

NEWSLETTER 130 / AUGUST 2025

1 – WETLANDS FOCUS

At the time of writing, Zimbabwe has just hosted the COP15 of the United Nations Convention on Wetlands of International Importance known as the Ramsar Convention. As a result, there has been much focus on the wetlands of Zimbabwe. For some years, the Matobo Conservation Society has been trying to have the wetlands of the Matobo Hills recognized under this convention, but like all things in this part of the country it is an uphill battle. Due to COP15 and the attention to our wetlands in general, we were able to get some focus on the Matobo Hills, with a visit by the Parliamentary Committee on the Environment, who were astounded by the wetlands and fully endorsed our efforts. Also, attention from the Bulawayo Youth Wetlands Dialogue, Bulawayo Youth Workshop (who endorsed our proposals), Birdlife Zimbabwe, the Natural History Museum and their wetlands project, and of course Dambari Wildlife Trust who part represented us at the Convention itself. But as yet, no response from EMA!

Like so much in Zimbabwe we have very good legislation, we just can't / don't enforce it. Now is the time for action by Government to put into practice all that they have been preaching over the past six weeks or so. Zimbabwe holds the chair for the next three years, so now is the time to have the Matobo Hills acknowledged as a unique wetland structure in the otherwise dry western part of the country. We'll be watching!

The need to protect our wetlands was made clear during the failed 2023/4 rainy season. After three poor years, and the impact on the wetlands from overgrazing, water extraction and cultivation, I don't think I had ever seen the Matopos as dry as it was at the end of 2024. Normally the wetlands of Gulati and Matobo Communal Lands are wet through to the next rainy season, providing a secure source of water. Last year they were baked dry and dust blew where sedges used to grow. There has been a dramatic rebound following the good rains, but if the wetlands are not managed, we will see a repeat. There is simply not enough care given to the management of these areas and, as shown by Dambari Wildlife Trust, wetlands can be brought back to life.

Consequently, there are a number of articles on wetlands and the Ramsar meeting at Victoria Falls. I apologize if you have all had enough of this issue. but it is very topical to the Matobo Hills.



Sotcha Spring



GoBambezha, South Eastern Matopos.

2 - NEXT EVENT

Date	Sunday 21 September 2025
Venue	Zhilo Wetland, Matopos
Meet	08:00am, Ascot Car Park (slightly earlier start to beat the heat)
Travel	Trucks or vehicles with a higher clearance to tackle the Zhilo pass.

We will travel out via the Gwanda Road, and then turn off to go via the Dianna's Pool Rd. We'll be travelling deeper into the hills along the Lumane Rd, possibly stopping off to visit the tree ferns in the Lumane Valley, then onto Zhilo wetland – aka "The Fairway". Subject to time and energy we may visit one of the many cave sites in the area. We hope to catch the last of the spring flush of the brachystegia forests in that area.

3 – REPORT BACK ON FIELD TRIP TO GULATI COMMUNAL LANDS

Participation at our field trip on Sunday 18th May was a disappointing 14 persons. Disappointing because the trip through Gulati CL was beautiful and so many folk missed it. Disappointing because the views from our destination were spectacular, and the ones who missed this trip were unable to enjoy it. Disappointing because the walk was a delight and members would have so enjoyed it. And most disappointing because of the constructive debate that was held regarding conservation in the Gulati Communal Lands and not everyone gets this chance to engage. A debate that was critical as most of the Matobo Hills fall under Communal Land, and not National Parks with many worthwhile observations. The day started with a meander through Gulati CL, arriving at the home of Dot Bekker. Tea was enjoyed admiring the spectacular view over the National Park, past Sham and into the Mtshелеli Valley. Introductions were made and Dot started the conversation with the support of Raphelos, one of the Gulati communal leaders. Members then joined in.

In due course we were taken by Rafelos on a walk, culminating in a clear flowing, cool stream, in the Wisha valley past Dwambomvhu before returning for our picnic lunch.



View westward into the Park



View NW into the Mtshелеli Valley



Aloe Chabaudeii in full bloom



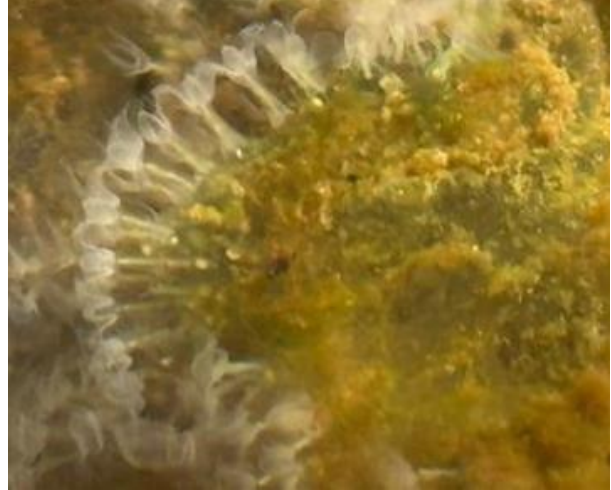
Wisha stream

4 - LOPHPODELLA THOMASI

Fresh water anemone were first recorded in Africa in the 1890s, and are globally a rare occurrence. In 1904 the first anemone in Zimbabwe was found in Harare by a Mr R.H. Thomas – and largely forgotten about until Mr Barny O'Hara noticed something unusual in the dam at The Farmhouse in June this year. A sample was sent to Mrs Cathy Sharp for identification and *Lophopodella thomasi* was confirmed. It is such a small creature that it is incredible that this was rediscovered. Once again, the Matopos surprises us all! Well done to Barny for being so observant!



Lophopodella thomasi



Fresh water anemone

5 – PARLIAMENT CHAMPIONS WETLAND CONSERVATION

With acknowledgement to Newsday, 5 June 2025



PARLIAMENT has launched the “Voices of Zimbabwe on Wetlands” campaign, putting community experiences and perspectives at the forefront of wetland management nationwide.

This initiative, supported by DanChurchAid and Conservation Conversations, aims to empower local voices and promote sustainable wetland conservation practices.

Community representatives shared their stories and insights with over 20 parliamentarians during the launch of the campaign, highlighting the importance of recognising local indigenous knowledge in wetland management.

Sam Matema, chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry, emphasised the need for a collaborative approach to protect wetlands.

“We need a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to managing Zimbabwe’s wetlands, where everyone has a role to play,” Matema said.

He said focus on community engagement and participation was crucial in addressing the challenges facing Zimbabwe's wetlands, including land invasion and climate change. By amplifying local voices and promoting sustainable practices, the "Voices of Zimbabwe on Wetlands" campaign can help to ensure the long-term conservation of these vital ecosystems, he said. Conservationists said the community-led approach had the potential to make a significant impact on wetland conservation and management in Zimbabwe.

6 – RHINO CONSERVATION TAKES CENTRE STAGE

NewsDay, Friday May 2

A wildlife leadership programme focused on rhino conservation is set for launch in May, aiming to equip local conservationists with the skills and mentorship needed to protect these endangered species. The programme, titled "Rising Wildlife Leaders: Careers", will provide individualised training, peer learning opportunities and professional guidance to bolster the leadership of conservationists over the next three years. The International Rhino Foundation (IRF) and the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN) have partnered to support six individuals from Indonesia, Kenya, Namibia and Zimbabwe, who are working to safeguard Javan, Black, White and Sumatran rhinos.

7 - POACHING ALARM

Herald, Saturday May 17

Iconic black rhino Gomo slain at Imire Conservancy: In a devastating blow to wildlife conservation, Gomo, a 22 year-old black rhino and beloved symbol of hope at Imire Rhino & Wildlife Conservancy, has been killed by poachers in yet another brutal act of wildlife crime. The rhino's horn was hacked off, feeding the illegal trade driven by international demand. The killing has sparked outrage and grief across the conservation community, reigniting calls for urgent and coordinated action to combat poaching. Gomo, who was born and raised at Imire, had become a beacon of resilience and a testament to the success of long-term conservation efforts.

NewsDay, Saturday May 17

Jumbo carcass with missing tusks discovered near Vic Falls: Rangers from the Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit (VFAPU) have discovered the carcass of an adult male elephant with its tusks missing, raising concerns of a potential poaching incident. The carcass, which appeared to be several days old and showed signs of scavenging, was located on a property near Victoria Falls. "Upon investigation, the carcass of an adult male elephant was discovered, several days old, with clear signs of scavenging. However, most notably was the absence of the tusks," a statement from VFAPU reads. The discovery was made following alerts from researchers at the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, who monitor collared wildlife in the area, including lions and vultures.

8 – WHITE RHINOS RETURN TO GONAREZHOU AFTER 100 YEARS

With acknowledgement to Newsday; 9 June 2025.



Gonarezhou National Park

THE thundering footsteps of white rhinos once again echo across Gonarezhou National Park, marking the species' return to the area after more than 100 years. The five southern white rhinos, all sourced

from the privately run Malilangwe Trust, were relocated to Gonarezhou between April and May this year as part of an effort to re-establish a viable white rhino population in the region.

According to a statement from the Gonarezhou Conservation Trust, the goal was to restore an element of biodiversity long lost to the ecosystem. The Trust said the reintroduction was aimed at establishing a new, viable meta-population of white rhino and creating a future for white rhinos in Zimbabwe's second largest national park.

White rhinos, once native to the Gonarezhou region, are believed to have disappeared from the park in the early 1900s, with isolated sightings continuing into the 1990s. Although there were isolated records of individual white rhinos in Gonarezhou up to 1992, the last viable population of white rhino in Gonarezhou likely dates back to the early 1900s, before the species was completely extirpated from Zimbabwe.

Reintroduction of white rhinos to Zimbabwe began in the second half of the 20th century from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. However, unlike the black rhino, no known attempt was made to re-establish a viable population of white rhino in Gonarezhou until now, making this reintroduction all the more significant.

The relocation follows the 2021 reintroduction of black rhinos to the park and builds on infrastructure developed for that project. Planning for the white rhino reintroduction began in 2023, with feasibility studies conducted to assess habitat suitability, security requirements and long-term monitoring protocols.

The five rhinos were selected based on social compatibility, age and sex. After immobilisation and transport, the animals were held temporarily in fenced acclimatisation pens before their release to secure zones within the park. The Gonarezhou Conservation Trust, a joint venture between the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and the Frankfurt Zoological Society, worked in partnership with veterinarians, ecologists and logistical teams from the Malilangwe Trust.

The trust announced that the return of white rhinos to Gonarezhou is a historic milestone and the start of a new phase for both the species and the park. "The return of white rhinos to Gonarezhou is a historic milestone, but it is only the beginning. Their release back to this wilderness marks the start of the next phase of the journey for them and Gonarezhou," the trust said. "Ensuring their protection and long-term survival will remain a key focus through ongoing intensive monitoring and security, collaboration with partners and the public."

To safeguard the animals, Gonarezhou has increased security measures, including ranger patrols, aerial surveillance and real-time tracking technology. Southern white rhinos are classified as near threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with an estimated global population of around 13 000. The species faces ongoing threats from poaching and habitat loss, particularly in southern Africa. The park, Zimbabwe's second largest, spans over 5 000 square kilometres and borders Mozambique and South Africa.

9 – KING MZILIKAZI COMMEMORATIONS TO RUN FOR 2 DAYS

Southern Eye, Thursday May 8

The annual King Mzilikazi commemorations will run for two days this year, marking a new development in the event's history. Mthwakazi ka Mzilikazi Cultural Association (MMCA) Mhlahlandlela steering committee secretary Lungisani Ndiweni said the commemorations would be held on September 5 and 6. "The event will take place on September 5 and 6, 2025, at King Mzilikazi Memorial Site (KoMhlahlandlela), 22km outside Bulawayo along Old Gwanda Road," Ndiweni said.

10 - NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM WETLANDS PROJECT

On a chilly Saturday morning on 19 June, in the shade of our beloved Natural History Museum, we gathered to officially open the Natural History Museum Wetlands project. This will be developed into a living display, with a billboard describing Wetlands. The site is between the Natural History Museum and Leopold Takawira Ave, in a place that has naturally occurring clays. In time an educational walkway will lead visitors along a route where they can (hopefully) see a dynamic wetland environment. This is very much the brainchild of Cathy Sharp, who also developed the Museum's Mike Garden Butterfly Garden.

After speeches and formalities, the billboard was opened by your Chairman, Gavin Stephens and Paddy Pacey, who is developing a similar project at Mukuvusi Woodlands in Harare. Thereafter teas were served.



Paddy Pacey and Gavin Stephens cut the ribbon Matopo Mission Primary School Conservation Club

11 – ZIMBABWE HOSTS COP15 AS LEADERS EYE VICTORIA FALLS WETLANDS PACT

With acknowledgement to APAnews Harare

The 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15) to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands kicked off in Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls resort town on Wednesday, drawing delegates from 172 countries. Running from 23–31 July, COP15 is themed "Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future" and is expected to culminate in the adoption of the Victoria Falls Declaration – a landmark commitment to scale up wetland restoration and establish a Global Wetland Restoration Fund. Speaking ahead of the meeting on Tuesday night, Zimbabwe's Minister of Environment, Climate and Wildlife Evelyn Ndllovu underscored the urgency of action. "Wetland conservation is not just an environmental concern, it is a climate imperative, a hydrological necessity and a development obligation," Ndllovu said. She said key initiatives to be launched at COP15 include the Global Wetland Watch platform for real-time monitoring and the African Wetland Observatory Network to support grassroots solutions, as well as the integration of wetlands into national climate and biodiversity frameworks, including Wetland City Accreditation Convention on Wetlands Secretary General Musonda Mumba described the moment as historic, marking the second time that the meeting has been hosted on African soil. "This is not just a meeting of governments; it's a platform for science, diplomacy, and community to come together around a common goal: protecting wetlands for our common future," she said. The Ramsar Convention, signed in 1971 in Iran, is the world's only international treaty focused exclusively on wetlands. It promotes the wise use of wetlands and has designated over 2,500 Ramsar sites globally. Zimbabwe ratified the convention in 2012 and currently hosts seven Ramsar sites, including Lake Chivero, Mana Pools and Monavale Vlei. According to the Convention Secretariat, the world has lost over 411 million hectares of natural wetlands since 1970, with a financing gap of up to \$550 billion threatening restoration efforts. President Emmerson Mnangagwa is expected to formally open the summit later this week. Delegates will also tour the Kasibo Wetland in Hwange, showcasing Zimbabwe's nature-based restoration efforts.

12 – LONGCHENG PLAZA'S LEGACY HAUNTS ZIMBABWE AHEAD OF CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

Nehanda Radio

The continued operation of Longcheng Plaza, a large shopping mall built on a wetland in Harare, stands as a prominent symbol of Zimbabwe's ongoing struggle to enforce its environmental protection laws, Nehanda Radio can report. As Zimbabwe prepares to host the COP15 Ramsar Convention meeting in Victoria Falls from July 23 to 31, 2025, the international spotlight will likely be on the nation's commitment to wetland conservation. 'Ramsar COP15' is shorthand for 'the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands'.

Members of Parliament this week debated an urgent motion to impose a moratorium on further wetland allocations, citing long standing concerns about unchecked development. Completed in late 2013 on a gazetted wetland along the Harare-Bulawayo highway, Longcheng Plaza became a controversial

development from its inception. Despite its location on what is legally considered a protected ecosystem, and opposition from environmental groups, the commercial complex proceeded with construction. In a 2018 report, Steady Kangata, then environmental education and publicity manager at the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), confirmed the mall lacked proper environmental certification, deeming its development illegal.

But the Chinese developers faced no penalties at the time, a situation that has appeared to persist in Zimbabwe. While the mall's management asserted in 2018 that "all due processes" were observed, environmentalists continued to point to it as a prime example of lax enforcement.

This historical context highlights a critical issue brought before Parliament this week by Harare East legislator Kiven Mutimbanyoka. During a motion calling for a nationwide moratorium on wetland allocations, he specifically cited Longcheng Plaza as "one of the most gruelling examples of wetlands destruction in Harare." He argued that the failure to halt its development set "a dangerous precedent, demonstrating that even legally protected wetlands could be sacrificed for commercial gain."

Mutimbanyoka's motion cited Zimbabwe's constitutional and international obligations to protect wetlands, which are rapidly being converted into residential and commercial properties.

The motion highlighted that less than 5% of Harare's 47 gazetted wetlands, including Ramsar sites like Lake Chivero, Cleveland Dam, and Monavale Vlei, remain intact.

Since 2017, the lake has not spilled, leading to dangerously concentrated pollutants and exorbitant water treatment costs. Harare's 47 gazetted wetlands, including three Ramsar sites, Lake Chivero, Cleveland Dam and Monavale Vlei, less than 5% remain intact," Mutimbanyoka stated.

"What is most egregious is that the very institutions mandated to safeguard these ecosystems are the primary agents of their ruin.

"Urban municipalities rather than upholding their custodial role, have facilitated wetland degradation through their present disregard for environmental policies. This paradox undermines a profound governance crisis.

"Authorities tasked with regulating land use are instead enabling its reckless exploitation. Their abdication of responsibilities is a fundamental driver of this environmental catastrophe, demanding urgent rectification. "The devastation of wetlands extends far beyond environmental degradation. It has escalated into a full-blown public health crisis and economic disaster. "Naturally, our wetlands are in a state of alarming decline. 21% are severely degraded, 61% moderately degraded, and only 18% remain in stable condition."

The proposed resolutions include an immediate moratorium on land allocation in wetlands by several key Ministries, an Inter-Ministerial Commission of Inquiry to investigate past allocations and recommend remedial action and the declaration of all wetlands as ecosystem-sensitive areas to prevent future disturbance.

The dire consequences of wetland destruction, as articulated by Mutimbanyoka, include chronic water shortages due to failing groundwater recharge systems, increased urban flooding (over 50 incidents in 2023 alone), and a public health crisis evidenced by over 10,000 cases of cholera and typhoid in 2022. He further stated that Lake Chivero, Harare's primary water source, has seen a 30% decline in water levels over the past decade, with pollution exacerbating the crisis.

Julia Pierini, coordinator of the Harare Wetlands Trust, stated in 2018 that the "will to protect the environment" was largely absent. More recent reports, including a 2022 Auditor-General's report, corroborate that EMA often fails to enforce its own orders, with local authorities, who hold demolition powers, sometimes complicit in illegal developments.

Concerns about the integrity of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) also persist.

In 2018, Ronnie Chirimuta suggested that EMA should conduct EIAs independently, a call echoed by other environmental advocates who argue that the process is often exploited to facilitate development on wetlands.

While Zimbabwe has enacted a 2022 National Wetlands Policy and the Environmental Management Act, a recent dialogue in June 2025 indicated that current laws are "not fully protecting wetlands" and called for urgent legal reforms.

13 – LET'S SAFEGUARD WETLANDS, ZIM TAKES OVER AS RAMSAR CHAIR

With acknowledgement to The Herald, 25 July, 2025

ZIMBABWE yesterday officially assumed the Presidency of the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP15), taking over from the People's Republic of China, with President Mnangagwa urging the world to act boldly and decisively to safeguard wetlands and address drivers of wetlands loss.

The handover was witnessed by President Mnangagwa at the official opening of COP15 in Victoria Falls in a momentous ceremony marked by symbolism and global solidarity.

The event was graced by high-ranking dignitaries, including the Vice President of Malawi, Dr Michael Bizwick Usi and the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini, Russel Mmiso Dlamini.

Also present were representatives from the United Nations, conservation bodies and indigenous communities, underscoring the global significance of wetland preservation.

Outgoing COP president, Mr Xia Jun of China, formally handed over the Ramsar Convention flag to Zimbabwe's Minister of Environment, Climate and Wildlife, Evelyn Ndllovu, symbolising the transfer of leadership for the next three years.

President Mnangagwa hailed the occasion as a pivotal moment for Zimbabwe and the global community. "Today, we thus, gather as representatives of our nations and as stewards of a shared heritage and future. We are one-united people and citizens of our planet Earth, with a sacred duty to protect that which has been entrusted to us by Almighty God, for both present and future generations. "It is in this spirit, therefore, that the theme of this Conference, 'Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future,' is timely, in its emphasis on the role of wetlands in ecological health, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience," he said.

The President underscored the importance of wetlands to economies. "Wetlands, which include swamps, marshes, fens, bogs, estuaries, mangroves, and peatlands, are crucial habitats for about 40 percent of the earth's species. They provide livelihoods for more than a billion people. To neglect wetlands would be to abandon a critical portion of our existence," he said.

He further outlined the multifaceted benefits of wetlands, including water purification, flood control, and carbon storage, which align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"All these benefits complement efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in addressing poverty (Goal 1) and hunger (Goal 2); water supply challenges (Goal 6); promoting sustainable human settlements (Goal 11); Climate Action (Goal 13) and Partnerships (Goal 17)," he said.

Despite their importance, President Mnangagwa warned that wetlands face unprecedented threats. "Wetlands are among the most threatened habitats on Earth. They face challenges such as habitat loss and degradation due to urbanisation and development, agricultural expansion, and climate change, leading to shifts in wetland distribution, and altered hydrological cycles, among others," he said.

He called for urgent, collaborative action to reverse the decline, stressing the need for innovative restoration techniques, robust policy frameworks, and community involvement.

"Now is the time for us to change our mind-sets and start implementing multi-faceted and collaborative approaches towards protecting our wetlands," he said.

The President outlined Zimbabwe's strides in wetland conservation since ratifying the Ramsar Convention on 3 May 2013.

A key outcome of COP15 is the anticipated endorsement of the Victoria Falls Declaration, a landmark framework aimed at galvanising global efforts for wetland conservation.

President Mnangagwa elaborated on its significance:

"At the centre of this Declaration is the acknowledgement of the critical ecological, social, and economic importance of wetlands, and their global significance for sustainable livelihoods.

"The Declaration also serves as a guide and reminder for us to conserve, restore, and sustainably manage wetlands. Equally, we should remain seized with the enormous challenges facing wetland conservation, especially in the context of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution." He reaffirmed Zimbabwe's commitment to championing resource mobilisation and international collaboration. "



Outgoing Ramsar President Mr Xia Jun of China hands over the flag, signifying the transfer of the chairpersonship to incoming president Dr Evelyne Ndlovu, who is Zimbabwe's Environment, Climate and Wildlife Minister.

"My Government commits to champion resource mobilisation for sustainable wetland management, rehabilitation, and collaboration. This includes building strong linkages among partners such as other multilateral environmental agencies, countries, institutions, the private sector, and stakeholders

"The scale of wetland loss and its associated threats demands immediate and cooperative action from all stakeholders. Time has come to secure the guaranteed preservation of wetlands as a foundation for a sustainable, equitable, and resilient future," he said.

He urged delegates to move beyond rhetoric and embrace implementation.

"While the formulation of policies and adoption of resolutions are essential, their effective implementation is even more critical, along with our readiness to invest in wetland protection. Therefore, let this COP15 be recognised for taking concrete steps from discussion to implementation," he said.

The President expressed gratitude to the outgoing COP President, China, and the Ramsar Secretariat for their support. "I appreciate the sterling work done by the outgoing COP President, the Government of the People's Republic of China. The guidance and support you provided to us in preparation for our Presidency are highly appreciated," he said.

With the declaration of COP15 officially open, Zimbabwe now stands at the helm of global wetland conservation efforts, poised to lead with innovation, collaboration, and unwavering commitment.

As the world watches, the Victoria Falls Declaration is set to be a cornerstone in the fight to preserve these vital ecosystems for generations to come.

14 – NATIONS PLEDGE TO PRESERVE WETLANDS

With acknowledgement to Rutendo Nyeve in Vic Falls

More than 170 countries have reaffirmed commitment to the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands at the ongoing 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) of the Ramsar Convention in Victoria Falls.

The high-level summit, hosted by Zimbabwe, has brought together global leaders, environmental experts and policymakers to strengthen international cooperation in protecting wetlands, critical ecosystems that sustain biodiversity, support livelihoods and combat climate change.

Eswatini Prime Minister, Russell Dlamini, commended Zimbabwe for its leadership in wetlands conservation, describing its efforts as a benchmark for the region.

Representing His Majesty King Mswati III, Prime Minister Dlamini praised Zimbabwe's role in hosting COP15, following the successful Transfrontier Conservation Areas Summit.

"The Kingdom of Eswatini fully supports efforts to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Zimbabwe and Eswatini stand as examples of what can be achieved through commitment and regional synergy," he said.

Prime Minister Dlamini outlined Eswatini's own progress in wetlands preservation, including the adoption of a national wetlands policy and a wetlands strategy and action plan.

He highlighted the cultural significance of wetlands, citing the annual Reed Dance (Umhlanga) Festival, which depends on healthy wetlands for reeds used in the ceremony.

“We have witnessed tangible benefits from wetlands restoration, including the revival of near-extinct plant species, recharged water sources, and economic empowerment through handicrafts, weaving, and sustainable agriculture,” he said.

However, he warned of growing threats from urbanisation, which has led to wetlands being drained and converted into residential and commercial spaces.

“We must explore innovative construction methods to preserve these critical ecosystems,” he said.

Malawi’s Vice President, Michael Usi, delivered his solidarity statement calling for the urgent need for accelerated action in wetlands protection.

“This important global gathering in the breathtaking setting of Victoria Falls reminds us that for over 50 years, the Ramsar Convention has provided the essential global framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.”

15 – AS WETLANDS COP15 OPENS IN ZIMBABWE, ITS TIME TO RETHINK HOW WE VALUE WETLANDS

There is more to Victoria Falls than meets the eye. As the world’s largest waterfall, it marks the edge of a broader wetland system—one that supports water security, biodiversity, and livelihoods across southern Africa. As Zimbabwe hosts the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (COP15), this location invites a closer look at the role wetlands play in sustaining life, and the decisions now needed to ensure they continue to do so.

COP15 arrives at a moment when wetlands—essential for climate resilience, food production, water supply, and biodiversity—are being lost and degraded at a rate that outpaces our responses. According to the Convention’s recently released flagship publication, the *Global Wetland Outlook 2025*, global wetland extent has declined by **22% since 1970**, with losses continuing at an average rate of **0.52% per year**. Degradation is accelerating: **one in four remaining wetlands** is now in poor ecological condition, with that proportion rising.

Despite these figures, wetlands still provide some of the most valuable and cost-effective solutions to the world’s most pressing challenges. They support water security for billions of people, absorb carbon more efficiently than most other ecosystems, and deliver an estimated **\$7.98 to \$39.01 trillion** in annual ecosystem services. Yet these contributions remain undervalued in decision-making and underfunded in public and private investment.

Zimbabwe knows better than many others just how important wetlands are. Wetlands provide water to more than two-thirds of the population, allowing for agriculture and tourism while buffering against floods and droughts. In response to growing pressures, the Government has implemented stronger legal protections, advanced local restoration initiatives, and deepened public engagement on wetland issues. The recent recognition of Victoria Falls as a Wetland City reflects both local commitment and the kind of urban ecological leadership that can be replicated elsewhere.

But national ambition, however strong, cannot substitute for global coordination. Wetlands are shared systems. They cross borders and connect sectors. Protecting them requires cooperation, consistent investment, and a shift in how they are understood: as strategic infrastructure that protects the stability of our economies, health systems, and food supply.

The *Global Wetland Outlook 2025*, sets out the scale of action needed: **at least 123 million hectares** must be restored to account for past loss, and **428 million hectares** of remaining wetlands must be conserved. Doing so will require a major increase in global financing—somewhere between **\$275 and \$550 billion per year**, yet current investments fall far below that range. In fact, biodiversity conservation across all ecosystems receives just **0.25% of global GDP**.

Zimbabwe’s hosting of COP15 is both timely and significant. It brings global attention to a region where wetlands are still deeply embedded in the landscape and culture, but also increasingly vulnerable. The conference presents a unique opportunity to prioritise wetlands in the biodiversity and climate agendas, and to align technical, political, and financial systems behind that goal.

Africa, home to approximately **40% of the world’s remaining wetlands**, is well positioned to lead this shift. Many of the continent’s wetlands remain ecologically functional, and traditional knowledge of sustainable management practices endures. But external pressures—driven by extractive industries, land-use change, and climate stress—are growing rapidly. Without targeted support, we risk losing these ecosystems for good.

COP15 can help turn that tide. The Convention provides a platform for negotiation, as well as strategies, data, policies, and innovations. It is also a place to elevate voices that are often underrepresented; local communities, indigenous groups, cities, and young people, who are already shaping the future of wetland stewardship on the ground.

This meeting in Victoria Falls will not solve every problem. But it can set a new trajectory. Decisions made here have the potential to ripple outward, shaping how wetlands are valued and governed across continents.

Rivers rarely follow straight lines, and neither does meaningful change. But when enough tributaries converge, that momentum can become difficult to ignore. It's a life lesson that wetlands have taught us, and perhaps now the world is finally ready to listen.

16 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

22 September 2025	World Rhino Day
28 – 30 November 2025	Matobo Classic

17 – 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 new stocks of hats and caps at \$15 each 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

Facebook

Don't forget to join our Facebook page, with nearly 1000 members now.

The Natural History of the Matobo Hills

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

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

This limited-edition book has just been published by the Matobo Conservation Society as it records an important part of the Matopos History. Available at \$50 each as stocks last. Contact the Secretary.

18 - IN MEMORIUM

Alan Elliot. Alan passed away on 1st August 2025. He enjoyed an interesting career, as he was the first to develop wilderness camps that evolved into Touch The Wild. His favourite camp was that of Matobo Hills Lodge, so much so that, when he sold Touch The Wild, he kept Matobo Hills Lodge for himself! Alan had a deep knowledge of the bush, and will be missed by family and friends alike. We send our sympathy to the Elliot family at this sad time.

Gordon MacDonald. We were saddened to learn of the passing of Gordon on 5th August 2025. Gordon & Heather joined the MCS in November 2001, and, although less active recently, have remained loyal members of the Society for over 23 years. Gordon was a long-serving teacher at Falcon College where he encouraged environmental awareness and helped establish Quiet Waters. He was passionate about the wilderness, taking every chance to get out into the wilds. He will be missed by Falcon, WEZ and the MCS. We extend our condolences to Heather and family.