MATOBO CONSERVATION SOCIETY
'Gcina Imvelo'

matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com www.matobo.org Welfare No: W/0 30/94

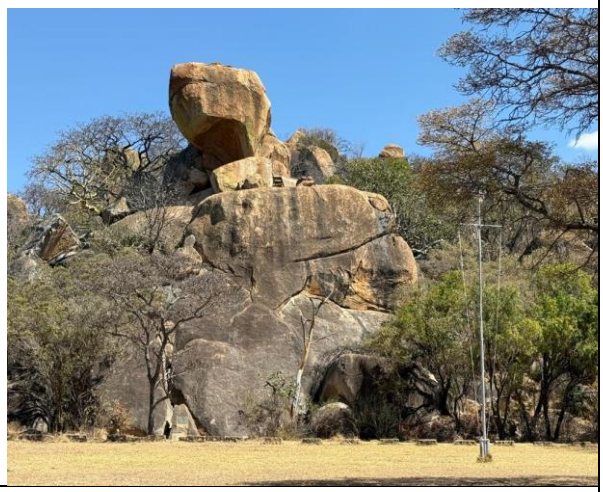
**NEWSLETTER 134 / AUGUST 2026**

## 1 – GORDON PARK CELEBRATES 90 YEARS AND GETS A FACELIFT

Gordon Park, an historic Scout Camping Ground was established in 1936 in the Rhodes Matopos National Park. Located in the Mtsheleli Valley, just off the Circular Drive, and below Worlds View, this historic camp site was visited by Baden Powell in the same year and has hosted many Jamborees. Scouting Zimbabwe celebrated its centenary in 2009.

In 2025 a trust under Tony Klein was established in the UK to raise funds to save this site and refurbish the facilities. The local trust, under the leadership of the MCS, has been busy with the work, whilst the UK trust has been settling the outstanding park rentals and costs. With staff engaged and water restored Gordon Park is gearing up to host not just the Scouts but also local schools on their conservation studies - an ideal facility right on Bulawayo's doorstep.

Welcome to Gordon Park



The Knapman Training Ground below BP (Africa) Rock, Gordon Park

Entrance to GP with Sham behind

Parade Ground with Shumbashaba

## 2 - NEXT EVENT

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| Date | Sunday 20 September 2026 |
| Venue | Gordon Park |
| Meet | 08:15 for 08:30 departure, Cresta Churchill |
| Travel | All vehicles |

The MCS will join with Matabeleland Scouts and old boys in a reunion and site visit to Gordon Park to celebrate the 90th anniversary. Bring your binos, walking shoes and packed lunch. Park fees are not payable if you intend only going as far as Gordon Park, and the Gordon Park book has to be completed at the main gate. There will be interesting talks and walks, and a service in the chapel at 11:00am.

## 3 – REPORT BACK – MANANGWE WETLAND

On 14 June, a lovely winter morning, we travelled to Manangwe Wetland near Silozwane. On the way we were able to stop at the park boundary to see the new fence recently installed through the generosity of the Bright Life Foundation, before heading down the Silozwane Cave Road – which rapidly deteriorated (as a result of the rains this year). In fact, we learnt that it is no longer possible to drive to Silozwane cave as the road no longer exists (one of the great tourist attractions closed because there has been no maintenance of the roads). On arrival the traditional tea was enjoyed, and we met with Clr Sibanda, before proceeding to the protected area. The benefits of protection could immediately be seen – apart from gushing clear water, tall grass and green shrubs were abundant.
We then proceeded to climb a nearby dwala – with some great rock climbing and superb views.
After lunch we visited a rewarding local rock art site – with some more climbing for the young at heart! Then afternoon tea and returning home via the park – always a treat.
Errata – In the previous newsletter we said we would visit Tshogono Wetland, (which is near Tovi). We got mixed up with the names – right wetland, wrong name!
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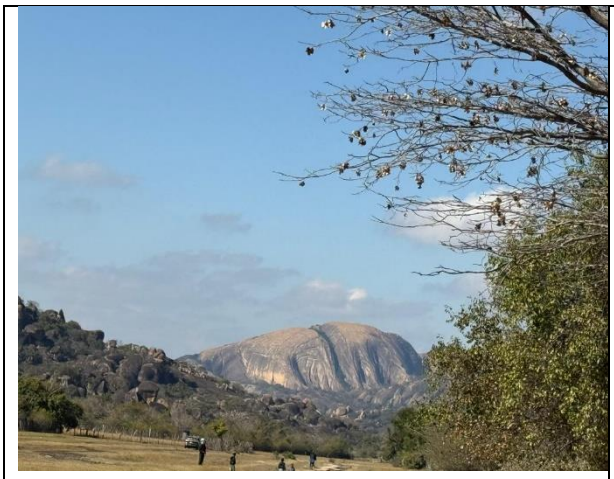
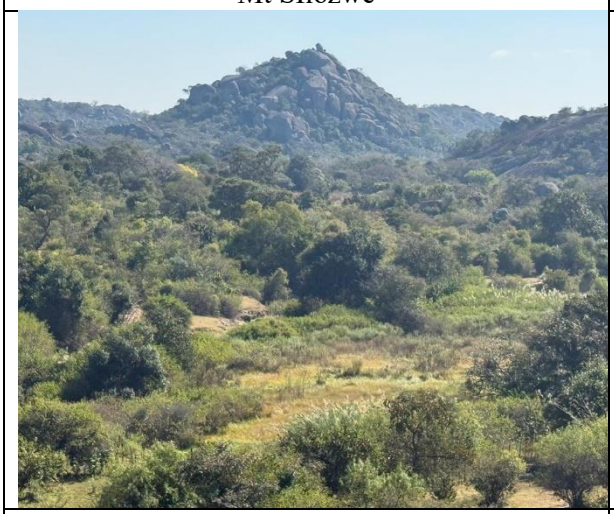
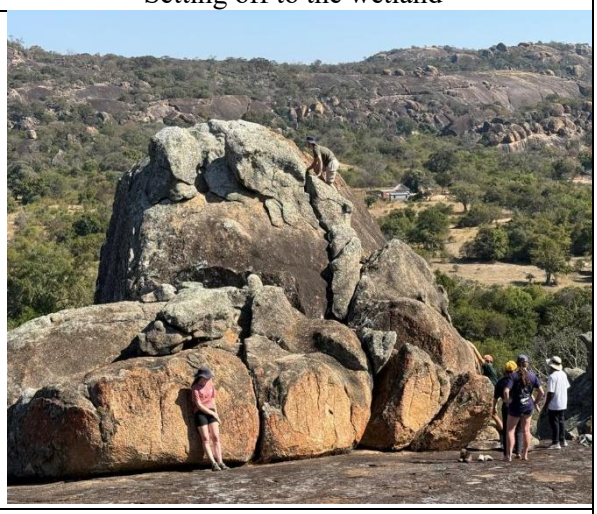


Mt SIlozwe

Setting off to the wetland



Manangwe wetland



Rock climbing

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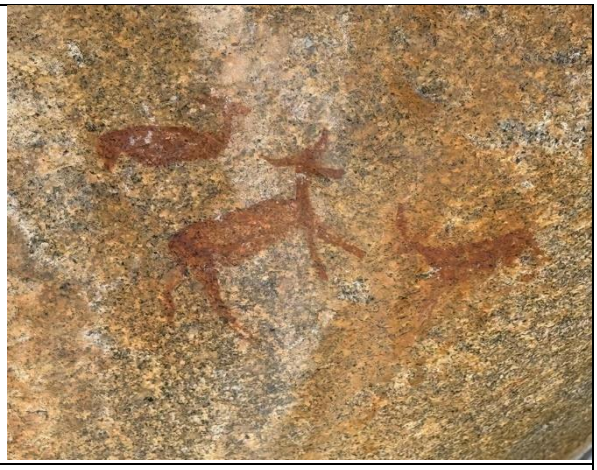
| |  |
| Giraffe | Rock Art |

## 4 – RHODES MATOPOS NATIONAL PARK CENTENARY

Our beloved Matopos National Park officially turns 100 years old in November this year. To this end National Parks are planning a number of celebratory events from 19th to 21st November to mark the founding of the country's oldest National Park, and your Society will be involved. More details will be shared with you in due course.

The Park gazetted in 1926 looked quite different to the Park we see today. It was significantly larger and incorporated what is now the Khumalo and Gulathi Communal Lands. It was felt that both wildlife and human occupation were compatible and emphasis was placed on watershed protection. However, by 1963 it was apparent that the rapidly growing human population – and even more so the cattle numbers – were threatening the wildlife and environment. Consequently, a decision was made to reduce the Park to a core central area and resettle the inhabitants either north into the newly created Gulathi TTL, or south into the newly created Khumalo TTL. This left the current National Park with its peculiar and somewhat ineffective shape today. Ineffective in that fails to secure any major watershed or wetland areas, most of which lie in the increasingly stressed Gulathi Communal Lands.

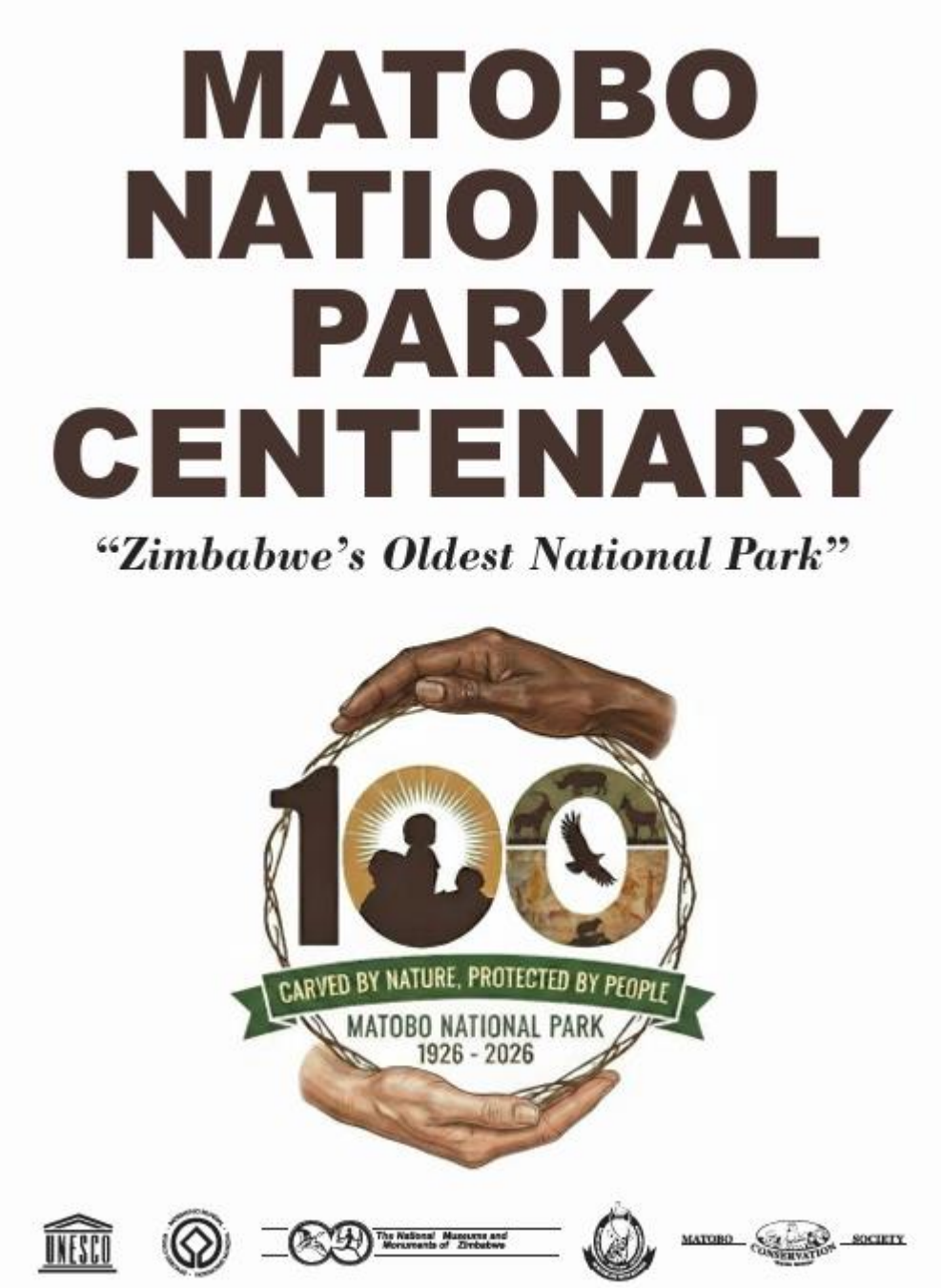
In 1965 the two Rhodes Estate farms, Hazelside and Worlds View, both National Monuments, were formally incorporated into the Park, and in 1980 a small section just north of Maleme Dame was acquired. The last increase took place in 2024 when the new boundary fence erected by the Matobo Conservation Society extended the northern boundary to the Matopos – Kezi Road.

Matobo National Park has a wide diversity of fauna: 175 bird, 88 mammal, 39 snake and 16 fish species. Game includes white rhinos, sable antelopes, impala and leopards. The park contains the world's densest population of the latter, due to the abundance of hyrax, which make up 50% of their diet. Matobo National Park contains the highest concentration of black eagles, and breeding pairs of these birds, worldwide.

The Matobo Hills is an area of high botanic diversity, with over 200 species of tree recorded in the national park. Many types of rare endemic plants have been recorded.

Matobo National Park is home to a diverse array of fungi, which play a critical role in the ecosystem. These organisms, including saprophytic and mycorrhizal species, decompose organic matter, recycle nutrients, and support plant health through symbiotic relationships. Fungi enhance soil fertility and structure, contributing to the stability of the park's unique granite landscapes. Additionally, they serve as a vital food source for various insects and small mammals, further enriching the park's biodiversity. Certain species of fungi found in the park are also collected and consumed by local communities, showcasing their cultural and ecological significance. The presence of fungi underscores the interconnectedness of flora and fauna in this ecologically rich environment.

The rich lichens that are so evident on the Matobo rocks are a mix of an algae and fungi in a symbiotic relationship.




## 5 – PVO

As resolved at the AGM, the Constitution of the MCS has been amended to comply with the Private Voluntary Organisations Act, and the Society will endeavour to be registered. It is a bewildering process with many contradictory moves, and a Constitutional Court challenge on the table.
Despite our misgivings of the whole process, we must comply and are proceeding accordingly.

## 6 - RAINFALL

**El Niño threatens Zim -MSD**: The Meteorological Services Department (MSD) has implored Zimbabweans to prepare for below-normal rainfall during the upcoming 2026/27 agricultural season. Speaking yesterday on the sidelines of the
National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2) agriculture, food, climate, and environment thematic working group meeting in Harare, MSD director Rebecca Manzou revealed that climate models indicate a 90% chance of an El Niño weather pattern developing. However, she noted it was still too early to pinpoint its exact severity or local impact –*Daily News*, Thursday June 11.

Final year to date rainfall (30 June 2026):
Western Matopos 772mm, Central Matopos 743mm, Eastern Matopos 1,315mm and Bulawayo 824mm

Rainfall to date (since 1 July 2026)
Western Matopos 0mm, Central Matopos 0mm, Eastern Matopos 4mm and Bulawayo 0mm

## 7 – A HISTORIC CONSERVATION MILESTONE FOR ZIMBABWE

In a remarkable testament to conservation efforts, the Zimbabwean government and its partners are celebrating the return of rhinos to Matusadona National Park. The historic operation, led by Matusadona National Park, the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Zimparks), and African Parks, reflects visionary leadership, effective wildlife management, value-driven partnerships, and the dedication of conservationists and local communities.

The return of the iconic giants, which historically inhabited the Matusadonha landscape, not only consolidates Zimbabwe's status as a global leader in biodiversity conservation but also directly supports Zimbabwe's National Rhino Strategy by establishing a founder population that should, over the next 15 years, contribute to another metapopulation in the country.

ZimParks Director General Prof. Edson Gandiwa stated, "The return of black rhino to Matusadona National Park is a historic event and a proud moment for Zimbabwe's conservation efforts. It is a testament to what is possible when government, conservation organisations, and local partners work together with a shared purpose."

We extend our sincere gratitude to the The Wyss Foundation, Stichting Natura Africae, the European Union, Thomas and Sara de Swardt, Global Wildlife Fund, Pangolin Crisis Fund, and the Elephant Crisis Fund, whose ongoing support for Matusadona has been instrumental in creating a safe, well-managed protected area for rhinos to roam once more. Our appreciation also goes to Imire and the Dambari Wildlife Trust for their role in ensuring the success of this operation.

"The animals, sourced from Imire Rhino and Wildlife Conservancy, and six animals from Matobo National Park, and one other undisclosed location, were loaded into specially designed crates and airlifted to the park on the shores of Lake Kariba. The sustained effort and investment by organisations like Imire, Dambari Wildlife Trust and Matobo National Park in protecting these animals has been central to this moment; without their commitment, this return would not have been possible". Africa Peace Parks

## 8 – COMMINITY HALL FOR MATOBO VILLAGERS

With acknowledgement to The Sothern Eye, 11 August.

CHIEF Masuku of Matabeleland South has spearheaded the construction of a community hall and an arts and culture centre in his village.
Construction of the more than 1 000-capacity hall started a couple of months ago and it will be commissioned soon.
In an interview with Southern Eye, Chief Masuku said the project would cost US$60 000.
"We started this project a couple of months ago and we are receiving donations in terms of materials and cash from well-wishers. I have decided to spearhead this project so that it benefits the community in various ways.
"It will be used as a court centre or for functions like weddings, cultural activities, among others. This was after considering that sometimes our community is having these functions under unfair weather conditions.
"Electricity and water have already been installed, a projector will soon be connected, and we are soon going to construct traditional huts in line with our culture.
"This will also be a culture centre where we want to take our youth on board and teach them our culture, which has become the missing link in this generation.
Masuku said the centre would also act as an innovation hub for locals, especially youths, as they want them to be innovative and stay away from social ills affecting the young.
He highlighted that they have also built a gazebo at the centre for relaxation or entertainment, where he said the community would meet to eat and drink in a relaxed atmosphere.
UNESCO

## 9 – FROM HERITAGE TO HUMAN CONNECTION: PREPARING SOUTHERN AFRICA'S HERITAGE SITES TO TELL STORIES THAT MATTER.

UNESCO – 30th August 2026

Turning heritage into visitor experiences

The training marked an important step from planning towards implementation across six participating heritage destinations: Tsodilo Hills World Heritage Site, Matsanjeni North, Morija Cultural Precinct, Twyfelfontein / Ui-//aes World Heritage Site, ǂKhomani Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site and Matobo Hills World Heritage Site.

Work is underway across the sites to strengthen how heritage is managed, interpreted and connected to sustainable tourism development.

Rather than developing interpretation frameworks that remain planning documents, the project aims to translate them into experiences visitors can see, hear and participate in, including guided experiences, heritage trails, exhibitions, community storytelling and appropriate digital interpretation.

Through the Certified Interpretive Planner training approach, participants explored practical methods for identifying the significance of heritage, understanding audiences, developing meaningful themes and connecting tangible places with the stories, memories and values associated with them.

The training challenged us to think beyond simply giving visitors information about our sites. Good interpretation is about creating a connection, helping visitors understand why a place matters, whose stories it carries and what they should take away from the experience.

Corera Links, Socio-Economic Transformation Officer, ǂKhomani Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site, South Africa

Putting communities and multiple voices at the centre

Heritage sites carry different histories, memories, meanings and perspectives. The objective is therefore not to develop one standard story across the six destinations, but to equip each site team to create an interpretation framework grounded in its heritage values, communities and visitor context.

Community participation is central to this process. Local communities are not only beneficiaries of heritage tourism; they are knowledge holders, custodians and storytellers whose perspectives can shape how places are understood and presented.

Their participation can also create opportunities for local guides, creatives, cultural practitioners, entrepreneurs, women and young people to engage more meaningfully in the visitor economy.
As local guides, we are not only showing visitors places; we are sharing stories that come from our communities and our lived experiences. It is important that local people are involved in deciding how those stories are told, so that visitors hear the voices of the people connected to the heritage.
Sipho Khoza, Local Community Guide, Matsanjeni North, Eswatini

Learning by doing
Through facilitated sessions, group exercises, practical activities and reflection, participants explored how interpretation can provoke curiosity, encourage participation, create deeper meaning and strengthen stewardship of heritage.
One question captured the approach:
“What story should every visitor remember after leaving your heritage site?”
The question encouraged site teams to think beyond signs, information panels and guided commentary towards the lasting connection between visitors and heritage.
Interpretation is not simply about providing more information. It is about creating meaningful connections between people and heritage. When visitors are encouraged to think, participate and discover meaning for themselves, interpretation can contribute to a deeper appreciation of a place and its values.
Michal Medek, Lead Trainer, Interpret Europe
From training to action
Participants will now take the knowledge and methods developed during the programme back to their respective sites. The next stage will involve working with site teams, communities and other stakeholders to develop site-specific interpretation and storytelling frameworks.
The frameworks will identify the stories each site wants to communicate, audiences it seeks to reach, perspectives that should be represented and appropriate ways of transforming these narratives into visitor experiences.
This site-level approach recognizes that Tsodilo Hills, Matsanjeni North, Morija Cultural Precinct, Twyfelfontein / Ui-//aes, ǂKhomani Cultural Landscape and Matobo Hills have distinct histories, landscapes, communities, heritage values and tourism contexts.

This training is not an end in itself. What matters now is how the learning is taken back to each of the six sites and translated into interpretation and storytelling frameworks developed with communities and other stakeholders. Ultimately, we want to see those frameworks move from paper into real visitor experiences that strengthen people's connection with heritage while creating opportunities for communities.

Rodney Bunhiko, Project Coordinator, UNESCO

Turning stories into sustainable futures

Strong interpretation can contribute to meaningful visitor experiences, diversified tourism products, local livelihood opportunities and greater understanding of why heritage needs to be protected.

For the *Africa–Europe Partnerships for Culture* project, this connects interpretation to the wider objective of developing sustainable culture and heritage-based tourism across Southern Africa.

Success will ultimately be reflected in what happens at the six sites: whether guides are better equipped to engage visitors, communities have stronger voices in presenting their heritage, new experiences and opportunities emerge, and visitors leave with a deeper understanding of the places and people they encounter.

The regional training provided a common foundation. The next step is to turn that learning into locally grounded interpretation frameworks, and those frameworks into experiences that connect people with heritage.

Because the most powerful heritage stories are not simply those that are told, but those that people understand, connect with and carry with them long after they leave.

## 10 – 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.

In response to this crisis, the Southern African Science Service Centre for Climate Change and Adaptive Land Management (SASSCAL) has launched the Wetlands Monitoring and Assessment (WeMAST) project.

WeMAST uses advanced geospatial and remote sensing technologies to monitor and manage wetland areas, providing real-time data to policymakers and local communities.

The project aims to enhance early warning systems, support sustainable development planning, and build long-term resilience to climate risks.

SASSCAL interim executive director Budzanani Tacheba emphasised the importance of protecting wetlands for the wellbeing of communities.

"Wetlands support livelihoods across our region. From flood control to water purification and food security, their protection is directly tied to the wellbeing of our communities," Tacheba said.

WeMAST project is a collaborative effort, supported by the African Union and European Union.

"With the right tools, we're empowering the region to act early, plan wisely and protect effectively," Tacheba added.

Southern Africa's wetlands promote sustainable development.

WeMAST project is a critical step towards providing a framework for wetland conservation and management.

A report by the United Nations Development Programme of 2020 revealed that 30 wetlands were under threat from illegal settlements in Harare alone.

Furthermore, wetlands are increasingly being destroyed by construction projects, agriculture and mining, among other human activities.

## 11 – MATOBO HERITAGE MTB CHALLENGE

The 17th annual Matobo Heritage MTB Challenge held in late March proved a challenge with the all the rain we had enjoyed. Whilst the event itself enjoyed good weather, the hills were still water-logged that gave rise to a special experience. Sections of the three-day route were changed to avoid as

much bog as possible – but cyclists still had to navigate some sticky parts. At the Tuli river a float was erected to assist both bicycles and riders across the still deep and fast flowing river and it was kept busy as the 90 riders or so crossed over on day 2. However later that day the bus collecting drivers got stuck in the mud going to Camp Dwala throwing the plans into disarray! We finally got the last volunteer's home by 6pm – a much longer day than planned – and it took 5 days to get the bus out!
The front of the race was a tough one, with just a 3-minute gap between 1st and 2nd.
Once again the event could not be so successfully hosted if we did not enjoy the support of so many volunteers.

## 12 – MATOBO HERITAGE TRAIL RUN

Just under 40 runners met at Camp Dwala on 21st August to take part in the 11th edition of the annual Trail Run. This was one of the largest turnouts for the event with runners opting for either a 63km (42+21), 50 (30+20) or 24km (12+12) routes, over two days. Stuart Gimmel won the event in 6hrs 54mins (4hrs 43 mins for the 42 Km and 2hrs 8mins for the 21 km.)

## 13 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

| | |
|---|---|
| 05 June 2026 | World Environment Day |
| 18 – 20 September | Gordon Park 90th Anniversary |
| 20 September 2026 | MCS Field Trip to Gordon Park |
| 19 – 21 November 2026 | Rhodes Matopos National Park Centenary Celebrations |
| 22 November 2026 | MCS 34th Annual General Meeting (date TBC) |
| 28 – 30 November 2026 | Matobo Classic |

## 14 – MEMBERS NOTEBOOK

**Subscriptions**

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2027 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**

**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. 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 downloading maps and information.
Please email to **matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com**

**Facebook**

Don't forget to join our Facebook page, with over 2,000 members now and 47,000 views in the past month.

**The Natural History of the Matobo Hills**

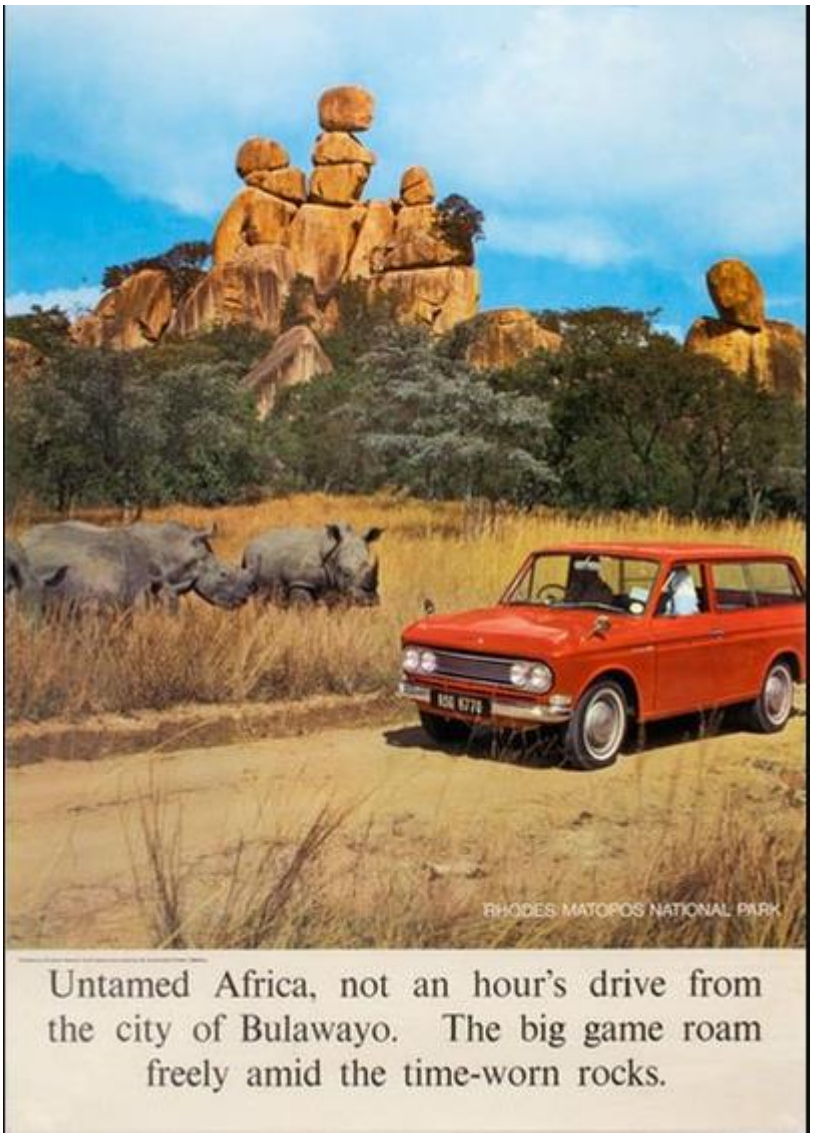
This MCS publication is available at the Natural History Museum for US$25.

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

This limited-edition book was published by the Matobo Conservation Society in 2025 and records an important part of the Matopos History. Available at $50 each – as long as stocks last. Contact the Secretary.

## 15 – SUBSCRIPTION REMINDER

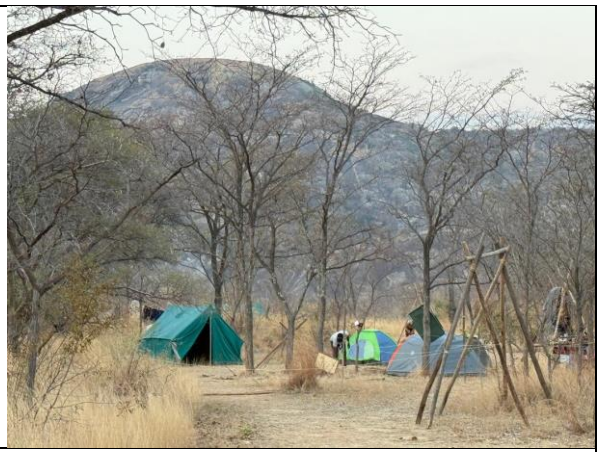
**Subscriptions fall due at the end of September as we reach our year end. Please settle with the Treasurer or Secretary in good time.**




Untamed Africa, not an hour's drive from the city of Bulawayo. The big game roam freely amid the time-worn rocks.

An old familiar promotional picture of Rhodes Matopos National Park. Whilst the vehicles have changed neither the balancing rocks nor the rhino have changed over the years! Matobo National Park @ 100

A late afternoon Visitor to Gordon Park



Scout camp at Gordon Park with Shumbashaba