

**NEWSLETTER 125 / JULY 2024**

**1 – MATOPOS CLEAN UP**

At short notice, the MCS was able to assist in a Clean-up along the Matopos Road. We hope that measures will be put in place to stop the terrible littering along our highways, and on the Park roads.



## 2 - NEXT EVENT

Date Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2024

Venue Mangwe Pass

Meet 08:00am, Natural History Museum

Travel On the 8<sup>th</sup> July 1854 the first wagon rolled over the Mangwe Pass. To mark the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we will be joining with the Pioneer Society, History Society and Friends of the Museum to visit the Mangwe Pass.

We will also use the opportunity to visit Lee's house and cemetery, from about the same era, as well as two of the 1896 Forts constructed along the route during that troubled period. This is a significant anniversary for this part of the world, and consequently friends are more than welcome. Please bring your picnic lunch. If possible we will arrange for an 1894 wagon ride as well – at extra cost but details will follow.

Trucks are preferred but cars will certainly be suitable. Please remember that there is a Zinara toll gate at Figtree. Also NOTE CHANGE OF MEETING PLACE AND TIME.

Don't forget your sunblock, hat, picnic lunch and drinks! Might also need to come prepared for a cool day. There will be a talk at each point of interest.

## 3 – REPORT BACK – THREE SISTERS

On Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, following a couple of cold grey days, we assembled at Cresta Churchill under a mackerel sky and travelled a short way along the Matopos Road to Three Sisters. ZimParks had given us permission to enter the Three Sisters area to see the project undertaken by your Society, with the generous support of Brightlight Foundation, Leichtenstein.

Apart from the provision of rooms, we have installed water and solar power, and are currently providing beds and basic furniture to assist the ZimParks staff. The facility includes a kitchen area and ablutions. The construction of the Rangers Base has seen a vast improvement in the living conditions of the staff. We have also extended the water to game troughs in the area to ensure water is available in the dry months of the year. Hopefully, we can now secure and protect the wildlife in the Three Sisters and Upper Mtsholeli area.

Our next target is to fence the area to the south of Three Sisters up to Imadzi Hill, in the hope that this will secure the entire upper Mtsholeli Valley from cattle.

We also took the opportunity to see work carried out on earlier fencing projects as well – also supported by Brightlight Foundation, and Beit Trust and Educasa Foundation.

We also thank Stuart Danks for his support in our fundraising efforts.



Meeting at the Ranger base



Ranger base facilities





Newly erected fence



Boundary fence in place



Morning tea



Walk to the First Sister!

#### **4 – PREPARATIONS FOR KING MZILIKAZI COMMEMORATIONS BEGIN**

Preparations for ‘Umgubho wenkosi uMzilikazi,’ King Mzilikazi’s annual commemorations to mark 156 years since the death of the founder of the Ndebele nation, have begun. Mthwakazi kaMzilikazi Cultural Association, Dingani Likhwa Tshabangu representative said the commemorations will be held at the Mhlahlandlela memorial site on September 7 this year. Tshabangu sent an SOS for cash and other materials to make the event a success – *Southern Eye*, Saturday June 22,

#### **5 – THE DARK LIGHT: ZIMBABWE’S ENERGY NIGHTMARE**

*With acknowledgement to Mail & Guardian, June 13 2024.*

Harare - Zimbabwe’s electricity deficit has been linked to widespread deforestation as illegal loggers are increasingly cutting down trees to produce charcoal, which is sold in major cities such as Bulawayo and Harare.

Desperate to earn a living, locals like 42-year-old Loveness Ncube, a Hwange resident, are frequently arrested and fined by law enforcement officials. Illegally producing charcoal has sustained her family for 20 years.

She said she has become a major supplier to those needing charcoal in Bulawayo. Sometimes, the sellers are forced to pay bribes to move their products.

“While we have clients, it’s no longer easy now we have rangers from ZimParks [Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority] who conduct surveillance and arrest those they find,” she said. “Sometimes you have to pay a bribe just to be allowed safe passage.”

For years, Zimbabwe has experienced significant power shortages largely due to lack of investment in energy generation infrastructure, with the situation changing following President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s rise to power in 2017.

His administration presided over the construction of the Hwange Thermal Power Station Units 7 and 8 Expansion Project, following an investment of US\$1.5-billion by China in 2018. It is now the country’s major supplier of electricity, having added 600MW to the national grid.

While the government has made strides to address power shortages, the country still has a deficit of more than 300MW, according to the Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority. Public records indicate that at least 300,000 households still need to be connected to the national grid.

This energy gap has seen a rise in the illegal cutting down of trees, with mopane trees being the main target because the wood is believed to produce the best quality coal. Mopane trees take 35 years to grow fully, but are cut down and burnt within minutes.

Charcoal production is outlawed in Zimbabwe, yet it is openly sold in Bulawayo's high-density suburbs and, unbeknown to most of its consumers, is causing widespread environmental damage.

Experts worry that if this situation is not averted, the country will lose a huge chunk of land to deforestation. According to the country's forestry regulator, the Forestry Commission, about 330,000 hectares of forestry cover is being lost each year.

Matabeleland North is feeling the adverse effects and the commission says more than 14,302 hectares of land was lost in the province through deforestation between 2001 and 2023.

Forestry Commission chief conservator for Bulawayo and Matabeleland North, Armstrong Tembo, linked electricity demand to the thriving charcoal business. He said that "as electricity consumers turn to charcoal, the environment suffers."

"It's really devastating, we are talking about hardwood indigenous timber which takes a long time to mature," he explained. "What is disturbing is these are people that have poached the timber and have had no investment, so for them it's a quick buck, and they will sell it for a song without giving back to the communities and doing any afforestation."

Tembo said it has become increasingly difficult to arrest some of the illegal loggers because they "innovate" to evade the law by constantly changing their strategies.

According to him, existing legislation does not deter culprits from committing this crime, time and time again. He even referred to the punishment as "a pittance."

Zimbabwe's Forest Act [19:05], created to protect the country's forests, penalises offenders by handing down fines up to Level 8, equivalent to US\$500, or a custodial sentence not exceeding two years in jail. Although arrests have been made, public records show that only fines have been imposed on individuals found to have broken the law.

"When someone is arrested, they pay a fine and go back home and indulge again because fines are not deterrent enough," said Tembo. "What we are advocating for now is custodial sentences. Hopefully this might awaken the culprits."

Another hotspot for the illegal charcoal business is Hwange, mostly due to its proximity to the Hwange National Park and Hwange Colliery mines.

Nxolelani Ncube, environment and natural resources officer at the Hwange Rural District Council, called the crime "well-coordinated".

"Some of the illegal loggers use haulage trucks that would be transporting coal from Hwange Colliery mines to smuggle their products beyond the district," he said.

Ncube said that as law enforcement agents have turned up the heat against illegal loggers, they have responded by changing their strategy, including operating during the cover of night.

"People are even bringing chainsaws and quite a lot of undesired methods are being used to cut down the trees," he said.

Although the district council has been running awareness campaigns in collaboration with ZimParks, the Forestry Commission and police, their efforts have not yet yielded any real results.

Ncube explained that there should be more engagement with the judicial system and that "maybe it's a matter of understanding the magnitude [of the deforestation] and what these trees have to offer us".

Although it is challenging to stop the demand for charcoal due to power shortages, Ncube suggested people consider adopting renewable energy sources instead. "People in urban areas should try to use biogas digesters, they should use LP gas and solar power, and deviate from using natural resources such as charcoal, which is destructive," he said.

Hwange's dependency on coal makes things challenging for environmental lobbyists.

Daniel Sithole, the executive director of Hwange-based Green Shango Environmental Trust, said more needs to be done to stop deforestation in the town and beyond.

“The reduction of carbon sinking in the forest is a challenge as Hwange is a coal-mining town responsible for fossil fuels,” he said. “We need these trees to make sure they carbon sink our excess carbon while mining is in continuation.”

Carbon sinks help to regulate the climate by absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. This is why having thick forest cover near where coal is mined and burned is so important.

Sithole added that illegal charcoal production is also fuelling human-wildlife conflicts within the Hwange National Park, as communities encroach on animal habitats to seek livelihoods.

For Brenda Sibanda, a charcoal vendor in Bulawayo’s Cowdray Park, environmental issues are far from a concern.

“Most of my clients have not been connected to the national grid,” she explained. Charcoal is also cheaper than liquefied petroleum (LP) gas and firewood. Even those connected to power come to us when there is load-shedding,” she said.

By selling charcoal, Sibanda is able to support her family and pay school fees. She sells a plastic bag of charcoal for US\$1, and a 20-litre bucket for US\$4.

In April this year, Vice-President Constantino Chiwenga said the country is in the process of reviewing its laws to deter forest crimes. He was addressing participants at a human-wildlife conference, held on the sidelines of the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair in Bulawayo.

“The government has taken proactive steps to enhance the regulatory responsibilities of the Forestry Commission,” he said. “The Forest Act has been revised through the Forest Act Amendment Bill, with the aim of strengthening forest protection and combating veld fires through the introduction of mandatory and deterrent sentences. These legislative measures demonstrate our commitment to preserving our precious forests for future generations.”

In addition to this, he said that protecting the environment opens doors for international funding and sustainable protection of the environment.

## **6 – ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION REACHES ALARMING PROPORTIONS**

*With acknowledgement to Newsday Zimbabwe, 7 June 2024*

ZIMBABWE continues to face a myriad of environmental problems ranging from pollution, mining waste dumps, resource depletion, deforestation, and land degradation, according to Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG).

In a statement to mark the World Environment Day running under the theme: Land Restoration, Desertification, and Drought Resilience, on Wednesday, CNRG said several communities were witnessing environmental degradation on a scale never seen in the country’s recorded history.

CNRG said a significant portion of Zimbabwe’s arable land had been rendered unusable due to mining activities.

“Zimbabwe’s natural resources — from its vast woodlands and wildlife to its mineral wealth and water sources — are the foundation of the economy and the lifeblood of communities,” CNRG said.

“Currently, these resources are under increasing threat from unsustainable mining practices, weak governance, and the devastating impacts of climate change.

“Integrating development with robust environmental management has become a major concern. The mining industry thrives at the expense of the environment, posing a serious threat, especially to mining host communities and future generations.”

CNRG said the organisation had documented numerous cases of illegal mining, deforestation and other environmentally destructive activities that are degrading Zimbabwe’s ecosystems and depriving local communities of their rightful benefits.

In a related development, United Nations resident and humanitarian co-ordinator Edward Kallon said droughts could affect over three-quarters of the world's population by 2050.

"With up to 40% of the planet's land degraded, directly impacting half of the world's population and the number and duration of droughts increasing by 29% since 2000, urgent action is needed," he said as he commemorated the World Environment Day at the Geo Pomona Waste Management Site in Harare on Wednesday.

Kallon said there was need to strengthen policy or legal frameworks in agriculture and land management, including sustainable land use planning and incentives for sustainable farming and agro-forestry.

"Scale up resilience and community asset-building initiatives, focusing on young people and climate-resilient farming practices such as water harvesting and management technologies.

"Enhance research and development — agronomy and crop research, introducing drought-tolerant crop varieties and seed and optimising productivity. The youth can play a vital role in this," he said.

Kallon added there was also needed to invest in climate-smart, environmentally friendly local institutions and markets to ensure sustainable food security.

## **7 – BRAZZAVILLE DECLARATION PRIORITISES DECADE OF TREE PLANTING**

*With acknowledgement to the Herald, 8 July 2024.*

The United Nations must prioritise the decade of planting trees to fight climate change and its dire effects on the people and environment, the Brazzaville Declaration states.

The declaration came at the end of the four-day first International Conference on Afforestation and Reforestation, where Zimbabwe's delegation was led by Vice President Kembo Mohadi.

Environment, Climate and Wildlife Minister Dr Sithembiso Nyoni, Permanent Secretary in VP Mohadi's Office Dr Benson Martins Dube and Permanent Secretary for Local Government and Public Works Dr John Basera also attended.

Trees and forests not only lock in carbon, reducing greenhouse gases, but protect the ground and stop erosion.

Apart from host President Denis Sassou Nguesso, other leaders who attended the official opening of the conference were President Umaro Sissoco Embalo of Guinea-Bissau, President Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic, President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, President Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia, and President Brice Oligui Nguema of Gabon.

From Southern Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, and Madagascar joined Zimbabwe in sending representatives.

Republic of Congo Minister for Forest Economy, Rosalie Matondo, read out the Brazzaville Declaration.

It says African leaders called for "the adoption of a resolution by the 79th General Assembly of the United Nations to officially endorse" the plan ahead of the annual meeting that takes place in New York in September.

The leaders also called on the UN to hold an international conference on reforestation biennially and on a rotating basis, from one continent to another.

The UN should realise the "crucial importance for the planet" and declare that the planting of more trees would help combat climate change through reducing erosion.

Trees also help generate income, while also being used in the health sector for the production of medicine.

In his remarks, VP Mohadi said the conference had come at an "opportune time when mankind is faced with an existential threat due to global warming, deforestation, floods and famine, occasioned by climate change."

Zimbabwe, he said, had declared a state of disaster following a poor 2023-2024 summer cropping season due to erratic rains caused by the El Nino phenomenon.

“As I speak, the whole Southern African sub-region is facing a severe drought due to El Nino weather occurrences,” he said.

“We, therefore, applaud the Government of the Republic of Congo for hosting this auspicious conference at this important juncture in the lives and history of humanity.

“Let us all put all hands-on deck to reverse this global phenomenon. Let us do so, not only for our own sake, but for the sake of future generations to come.”

Zimbabwe had instituted a reforestation levy on tobacco growers in cognisance of the negative effects arising from growing and curing the crop. The levy is dedicated to tree planting and reforestation.

In addition, Government had designated the first Saturday of every December as a tree planting day during which the national psyche is mobilised towards planting more trees, particularly indigenous ones.

President Sassou Nguesso said the conference was the beginning of “a process of research and a life-saving response.”

“The situation we already know remains worrying (and) the need for action is clear. It’s all about the will to act and putting in the necessary effort,” he said.

African Union Commission chair Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat said the greatest challenge today was not only to stop the disappearance of forests, but also to restore those that have disappeared and create new ones.

Kazakhstan’s advisor to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Special Representative on International Environmental Cooperation, Zulfiya Suleimenova, said the Eastern European country was committed to biodiversity and ecosystem preservation.

Kazakhstan intends to plant two billion trees by 2027, with 843 million planted between 2021 and last year.

The conference, which attracted over 2 000 delegates, was part of an “African and global decade of afforestation and reforestation” launched by President Sassou Nguesso at COP27 in Egypt in 2022.

Since 1986, Congo has declared November 6 every year a national holiday during which everyone should plant at least one tree. Kenya has also declared a special holiday on November 13, so that people plant trees.

The conference was organised by the Congolese government, the African Union Commission, the UN Forum on Forests, and the African Forest Forum.

## **8 - FROM THE FIRST PAGE - MATOPOS CLEAN UP APPRECIATION**

5 July 2024 saw our inaugural Matopo Highway Clean Up take its first baby step towards keeping our UNESCO HERITAGE SITE of Matopos National Park litter free. May I extend my sincere gratitude to EMA Mat South Province for taking their time to grace this momentous occasion, thank you, Matopo Conservation Society for 130 bin liners and 240 bottles of water, Rowallan for manpower and transport, Chief Nyangazonke Ndiweni for transport and manpower, Gulati Community Development Trust, for human capital mobilisation of volunteers, ,President Elect for Rotary Club of Matopos, ZIMPARKS Matopo, EHT Nyatsanza, United Youth Voices Through Advocacy for volunteer mobilisation, Matopo Secondary, REPS and a third school(forgot name) NewDay’s Magaret Lubinda for media coverage, Keyona TV representatives, Greenhut representatives and all volunteers who took their time to restore our land to its naturalness. In total we had 52 volunteers and over 100 school learners.



## 9 – RAINFALL

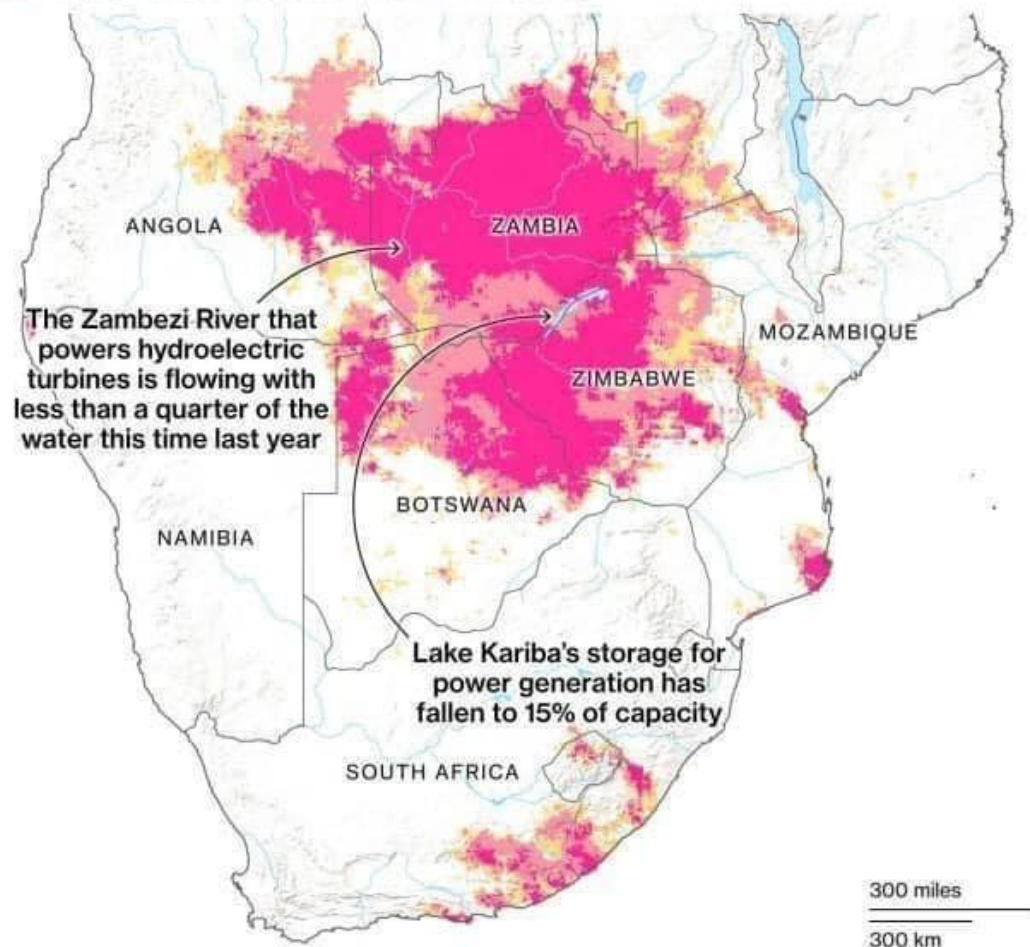
Just when we thought we were finished with the rainfall for 2023/4 season, June surprised us with 12mm in the eastern Matopos. In the last week of the month cold drizzle turned to rain for a couple of days, giving a final small top-up.

Rainfall for the season – Western 187mm, Central 447mm, Eastern 452mm

### Parts of Southern Africa Have Had the Driest February on Record

Preliminary satellite data shows El Niño's severe impact

■ Driest on record ■ Second-driest ■ Third-driest

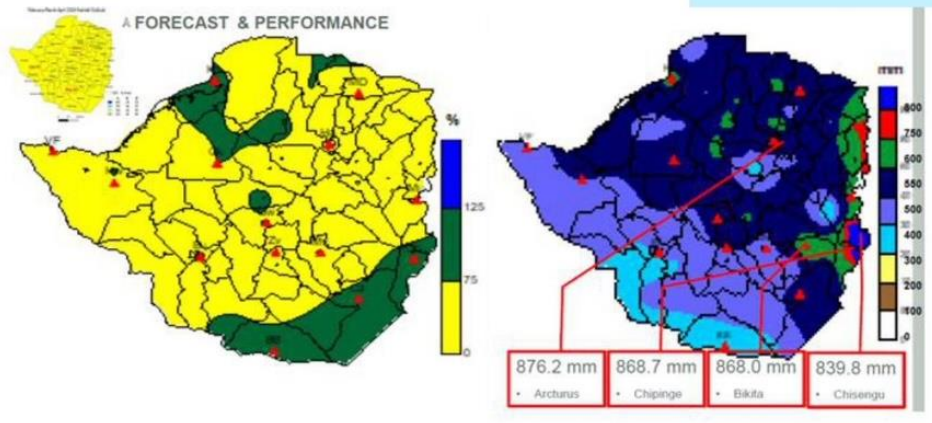


Source: UC Santa Barbara Climate Hazards Center  
Note: Preliminary data from Feb. 1–28; records started in 1981.



## END OF THE 2023/2024 RAINFALL SEASON

The 2023/2024 Rainfall Season experienced below-normal rains, primarily due to the El Nino phenomenon. The forecast made by the Meteorological Services Department before the start of the season accurately predicted this (small map on the top left of Figure 2.1). Most areas of Zimbabwe received less rainfall than usual, (yellow colour in Figure 2.1 a), with only a few patches in the southern and northwestern parts of the country receiving rainfall within the normal range. This rainfall pattern has implications for various sectors, such as agriculture, where farmers faced challenges in crop production and water resource management.



Seasonal forecast and performance (b) Actual seasonal rainfall totals from October 2023 to mid-April 2024

The seasonal rainfall accumulation totals map in Figure 1.1 (b) indicates **Arcturus** as having the highest (876.2mm). Other areas which had notable falls surpassing 800mm, were **Chipinge** (868.7mm), **Bikita** (868.0mm), and **Chisengu** (839.8mm). The extreme south west parts of the country have rainfall totals below 250mm, namely **Matopos Research Station** (249.3mm), **Beitbridge** (240.1mm) **Chitupasi** (235.3mm), **Figtree** (230.3mm).

## EL NINO UPDATE: BETTER NEWS

Although the El Nino phenomenon observed during the summer did not reach the level of a strong El Nino, there are indications of a transition to La Nina. Historically, strong El Ninos have been followed by two consecutive seasons of La Nina. The intensity of this transition can vary, but it is expected to have a significant impact on weather patterns during the spring and summer seasons. The current projections suggest an increasing likelihood of La Nina developing by June-August 2024 as shown in Figure 3.1. Understanding these weather patterns is important for various sectors and stakeholders to prepare and adapt to potential changes in precipitation, temperature, and related impacts.

## 10 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

23-25 <sup>th</sup> August 2024	Matopos Heritage Trail Run
17th November 2024	Annual General Meeting
24 – 25 <sup>th</sup> November	Matopos Classic MTB

## 11 – 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](mailto: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](http://www.matobo.org)**

Visit our website, and make use of the RESOURCES page for downloadable maps, checklists and information. Please email queries to [matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com](mailto:matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com)

### **Facebook**

Don't forget to join our Facebook page, with nearly 700 members now.

### **The Natural History of the Matobo Hills**

This MCS publication is available at the Natural History Museum for US\$30.

## **12 – MATOPO MISSION FIRE**

In the early hours of Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July, a fire broke out in one of the boys dormitories at Matopo Mission destroying the accommodation and possessions for 52 boys. Fortunately, no one was hurt in the fire.

The MCS is appealing to any well-wishers who may like to assist with either the refurbishment or assistance to the Matopo Mission to rebuild the facility.

## **13 – IN MEMORIUM**

John Minshull – 24 March 1936 – 6 July 2024

We were saddened to hear of the passing of John Minshull on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July. Another of the giants from the Natural History Museum, and a loss to both the Museum and the environmental world in general.

John graduated from Rhodes University in 1958 as an entomologist and as a result always had an interest in all things creepy crawlly. His first job with his young wife Jacqueline was at Lake Sibaya, and in 1968 he joined National Parks and Wildlife Department as a Fish Research Officer on Lake Kariba and then Lake Kyle. He joined the Queen Victoria Museum in Harare as Ichthyologist in March 1978 after completing his Masters in Tropical Resources Ecology and in October of the same year he took over as Director. With the restructuring of National Museums and Monuments in 1981 John stepped down as director and he, his collection and his family moved to what became the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo where both he and his wife worked as curators for many years. John took early retirement in 1992 and went teaching at CBC and consulting on farm dams and fish farms. He then joined ACOL chemicals where he was tasked with writing up years of research while he mastered the art of typing and the ways of a computer!

John was an avid reader with many interests and his later years he was studying human evolution and bacteria!! And was a fountain of knowledge on many things. He loved jazz music and had played the double bass, collected stone age implements, loved aloes and cacti, was a Bowls Maestro, and always wore his beloved hat, long socks, and khaki. He has a great sense of humour and conversations were always lively and centred around a beer or two!

John was best known by all for his contribution as an ichthyologist, ecologist, and fisherman with many complaints that his "Fishes of Zimbabwe" was out of print and copies hard to find. His contribution to aquatic science was considerable, his fieldwork in Zimbabwe extensive and the size and scientific value of the museum fish collection is his legacy to the nation. He will be missed by all, and your deepest condolences, thoughts and prayers go to his daughter Pippa and his grandchildren. A life well spent.