

Biodiversity Survey in Hwange and Matopos National Parks

Viv Wilson

Held on Thursday 12 April 2001 at Chelmsford Road, Matsheumhlope, Bulawayo.

Viv Wilson gave a brief account of his zoological surveys over the last 40 years including in the Luangwa Valley in Zambia, with Rhodesia National Parks Research Branch, the mammal survey of Hwange National Park, etc. He carried out a lot of specimen collecting, much of which now resides in the Natural History Museum, Bulawayo.

He went on to start Chipangali as a wildlife orphanage, for education, captive breeding and for research. His major interest has been in mini-antelope. This led to a series of jobs over much of Africa (especially West and Central Africa) looking at duiker and the bushmeat trade.

A few years ago he was asked by DNPWLM to redo his original Hwange National Parks mammal survey. This covered all large mammals (duiker and larger) and small carnivores (genet and larger). Surveys were also done on birds, herps and small mammals, but not on invertebrates or plants. Comparing results to the previous survey significant changes in numbers can be seen, mostly ascribed to habitat change. Full data and conclusions have been written up and are ready for publication. There was a suggestion that it could be edited down and published as a part of *Syntarsus* (Wilson to help with funding).

Viv then went on to describe his detailed biodiversity survey of Matobo National Park, which started recently. This particularly covers status and distribution of leopard, but also covers other mammals, birds, herps, butterflies, scorpions and plants. There was discussion on where the figure of 100 leopard in the Matopos comes from - it was not clear how accurate this was. The emphasis of much of the survey is on numbers and distribution of particular species, rather than on lists.

The following discussion focussed on: (a) possible synergy and the need for coordination between those carrying out biological work in the area, (b) the definition of the Matobo (strictly Nat. Park or wider to include moist E Matobo), and (c) management requirements. All in the context of the World Heritage Site application.

It was agreed that the Matobo Conservation Society (Gavin Stephens / Ian Sheasby) would call and chair a meeting to bring together all those carrying out or interested in contributing towards biological work in the broad Matobo area, whether professional or amateur. A Biological Technical Group, a coordinated formal structure, would be formed in order to encourage greater cooperation and common protocols between the people involved. This would yield a better picture of the biodiversity and ecology of the area. Biodiversity would be addressed over the wide Matobo area, but ecology and dynamics may be better looked at within the Park. It is hoped that technical findings and conclusions from such a group would feed into a broader management committee for the Matobo, which the Matobo Conservation Society hopes to initiate. This would have representation of communities and land managers.