

NEWSLETTER 129 / MAY 2025

1 – THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

After a late start, the rains this year have generally been well above average, as will be seen below. The revival of the hills has been transformative. The rivers are all flowing well, the dams have filled and are still spilling, and the wetlands have filled up. Whilst we all shared pictures of Maleme Dam spilling, it was probably in Gulati Communal Land that the impact could be best seen. The wetlands had dried out to hard baked valleys, and even the wells were extremely low. By the end of February, it was impossible to cross from valley to the next without sinking into fresh clear water.

In the Game Park, the dry Whovi River had filled again, whilst both Mpopoma and Chitampa dams filled.

Any activity within the hills was accompanied by the sound of running water, be it a gushing waterfall, a spilling dam or a gurgling brook.

The vegetation responded in like form. It is always amazing to see how the dry bush responds to good rains, as trees continually burst into fresh foliage and the veld thickens to an impenetrable tropical forest. The rains continued into late April, probably an omen for a cold winter, which means that the vleis should retain their water well beyond the first rains next season.



Whovi river drift, Game Park



Eastern Matopos

2– RAINFALL

The first rains fell in late October, isolated and light, and the brief wet spells were interspersed with long and very hot periods, right through December. Another year of drought loomed on the horizon. Finally meaningful rain started to fall towards the end of December, probably too late to improve crop fields in the rural areas, but hopefully will continue so as to refill the wetlands, streams, rivers and dams and so secure water for the year ahead. Rainfall measures in mm at 30 April:

Eastern Hills 868.5	Central Hills 710	Western Hills 803
Maleme 765.4	Toghwana 578.7	Whitewaters 735.3
Hazelside 742.3	Tshabalala 518.6	Bulawayo (Burnside) 787

3 - NEXT EVENT

Date Sunday 18th May 2025
Venue Gulati Communal Lands
Meet 08:15am, Cresta Lodge
Travel All vehicles.

We will travel out to Gulati Communal Land via the Fort Usher Road, and be hosted by Mrs Dot Becker at her home near Thabas Mbomvu. We will have an update on land management and plans for the Gulati CL as well as undertake a number of walks. Gulati CL has been transformed with the wonderful rain that we have received this year so it promises to be an attractive autumn outing.

4 – REPORT BACK – DIANA’S POOL

On Sunday 16th March, under a grey cloud, we gathered at Ascot Service Station and travelled in convoy out to Diana’s Pools, via the Diana’s Pool road, which was in pretty good condition. This made the drive considerably shorter than going via Mawabeni. It was a delight to splash across the Umzingwane river drift, and in no time, we were at our destination. The weather also started to improve. After the now traditional cup of tea, we set off to the Orbicular Granite site and spent some time exploring the area with some discussion of its importance.

A lovely picnic lunch followed under the trees whilst the Nkankezi river flowed strongly over the waterfalls and into the pools.

	
Umzingwane River drift	Diana’s Pool and falls
	
Returning from the orbicular granite	Orbicular granite sample

5 – WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Your Society plans to join with National Parks to commemorate World Environment Day. Whilst the 5th June is the UN designated day, we will join Parks on Saturday 7th June at Maleme Rest Camp and assist in clearing cactus, other exotic plants and litter from around the lodges. This will start at roughly 10:00, so we will meet at Cresta Churchill at 09:00. This is a chance to get off the couch and do some real work for the environment. Bring your hat, a picnic lunch, garden gloves and any tools you think might be necessary. Hope to see you there – free Parks entry provided.

6 – GOVERNMENT OKAYS US\$110 MILLION OLD GWANDA ROAD UPGRADE

Herald, Wednesday January 29.

The government has signed a concession agreement with a local contractor, Zwane Enterprises (Pvt) Ltd, which was selected for the reconstruction of the 120km Old Gwanda Road. The development comes after Cabinet last year approved the US\$110 million Public-Private-Partnership investment for the construction and upgrading of the road. Zwane Enterprises expressed interest in the construction of the gravel road in 2023 and has a US\$150 million budget for the project. In the past few months, the investor has been conducting feasibility studies and a total of 43 homesteads are expected to be relocated to make way for the project. Government recently revealed that it will be engaging the private sector in the construction of major roads in the country under the “Build, Operate and Transfer” model. Two toll gates are expected to be placed along Old Gwanda Road. Yesterday, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development, Engineer Joey Makumbe, signed the agreement on behalf of the government while Zwane Enterprises chief executive officer, Engineer Bekithemba Mbambo, signed for his company.

Old Gwanda Road investor ropes in 8 contractors: Zwane Enterprise, the investor behind the upgrading of Old Gwanda Road, has roped in 8 companies that will be involved in the construction of the 120km stretch with President Mnangagwa expected to lead the project’s ground-breaking ceremony in two weeks’ time. The ambitious road construction will cost about US\$150 million including the road furniture while part of the funds will cater for the construction of new homesteads for affected families. A total of 42 homesteads will be moved while 24 graves will be relocated to pave the way for the road construction. The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development last month signed a concession agreement with Zwane Enterprise, giving the investor a greenlight to start the construction of the road. Before moving its yellow machinery on site, Zwane Enterprise, which won an unsolicited bid to rehabilitate the road, arranged a traditional ceremony and a church service within the road’s route. Vice-President Kembo Mohadi led a traditional ceremony in Dula, Umzingwane District, as part of community’s beliefs before the major project is commenced. He will lead the Christian service at Matopo Mission’s Brethren in Christ Church, tomorrow. Zwane Enterprise executive Engineer Bekithemba Mbambo told a press briefing that after the spiritual sessions, the next important item will be the ground breaking ceremony. “On March 12 we are going to have the big one, the groundbreaking ceremony where the President is expected to grace us as the guest of honour,” he said. “We wish to start the road soon after ground breaking and we hope to finish most of it this year. We have been given 18 months within which to finish the road,” said Eng Mbambo. *Herald, Saturday March 1.*

EDITOR: Both UNESCO and the Matobo Conservation Society are asking for sight of the Environmental Impact Plan, which is still outstanding. No work can start until this has been approved.

7 – MATOPOS HERITAGE MTB CHALLENGE

The 16th edition of the popular annual cycling event across the Matobo Hills took place from 26 to 30 March. Cyclists travelled from the USA, Denmark, Australia, South Africa, Botswana and Zambia. Again, it proved most successful, but this success would not be possible with the support of so many MCS volunteers who man water-points, transport vehicles and provide support in other areas. Is the ride achieving our aims? Yes, it is exposing the Matopos to a growing number of outdoor-oriented folk who would not otherwise have visited our special place. It provides support to the National Parks and encourages further visits. It also provides a snap shot of the Matopos year after year, and we can see over just 16 years, the increase in deforestation. This information is fed back to the authorities. And there is a small excess each year that is contributed towards MCS projects.

And then, of course, there is the ride. Slightly slower this year, due to flooded vleis, water-logged valleys and full rivers to cross. The paths were also more sandy in places. Route changes had been effected to avoid the worst of the wet conditions, but the new routes were well received. There were tumbles, scratches and one evacuation, but lots of exhilaration! And the final judge; the cyclists, loved it with much camaraderie, fun and sense of spirit throughout the ride. Once again, we can claim to host the best MTB cycle route in Southern Africa. These words come from the riders not the organisers!

Our sincere appreciation to the Organising Committee and the many volunteers and we look forward to the 17th edition in March 2026.

8 – PROTECT WETLANDS: ACTION AID ZIMBABWE

With acknowledgement to NewsDay. 4 February 2025



According to ActionAid Zimbabwe, unauthorised activities have compromised the functionality of wetlands, leaving communities vulnerable to climate change.

A local non-governmental organisation, ActionAid Zimbabwe, has called on the government to enforce laws which protect and preserve the country's wetlands.

In a statement yesterday, ActionAid said the plea comes as Zimbabwe prepares to host the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in Victoria Falls in July this year.

The conference will be held from July 23 to 31 in Victoria Falls under the theme "Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future".

It highlights the urgent need to safeguard these critical ecosystems, which are disappearing at an alarming rate. According to ActionAid Zimbabwe, unauthorised activities have compromised the functionality of wetlands, leaving communities vulnerable to climate change.

"The theme for this year, Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future, underscores the urgent need to safeguard these critical ecosystems, which are disappearing at a rate three times faster than forests.

"This alarming loss poses significant challenges, particularly for vulnerable communities, as they grapple with the intensifying effects of climate change.

"For example, wetlands, which play a crucial role in water management, flood mitigation and biodiversity support, are struggling to function effectively due to unauthorised activities, leaving communities vulnerable."

ActionAid commended the government for establishing comprehensive laws, regulations and policies to protect and preserve wetlands, emphasising the need for effective enforcement of the policies.

"Zimbabwe has been a party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands since May 2013 and has demonstrated its commitment to wetland conservation through key legislative measures, including the 2006 Environmental Management Act, the 2007 Environmental Assessment and Ecosystem Protection Regulations and the 2022 National Wetland Policy and Wetland Management Guidelines.

"These frameworks align with section 73 of the 2013 National Constitution, which emphasises the importance of environmental protection and are also consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," the organisation said.

It said the government should strengthen law enforcement and policies aimed at protecting and preserving wetlands in both rural and urban areas, address illegal settlements on wetlands and provide alternative areas for displaced people. It further said the government should empower relevant agencies mandated to preserve wetlands, such as the Environmental Management Agency.

Meanwhile, the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association has called on stakeholders involved in wetlands management to collaborate effectively, overcoming institutional challenges and conflicts that may hinder conservation efforts.

"Wetlands are vital for people and nature. Wetlands provide water filtration, flood control and biodiversity support. Let's protect these ecosystems."

9 – PRIORITISE WETLAND CONSERVATION - NYONI

Acknowledgement to Newsday

Government has raised concern over lack of seriousness in conserving wetlands with Environment, Climate and Wildlife Minister Sithembiso Nyoni stressing their critical role in sustaining ecosystems and water sources. Nyoni made the remarks during the launch of the Wilderness Ngamo Livestock Farm and Vocational Training Centre in Tsholotsho, while announcing Zimbabwe's upcoming role as host for two major international environmental conferences this year. Zimbabwe will host the SADC Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCA) Conference and Summit in May 2025 and the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in July. Nyoni highlighted the importance of wetlands, noting that they serve as the starting point for many rivers.

Wetlands under threat: Southern Africa's wetlands, including those in Zimbabwe, are facing unprecedented threats from land degradation, human encroachment and climate change. In Zimbabwe, wetlands have been affected by land invasion, widespread deforestation, overgrazing and poor water management practices. The country's wetlands, which support livelihoods and biodiversity, are being degraded at an alarming rate. The result is loss of ecosystem services, including flood control, natural water purification and habitat provision for wildlife. The impact is felt across communities, with many facing water scarcity, reduced agricultural productivity and increased vulnerability to climate-related disasters.

10 – MATOPOS SCIENTISTS DEVELOP INSECT-BASED LIVESTOCK FEED

With acknowledgement to The Chronicle, Judith Phiri, 29 April 2025

USING locally available resources and insect-based proteins such as mealworms and black soldier flies, scientists at the Matopos Research Institute in Matabeleland South Province have developed innovative solutions to enhance feed availability for livestock by formulating alternative animal feed.

The innovation is expected to address the growing challenges in livestock production caused by climate change, resource scarcity, and competition between food, feed and fuel.

As part of its initiatives, Matopos Research Institute has successfully registered mealworm starter, grower and finisher diets under the Farm Feeds regulations, specifically for poultry.

The institute has also introduced "frass blocks," a multi-nutrient feed supplement for ruminant animals such as goats and sheep, which is produced from insect waste material.

Speaking during a recent familiarisation tour of the institute's innovation hub in Matopo, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development Permanent Secretary, Professor Obert Jiri, commended the work being done by the scientists.

"What we have seen here with the feed trials and experiments is truly fantastic. This is the foundation of our agriculture. Through innovations like these, we can commercialise new feed formulations that are scientifically tested and proven," he said.

Professor Jiri noted that not every innovation would make it to commercialisation, but stressed that the process of experimentation was essential for agricultural transformation, especially in the face of threats such as El Niño-induced droughts that have previously devastated livestock populations.

He said there is a need to find solutions for climate change, livestock diseases, and livestock growth as the country is grappling with inbreeding, where the livestock are growing smaller and smaller.

"Science must drive our agriculture. Even if results are not immediate, science-based agriculture will never fail us. We need to continue investing in research to find solutions to climate change, livestock diseases, and genetic challenges like inbreeding, which is causing smaller livestock.

"That is what we must aim for, to have a basket of all these experiments and innovations as we aim for those that are successful technologies that can drive our agricultural transformation based on science," said Professor Jiri.

Professor Jiri said that by developing affordable, sustainable feed alternatives that are locally sourced, Matopos is not only offering solutions to immediate feed shortages but also helping smallholder farmers reduce costs and improve animal productivity, thereby contributing to national food security and rural development.

Matopos Research Institute's principal research officer, Ms Primrose Nkomboni, who is a nutritionist, said that their research is guided by a mandate to create affordable, sustainable feed solutions using resources that farmers can easily access. "These are resources that farmers can easily access. When we identify the resources, we take them to the laboratory for testing. We test for crude protein, fibre and other nutrients. After that, we then formulate our feed, such as lucerne, mopane, or black soldier fly-based pellets," she said.

One of the major successes includes the formulation of bush meals, a protein-rich feed made from a mixture of mopane leaves, acacia pods and hay, which contains 23 to 26 percent protein and is ideal for feeding ruminants and donkeys, particularly during dry seasons when conventional feed becomes scarce.

The institute is also producing black soldier fly-based pellets, comprising 30 percent insect meal and 70 percent bran, used for feeding poultry and ruminants. In addition, the team is exploring cactus-based silage, taking advantage of the plant's high water content (around 90 percent) and its rich fibre and energy properties to enhance livestock nutrition during dry periods. "We also use acacia to make silages and improve the quality of our hays and cereal stovers. It aids and improves the digestibility of hay and cereal stovers," said Ms Nkomboni. She said ongoing feeding trials using mopane-based pellets are investigating the leaves' natural anthelmintic properties, which could help reduce internal parasite loads in goats. "Feeding trials are ongoing for goats with mopane-based pellets. We want to see how the goats perform in terms of internal worms. Properties in mopane are known for reducing the worm load in the gut," said Ms Nkomboni.

The innovations at Matopos Research Institute come at a crucial time as Zimbabwe seeks to build a more resilient livestock sector in the wake of increasing droughts, erratic weather patterns and rising input costs.

11 – US\$480K RHINO HORNS CRIMINAL GANG BUSTED

With acknowledgement to Zvikomborero Parafini, HMetro, 25 February 2025

TWO men tried to illegally export rhino horns worth US\$480 000, which were hidden in sculptures, to China but their criminal enterprise was busted by police and officials at Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport. Both men are Chinese nationals and were denied bail.

Lin Wang, also known as William Kings, and Fuxi Wang, were not asked to plead when they appeared before Harare magistrate Isheanesu Matova. They were remanded in custody and were advised to approach the High Court for bail considerations as they are facing a third schedule offence. The court heard that last Thursday, Lin Wang claimed he wanted to export a sculpture from Zimbabwe to China through Robert Gabriel International Airport.

He engaged a clearing agent and the two met in Alexandra Park, where they agreed that Lin would pay US\$600 for the transaction. He paid US\$300 as deposit and they agreed to meet two days later to complete the transaction. Detectives, who were on surveillance in Alexandra Park along Fleetwood Road, saw Fuxi handing over a white plastic parcel to Lin at the main gate of a house.

Lin collected the parcel and drove away in a hired Nissan X-Trail. The surveillance team followed and they saw Lin inviting the agent into the car and paying US\$200 of the US\$300 balance. During the transaction, the police pounced on them and introduced themselves. Detective Sergeant Kemusi recovered the white plastic bag which had a khaki cardboard box concealing the rhino horns.

Lin was asked to produce a permit allowing him to possess the rhino horns and he failed, leading to his arrest. The recovered horns were worth US\$120 000. The court also heard that on September 12 last year, Lin indicated that he wanted to export a sculpture from Zimbabwe to China through Robert Gabriel International Airport via Emirates Airways. Lin met the agent, Cuthbert Maoko, at Robert Gabriel International Airport Departures car park and they proceeded to National Handling Services (NHS) Cargo handling area. He handed over a 13 kg owl sculpture to the agent to facilitate its export to China and it was placed in a cardboard box. He left and the agent proceeded to Aviation Ground Services to process export papers. The sculpture was physically examined by officials from ZIMRA, CID and AGS. The sculpture was put on AGS Scanner and the image and the officials became suspicious. The sculpture was held by ZIMRA. When the sculpture was broken, after two months, it was discovered that there were five rhino horn pieces which were wrapped by a newspaper.

The agent implicated Lin. The agent called him to come at the airport to answer questions relating the case but he disappeared. The five rhino horn pieces seized by ZIMRA were worth US\$360 000.

12 – “NIGHTMARE CRISES” AS SA’S NATIONAL HEALTH LABORATORIES RUN OUT OF SNAKE, SCORPION AND SPIDER ANTIVENOM

With acknowledgement to E Ellis, 4 March 2025

The South African National Health Laboratory Service has stopped manufacturing snake, scorpion and spider antivenom and has not yet indicated when it will start again, leaving millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa at extreme risk.



A Cape cobra. (Photo: Gallo Images / GO! / Villiers Steyn)

“As of next month, people will start dying,” says Arno Naude of Snake Bite Assist. “Hospitals everywhere tell me they are running out.” The National Health Laboratory Service has admitted that due to construction work, all manufacturing of snake, scorpion and spider antivenom has ceased and their stockpiles are now empty, except for boomslang antivenom. “Today, exactly a year ago (4 March 2023), we were assured by the National Health Laboratory (NHLS) that they have ‘more than enough’ antivenom,” Naude said. “We thought they were back on track. But the truth is their stockpile was next to nothing.”

Upgrades

But this week, the NHLS’s Mzi Gcukumana said that in late 2024, the service reported that the South African Vaccine Producers (SAVP) facility had undergone extensive infrastructure and equipment upgrades. “These upgrades were planned and necessary due to the deterioration of ageing infrastructure, which had hampered compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) within the SAVP sterile manufacturing unit. “This deterioration became more apparent during significant load shedding, resulting in frequent operational disruptions. A steady power supply is important for manufacturing controlled-air-and-temperature conditions,” Gcukumana said.

“Due to the extent of the work required, antivenom manufacturing processes had to be temporarily discontinued during the renovations. While in the middle of renovations, the project experienced delays due to postponed delivery of specialised equipment and the requirement to maintain required quality standards, both of which were aggravated by the rigorous regulatory environment for sterile manufacture. “During this period, the stockpiles of spider, scorpion, and polyvalent antivenoms were depleted. As a result, only the supply of boomslang antivenom remains available for distribution. The NHLS is now concentrating on the commissioning of the facility. This process entails cleaning, validation and quality control protocols to meet the regulatory requirements for sterile pharmaceutical production. “The NHLS is doing everything possible to speed up the final stages of the process to resume snakebite antivenom production and will keep providing updates on progress,” Gcukumana said.

There are two types of antivenom in South Africa. Polyvalent antivenom is made from the poison of 10 types of snakes found in southern Africa: Puff adder, Gaboon adder, Rinkhals, Green mamba, Jameson’s mamba, Black mamba, Cape cobra, Forest cobra, Snouted cobra and the Mozambique spitting cobra. Boomslang antivenom can be used to treat only boomslang bites.

Naude said the failure of the NHLS to provide sufficient antivenom should cause outrage in South Africa as thousands of lives of both humans and animals are placed at extreme risk. “We are going into the second peak of the snake season. During the Easter holidays, we always see a huge increase in snakebites,” he said.

Several sub-Saharan countries, including Uganda, had been buying antivenom from South Africa and now had to import it from elsewhere. “South Africa is importing a product from India. It is a little cheaper, but you have to use more. But this is only available for emergency use if you have medical aid. You can’t find this in a state hospital. And even if you did, the product was never intended to be used

in South Africa, so it doesn't state on the leaflet that it can be used for ... South African snakes, so the doctors are refusing to administer it, Naude said.

'Poor and rural people will be hit hard'

"Poor and rural people will be hit hard by this. Most state hospitals in rural areas tell me they have maybe enough left for two or three bites and after that, their antivenom will be finished." He said there was a product in use in Swaziland that was cheaper and worked better than the imported product, but in South Africa, it could be used only by vets. "They had good results there with this product. Out of 800 patients bitten, they did not have one death. But this product has not yet been approved by the World Health Organization," he said, "and it can't be used on humans in South Africa."

Naude welcomed the upgrading of the equipment at the NHLS and said it also had become clear that in the recent past, the antivenom supplied by South Africa was not up to standard. "The quality was not what it should have been and we saw a lot of allergic reactions. Skilled people have left the NHLS and their equipment is very old." However, he said they had been assured that there was enough stock to see the upgrading project through. "But then again, we are lied to all of the time," he said.

'Huge crisis'

"We have a huge crisis on hand," Naude said. "Other countries in sub-Saharan Africa are buying antivenom from the Middle East and India. But they can just as well buy distilled water. It is completely useless. Also, it isn't stocked by government hospitals so you also must go buy it yourself. "No vets have antivenom any more," Naude said. "This country should also be held responsible for the deaths that occur in sub-Saharan Africa because of what the NHLS has done."

Apart from running out of polyvalent antivenom, the NHLS also no longer has antivenom for scorpion stings and spiders. "Two weeks ago, a young child died in Botswana after a scorpion sting. Their family sold everything they had to buy vials of antivenom, but this was made for a scorpion in North Africa so it didn't help," he said. He said if a person who has medical aid was bitten by a snake today, they could still scramble and find something to use. "But [it] might be too late. I have seen people die within 9 minutes."

"The other problem is that people might survive, but without antivenom they will likely lose an arm or need a kidney transplant. The suicide rate among snakebite victims within two years after the bite is sky high, he said, "especially those who suffered a significant injury". "The government must stop messing around. Snakebites have been declared a neglected tropical disease. It is actually the most neglected," he said.

He said the risk, especially in the Northern Western Cape, the Northern Cape, Limpopo, Botswana and Namibia of fatal thick-tail scorpion stings were sky-high. "Children and the elderly are especially at high risk. And there is nothing you can import for this scorpion sting, he said.

Naude said it didn't help for the NHLS to declare that it still had boomslang venom. "First, what does it help to have boomslang antivenom? These bites are so rare. You almost have to apply in writing to get a bite," he said. He said the antivenom could offer some solace, though, because he had witnessed a person dying from a boomslang bite "and it was excruciating".

Steve Meighan from Deep South Reptile Rescue said it could not be overstated how much trouble the country was in. "And even if they start working today it will still take months before they are producing antivenom," he said. "I have been involved with snakes since 1991 and this is the first time that this [has] happened. He said in two recent cases, snakebite victims had to be treated with products from a vet.

Michele Clarke from the Democratic Alliance said the party would question the NHLS in the parliamentary committee on health on Wednesday (5 March) about the antivenom crisis. "We will demand clarity on how much antivenom has been produced and distributed since 2023. The NHLS must also account for reported shortages in hospitals and what is being done to address them. The crisis is reportedly due to load shedding and renovations at the South African Vaccine Producers (SAVP). Reports indicate that South Africa, once an exporter of antivenom, is now forced to import substandard alternatives. This places thousands of lives at risk, especially in rural communities.

"South Africa records approximately 4,000 snakebites annually, with around 900 hospitalisations and 100 patients requiring antivenom. Without urgent access to treatment, severe complications or death can occur," she said. "A single snakebite can kill within hours without access to antivenom, lives and limbs are being lost unnecessarily."

13 – FIVE JOURNALISTS WIN AT AFRICA TRAVEL WEEK MEDIA AWARDS

With acknowledgement to Nehru Odeh, 16th April, 2025

Africa Travel Week has announced the winners of its 2025 Media Awards, recognising five exceptional journalists whose work has helped elevate the profile of Africa's tourism offering on the global stage. The event held between 9 and 11 April 2025 at Cape Town International Convention Centre.

A distinguished judging panel, which included Pat Riddell (National Geographic Traveller UK), Barry Neild (CNN Travel), Ellie Rothnie (Canon Ambassador), and Kojo Bentum-Williams (Voyages Afriq) selected the winners from a competitive field of entries.

The five award-winning journalists are : Mike Unwin, who claimed the top prize for his piece, "Rock of Ages", published in Travel Africa Magazine. Others are Summer Rylander for "What Does Successful Low-Volume, High-Value Tourism Look Like?" ; Ryan Eslin for "A wild, Wild Life"; Shanna Jacobsen for "Addressing the Train-Retain Drain"; and Qaqamba Matundu.

Mike Unwin 's piece, "Rock of Ages" is a vivid exploration of Zimbabwe UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Matobo Hills. "I'm delighted that my feature on Bulawayo and the Matobo Hills has won ATW's Destination award. Bulawayo was where my experience of Africa began, as a teacher many years ago, and I have held a deep affection for this magical corner of the world ever since. Many thanks to the always excellent Travel Africa magazine for allowing me the opportunity to put my feelings into words," Unwin said.

Summer Rylander's thoughtful analysis "What Does Successful Low-Volume, High-Value Tourism Look Like?" examines Botswana's distinctive approach to balancing tourism development with environmental conservation. "Sustainability is at the heart of my work as a journalist and I'm proud of this piece, which delves into the ethics of access in relation to the protection of nature and doing right by local communities. What an honour it is to receive this award! Thank you to the judges and well done to the other nominees," Rylander noted

Ryan Enslin's captivating photo essay "A Wild Wild Life" documents the unique wildlife encounters possible in Cape Town, revealing an unexpected side of urban Africa. "Travel writing and photography have always been deeply personal for me. They are ways of capturing and sharing the moments that speak directly to my soul," reflects Enslin. "Each story I tell is, in many ways, a passion project, born from a place of curiosity and connection. To have that recognised by the Africa Travel Week Media Awards is incredibly encouraging. It reminds me that these stories, rooted in heart and experience, resonate with others too."

Shanna Jacobsen's investigative report "Addressing the Train-Retain Drain" examines critical staffing challenges facing South Africa's incentive travel industry in the post-pandemic landscape. "This is a big deal for us, not just to spotlight the skills constraints the incentive travel industry is currently grappling with, but to try find a means to address the issue," Jacobsen remarked

Qaqamba Matundu won for her remarkable report on the rediscovery of South Africa's "lost" golden mole, highlighting both an important conservation milestone and emerging journalistic talent. "This award is a testament to the power of storytelling and the incredible support I've received along the way from my editor," says Matundu. "Here's to pushing boundaries, sharing impactful stories, and inspiring others in the media industry."

Megan de Jager, Portfolio Director at RX Africa, noted: "Compelling storytelling is essential for showcasing Africa's extraordinary destinations and experiences. These award-winning journalists exemplify the highest standards of travel reporting, helping to position Africa within the global tourism conversation."

Now in its second year, the ATW Media Awards celebrate excellence in travel reporting, photography and storytelling across five categories. It also celebrates outstanding travel journalism that brings Africa's diverse tourism destinations to global audiences. Quality reporting plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and raising awareness of the continent's travel offerings. "Compelling storytelling is essential for showcasing Africa's extraordinary destinations and experiences," says Megan De Jager, Portfolio Director, Travel, Tourism & RX Africa Marketing. "These award-winning journalists exemplify the highest standards of travel reporting, helping to position Africa within the global tourism conversation."

The annual ATW Media Awards are open to all media practitioners including journalists, bloggers, videographers, and photographers producing content related to African travel. The programme forms part of Africa Travel Week's broader initiatives to promote the continent's tourism offerings to international markets. WTM Africa was launched in 2014 in Cape Town, South Africa. In 2024, it facilitated more than 10 thousand unique pre-scheduled appointments, an increase of more than 8% compared to 2023 and welcomed more than 10 thousand visitors (unaudited), 25% more than 2023.

About ATW Connect: Africa Travel Week's digital arm, is a virtual hub packed to the seams with interesting content, industry news and insights, and the opportunity to hear from experts on a variety of topics in our new monthly webinar series. All with the aim to keep all of us in the travel and tourism industry connected. ATW Connect focuses on inbound and outbound markets for general leisure tourism, luxury travel and the MICE/business travel sector as well as travel technology.

14 – HARARE COUNCIL PUMPS RAW SEWAGE INTO LAKE CHIVERO AND THIS KILLS FOUR RHINO.

With acknowledgement to The Herald

Harare City Council has been discharging raw sewage into the Mukuvisi River, which flows into Lake Chivero, the city's main water source, for the past two weeks. This has created serious health and environmental hazards, resulting in Zimparks banning all fishing activities at Lake Chivero, where thousands of fish have died, alongside animals including four rhinos and three zebras. The pollution, primarily from raw sewage, has caused a surge in cyanobacteria, posing health risks to both humans and wildlife.

15 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

18 May 2025	Field Trip to Gulati Communal Lands
7 June 2025	Matopos Clean-Up Day for World Environment Day (5 June)
22 – 24 August 2025	Matopos Heritage Trail Run
22 September 2025	World Rhino Day
23 November 2025	Matobo Conservation Society AGM
27 – 30 November 2025	Matobo Classic MTB

16 – 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 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, sleeveless safari jackets and golf shirts) can be ordered on request. Please contact the Secretary via WhatsApp +263 71 240 2341 for further details

Website – www.matobo.org

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The Natural History of the Matobo Hills

This MCS publication is available at the Natural History Museum for US\$20. The price has been reduced.

Umvukela – The 1896 Anti-Colonial Rebellion in Matabeleland by Ian Cross

This limited-edition book was published by the Matobo Conservation Society as it records an important part of the Matopos History. The first edition has been sold out, and a reprint is being considered. Contact Rob Burrett on email robburrett@icloud.com to book a copy.