

MATOBO



SOCIETY

matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

www.matobo.org

Welfare No: W/0 30/94

NEWSLETTER 123 / OCTOBER 2023

1 – MATOBO HILLS CELEBRATES

2023 is an auspicious year for the Matopos:

- Sixtieth anniversary of the Matopos Black Eagle Survey, 1963
See our special article (number 6 below)
- Thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Matobo Conservation Society, 1993
See the celebration plans (number 2 below)
- Twentieth anniversary of the Matobo Hills being declared a World Heritage Site, 2003

2 – MATOBO CONSERVATION SOCIETY @ 30 YEARS

To mark this auspicious anniversary, your Committee has decided to reserve The Farmhouse for the night of Saturday 25th November. The Farmhouse has generously offered us a special rate of US\$60 per person, Dinner, Bed and Breakfast.

Please make your reservation directly with The Farmhouse on WhatsApp +263 (0)77 556 8345.

You are welcome to bring your own drinks for the evening. Dinner only, for those not staying at the Farmhouse, is \$20 per person.

It is intended that we will commence proceedings with a late-afternoon tea / drinks to mark the end of the day at the Back Camp on The Farmhouse property. There we can enjoy the magnificent view across our wonderful Hills. Thereafter we will transfer to The Farmhouse for our dinner and formalities.

The next morning, Sunday 26th November, game drives and walks are possible, then we will hold our Annual General Meeting at 10:00am at The Farmhouse. Those wanting to bring a packed lunch are more than welcome to do so.

3 – WORLD HERITAGE UPDATE – VICTORIA FALLS

Independent, Friday June 2023.

Zim and Zambia in joint management of Vic Falls: Zimbabwe and Zambia have stepped up efforts to manage the iconic Victoria Falls and look at possible opportunities for developing the tourist attraction. Officials from the two countries met in Livingstone, Zambia, recently at the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting to discuss the trans-boundary Victoria Falls World Heritage Site. Zimbabwe and Zambia share Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, one of the seven Natural Wonders of the World. Speaking at the meeting, Tourism and Hospitality Industry minister Nqobizitha Mangaliso Ndhlovu hailed joint efforts to protect and develop the site. Ndhlovu said updating the Strategic Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Report, which started in 2021 and work on the updating of the Joint Integrated Management Plan of the property were also crucial.

He called for the two countries to ensure that any development near Victoria Falls did not disturb the site. He said proposed key projects, such as the Batoka George hydroelectric power station, needed to consider and address concerns raised by key stakeholders while maintaining viable and appropriate technical requirements for optimum power generation

4 - NEXT EVENT

Date	Sunday 29 th October 2023
Venue	Rowallan Park
Meet	08:15am, Cresta Churchill Hotel
Travel	Trucks are preferred but cars will certainly be suitable.

Don't forget your sunblock, hat, picnic lunch and drinks! Might also need to come prepared for a hot day. There will be a series of talks on Rowallan Park, and the History of the Girl Guides.

5 – REPORT BACK

Sunday 21st May saw a good crowd of members assemble at Cresta Churchill for the drive out to Marula, and onto the Mangwe area. We were met by more folk at the Mangwe memorial, where after a cup of tea and brief walk around the site, Mr Rob Burrett gave a talk on the importance of the pass. Thereafter Mr Neville Rosenfels spoke about the building of the monument itself, and the family history of the area. Of interest – there were four generations of Rosenfels at the monument that day.

Thereafter we followed Neville onto Fort Mangwe, where once again a talk was given, and members could examine what was left. Of interest was the now thick woodland all around whereas in 1896 the area would have been clear of trees.

After the Fort we visited the remains of trader John Lee's house, dating from the 1870's. It was very disturbing to see that a new landowner was using the stone to build a modern dwelling, with no respect to the history – especially as Lee was a friend of both Kings Mzilikazi and Lobengula and suffered as a consequence at the hands of the BSAC. We hope that NMMZ have taken action.

A few members then went onto the old cemetery across the river from the house. The names so much associated with the history of the country appear on some of the headstones.

A picnic lunch was then enjoyed at the home of Neville and Georgina Rosenfels, for which the old wagons in their collection, including the family wagon from 1894, had been brought out for us to enjoy.

We express our heartfelt thanks to the Rosenfels for kindly hosting us, and to Rob for the various talks.

Extract from "Memorial to Pre-Pioneers"

The Mangwe Pass Memorial to the Pre-Pioneers was unveiled on July 18, 1954, by Sir Robert Tredgold, a great-grandson of Robert Moffat who was one of the first Europeans to enter the pass. The inscription reads: "One hundred years ago the first of the missionaries, hunters and traders passed slowly and resolutely along this way. Honour their memory"

This memorial, made from blocks of granite from the local rocks, stands amid the boulder-strewn hills that overlook the pass. An interesting feature which many people do not recognise consists of the impressions of an ox-wagon, a dog, a person wearing boots and another with bare feet, which have been made on a concrete platform in front of the monument.



Neville Rosenfels, Mangwe Pass Memorial



MCS Field Trip To Mangwe



Fort Mangwe



Fort Mangwe



Ruins of John Lee's House



Ye Olde Wagon, from 1894

6 – BLACK EAGLE SURVEY – 60 YEARS

There are many raptor species found in the Matobo Hills, with the most obvious, and iconic perhaps, being the Black Eagle, or as it is supposed to be called now, the Verreaux's Eagle. The unusual high number of these birds, certainly in the early days of the survey, were a constant wonder. No-one knows for sure – but could the Matobo area be the “breeding pool” distribution of this species to other parts of Southern Africa? Unfortunately, this question is yet to be investigated but with today's amazing modern technology and satellite tracking used on birds that has been so successful elsewhere in the world, perhaps one day, this can be solved.

The history behind the Black Eagle Survey began with a game ranger, Ron Thomson who was stationed in the Rhodes Matopos National Park in 1959 and 1960. Ron was a keen bird-watcher and was

impressed by the number of Black Eagle pairs he observed whilst touring the area for which he was responsible.

When Ron left the Matobo Hills, he provided the Department of National Parks with a composite list of birds in the area and his account of the Black Eagles along with a list of the eyries he had found. At that stage, Ron had compiled a list of 37 eyries, 35 of which were within the Rhodes Matopos National Park. However, there were only brief descriptions of where the nests were actually located.

In 1961, Carl Vernon, a student teacher in Bulawayo, obtained Ron Thomson's list of eyries and began locating them. Then in 1963 Carl began compiling the data which kick started the Black Eagle Survey and during that year and 1964, added map references along with more detailed information of the locations as well as new eyrie sites that he had found. Mrs Valerie Gargett, a mathematics teacher, accompanied Carl on some of his trips to the Hills becoming increasingly involved in the work.

As Ron Thompson had previously done, Carl numbered each nest as he found them. By the end of 1964, Carl Vernon along with members of the Matabeleland Branch of the Rhodesian Ornithological Society, had added 31 eyries and so the total stood at 68 nest sites. By the time we eventually managed to get a place on the team in 2007, there were over a 100 sites in the survey.

At the end of 1964, Carl Vernon left Bulawayo and Valerie Gargett, who was then Secretary of the Matabeleland Branch of the Ornithological Society, was handed all his records and a draft of his paper prepared for publication. He passed them across with the words, "Now it is over to you." Val eventually gave up her teaching career to take on the survey full time and was ably assisted by her husband, Eric, until they immigrated to Australia in 1985 although Val continued to collect and analyse data from the study.

This breeding survey is renowned, as it is the longest running survey of its kind anywhere in the world. 2023 is the 60th consecutive year of the breeding survey of the Black Eagles of the Matobo Hills.

Valerie Gargett's book "The Black Eagle – A Study" – was published in 1990. Her publication is often referred to by both professional and amateur ornithologists as the "Bible" of the Black Eagle. The book is the culmination of all her intense work over more than two decades and contains a wealth of information.

Gathering data on the survey follows the same format and guidelines introduced by Val Gargett and is conducted with the permission of Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. A permit to do so is obtained on an annual basis.

Volunteers are known as "Citizen Scientists" and subsequently are not required to draw any conclusions from their collected data – as Val said "...just record what you see, don't try and tell us what you think the eagles' intentions are".

As there have been known cases of illegal egg collection in the Matobo area, and the eagles are a Protected Species, the locations of known territories and nest sites are kept as confidential as possible. Only Members of Birdlife Zimbabwe may take part in the survey and to this end, all members as well as any Ornithological or other visitors to nest sites are required to sign a Confidentiality Statement. Many raptor species including several species of Owl are protected in this country, this confidentiality should apply to many species in Zimbabwe.

Eagles are territorial and therefore, the area in which their nests are situated are known as “territories”. As the eagles do not always use the same nest, the pair occasionally builds what is called an “alternate” nest, sometimes two, within the same territory they occupy.

Eagles’ nests are constructed of sticks and are usually built near the summit of a granite kopje. Others build in larger crevices, or possibly depressions in rock formations. Only one nest in the Hills has been logged as a “tree nest”.

The area of the survey covers approximately 1 220 square kilometres. The outlying areas outside of the park boundary was host to several nests’ way back when, but now those sites are derelict. However, there have been recent sightings of adult birds in a couple of disused territories outside the park which are not easy to get to, but these will require further monitoring. There are two active sites on farming properties adjacent to the Park.

The survey is basically broken down into three reporting periods – the first being 31st May, then 31st July and the final one from August through to mid-November if possible.

Observations start in about April and during this first period all nests need to be visited to see if there are eagle pairs in the territory. If observers are fortunate enough, they may encounter flight displays – which we like to call “Sky Dancing”. It is a truly spectacular experience for anyone and has, in the past, got some people well and truly hooked on observing Black Eagles!

This is the period when nest renovations begin and with little experience, observers can make out whether new nesting material has been added. The size of some of the nests is difficult to imagine. Greenery is added to the cup of the nest, usually when an adult is incubating, with fresh green sprays being added once the chicks arrive.

Main breeding takes place between April and July. Two eggs are usually laid. The incubation period is about 44 days, after which time, two chicks will likely hatch out within days of each other. Invariably one chick will kill the other by pecking it to death. The adults do not intervene in this “Cain and Abel” struggle.

For about 12 weeks the chick will be fed by the parents. The chick lies inactive for the first few weeks, but later stands in or on the side of the nest, often calling lustily.

When making and recording observations, observers can make a fairly close estimation of the age of the chick as the plumage of the chick changes rapidly during this period.

By the end of July, being the close of the second period, any successful breeding would be most easily seen as the parent birds will always be in close proximity of their nests.

The final reporting period should cover whether breeding has been successful with a chick that has “fledged” or not. Fledged means if the chick has left the nest. A newly fledged Black Eagle is every bit as magnificent as its parents with its golden crown and beautiful russet and gold edged plumage.

It has been established that the Hyrax (or commonly known as Dassie) is the main prey of the Black Eagle. In order to try and anticipate the survival and continued success of the Black Eagle, dassie counting sites were identified by Prof Ronald Barry, assisted by Peter Mundy, in 1992. Members involved in the study were expected to participate in an annual dassie count held in May of each year. Annual counts were taken over by the Matabeleland Branch in 2005 and were done for 14 years. Due to logistical problems, including the arrival of Covid which still blights the world, this has not been held

since 2019. It is unlikely, at this stage, that this will be re-introduced due to manpower shortages and lack of knowledge of the dassie counting sites.

In Brian Marshall's editorial in *The Honeyguide* on this survey reaching its 50th anniversary, he writes "The most significant feature of the Black Eagle survey is that it has always been run by volunteers, enthusiastic amateurs whose principal objective is probably to enjoy the Matopos, enjoy the eagles, and savour the satisfaction of gathering valuable data. The survey has never been externally funded, which is truly remarkable when one considers how much science in Africa has floundered for a lack of funding (this often means donor funding).

We are truly grateful to several well-wishers who, over the years, have generously donated to the survey, the support from Birdlife Zimbabwe National Office in recent years allowing us to retain monies collected from calendar sales in Matabeleland as well as assisting with applying for the permit. The amazing bunch of "citizen scientists", past and present, who, over the 59 years, have given so wholeheartedly of their time, some of whom have claimed no compensation. Our thanks to Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority as without their co-operation, this milestone would not have been reached.

Thank you to all those who assisted with this presentation.

Valerie Gargett ended her book with these words: "*It is intended to continue the Breeding Survey for as long as circumstances and the availability of helpers permit.*"

Sixty years on, and the Breeding Survey continues. We salute all the volunteers over the years that have contributed to this extraordinary achievement.

The Matobo Conservation Society is a supporter of and contributor to the annual Black Eagle Survey

7 – MATOPOS HERITAGE TRAIL RUN

The 8th annual edition of the Matopos Heritage Trail Run took place in late August with 32 riders in all, and a number of supporters. Once again, day one was hot and clear at 33C though a breeze did help, but on day 2 the weather changed to a maximum of 13C, with mist and heavy guti! The same conditions as the last two years!

The scenery on day one was again lovely, with a number of *Brachystegia* trees coming into their spring foliage, and some water in the streams along the way. Visibility of day two's scenery was of course compromised, but the cooler conditions made for easier running.

For the second-year runners had a choice of the Heritage 50km run (day 1 = 30km; day 2 = 20km) or the Challenge run 63km (day 1 = 42km; day 2 = 21km). Only a handful of runners did the Challenge and congratulations to Leo Teede on being the first in each day.

8 – BELOW NORMAL RAINS FORECAST

Herald, Wednesday 6th September 2023

According to a preliminary weather forecast, Zimbabwe expects to receive normal to below normal rainfall with parts of the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces getting below normal rains for the beginning of the 2023/24 planting season. In a statement, the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry said the bulk of Matabeleland North, parts of Midlands covering Gokwe North and South districts, parts of Matabeleland South province covering Bulilima district will receive below normal to normal rainfall for the sub-season October-November-December. The period October to March is the main rainfall season over most parts of the country. The Meteorological Services Department (MSD) issued the statement at a National Climate Outlook Forum (NACOF), a platform where stakeholders across climate sensitive sectors discuss the implications of the expected seasonal rainfall outlook for planning purposes. The outlook for October 2023 to March 2024 is that

for the October to December (OND) 2023 period, there will be increased chances of normal-to-below normal rainfall for most parts of the country except the greater part of Matabeleland North, parts of Bulawayo Metropolitan, parts of Midlands and parts of Mashonaland West which have increased chances of below normal-to-normal rainfall.

9 – HUMAN -WILDLIFE CONFLICTS THREATENING TOURISM: ZIMPARKS

With Acknowledgement to Newsday Zimbabwe, 5th July 2023

Competition for space between human beings and wildlife is threatening the country's tourism industry, a senior government official has said. Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) executive director Fulton Mangwanya said wildlife and wild-lands were the backbone of the country's tourism. Speaking during the Mid-Zambezi Region chiefs' biodiversity conservation indaba in Kariba recently, Mangwanya called on all stakeholders to combine forces for the protection and preservation of both natural and cultural heritages.

"Today due to the ever-growing population in Africa and the whole world, we have noted with concern the competition for space between humans and wildlife," he said. "As a result, landscapes are increasingly fragmented, hence disrupting free movement of wildlife, leading to more frequent human-wildlife conflicts." He said the situation had been made worse by destruction of forests, unplanned and uncontrolled veldfires which alter the wildlife habitat. "Our tourism is wildlife-based, hence the need to guard jealously our heritage for the present and future generations," Mangwanya said.

He appealed to traditional leaders and local authorities to ensure that there is enough space for wild animals and come up with futuristic plans to take conservation initiatives to a higher level. "As a country, Zimbabwe is endowed with rich biological diversity and is one of the world's torch-bearers when it comes to conservation of wildlife and other natural resources," Mangwanya said. "This of course is strongly supported by the socio-economic benefits which are closely linked to our philosophy of sustainable conservation."

Speaking at the same event, African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) country director Olivia Mufute called for conservation of wildlife in Zimbabwe. "Wildlife is the backbone of the economy, hence the need to conserve what we have," she said.

The indaba, organised with support from AWF, was meant to share experiences on human and wildlife conflicts, challenges faced in resources protection as well as sharing information on emerging issues in biodiversity conservation.

10 – 240% JUMP IN TOURISTS AT PARKS

With acknowledgement to the Herald, 2nd June 2023

Zimbabwe has recorded a 240 percent increase of tourists at national parks within a year, the majority being locals, as the country's tourism sector continues to rebound and gallop towards its US\$5 billion per annum target. Statistics released by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Zimparks) show that the country is recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic after recording an increase of 397 586 tourists, with locals accounting for 182 350, while foreigners were 179 980. In 2021, 286 344 tourists visited the parks, 251 088 (domestic) and 35 256 (international) while in 2022 it then boomed as 683 930 tourists were recorded, 468 694 (domestic) with 215 236 being international ones.

Zimparks spokesperson Mr Tinashe Farawo said the country witnessed an increase in terms of tourists, especially domestic visitors since Covid-19. He said in 2019, domestic visitors were 454 140 international and 474 251 locals, totalling 928 391, but the figures dropped drastically in 2020 due to Covid-19, with domestic tourists being 173 752 while international arrivals were at 58 174, the overall being 231 936. "If you look at the nearly one million tourists who visited our parks in 2019 and the 600 000 who visited last year you will see that in 2019, between 60 to 70 percent were foreigners,"

said Mr Farawo. “Now things have changed. If you look at the 600 000 plus which visited our parks last year, you will see that more than 400 000 were locals and the balance of course foreign tourists.” Mr Farawo said they would keep on encouraging people to visit Zimbabwe which has one of the world’s seven natural wonders. “This is in line with the Government’s policy of creating a US\$5 billion tourism economy in the near future so, we will continue to do more programmes tailor-made so that more people can visit,” he said. “Programmes like ‘stay now and pay later’ will also be implemented as we move towards that target.”

11 – ED THREATENS RHODE’S GRAVE

With acknowledgement to Newsday Zimbabwe, 3rd July 2023

PRESIDENT Emmerson Mnangagwa has threatened to “take action” if the British failed to claim the remains of Cecil John Rhodes buried at Matobo in Matabeleland South province. He made the remarks during a Zanu PF rally in Bulilima, Matabeleland South, on Saturday. “There is this place where Rhodes is sleeping at Matobo. At one time when we became independent, the late Josiah Tungamirai and Solomon Mujuru came to me and said we want to go and blast Rhodes’s grave because he is a colonialist.

“It will come a time when the heads of our ancestors such as Mbuya Nehanda will come back, and they should take their dead ones. I stopped them,” Mnangagwa said. He indicated that plans to bring back the remains of the ancestors’ heads from Britain were now at an advanced stage. “If they ask for him (Rhodes) we will give them. If they do not need him, we will see what we can do about it,” he added.

Rhodes died in 1902 and was buried in Matobo Hills National Park, south of Bulawayo, as per his wish.

Calls for the exhumation of his remains date back to 2012.

The late former President Robert Mugabe blocked war veterans and Zanu PF politicians from exhuming his remains, saying his legacy was part of the country’s history. The veterans had blamed his grave for causing erratic rainfall patterns in the Matobo area. The gravesite is a tourist attraction, visited by thousands of tourists both local and foreign. It lies at the summit of a hill known as the “World’s View.”

In 2003, Matobo Hills was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Rhodes was a colonialist and politician who made his fortune in South Africa’s diamond fields. He founded the De Beers diamond firm and left most of his fortune to benefit the nascent Rhodesia and the Oxford University Scholarship programme that bears his name.

12 – ILLEGAL ORCHIDS ON SALE AGAIN

The sale of indigenous orchids, notably *Anselia africana* (Leopard Spot), by vendors at Bradfield Shopping Centre has resurfaced. This practice may extend to Hillside, Morningside, and other centres. We urge members to ensure that no support is extended to this illegal practice, and to report the vendors to either the ZRP **2241161**, National Parks **0773 166 751** or to EMA **0712 004 696**.

NATIONAL PARKS WILDLIFE ACT 14/75 (1 August 1990 Amended)

S 35-93 Specially Protected Indigenous Plants

No person, subject to certain provisions, shall pick any specially protected indigenous plant.

<u>Specific name</u>	<u>Common name</u>
<i>Cysbanthes</i>	<i>Fire Lilies</i>
<i>Cyathia</i>	<i>Tree Ferns</i>
<i>Aloe</i>	<i>Aloe, all species, including hybrids</i>
<i>Gloriosa superba</i>	<i>Flame Lily</i>
<i>Epiphytic/lithophilic</i>	<i>Orchids</i>



Our Chairman was threatened by the vendors for taking the picture copied to the left.

The vendors claimed that the prohibition on the sale of the orchids, allegedly from the Eastern Highlands, was racist as white hunters from overseas were allowed to hunt lion. Our Chairman advised that he was not responsible for the laws of the country, but to abide by them. In any event, the hunting of lion is controlled by National Parks, with revenue going to the country. The same National Parks are responsible for preventing the illegal harvest of protected plant species, which include all orchid species in Zimbabwe.

The authorities have been notified.

13 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

29 th October 2023	Field Trip to Rowallan Park
25 th November 2023	30 th Anniversary Dinner at The Farmhouse
26 th November 2023	Annual General Meeting at The Farmhouse
20-24 th March 2024	15 th Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge
6 th April 2024	Matopos 33-Miler

14 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024 are now due. 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 matoboconservationsociety@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 to date.

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