Africa, which is the traditional rhino poaching hotspot.

Demand from Asia, where rhino horns have been used in traditional and folk medicine for their alleged therapeutic effect, drives rhino poaching, according to NPR.

Rhinos in Botswana

Although Botswana withholds information about its rhino population, a report the government submitted to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) held in Panama last year indicated that the country was home to approximately 285 white rhinos and 23 black rhinos. According to Rhino Conservation Botswana, the number of rhinos in the nation in 2019 was just under 400, with the majority of them foraging on the grasslands of the northern Okavango Delta.

Another government document claims that Botswana started dehorning rhinos in recent years to make them less desirable to poachers, but that this practice has not been successful because the poachers would still be interested in the horn stump that was left behind.

To better protect the rhinos, rangers, law enforcement, as well as nongovernmental groups, have increased ground and aerial patrols, Voices of America reports.

Rhinos of the World

In the past, rhinos were found in many parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and were depicted in cave paintings by early Europeans. At the start of the 20th century, there were 500,000 rhinos in Africa and Asia, but their population declined to 70,000 by 1970 and today only about 27,000 remain in the wild. Due to persistent poaching and habitat loss over many decades, very few rhinos now survive outside of national parks and reserves. The black, Javan, and Sumatran rhino species are critically endangered.

Protected sanctuaries in Africa have helped southern white rhinos to thrive, despite being thought to be extinct at one point, and they are now considered near threatened. However, the western black rhino and northern white rhino have both become extinct in the wild. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the only two remaining northern white rhinos are kept under 24-hour guard at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya.

Editor – Rhino poaching swept through Zimbabwe after Independence, and in recent years has been focused on South Africa. Now it's turning north again – hitting Botswana. It is inevitable that Zimbabwe will once again come under fire (literally). The future of our Matopos Rhino is again under very real threat.

8 – ZIMBABWE BIDS TO HOST WETLANDS SUMMIT

With acknowledgment to Herald, Wednesday 1st March 2023.

Zimbabwe is bidding to host the main wetlands summit in 2025, with Cabinet now approving plans by the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry to host the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 15) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The meeting, scheduled for Victoria Falls, will see leaders from various countries converge in the country to discuss ways to use wetlands sustainably. Addressing the post Cabinet briefing yesterday, Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Minister Monica Mutsvangwa said the hosting of the meeting would augur well for the country's engagement and reengagement drive.

9 – POACHING THREATENING TOURISM

With acknowledgment to Newsday, 7th March 2023.

POACHING and illegal wildlife trade is threatening Zimbabwe's tourism industry, wildlife industry stakeholders have said.

During last week's World Wildlife Day commemorations which ran under the theme "Partnerships for Wildlife Conservation", stakeholders from government, civil society and the private sector said the country has experienced massive economic loss due to illegal wildlife trade.

Speaking over the weekend at the Nyangambe community conservancy game scout graduation ceremony in Chiredzi, which coincided with the World Wildlife Day celebrations, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) acting mission director Ramses Gauthier said: "Poaching and illegal wildlife trade are threatening the country's tourism industry and the livelihoods and security of rural communities."

He said wildlife scouts play a critical role in safeguarding the country's flora and fauna for future generations.

Zimparks Save Valley Conservancy senior area manager Douglas Kuramba said: "To all poachers and your associates, be strongly warned that we are more than prepared to confront you anywhere and

anyhow. Should you dare take a chance with our resources, the rangers have been equipped with techniques to deal with you.”

Resilience ANCHORS, through support from USAID, is working with communities in Nyangambe, particularly the Wildlife Management Committee, to ensure that the Nyangambe Wildlife Conservancy provides increased opportunities for previously disadvantaged communities to engage and benefit from the wildlife industry.

Meanwhile, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) has partnered government, through the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) in conservation and anti-poaching campaigns.

Since 2018, AWF has invested over US\$10 million in the mid-Zambezi Valley through infrastructural developments, provision and digitalisation of radio communication equipment, provision of fuel, field and camping equipment, patrol rations, vehicles, and boats for anti-poaching patrols.

AWF director Olivia Mufute said: “We have facilitated specialised training and capacity building programmes for rangers as part of efforts to combat poaching and reduce illegal wildlife trade and trafficking in the landscape. With support from our partners, we donated three vehicles to ZimParks in 2021, one vehicle in 2022, and recently purchased two Toyota Land Cruisers to support anti-poaching work by ZimParks in the mid-Zambezi Valley. We also supported ZimParks with a one spot fisher patrol boat, one pelican boat and installed a modern boat jetty at D Camp, along the Zambezi Valley.” Mufute said ZimParks rangers have been trained on use of Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool technology to improve data collection.

10 – NATIONAL PARK UPDATE

Parks have started to repair the fence on the Southern boundary of Matobo National Park. Whilst a cattle fence has been erected, there has been no repair yet of the gates – and so holes remain. But it’s a good start.

The fence repair and maintenance will only work with the buy in of the local community. Parks engaged the local leadership who were very understanding and promised to support Parks to curb the problem of cattle encroachment. However there still remains some pockets of resistance in the same community which is derailing their efforts. Parks will however continue to engage them with the hope that they will make them understand one day.

No repairs/maintenance has been done to the Toghwana dam.

The roads are in bad shape. Parks plan is to hire motorised graders immediately after the rain season (funds permitting).

11 – MEMORIES OF THE MATOPOS BRANCH TRAIN LINE

With acknowledgement from Dave Gray of the Pioneer Society

A trip to Matopos by train was always a real excitement for families unable to go by car and the Sunday morning train from Bulawayo in the 1920’s was usually well filled.

A 7th Class engine would set off with a second-class coach, sometimes two, a van and perhaps one or two trucks for the branch line from Westacre Junction. Stops were made at Khami and Westacre (to sign the book) and sometimes at the loading spur at Lonsdale Farm on the last lap to Matopos.

Arriving at the terminus most people adjourned to the old Terminus Hotel for much needed refreshment and some to book for lunch, while others ambled off to find a pleasant picnic spot under trees by the stream. A few energetic ones brought cycles to explore among the Matopos hills and even reached World’s View.

The Hotel put up a good lunch and had shady grounds for relaxation. Nowadays it is the District Administrator’s offices, with staff houses and a Police camp nearby. The day soon passed and just before five the locomotive’s whistle was sounded to recall passengers. During the day the train crew had run the engine round the triangle and shunted the coach and van into position for return, after which they too had adjourned to the Hotel. On the homeward trip all the passengers were now good

friends and passed the time in rousing chorus or chatter until Bulawayo once more hove in sight in the dusk of evening.

For many years the Matopos train was hauled by a 7th Class loco from Bulawayo shed and staffed by R R driver and fireman, while the S A R goods inspector acted as guard as he was familiar with the S A R train working and paper orders. No heavier locomotive was allowed over the Westacre-Matopos section which was old light weight track and without ballast.

With the coming of good roads and plenty of cars the passenger traffic dropped off to a few Africans and the train day was altered to Tuesdays.

The last train was hauled by Engine No 72 of whom driver Swiney was in charge. The train was seen off from platform 6 by Sir Arthur Griffin, Messrs S E L West (C S T), F G John (Running Supt.), A H Croxton (Act. Operating Supt.) F A Hill and J Knapman of the G M's staff.

For this last trip on 1st June 1948 the load included short cattle, two open short trucks, a Native coach and van. Inspector J Markram represented the South African Railways (S A R) under whose control (and that of the C G R) the line had always been worked since its opening in November 1903. So, after 45 years the Matopos line ended its life and soon was uplifted, but its formation can still be seen running across the grassy veld.

A H C 1971 - From the Archives

12 – DESPERATE VILLAGERS DRIVE CATTLE INTO ZIMBABWE'S MATOPOS NATIONAL PARK

Human-wildlife conflict, spread of disease likely if the situation continues.

By Farayi Machamire for Zim Morning Post

Zimbabwean villagers say they are driving their cattle into Matopos National Park for grazing as a last resort in response to depleted pastures. Their continued human encroachment leaves their cattle vulnerable to contracting diseases and more precariously once wild animals have a taste of their cattle, it fuels human wildlife conflict. Park officials note that encroachments have seen some cattle contract catarrhal fever from coming into contact with wildebeest. Hyena and leopard attacks on livestock are frequently reported, as are baboon raids on village crops, as well as baboon attacks on chickens and children, particularly in wards 15, 16, and 17.

Matopo resident Thulani Zulu claims that friction between Park authorities and villagers has pitted communities surrounding the park against wildlife “creating a scenario of them versus us.”

“The relationship between villagers and park authorities is strained because villagers feel authorities have not done enough to ensure that they benefit from living alongside wildlife,” Zulu claims.

Matopos National Park, which boasts of the Matobo Hills – one of the highest concentrations of rock art in Southern Africa dating back at least 13,000 years – was established in 1926. As part of a compromise between the colonial authorities and the local people, areas were re-designated for settlement. Villages in close proximity to Matopos National Park include Gulati area which is about 5 kilometres away from the park's boundary, Silozwi, Chapo, Bazha, and Dewe areas which are all within 5 kilometres from the park's boundary.

Professor Edson Gandiwa, Director Scientific Services at the Zimbabwe Parks, and Wildlife Authority (ZimParks), says that there are currently two distinct types of human encroachment at Matopos National Park: settlements and movements, or illegal entry. “Community encroachment in terms of settlements has only been experienced within the Park buffer zone where the communities are building adjacent to the park boundary,” says Professor Gandiwa. “The park's boundary is not fenced; hence locations of illegal entry are possibly everywhere. It is more prevalent at the eastern park boundary and less at the boundaries close to the park's Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ). “Efforts are being made

to erect the boundary fence (parts of Hazelside and Whitewaters have been done so far) and prevent cattle encroachment as well as human illegal entry.”

Movement of people from their ancestral homes which made it impossible for them to access the pastures and hunting areas they had previously used, lowered public support for the park, leading to disregard for its limits and encroachment, say officials. “When the National Park was established, it included public roads which made it difficult to identify illegal entry and control human or vehicle movements. Some people were also relocated, hence could not access previously utilised pastures and hunting grounds. This could have decreased acceptance of the park by people, resulting in disregarded boundaries and encroachment,” says Professor Gandiwa.

Matobo Rural District Council chief executive officer Elvis Sibanda says the council is aware of the problems the park is facing. However, in response to inquiries, he remained silent regarding the council’s interventions and remedies. “The boundary fence in some sections of the community bordering the park, is no longer there as it was removed way back. There are no cattle grids in some roads leading to the parks. All this results in livestock straying into the national parks and animals also crossing to the community,” says Sibanda. “There is a need to attend to areas of challenge such as repairing the fence and resuscitating grids so that good relations are maintained,” he adds.

Given the central location of the park in relation to the communities, ZimParks recognizes that there will inevitably be challenges involving human–wildlife conflict and poaching for the pot. Baboons, monkeys, wildebeest, crocodiles, hyenas, and occasionally leopards, jackals, and snakes are among the animals that are frequently reported and regularly brought up in communal areas during human wildlife conversations. “In the Park human wildlife conflict takes many forms, including baboons raiding crops, attacking chickens and kids especially in wards 15, 16 and 17,” says Professor Gandiwa. Losses incurring to villagers due to the ongoing conflation between humans and wildlife are varied. For instance, in Gwandavell, Lushumbe, Boomerange, and Chapo, monkeys raid crops, hyenas and leopards attack cattle. Jackals have been reported killing cattle, such as in Boomerang. In Silozwi, Gwandavell a secondary school, for example, pythons have been reported feeding on chickens. Crocodile attacks on humans, such as the one in ward 17. Catarrhal fever, for example, is transmitted to cattle by wildebeest.

Local communities say the high cost of living with wildlife coupled with limited alternative ways to make a living and meet basic needs often ignite cases of wildlife crime.

At the same time, compensation remains a contentious issue. Zimbabwe does not have a compensation law, although there is a Human Wildlife Conflict Relief Fund being set up by the Government to provide medical expenses and funeral costs to human wildlife conflict victims. The Relief Fund is awaiting approval by the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism, and Hospitality Industry. “Matobo National Park itself has no compensation policy for the victims of human wildlife conflict. However, there are unrelated benefits that include, but are not limited to cooperative social responsibility by the park,” says Professor Gandiwa. “These benefits are accrued from the National Park by the surrounding communities. In addition, Matobo District has a CAMPFIRE status, hence the communities benefit from wildlife in their area through CAMPFIRE. On a national level, there is a Human Wildlife Conflict Relief Fund being set up to provide compensation to human wildlife conflict victims.”

Matobo National Park maintains that it enjoys a friendly relationship with the nearby communities who they appreciate as they offer important sources of information, labour, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and cultural guidance. Community benefits from the park include “donations such as in 2021 – the proceeds from hay bales worth \$2000 (£1600), thatching grass for Silozwi Clinic, Silozwi

Secondary school as well as roofing poles, monetary donations to villages from Matopo Rhino conservation, water provision for example from Mtshелеle dam, Curios (provision of market), building of houses for community members in Silozwi and white waters and issuing of permits for free harvesting of firewood to use during funerals and other events.”

Matopo resident Zulu, however, says living adjacent to the national park is not as rosy as it is cranked up to be. This stresses the need for holistic engagement between Parks and villagers. “The communities surrounding the Parks are actually required to pay \$4 (£3.20) for park entry and this causes strain and conflict,” says Zulu. “Villagers’ source of income is mainly agriculture, but their farming produce is often wiped out by baboons and monkeys. In response, poaching for the pot becomes a desperate necessity, indicating a need for greater engagement and understanding between Park Authorities and the local people.” Livestock and human settlement encroachment into protected areas and associated interactions with wildlife is a global issue with implications for sustainable development particularly in developing countries.



This article is reproduced here as part of the African Conservation Journalism Programme, funded in Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe by USAID’s VukaNow: Activity. Implemented by the international conservation organization Space for Giants, it aims to expand the reach of conservation and environmental journalism in Africa, and bring more African voices into the international conservation debate.

13 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

- 21st May 2023 Field Trip to Mangwe
- 4th June 2023 Environmental Field Day (World Environment Day 5th June)
- July 2023 Field Trip - TBA
- 25th August 2023 Matopos Heritage Trail Run
- October 2023 Field Trip – TBA
- 19th November 2023 Annual General Meeting

14 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023 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 – www.matobo.org

We have recently upgraded our website which is now more modern and easier-to-use. It is intended to be more attractive and informative to both members and the general public. Member suggestions and contributions for the revised website are welcome.

Please email to matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

Facebook

Please visit our new Facebook page “Matobo Conservation Society” - LIKE or FOLLOW this to keep up todate.

The Natural History of the Matobo Hills

This MCS publication is available at the Natural History Museum 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

Inange Cave

