MATOBO CONSERVATION SOCIETY

'Gcina Imvelo'

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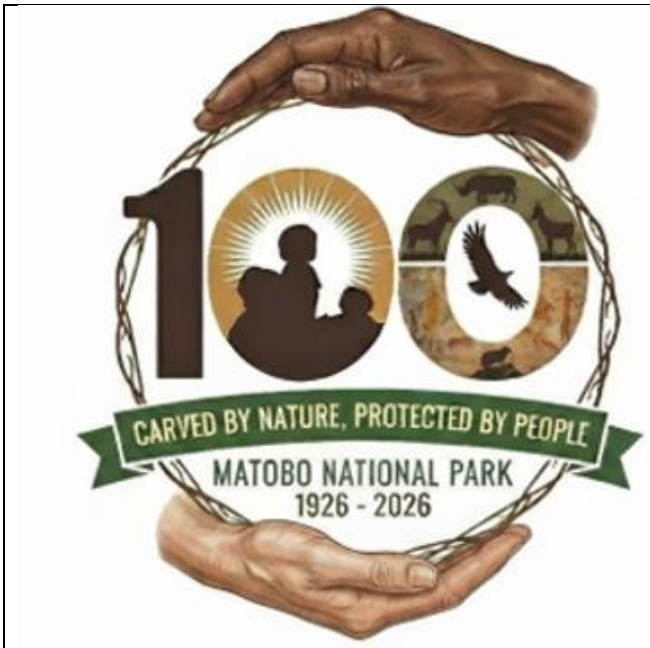
NEWSLETTER 135 / OCTOBER 2026

1 – RHODES MATOPOS NATIONAL PARK CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



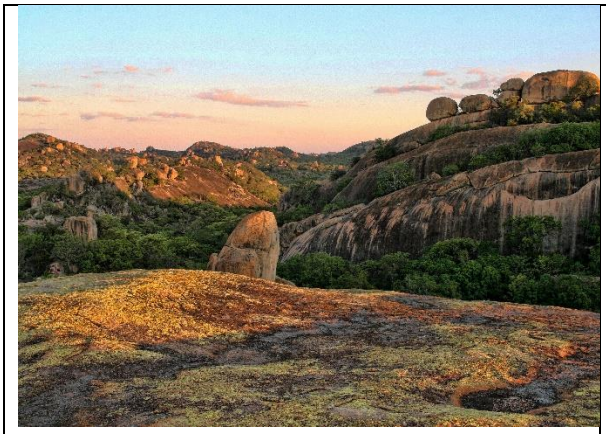
The Rhodes Matopos National Park, or commonly called Matobo National Park had its origins in the will of CJ Rhodes when he bequeathed his Matopos Farms to the people of Bulawayo for recreational and research purposes. However, it was not until 1926 that the Park was formerly declared – making it Zimbabwe's first National Park.

This is an historic milestone that we will be celebrating in style!

Following our AGM on Sunday 22nd November we will partake of a formal lunch to celebrate the occasion. See the details at the end of the newsletter. We hope to see you all at the AGM to mark this special event.

Mother and Child balancing rocks

Malindidzimu (Worlds View)



Matopos Landscape near Bambata

Rock Art at Inange cave

2 - NEXT EVENT

Date	Sunday 22 November2026
Venue	Rowallan Park
Meet	08:15 for 08:30 departure, Cresta Churchill
Travel	All vehicles
AGM	11:00am followed by lunch at 12:30pm

The MCS will hold its AGM on Sunday 22nd November at 11:00am at Rowallan Park A programme of events, including a 3-course lunch has been arranged with the details at the end of this Newsletter. We hope to see you there as we celebrate the centenary of our special Park.

3 – REPORT BACK – GORDON PARK

On Sunday 20th September we joined with both current and past Scouts to mark the 90th anniversary of the establishment of Gordon Park in 1936. Following our conventional tea we went for a short walk along the Mtsheleli River – still full of clear water – then onto Headquarters and finally inspected the newly renovated ablutions. The renovations had been funded by the Gordon Park Educational Trust and the first school camp will take place in November. Thereafter we joined with the Scouts for a Service of Celebration at the open-air chapel before retiring for a fascinating talk given by Dr Nicky Pegg on rhino management in the National Park. A picnic lunch followed. A leisurely afternoon was spent at Gordon Park before folk set off for home – meeting some large residents en route!
We congratulate Gordon Park on its achievement.

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Gordon Park

Knapman Training Ground

Church Service	Reunion
Rhino Talk by Dr N Pegg	Big Boys

4 – RHODES MATOPOS NATIONAL PARK CENTENARY

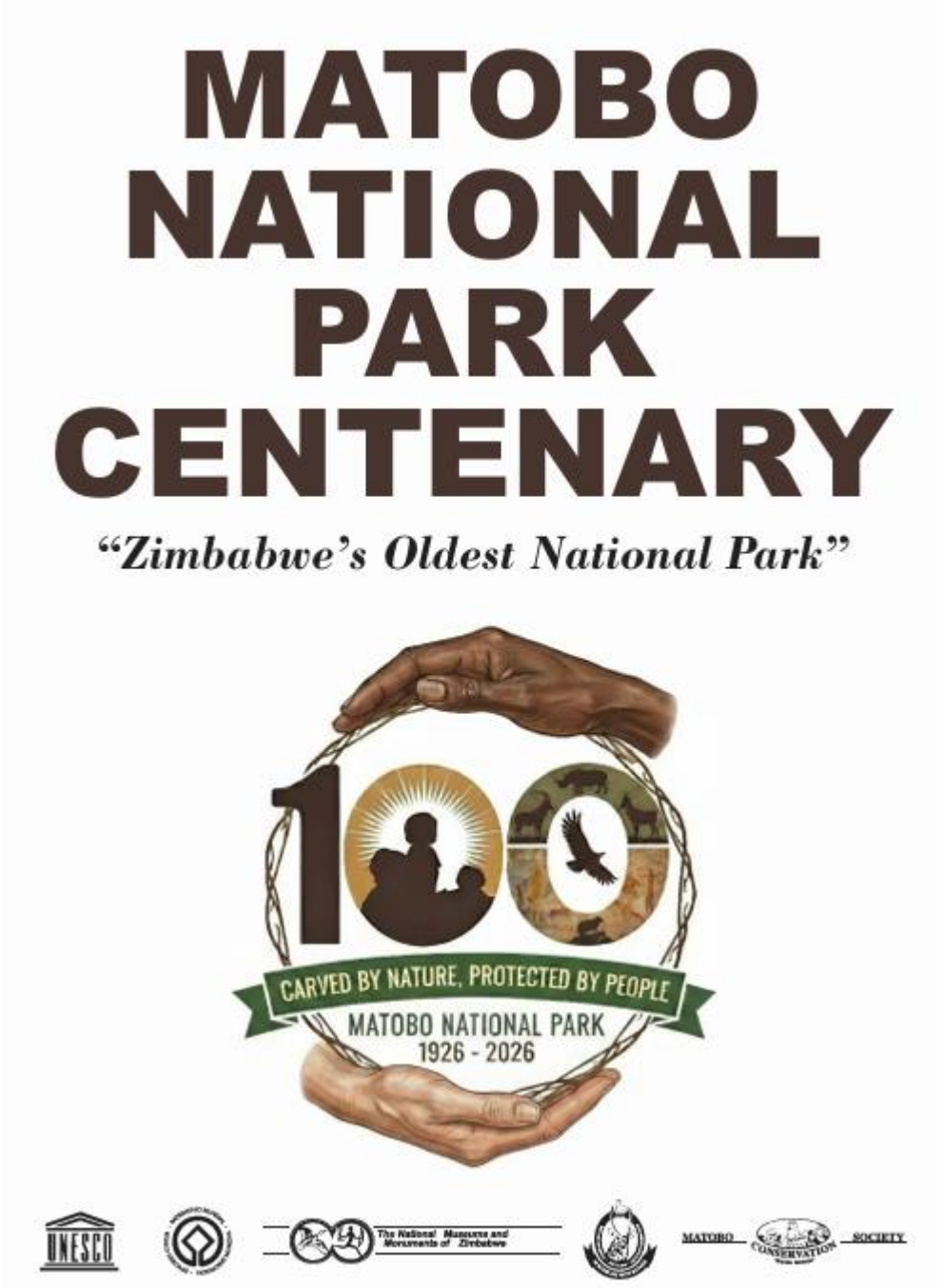
To celebrate the centenary of the Matobo National Park a number of events have been lined up and we hope you will be able to participate in some, or all, of them.

Thursday 19th Formal Function and awards at Maleme Rest Camp
Friday 20th Free entry
Saturday 21st Sports activities, including a MTB ride, at Maleme Rest Camp
Sunday 22nd MCS AGM at Rowallan Park

During the 1950's the then Government of Southern Rhodesia began to develop the Parks estate more extensively. In the Matopos this led to the building of a number of dams, starting with Mpopoma, Maleme, Mtsheleli and Toghwana amongst others. At this time Maleme Rest Camp was developed to provide accommodation within the park. Great care was taken to conceal the Rest Camp so that it did not impose upon the landscape. In the 1960's the Camp was extended, and two special lodges were added, Fish and Black Eagle Lodges, which enjoyed unsurpassed views of the Maleme Gorge and Dam. In the 1990's Mbila Lodge was built across the Dam – the concept of concealment was clearly abandoned.

Camping Grounds were established at Maleme, Mtsheleli and Toghwana, and later at Sandy Spruit and Msilume. These proved popular during the 1970's and again after independence but now are not as well used.

White rhinos were introduced in the 1960's and black rhino in the 1990's.The Matopos has proved to be highly successful in breeding these animals and regularly animals are translocated to other sanctuaries, such as Hwange and Matusadona. Sadly, the large herds of Sable, Wildebeest and Zebra are no longer found within the National Park – excessive game capture and poaching have reduced these numbers, but camera traps still show a great variety of wildlife in the Park



5 – PVO

Committee members were interviewed by the BCC Department of Social Welfare as part of the PVO registration. We continue to pursue the process.

6 - RAINFALL

We enjoyed unexpected rain in early October, sufficient to get the streams flowing and the weirs spilling again. The Hills are still very wet, from the last season, so it did not take much to get them flowing again. Western Matopos 58mm, Central Matopos 86mm, Eastern Matopos 56mm.

7 – CHROME MINER GROUNDED IN MAVURADONHA

Acknowledgement to the Independent, Sept 4, 2026

A chrome mining firm has been barred from operating within the precincts of the protected Mavuradonha Wilderness, 6 years after the government outlawed mining in national parks and other ecologically fragile areas. In 2020, authorities banned companies, including foreign entities, from conducting mining operations in national parks, primarily to protect wildlife and the environment, following mounting pressure from environmental campaigners. Authorities later renewed and strictly

reinstated the ban on riverbed and alluvial mining in August 2024. However, while mining companies have largely complied with the restrictions, some still hold vast and potentially lucrative claims in protected areas and, in some cases, continue to operate illegally. In one such case, Armane Engineering Mining was red-flagged by the Environmental Management Agency (Ema) for extracting chrome within the vicinity of Mavuradonha Wilderness, a protected conservation area, national monument and prospective UNESCO World Heritage Site. Investigations by the Independent into compliance with the government's 2020 directive established that Armane was slapped with a level 14 penalty by Ema on April 28 for conducting mining operations without an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), effectively grounding the company's operations. Ema principal environmental education and publicity officer Liberty Mugadza said a fortnight ago that the agency had stopped issuing EIAs for mining activities in the Mavuradonha Wilderness and other protected areas where miners did not have lease agreements from the relevant Rural District Council (RDC).

8 – POACHER IS TRAMPLED TO DEATH BY ELEPHANTS WHILE LINING UP A SHOT TO KILL A WHITE RHINO.

Acknowledgement to Daily Mail, 15 Sept 2026

An armed poacher sneaking up on unsuspecting rhinos was ambushed by a herd of elephants and trampled to death as he lined up a shot to cash in on its prized horn.

Two men with a high-powered rifle and an axe had crossed into the iconic Kruger National Park in South Africa looking for a potential £10,000 payday with a single shot. But unknown to them the white rhino herd had been following a water source along with a group of nearby African elephants sheltering from the harsh sun under trees. As the pair closed in on the rhinos – whose horn per ounce is worth more than gold or cocaine on the black market – the elephants broke cover and charged them. A Kruger National Park source said: 'The two ran in different directions but the one lining up the shot was the slowest to his feet and the elephants went for him first. 'He was quickly overrun and the elephants trampled him into the earth and all that we found was basically a very large blood stain around the clothing he was in. 'The other poacher made it to safety but has since been arrested. We were alerted to the incident and followed the suspect back to where the incident happened. 'The report came in that there was not much left but a big blood stain in the earth and his clothes.

'Elephants are extremely intelligent and as they say never forget and may well have witnessed poachers before sneaking up on rhinos and went to protect them. 'For us it's a big boost when the animals win and poachers lose. The Kruger is huge and we can't be everywhere so it's nice when the nellies give us some help!' There are some 1,850 white rhinos in the Kruger National Park which is the same size as Wales and home to the Big Five of elephant, rhino, buffalo, lion and leopard. Last year, 175 rhinos were shot dead by poachers for their horns which can earn them fortunes and once exported to the Far East can be worth 20 times as much. The horns – although made only of keratin which is the same as human fingernails – are highly prized in oriental medicine to be sold in potions as 'magic cures'. South African National Parks spokesman JP Louw said: 'We received information that two poachers entered the park illegally through the Pafuri area to hunt. 'It would seem they encountered a herd of elephants and fled in different directions and one suspect on returning home later reported his accomplice was missing.

'He said while he was running away he heard loud screaming and after his arrest he led us back to that area and we discovered the body of the trampled suspect' he said.

An alert was raised by a suspected poacher at Pafuri Rangers Lodge who told rangers his accomplice had been trampled to death . The surviving suspected poacher has been handed over to the South African Police to face trial. The alert was raised at the Pafuri Ranger Lodge and rangers hiked 6km (four miles) inland following their tracks to near a river where they found the body near a rhino herd. There was little sympathy on Facebook and one commenter Junior Legabe said: 'The elephants are the gatekeepers! I wish the hyenas got to them after they did.' Another Modbe Raganya said: 'Elephants have done justice for the targeted rhinos! Big ups to the elephant family for helping the game rangers do their job out there.' In 2018, three poachers broke into the Sibuya Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape after their prized herd of white rhino but found themselves hunted instead. The resident pride of lions pounced and tore all three men armed with high-powered rifles and axes to cut off the rhino horns to shreds and ate the poachers alive. All that was found was three empty pairs of shoes and their guns and the axe along with some chewed up bloody bones and the heads were never found. In the same year at the Ingwelala Private Game Reserve in Hoedspruit, Limpopo Province, game rangers found only the head and the rifle of an eaten poacher. It was found close to a rhino herd and he had also been eaten by lions. In 2019, in the

Kruger National Park three poachers were tracked by rangers and as a K9 unit closed in they dropped their guns and an axe and made a run for it. But in their haste, they surprised a herd of elephants close to the rhinos which stamped and crushed one poacher to death but the other two managed to escape. They were tracked down and caught but by the time the rangers got back to the victim he'd been eaten by lions and only his skull and clothes remained. It is not known how many poachers are eaten by wild animals in Africa each year because if any of the gang survive attacks by lions or elephants they very rarely report it to police. Any survivors usually leave their fellow criminals behind for the hyenas and vultures or return later and hide their bodies themselves to prevent their discovery by game rangers.

9 – PG CALLS FOR TOUGHER WILDLIFE JUSTICE

With acknowledgement to the Daily News, 23 September, 2026

Zimbabwe must clamp down on lucrative wildlife crime while maintaining fair, humane justice for impoverished offenders, Prosecutor-General Loice Matanda-Moyo urges. Speaking during the official launch of a landmark publication titled A Review of Wildlife Criminal Law and Wildlife Court Judgments in Zimbabwe in Harare yesterday, Matanda-Moyo said the country's wildlife was a national and global treasure that needed greater protection. "Zimbabwe is blessed with some of the most magnificent wildlife on Earth. Our elephants, our rhinos, our pangolins, our lions, these are not just animals. They are symbols of our national identity. They are part of our cultural heritage. They are treasures that belong not just to us, but to all humanity and to future generations. The UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) estimates illegal wildlife trade to be around US$23bn annually around the globe. It is one of the most lucrative criminal enterprises in the world, ranking alongside drug trafficking and arms smuggling. It is increasingly linked to organised crime, money laundering and even terrorism financing. Zimbabwe stands at the forefront of this battle. We cannot afford to fail," she said. Matanda-Moyo, however, said the fight against wildlife crime should not result in blanket punishment, noting that some offenders were driven by poverty and desperation.

10 – WHITE RHINOS REINTRODUCED AT VIC FALLS RESERVE

Source: Anantara Stanley & Livingstone Hotel

Anantara Stanley & Livingstone Hotel, set in Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls Private Game Reserve, has received its first white rhinos joining already resident black rhinos. The translocation was carried out by the Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority and Lake Kyle Recreational Park.

The reserve established an intensive protection zone for rhinos in 2006.

"Welcoming white rhinos alongside our black rhinos is a dream come true for our team and a huge victory for Zimbabwean conservation," says Reserve Manager Picket Chabwedzeka. "Having both species in Victoria Falls isn't just a historic milestone, it's evidence that dedicated protection works and we are proud to give our guests a direct opportunity to help secure their future."

The hotel has also introduced the Rhino Guardian Game Drive hosted by the reserve manager. The three- to four-hour private experience includes rhino tracking within the protection zone and a briefing with the reserve's anti-poaching unit.

The drive costs US$600 per person for groups of two to six guests. According to the hotel, US$340 per guest goes towards reserve management, including fence maintenance, snare removal and anti-poaching operations. Advance booking is required.

11- THE SPHERICAL ROCK-HOLES: HOW DO YOU MAKE A PERFECT BOWL IN GRANITE?

Across Zimbabwe there are hundreds of grinding hollows in granite. Most are shallow ellipses worn by rubbing, or deep pits pounded for crushing.

A smaller class is different.

Voytek and Dorothy Popiel spent ten years on it and reported in the Prehistory Society newsletter (June 2004) on holes that are circular in plan and in cross-section. In other words, hemispheres. They have a sharp rim, often a chamfer and a small cusp, and they are shallower than a dolly hole.

Where: They recorded over 100 holes at 15 sites, including Chegutu, Kwekwe, Naletale, the Masvingo area, Bikita, the Matopos, Harare and Sondelani south of West Nicholson.

How big: Size is fairly consistent within an area but varies between sites. Sphere diameters run from about 160 mm at Sondelani to over 300 mm around Masvingo.

Siting: The Popiels found nothing special. No rocky amphitheatre, hilltop, river or visible mining waste. Sometimes better rock was nearby. Elders said the holes had always been there.

The puzzle is the precision. Rubbing a stone by hand should wander. Pressure varies, the rock has soft and hard spots, and the shape should drift as the hole deepens. Yet these stay round.

Several ideas are on the table, the academic explanation:
• Rubbing with a rounded stone in a circular, rocking motion, which is the Popiels' working assumption.
• A self-correcting process. When a rounded stone is worked in many directions inside a hollow, both surfaces may wear toward matching spheres. Lens grinders have long used this principle. It's a hypothesis, and nobody has tested it on these holes.
• A rotary tool. One old rancher's account from Sondelani describes chatter marks like those from a drill starting on an uncentred spot. That is second-hand and unchecked.

What is still open:
- how was such uniform precision achieved?
• No rubbing stone has been confidently matched to these holes.
• Who made them, and when? There is no date.
  - there is no oral tradition to explain them
• The Popiels asked for photogrammetry, scratch-mark microscopy and analysis of material trapped in cracks. As far as I know, that work was never done.

"Dolly Holes" are found throughout the Matobo Hills, alongside grinding stones and "morter and pestle" holes. They are usually found as single holes, or in a small group. A particulary large one exists at Amalinda.

12 – SACRED MATABELELAND MOUNTAINS UNDER SIEGE

With acknowledgement to Silas Nkala, 27 September, 2026
Mountains across Matabeleland are under increasing threat from mining activities while uncontrolled sand extraction leaves degraded landscapes and abandoned pits raising serious concern about the effectiveness of Environmental Protection and enforcement measures. The concerns were raised in the Senate where legislators hope that mountains will be protected. Matabeleland is home to numerous mountains of deep cultural and spiritual significance including historical sites tied to Mware worship and pre-colonial heritage Matabeleland South and Matabeleland North have granite and other mineral deposits which have attracted large scale and artisanal miners in recent years. The rush for granite, lithium and other minerals has intensified amid growing demand for transition minerals and Zimbabwe's national drive to expand mining output. Sand extraction has similarly emerged as a major environmental challenge nationwide, driven by an ongoing construction boom and urban expansion.

Bulawayo Senator Kucaca Phulu said mining activities which destroy the mountains across Matabeleland South and Matabeleland North particularly as miners targeted granites and other available resources. “What programs are in place to protect our mountains especially the sacred ones with history and great importance to our community?” he asked.

EDITOR - In the Matobo Hills this threat has manifested itself with planned cell phone masts on strategic hills, granite collection, and sand extraction. Despite repeated reports to the authorities there has been no response apart from National Museums and Monuments reporting the matter and calling for restraint. As the Matobo Hills fall within a cultural landscape World Heritage Site the matter has attracted the attention of UNESCO and yet EMA and ZRP take no action.

13 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

19 – 21 November 2026	Rhodes Matopos National Park Centenary Celebrations
22 November 2026	MCS 34th Annual General Meeting
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

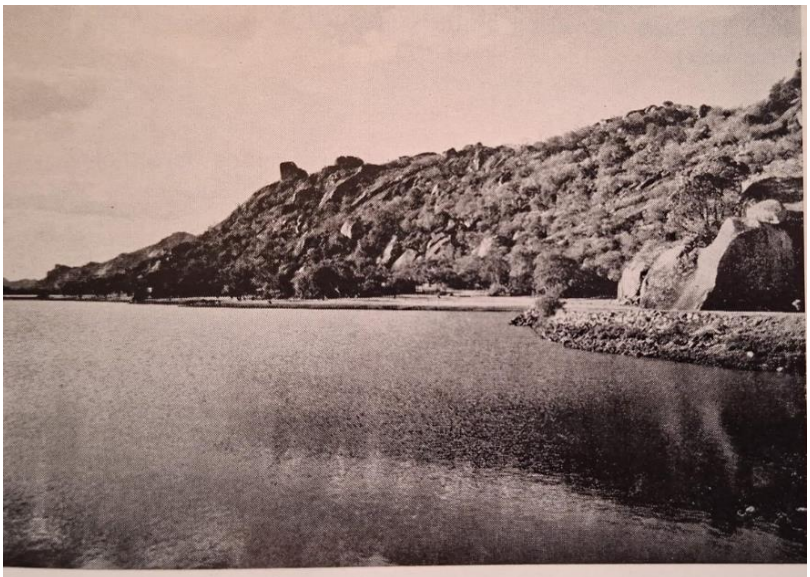
Don’t forget to join our Facebook page, with over 2,000 members now and 47,000 views in the past month.

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.



Maleme Dam — Matopos National Park.

Another old familiar promotional picture of Rhodes Matopos National Park. Maleme dam
Matobo National Park @ 100

16 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To celebrate the centenary of the Rhodes Matopos National Park we will hold our AGM in the National Park at Rowallan Adventure Park. Rowallan Adventure Park have generously offered a 30% discount to any folk who wish to spend Saturday night at the camp and reservations can be made with Fiona Rix on 0781 706 108. A combined bring and braai will be held in the evening.

On Sunday 22nd November we will hold our AGM followed by a talk on the black eagles of the Matobo Hills. Then there will be a formal lunch - the cost of the 3-course lunch is $20 per head, including a glass or two of wine. Please book your lunch by 6th November with Gaynor on 0712 2402341 or Gavin on 0772 221223. We look forward to seeing you there.