

MATOBO CONSERVATION SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 68

DECEMBER 2009

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1 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our Annual General Meeting was successfully held on the 29 November at Gordon Park. A write up of events is contained elsewhere in this newsletter. The AGM at Gordon Park was to celebrate the centenary of Scouting Zimbabwe, and in particular First Bulawayo (Pioneer) Troop, with Mr Norman Scott fittingly the guest speaker after the AGM.

The newly elected Committee comprises two new members, Gaynor Lightfoot and Duncan Purchase. Both are welcomed onto the committee and we look forward to sharing their experience with us. They join existing members Paul Hubbard and Shelagh Adams. The new office bearers are Chairman Gavin Stephens, Secretary Jean Whiley and Treasurer Adele Edwards.

Our former Chairman Iain Sheasby was unable to continue in office, and stood down from the Committee. We will miss his valuable input but have been assured that will still assist! Norman Scott also did not seek re-election, needing time to focus on his various activities. Norman has been a useful source of information, but has also promised to help out when called upon. We thank them both for their help and contributions.

2 – BOOK RAFFLE

We hoped to hold our raffle at the AGM, but had not sold quite enough tickets. It was agreed by members present to delay the raffle as we endeavour to sell more tickets and raise additional funds. So if you have not yet bought your tickets, it's not too late. A reminder of the prizes - "Legacy on the Rocks" by Elspeth Parry (donated by Elspeth Parry) and "Albizia Southern Africa" by Martinus Steyn (donated by Brian Kalshoven).

3 – RAINFALL

The rains have come – and the hills transformed to the tropical green scenery we love, with gurgling streams! As at 6 December 2009 the eastern Matopos has received 205mm, the Eastern Matopos 185mm.

4 – CALENDAR

7 February 2010	Mshashasha	Topic – Fungus and Mushrooms
16 May 2010	tba	Topic –
5 June 2010	RMNP	Topic – Annual Clean-up Day (World Environment Day)
15 August 2010	tba	Topic –
28 November 2010	AGM	Venue to be advised

(We will endeavour to keep to these dates, but reserve the right to make amendments)

5 - NEXT EVENT

Date	7 February 2010
Venue	Mshashasha Falls (The Cascades)
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Churchill Arms Hotel
Travel	Trucks recommended (Weather will impact the road conditions)
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat!

We will visit the Mshashasha Falls once again, and in the company of Cathy Sharp we hope to see plenty of Fungus and Mushrooms in the *Brachystegia glaucescens* forest. These magnificent falls are the largest in the Matopos, and we hope to swim in the plunge pool at the foot of the falls so bring your costume!

(The World Wetlands Day is marked on the 2nd February, so this event will be our commemoration!)

6 – REPORT BACK

(with appreciation to Gaynor Lightfoot)

Fort Mangwe, John Lee's House & Cemetery

Members met at the Churchill Arms on a chilly morning and the convoy made it way onto the Plumtree Highway turning off at the Beaconsfield Road after many corrugations on the road, we arrived at the Mangwe Pass Memorial met by Neville & Ernest Rosenfel and Georgina. After a short chat was given and members were shown where the wagons passed through it was into our vehicles and off to Fort Mangwe Neville showed the way by this time the cloud was breaking at the sun as trying it's best to make an appearance. After passing the lovely Mangwe Dam we arrived at the fort for tea. Members looked around Paul answered any questions that arose. Then back on the road again this time off to John Lee's house (or what is left of it). On arrival members at there own pace made there away to the veranda etc. of the old house. Ernest gave a little chat on what he knew and Paul did likewise. The kopje Lee's Castle was pointed out and the story was told of Han's Lee and the lion in the cattle kraal. The cemetery was across the Mangwe River so some members took a walk to the cemetery. At the cemetery there were the graves of Mrs John Lee (Louisa): Frank Poecke : Trooper H C Elgar (BSAP):Reginald Jennings Rix (BSAP)9/5/1908 Age 29 : W Rennie Tailyour : Amandevu and unmarked graves with wooden crosses or just stones around. After our walk about the cemetery we made our way back to the vehicles and proceeded to the home of Ernest & Betty Rosenfels. We had our lunch in the beautiful garden. After lunch the oxen were in spanned and a ride was given to the members. After which the members made their way back to Bulawayo after a lovely day at Mangwe. Thanks to Ernest, Betty, Neville & Georgina for their input into the history of Mangwe as well as hospitality to MCS.

(Members wanting more information on all three sites can contact Gaynor who has additional material)

7 – AGM WEEKEND REPORT BACK

(With acknowledgement to Norman Scott and taken from the Gordon Park Newsletter)

A final task, that of planting a *Kirkia acuminata* !

The Matopos Conservation Society had last year resolved to hold its Seventeenth Annual General Meeting at Gordon Park this year, in recognition of Zimbabwe's Scouting Centenary. The date set was Sunday 29 November, 2009. In addition to this meeting, the Society had decided to hold a Strategic Planning Meeting in order to chart a new path for the Society taking into consideration the changes that had taken place over the past six years since the last revision had been made. In order for this additional meeting to take place, the Society requested to use the Park for the Saturday as well. This request was readily agreed to, for not only do we Scouts get exposure to the general public and may I add, people of a high profile, but we are as a Troop, members of the Society. We had been quietly preparing for this event for a number of weekends and so on Friday evening following the Troop meeting, four of us, Leon, Chris, Dale and myself, headed out to Gordon Park.

Our Saturday morning **started at 05.30 hours** with the preparation of the Lodge. Two of us had gone out to the Park during the week and had polished the wooden block floor, which now only needed a final polish to ensure a shiny surface. Then it needed to be set up as the venue for the Strategic Planning Meeting. The tables and chairs, chalk boards and jugs of water with glasses arranged for thirsty participants involved in the high level debates later in the day, transformed the empty Lodge into a most spectacular venue. Leon took care of these chores. Whilst these were being attended to, one lone figure was busy with the field mower, trimming the grass verges of the entrance road into the Park. Chris and Dale were put on kitchen duty at Headquarters to prepare breakfast to be ready at 07.00 hours for us hungry workers.

The first group of participants arrived at 10.30 hours and were directed to an area where they could pitch their tents, for many had intended to camp out for the Saturday night. Society members are outdoors orientated so no need for the luxury of four solid walls to sleep behind. Well before 14.00 hours when the workshop was to start, everybody who had been invited had sorted out their accommodation, had had lunch and were seated to get on with the task at hand. Concluding business by 17.00 hours it was time to relax, to have a walk around the Park, sundowners at the braai fires lit by the Scouts and talk of the beauty, the tranquillity of this Bush and Boulder Land, we call the Matopos - the reason why they were here. One by one

people drifted off to their tents and by 22.00 hours the camp was quiet, save for the **calling of the owls** about the camp and some other creatures going about their business in the darkened forests.

Only two Society members joined us Scouts at 06.00 hours on Sunday morning to climb the heights of Shumbashaba. It was a fantastic morning. Far on the eastern horizon an early morning rain shower was drenching the parched veldt, whilst a light cloud cover drifted lazily over head. It was 08.00 hours by the time we returned to Headquarters to have breakfast and then to prepare for an orienteering activity for our guests after the A.G.M. later in the day.

The Society's A.G.M. was held at 11.00 hours after which a short talk on the history and purpose of Scouting in Zimbabwe was delivered. Then it was lunch time followed by a few people taking part in the orienteering exercise set up in the morning. A final task, that of planting a **Kirkia acuminata (White syringa) tree adjacent to the Duty Hut in the Bowl Campsite** by the Matobo Conservation Society to commemorate Scouting's Centenary year. The tree planted was raised as a seedling by Dale in January of last year as one of his scout tests and will grow to a height of fifteen metres with a fine spreading crown.

Four tired Scouts fell into Ingulungundu as darkness crept in and left the Park for home for a well earned night's sleep.

Temperatures for the week ending 29 November; 52 F or 11 C and 92 F or 33 C. Rainfall 0.05 inch or 1,25 mm.

A Good Turn done by us Scouts of the 1st Bulawayo (Pioneer) Scout Troop in the true spirit of Scouting. As for our guests, Thank You for joining with us in celebrating our Centenary Year of Scouting in Zimbabwe. It was a pleasure to share our Camping Ground with you.

8 – ACACIA DEBATE

Did you know that we no longer have acacias in Zimbabwe? We now only have "wattles". Acacias are only found in Australia because a collection of little pencil sharpeners lobbied the International Botanical Congress in 2006 for Australia to retain the name as it had 1 000 species versus the 150 or so in Africa. The first acacia catalogued was an African tree in 1753, 17 years before the British sailed into Botany Bay, Australia ... but this did not matter. The African lobby was disorganised at the 2006 conference. Being organised ahead of conferences is an important thing as those less organised politically have come to find out for themselves ...

The normal manner in which names are assigned is to refer back to the first scientific description of the species in question. As acacia's were first described in West Africa BEFORE any Australian Species were even found, then the correct application is that Acacia's belong to Africa! Indeed the first mention of Acacia is found in the Bible – and biblical lands are adjacent to Africa not Australia!

A campaign is underway to correct this error, and the Matobo Conservation Society has voted in favour of the change being reversed so that Acacia's remain in Africa – and Australia can have the wattles!

9 – PRESS STORIES

Drought to hit Zimbabwe this farming season; Africa News; Monday September 28, 2009

BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE - Zimbabwe is likely to be hit by drought this farming season. The drought forecast by the Association of World Meteorological Services department in Southern Africa in the coming cropping season has become a cause for concern not only to farmers themselves but the entire Zimbabwean nation at large. Farmers who faced a number of challenges in the providing of the nation with adequate food in previous drought years are looking at mitigation measures to lessen the adverse impact of El Nino phenomenon.

Zimbabwe experienced the worst drought in the 1992 to 1993 season which affected many people especially those living in the rural areas. The same drought destroyed the national cattle herd and left the majority of smallholder farmers without their source of draught power.

Experience has it that El Nino induced weather patterns can either lead to floods that destroy crops, infrastructure and kill animals leading to food shortages as was the case in year 2000 or poor rainfall which does not last the whole season.

Rhino poaching; *Herald*, Tuesday, November 3, 2009

Zimbabwe has lost about 200 rhinos to poachers in the last 3 years as locals increasingly network with international syndicates in the illegal trade of the horns. Giving oral evidence before the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism yesterday, the Director of National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Morris Mutsambiwa, said 86 suspected poachers had been arrested this year alone. Of the 45 reported cases, 33 involved Zimbabweans either working alone or with international smuggling rings –

Zimbabwe faces expulsion from CITES, SW Radio, Monday December 14, 2009

MASVINGO - Zimbabwe risks being expelled from the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species, CITES, after losing about 26 percent of its rhino population in less than three years due to rampant poaching.

The country is believed to have lost about 160 rhinos since 2006 a figure which is considered too high by animal welfare organisations. According to the organisations, among them the Species Survival Commission and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the loss represents about 26 percent of Zimbabwe's rhino population. "The number of the rhino population is expected to decrease further by about 14 percent if poaching in the southern African country is not controlled", reads their report in part. "There has been rampant poaching in the country's sanctuaries and it is feared that some animal species especially the rhino might face extinction."

Officials within the department of national parks and wildlife have confirmed that Harare has irked CITES and the international body has issued a stern warning over unchecked poaching activities. "We have been warned and given six months to ensure that we comply with CITES standards".

CITES is an international body whose duty is to regulate and supervise the trade on endangered species among member states. Poaching is allegedly rampant in the Gonarezhou and Hwange National Parks, where it is believed that senior Zanu-PF politicians and government officials are indiscriminately killing wildlife. The Department of Parks and Wildlife has since banned all hunting activities as it battles to control the illegal killing of wildlife. Vitalis Chadenga the director of Parks and Wildlife Management Authority has denied that Zanu-PF functionaries and senior government officials are involved in poaching. "We have banned all hunting activities in our sanctuaries in order to control poaching activities", said Chadenga in a statement. "Our investigations have not nailed any politician as has been reported in the press".

However the country is failing to control poaching activities due to, among other things, the presence of farm invaders who moved into the sanctuaries during the height of farm invasion with the tacit approval of President Robert Mugabe's government. In Gonarezhou national park about 720 families from the Chitsa clan have invaded the extensive park. They have refused to vacate the park, arguing that they are just repossessing their land.

10 – SUBSCRIPTIONS 2010

A reminder – have you paid your subs? Contact either the Secretary or Treasurer for confirmation.

11 – MTB RIDES

October saw the annual two day Matopos Stage race. The event started on Friday afternoon 23 October, from the Jo'burg Rd, above the Blue Hills. The cyclists started down the old Dianna's Pool Rd, cutting off onto single track through the Umzingwane River, past Esibomvu and onto the mouth of the Mtshabezi Gorge. Then up and over Gorfinga before finishing for the day at Camp Dwala, a distance of 50Km's. The next day saw an early start as the race took the riders through Gulati Communal Land, into Toghwana dam, through the Mtshelili valley, and onto the main Maleme Road, where a welcome "refuelling" post was set up. Then down the scenic road, and onto Mineral King, across the Maleme River, past Matobo Hills Lodge, and finally finishing at Big Cave Camp, some 70km's in distance, making the entire race 120km's in the hot dry October sun! But according to the competitors (with 44 riders the best turnout yet) it was worth it. The teams from Harare and Botswana all enjoyed the unique scenery and history of the Matopos, and the MCS supplied information packs to all competitors. The total amount raised which will go to the Matopos Conservation Society was R4 400.00.

A BIG thank you to everyone who helped to make the event the success it was and especially to the following : Des Stephens for overall coordination and organisation
Well done to all those who participated, especially those who travelled down from Harare and up from Bots.
Lee McNab and his chefs for the excellent catering and Dave Nash/Braidwood for doing the T shirts
Allan Kedda for all his hard work over the two days, in support of the riders.
Andre Zietsman for providing the drivers and Maple Freight for providing the Mazda T35
Camp Dwala for accommodation, and to Big Cave Camp staff and Nikki Day
Dwala Insurance Services for sponsoring the entry into the Nat Park & providing a driver
Alan Winterton/Mark Johnstone for doing the tracks for the GPS's, and the MCS for doing the route write up
Shane Wessels for time keeping and driving a vehicle

The next event being planned is a three day Trans Matobo Hills World Heritage Site MTB ride. It is hoped this will become an annual event in which awareness of the Matopos will be increased.

12 – WORLD HERITAGE UPDATE

From October to November a number of stakeholder meetings were held to re-establish the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site Management Committee, and some significant progress was being made. Presentations and discussion were positive, informed and useful. Unfortunately a Ministerial directive was subsequently received that instructed the Department of National Parks to reject the various proposals. This was a crushing blow to all parties, and as the Management Plan expired in September, and the Management Committee is well past its mandate, the Matobo Hills is now at real risk of failing the expected UNESCO / ICOMOS audit and so will find itself placed on the Endangered List.

It is the contention of the MCS, that with respect to the Hon Minister of Environment and Tourism, the site correctly falls under ICOMOS as a cultural landscape which means that the National Museum's are the lead role, and this falls under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

13 - A HISTORY OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN ZIMBABWE DURING THE LAST 150 YEARS *Brief summary of a talk given to the Bulawayan Lecture Series, December 10, 2009, Hillside Dams boma, Bulawayo by Prof Peter Mundy.*

Conservation is the planned management of natural resources to safeguard their survival. Wildlife I take to include both wild fauna and flora. As conservation should be the new religion, I shall start with the Bible – Noah is the world's first known conservationist (Genesis ch.6, v. 19-20). Yet there is a contradiction, between man (= male and female) being called upon to “subdue the earth” and to “have dominion over every living thing” (Genesis ch.1, v. 28), and the statement later that “man has no pre-eminence above the beasts” (Ecclesiastes ch.3, v. 19). This is my first paradigm, and it includes ignorance. Note at that time, wildlife was everywhere.

Beginning with the voyages of the Polynesians around 500 AD, and the explorations of the Europeans from 1500 AD, extinctions on islands became the norm, symbolically culminating in the Dodo *Raphus cucullatus*, last seen in the late 17th century. But any concern over the survival of wildlife was not voiced until the late 18th century. In the late 19th century, Yosemite (1864) and Yellowstone (1872) in the USA were the first protected areas in modern terms. This is my second paradigm, that of preservation. Extinctions and dramatic declines were now happening on continents, represented locally by the Quagga and Bluebuck in southern Africa. Wildlife was now being seen as threatened and in danger of disappearing.

Meantime, the human population of the earth had turned past its inflexion point (around 1760) and was on its relentless and alarming growth upwards. In 2000, the UN had announced that humans had reached six billion in numbers, and rising. (At the time of Christ there were an estimated 180 million humans). More and more humans simply means less and less wildlife.

In south-central Africa the local black people had their conservation methods – (small) sanctuaries, chiefs' game, totems, superstitions. With very few people and lots of wildlife there was probably no significant impact. But the white hunters were let in, culminating in the last White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* in

the country then called Southern Rhodesia being killed in 1902, and (eventually) by F.C. Selous expressing concern about wildlife survival.

After colonisation in 1890, there followed many landmarks in the history of conservation, such that by 1980 and 2000 the country had acquired an international reputation. So many landmarks in fact that a book could be written about them! A few examples are: rinderpest (1896), exploitation of teak for the railways (1900), Rhodes' estates (1902), Ted Davison arrives at Wankie (now Hwange) to be warden of the game reserve (1928), tsetse fly eradication programme with 660 000 animals killed by 1958, Operation Noah on Lake Kariba by Rupert Fothergill (1959-63), reintroduction of White Rhinoceros (1960s), Parks and Wild Life Act (1975) with demarcation of the Parks and Wild Life Estate and 'royal game' (now specially protected) species, Zimbabwe joins CITES (1981), first WINDFALL then CAMPFIRE formulated (1978-86), IPZs for rhinos formed (1993), and so on, and so on. These achievements moved us into the third paradigm, that of conservation through wise use ("use it or lose it"). Zimbabwe became a champion of elephant conservation by using the great beasts: ecotourism, trophies, ivory sales, leather products etc.; just as one instance. Elephants have dramatically increased in numbers!

Since 2000 and the so-called land reform programme, we have gone backwards. Rampant 'poaching' has been the name of the game. (Are poachers created by legislation?). Hopefully when law and order returns, so will our reputation for sensible and successful conservation.

The African wildlife biologist Raymond Dasmann put the conservation effort plain and simple: "We have not inherited the earth from our parents, but borrowed it from our children" This should be our fourth paradigm.

14 – RHINO UPDATE

(Extracted from "Friends of Hwange" Newsletter, John Brebner)

"The stranglehold (of corruption) continues to be evident in our beloved Hwange Park with the devastating news of yet two more white rhino having been poached there recently. It is suspected that they were both pregnant females having been Tran located from Matopos. What a total waste of life as well as time, finance and effort."

15 – MATOPOS DVD ON SALE

Members are reminded that the Matobo Hills World Heritage submission DVD is now available. Members wanting to acquire copies should contact the Secretary to place orders.

16 – CONTACT DETAILS

Please don't forget to keep the Society updated on your contact details, especially your e-mail address!

We endeavour to keep in touch with our members – but it is a two way exercise and we need your help and co-operation.

Friends of members are always welcome to attend our quarterly outings.

The Society is always looking for new members – help us to attract new members to the MCS.

Members are always invited to make submissions to our newsletter.

17 – CONDOLENCES

The Society learnt sadly of the passing away of Mike Phillipson in September this year. Mike was a long serving member of the Committee, always reliable and regular in his attendance. Despite many hardships he endeavoured to join in as many events as possible until ill health made things impossible for him. We will miss his knowledge, and extend our sympathy and condolences to his wife Judy, and surviving family.

WE WISH ALL OUR MEMBERS A MERRY CHRISTMAS, HAPPY NEW YEAR AND SAFE TRAVELS!