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| [**matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com**](mailto:matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com) | [**www.matobo.org**](https://matobo.org/) | **Welfare No: W/0 30/94** |

**NEWSLETTER 127 / NOVEMBER 2024**

1 – MCS PROJECTS

Your Society has been busy in the Matobo National Park.

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| THREE SISTERS RANGER BASE | THREE SISTERS RANGER BASE |
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| NSWATUGI CAVE SITE MUSEUM | NSWATUGI CAVE SITE MUSEUM |
|  |  |
| REPAIRS AT MALEME | FRESH SIGNAGE AT SANDY SPRUIT |

2 - NEXT EVENT

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| Date | Sunday 17th November 2024 |
| Venue | Rowallan Park |
| Meet | 08:15am, Cresta Lodge |
| Travel | All vehicles |

We will meet at Rowallan Park on Sunday 17th November to hold our Annual General Meeting. The AGM itself will take place at 11:30am, so folk can make their way out at their leisure. For those who have not previously visited the revamped Rowallan Park it is a chance to explore. We hope to see you there. Please note that Park entry fees are payable. MCS subscriptions can be paid at the meeting.

3 – REPORT BACK – FORT USHER

Sunday 16th October saw a well-attended outing to the historic area of Fort Usher. In trying to maintain chronological order, we started at Usher’s Kop where a short climb to the summit brought us to Usher’s House (or the ruins thereof). With magnificent views around, we were given a brief history of William Usher and his arrival in 1870. We then returned to the cars for tea which was held in the lovely cool deep shade of the Mkuni Tree (*Paranari curatifolia*) adjacent to the Second Indaba Site. It was under this tree that Mrs Colenbrander and her sister Mrs Smith remained, whilst Cecil Rhodes conducted the Indaba. Following our refreshment, we progressed to the Indaba Site where Rhodes, once again unarmed, had met with all the chiefs to ratify the decision of the first Indaba, namely to suspend hostilities. The hill was given the name *Lahlamkont* “*the place where the spears were laid down*”. Enjoying the clear sunshine, with only the birds calling it was hard to imagine the tension that must have played out here 128 years ago. It was decided to retain our shady tree for lunch, during which our raffle draw was held.

Thereafter we drove back to Fort Usher itself, passing the old Hospital, and then walking to the site of the Fort itself – which had been largely levelled after 1897 when the BSA Police Camp had been built. The monument stone was located and then we proceeded across the Nkantolo river to the old Vet’s House subsequently owned by Martin Rosslee, and now sadly derelict.

4 - RHINO MAN FILM & RAFFLE

Between the entrance fees and the raffle, we raised just over $700 which will be used to assist Rangers in the Matobo National Park



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| JONO WATERS SHARING THE HISTORY OF THE MKUNI TREE WITH MEMBERS PRESENT. | THE OLD ROSS LEE HOUSE, ORIGINALLY THE VETERINARIAN’S RESIDENCE |
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| FORT USHER 1896 | ORIGINAL MONUMENT PLAQUE |
|  |  |
| SITE OF USHER’S HOUSE AND STORE | SECOND INDABA SITE AND MKUNI TREE |

5 – MATOBO RHINO TRUST RESTORES LUSHONGWE PLATFORM

The MRT restored the Lushongwe platform, that had been burnt down in a veldt fire, in the Whovi Game Park, They took the opportunity to sink a borehole, equipped with a solar operated pump to upgrade the water pan adjacent to the viewpoint.

6 – STUDY FINDS DROUGHT AREAS HAVE TREBLED IN SIZE SINCE 1980’s

*With acknowledgement to Stephanie Hegarty and Talha Burki, BBC World Service*

Nyakuma and her husband Sunday, who live in a village in South Sudan, struggle to find food due to drought. The area of land surface affected by drought has trebled since the 1980s, a new report into the effects of climate change has revealed.

Forty-eight per cent of the Earth’s land surface had at least one month of extreme drought last year, according to analysis by the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change, up from an average of 15% during the 1980s.

Almost a third of the world (30%) experienced extreme drought for three months or longer in 2023. In the 1980s, the average was 5%.

The new study offers some of the most up-to-date global data on drought, marking just how fast it is accelerating.

The threshold for extreme drought is reached after six months of very low rainfall or very high levels of evaporation from plants and soil, or both. It poses an immediate risk to water and sanitation, food security and public health, and can affect energy supplies, transportation networks and the economy.

The causes of individual droughts are complicated, because there are lots of different factors that affect the availability of water, from natural weather events to the way humans use land.

But climate change is shifting global rainfall patterns, making some regions more prone to drought.

The increase in drought has been particularly severe in South America, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.

In South America's Amazon, drought is threatening to change weather patterns.

It kills trees that have a role to play in stimulating rainclouds to form, which disrupts delicately balanced rainfall cycles, creating a feedback loop leading to further drought.

Yet, at the same time as large sections of the land mass have been drying out, extreme rainfall has also increased.

In the past 10 years, 61% of the world saw an increase in extreme rainfall, when compared with a baseline average from 1961-1990.

The link between droughts, floods and global warming is complex. Hot weather increases the evaporation of water from soil which makes periods when there is no rain even drier.

But climate change is also changing rainfall patterns. As the oceans warm, more water evaporates into the air. The air is warming too, which means it can hold more moisture. When that moisture moves over land or converges into a storm, it leads to more intense rain.

The Lancet Countdown report found the health impacts of climate change were reaching record-breaking levels.

Drought exposed 151 million more people to food insecurity last year, compared with the 1990s, which has contributed to malnutrition. Heat-related deaths for over 65’s also increased by 167% compared to the 1990s.

Meanwhile, rising temperatures and more rain are causing an increase in mosquito-related viruses. Cases of dengue fever are at an all-time high and dengue, malaria and West Nile virus have spread to places they were never found before.

An increase in dust storms has left millions more people exposed to dangerous air pollution.

“The climate is changing fast," says Marina Romanello, executive director of the Lancet Countdown.

"It is changing to conditions that we are not used to and that we did not design our systems to work around."

For the series Life at 50 degrees, BBC World Service visited some of the hottest parts of the world, where demand for water was already high. We found that extreme drought and rainfall had further squeezed access to water.

Since 2020, an extreme and exceptional agricultural drought has gripped northeast Syria and parts of Iraq.

What remains of the Khabor river in Hasakah, Syria. In the past few years, Hasakah, a city of one million people, has run out of clean water.

“Twenty years ago, water used to flow into the Khabor River but this river has been dried for many years because there is no rain,” says Osman Gaddo, the Head of Water Testing, Hasakah City Water Board. “People have no access to fresh water.” When they can’t get water, people make their own wells by digging into the ground but the groundwater can be polluted, making people ill.

The drinking water in Hasakah comes from a system of wells 25 kilometres away, but these are also drying and the fuel needed to extract water is in short supply. Clothes go unwashed and families can’t bathe their children properly, meaning skin diseases and diarrhoea are widespread.

“People are ready to kill their neighbour for water,” one resident tells the BBC. “People are going thirsty every day.”

In South Sudan, 77% of the country had at least one month of drought last year and half the country was in extreme drought for at least six months. At the same time, more than 700,000 people have been affected by flooding.

“Things are deteriorating,” says village elder, Nyakuma. “When we go in the water, we get sick. And the food we eat isn’t nutritious enough”. Nyakuma has caught malaria twice in a matter of months.

Her family lost their entire cattle herd after flooding last year and now survive on government aid along with anything they can forage.

“Eating this is like eating mud,” says Sunday, Nyakuma’s husband, as he searches floodwater for the roots of waterlilies.

During a drought, rivers and lakes dry up and the soil gets scorched, meaning it hardens and loses plant cover. If heavy rain follows, water cannot soak into the ground and instead runs off, causing flash flooding.

“Plants can adapt to extreme drought, to an extent anyway, but flooding really disrupts their physiology," adds Romanello. "It is really bad for food security and the agricultural sector."

Unless we can reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and stop the global temperature from rising further, we can expect more drought and more intense rain. 2023 was the hottest year on record.

“At the moment, we are still in a position to just about adapt to the changes in the climate. But it is going to get to a point where we will reach the limit of our capacity. Then we will see a lot of unavoidable impacts,” says Romanello.

"The higher we allow the global temperature to go, the worse things are going to be”.

7 – VELD FIRES KILL TWO, DESTROY 750 000ha

*Sunday Mail, 29 September 2024*

2 people died while more than 750 000 hectares of land have been destroyed in over 3 200 incidents of veld fires since the start of the fire restriction period on July 1, the Environmental Management Agency has confirmed. This represents a staggering 49.5% increase in land loss compared to the same period in 2023, when approximately 507 000 hectares were burnt.

8 – ZIMPARKS ADDS FOUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

*Herald, Monday 7 October 2024*

Government has appointed new board members for the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks), at a time the Parks and Wildlife are facing both human and climate challenges. ZimParks, in terms of the Parks and Wildlife Act (Chapter 20:14) as read with the Public Entities Act Corporate Governance Act (Chapter 10:31) has appointed four new board members, increasing the number of the entities’ overall board to eight in total. The newly-appointed board members include Retired General Sibangumuzi Khumalo, Lesley Ncube, Mary Moses and Cecilia Dubiwa. During the inauguration meeting for the new board members held at the ZimParks head office in Harare last week, the Minister of Environment, Climate and Wildlife, Sithembiso Nyoni, called on the board to actively contribute to the overall performance of one of the country’s key parastatals. Their designations were not clear at the time of going to print.

9 – OUTRAGE OVER “KING” MUNHUMUTAPA’S PRIVATE MEMBERS BILL

*With acknowledgement to Southern Eye, 25 October 2024.*

The Private Member's Bill introduced by the self-appointed “King” Munhumutapa has angered people in the Matabeleland region opposed to the move arguing that they have their own monarchs. Munhumutapa's Bill seeks to amend section 283 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and transfer powers of appointing traditional leaders from the Minister of Local Government to him. The controversial Bill was tabled in Parliament recently, sparking an out- rage from Matabeleland. If it succeeds, the Bill will see Timothy Chiminya, who has imposed himself as “King” Munhumutapa and it was endorsed by the courts, having sole powers to appoint chiefs across the country. Chiminya argues that the Munhumutapa Kingdom represents a significant part of the historical governance structure of Zimbabwe, with roots deeply embedded in the region's traditions, customs and heritage.

10 – POACHING AT FLAGSHIP KZN RHINO RESERVE DROPS DRAMATICALLY AFTER EMERGENCY DEHORNING DRIVE

*With acknowledgment to Tony Camie, 19 September 2024*

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| Poaching at flagship KZN rhino reserve drops dramatically after emergency dehorning drive |
| THIS ORPHANED WHITE RHINO CALF WAS RESCUED BY WILDLIFE MANAGERS DURING A MAJOR DEHORNING OPERATION THAT HAS LED TO AN ESTIMATED 80% DECREASE IN RHINO POACHING IN THE HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI GAME RESERVE. (PHOTO: ZULULAND RHINO ORPHANAGE) |

On average, 26 rhinos were killed each month last year at the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve. The killings have dropped to single-digit figures after an emergency dehorning programme. The painful decision to remove the horns of the world’s most famous rhino population appears to be bearing fruit, with an estimated 80% drop in poaching in KwaZulu-Natal’s flagship Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve over the last six months. This is according to the World-Wide Fund For Nature (WWF), the conservation group that has provided significant funding and other support to the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife provincial conservation agency to mount an emergency dehorning programme in the 96,000ha reserve in central Zululand. The entire global population of southern white rhinos was hunted to the point of extinction across Africa nearly 150 years ago, leading to the establishment of the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Game Reserve in 1876. By 1920, fewer than 100 of these animals had managed to survive. Over many decades, the former Natal Parks Board guarded the survivors and gradually increased this remnant population to the point where there were enough animals to start restocking the Kruger National Park, along with many other game reserves across Africa where the species had become extinct. Later, an unprecedented wave of horn poaching led to heavy casualties in Kruger and other parks, prompting wildlife managers across SA to dehorn rhinos to make them less attractive targets for poachers. Whereas managers in Kruger began dehorning rhinos at least three years ago, Ezemvelo opted against this drastic strategy and continued to suffer heavy poaching losses as criminal syndicates switched their attention away from Kruger to focus on animals still bearing large horns. That began to change in April when Ezemvelo and WWF launched a major operation to dehorn the famous Zululand population. In a statement on Thursday, WWF said poaching had dropped by roughly 80% since mass dehorning began in the park. Whereas an estimated 307 rhinos were killed in this park alone last year (an average of 26 per month), poaching has now dropped to single-digit monthly figures. WWF said only four rhinos were poached in June, eight in July and four in August, whereas almost 30 animals were being slaughtered monthly immediately before the operation began.

**Orphaned calves rescued**

Though the exact number of rhinos left in the park has not been disclosed for security reasons, it is understood that more than 1,000 have been dehorned. At least eight rhino calves orphaned by poaching were rescued during the dehorning project.

# Jeff Cooke, WWF South Africa’s rhino conservation programme manager said: “Unfortunately, rhino poachers are indiscriminate and often target female rhinos that have small calves at foot. These calves are usually ignored by the poachers and are left behind to fend for themselves. Fortunately, these eight calves were discovered in time, due to the extensive aerial surveillance carried out during the dehorning operation.”

# WWF said that alongside the dehorning, the security capacity of Hluhluwe iMfolozi Game Reserve had steadily improved, with more security cameras and “smart fences” and the deployment of tracking and detection dogs.

# Many of the dehorned rhinos were fitted with tracking “pods” to allow for the remote monitoring of their movements. These devices are normally fitted above the horn stumps.

# Cooke commended the hard work and dedication of those involved in the dehorning but cautioned, “While we have seen a dramatic decline in poaching, we cannot let our guard down. We know that the criminal syndicates are always looking to capitalise on security lapses wherever they can find them.”

# The dehorning strategy appears to have paid immediate dividends, but several conservation managers have warned that dehorning displaces poaching to other, smaller reserves where rhinos still have horns.

# Cognisant of these risks, wildlife managers at the 20,000ha Babanango Private Game Reserve in northern KZN announced this week that their rhinos had also been dehorned.

# As more reserves resort to these desperate measures, even the dehorned rhinos are at risk as poachers may shoot these animals to extract their remnant horn stumps.

# There are also concerns that the massive costs associated with dehorning rhinos on a regular basis are not sustainable in the long term for cash-strapped government agencies and several private parks, and that funding could dry up due to “donor fatigue”.

11 – FIFTEEN SUCCUMB TO SNAKE BITES

*Daily News, Monday 28 October 2024*

Snake bites continue to increase in the country with a total of 3 087 cases and 15 deaths recorded since the start of the year. This was confirmed by the Ministry of Health on Friday in its latest surveillance report.

12 – RAINFALL

*Sunday Mail, 22 September 2204*

Early, above-normal rains forecast: The 2024/2025 rainy season is projected to begin earlier than usual in the southern parts of Zimbabwe, while the rest of the country can expect normal rainfall to start around mid-November, the Meteorological Services Department (MSD) has advised. According to the MSD’s early season rainfall outlook, there is an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall between October and December, followed by normal to above-normal rains between January and March. The country’s eastern regions are expected to receive the highest rainfall totals. The latest forecast comes as preparations for the summer cropping season are at an advanced stage, with the government having secured all inputs to support the climate-proofed PRESIDENTIAL INPUTS SUPPORT SCHEME. With the early onset of rains, the government has set Monday next week as the deadline for farmers under the Pfumvudza/Intwasa programme to complete land preparations.

* The first rains fell in late October, isolated and light.
* Rainfall measures at 7 November: Eastern Hills 15mm, Central Hills 13mm, Western Hills 25mm.

13 – MATOBO VILLAGERS BEMOAN INADEQUATE FOOD DISTRIBUTION

# *With acknowledgement to Southern Eye. 25 October 2024*

[](https://www.newsday.co.zw/southerneye/local/article/200034025/matobo-villagers-bemoan-inadequate-food-distribution)

Villagers in Shumbeshave (ward 23) in Matobo have lamented the inadequate distribution of food with only 15 households out of 228 currently receiving food aid from the government.

The government is distributing food aid to villagers severely affected by the El Niño-induced drought that wiped out crops after below normal rainfall during the 2023/2024 agricultural season.

In an interview with Southern Eye this week, ward 23 councillor Joseph Sibanda said the Social Welfare and the district development co-ordinator (DDC) had promised to address the problem.

“When they will do that, I do not know since the law states that councillors are not involved in the issues to do with who benefits from food aid,” he said.

“In the process of selecting who gets food aid these people pick each other according to friendships. Councillors are only involved when not enough people get food aid like the issue is now.”

Sibanda said some villagers in the ward had received a bucket of maize each for Isiphala Senduna.

Shumbeshabe villager Tshinde Mpofu also confirmed that 15 villagers in the area were benefiting from the government’s food aid programme.

“The DDC is the one who knows about this and how people are being selected. To say that they pick their friends and relatives would be speculation but I do think that something fishy is going on here. Other villages such as Halale, Dewe and Domboshaba had received food aid while we received nothing,” he said.

However, Matobo DDC Obey Chaputsira said he was not aware of the issue but contradicted himself saying authorities were working to address the challenge.

“You are not the first person to ask me about that. There is confusion between the boundaries of areas but we are addressing the issue,” he said.

“To say that not everyone is getting food, that is a misrepresentation of facts. There are issues to do with food distribution. We are not covering everyone at the moment but we are looking into increasing the numbers.”

Earlier this year, villagers in Maphisa alleged discrimination in food aid distribution adding that the government programme was biased.

14 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

17 November 2024 Annual General Meeting

24 – 25 November Matopos Classic MTB

26 – 30 March 2025 Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge

22 – 24 August 2025 Matopos Heritage Trail Run

15 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK

**Subscriptions**

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025 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 [**matoboconservatiosociety@gmail.com**](mailto: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, ideal for Christmas presents. 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**

Visit our website, and make use of the RESOURCES tab for maps and information.

Please email 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.

16 – OBITUARY Pathisa Nyathi (1951-2024)

Pathisa was one of the few Ndebele historians that successfully balanced the interests of the general public and academic investigation. He loved to delve into the rich cultural heritage of the people and places of western Zimbabwe and beyond. Indeed, he has even offered an Africanist perspective on the ancient and sacred landscape of the United Kingdom’s Stonehenge monument on the Salisbury Plains. But it was the Ndebele people and places that were closest to his heart. In many ways Pathisa has become the recognised oral historian of the Ndebele people and associate communities who live around about. He restored local pride in the complex heritage of the Matobo Hills and Matabeleland in general.

Born in the Kezi District in 1951, Pathisa Nyathi received his primary education at Sankonjana Primary School in Matobo District, before going onto Mazoe and Mzilikazi High Schools. With limited options then available he enrolled in Gwelo Teacher’s College where Pathisa specialised in science and graduated in 1973. For the next two decades he taught at various high schools across the country, although mostly in his beloved Matabeleland. In later years he was a competent headmaster. In 1996 Pathisa was appointed an Education Officer for Matabeleland North in the Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education. In 2002 he was appointed Deputy Provincial Education Officer in the same district. After retiring from school education, Pathisa took on a different role as a public voice, an educator who loved to share his intimate knowledge of Ndebele history.

Drawing on the proud Ndebele tradition of storytelling and historical memory, Pathisa Nyathi became involved in a multitude of projects and was appointed to several boards where his understanding of traditional values did much to reorientate public heritage discourse. He was not negative to the colonial voice, but he provided the necessary Africanist counterpoint. Pathisa always maintained that we should use current spellings/names, something that was difficult to achieve as some things happened in the past and at specifically named places in the past, like it or not. But there were other areas of mutual agreement including the need to seek a traditional perspective in symbolism, settlement patterns, historical biographies and the role of oral memory in reformatting and balancing the historical, text-based narrative. His advice will be greatly missed by many of us.

Pathisa Nyathi wrote over 50 books and innumerable articles in academic journals, newspapers and public magazines. He was a historian of the people, not an ivory tower academic. Pathisa was never too proud to share his ideas, he never touted himself as the “world’s greatest expert”. He thought, investigated, chatted to others in the community and beyond, and drew on the rich depository of heritage knowledge that he possessed. This culminated in his founding of the Amagugu International Heritage Centre. Located off the Maphisa (Kezi) Road through the Matobo Hills, it is not far from the traditional spiritual shrine of Njelele, positioned so as to be at a respectable distance from the sacred site in order not to break with traditional mores. The Centre is now visited by large numbers of local and national school children and social clubs. Pathisa’s focus there, as with all of his writings, were on sharing heritage with the greater Zimbabwe audience. Foreign tourists were of much less importance, although they too were and are regularly welcomed.

While some of Pathisa Nyathi’s works can and have been criticised because of a select use of oral memory from some individuals and an absence of cross-referencing, Pathisa has left us a rich resource of heritage interpretation which will no doubt be picked through by future generations as they seek to understand their roots. Who will now take on the role as custodian of public memory it is hard to say - who is fit to stand in his shoes?

Go well Pathisa Nyathi. You were a good man as the cloudy, rainy day of your Bulawayo memorial service and burial at Lady Stanley Cemetery rightly attest. In Ndebele tradition, rain on the day of burial is a good sign that the ancestors are pleased with their son.

17 – REMINDER OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

ROWALLAN PARK

SUNDAY 17th NOVEMBER 2024

11:00am for 11:30am *SEE YOU THERE!*