



ORTHOLOPHA

The Newsletter of the Aloe, Cactus and
Succulent Society of Zimbabwe

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Issue 16-05 May 2016

Hi Everyone,

A bumper issue for you this month, mainly about a recent trip we undertook to the Nyajiiwa Falls Gorge on the Gairezi River as it meanders past alluvial floodplains and rages through mountain fortresses on the Zimbabwe Mozambique border in the northeast.

Don't forget the Rare Plant Sale next week where avid sellers will rip your last hard-earned greenbacks from your bulging purses and wallets as you snatch prickly, caudate, obese, succulent, palmate, maculate, immaculate and sundry other plants from them. You will be bonded to waterwise gardening forever after!

Cheers, Mafungi.

Your Committee

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Committee members:

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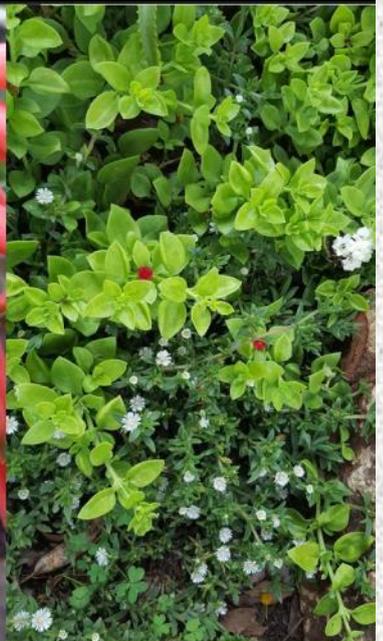
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Aloe, Cactus & Succulent
Society of Zimbabwe

Plants for our Future



ALOES, SUCCULENTS, CACTI, SABI STARS, BAOBABS, PALMS & CYCADS

RARE PLANT SALE | SUNDAY 29th MAY 2016: 9am - 1pm

Harare Botanic Gardens HERBARIUM entrance

Flowering Plant: MAY

What is this, on the right?

Send your knowledgeable and considered opinions to bo.hoom52@yahoo.com. The respected judge's decision is final and the winner will get a box of choice Belgian chocolates, provided they are shared.

April entry was *I think A. plowesii!!! If anyone knows any better please let us know. It is allegedly only found in the Chimanimani Mountains so it was out of typical habitat.*

Lucky winner in April was Caryl Stutchbury!

You can claim your prize at the May 2016 Plant Sale.



You can win a box of chocolates!!!

Send your entries to Mafungi at bo.hoom52@yahoo.com

The Aloe above is the May entry.

What is it ?

A clue: It was spotted by the im(maculate)ly keen-eyed Professor Barbara Maasdorp, about ten kilometres beyond Troutbeck on the way down to Nyamaropa. Photo by Mafungi.



When visiting wild areas it pays to engage the services of a local guide. For our visit to the Nyajjiwa Falls on the Gairezi described on the next few pages we used guide extraordinaire, Joe Tsungo who introduced us to the local Headman, secured our campsite and provided a camp guard and another guide to lead a low impact group on a gentle walk up the river. He is currently scouting the ground for our next expedition to Mt Nhanhi seen tantalisingly bleached on the horizon in the last photo on Page 5.

Annual Membership: We are well into the year and Membership payments have been slow, you are encouraged to make payment for 2016 as soon as you can, thanks very much to all those that have already paid.

Membership is \$20 per person/couple per year. Make payment to a committee member, or the CABS account: **CABS Platinum: Aloe, Cactus and Succulent Society**

Acc #: 901 649 1871 Reference: kindly include your names as a the deposit reference.

Alternatively send \$21-00 through EcoCash to **0783 911314**



The Magical Kingdom of Nyajiiwa Falls!!!!

After hiking around the back of the mountain that guards the western flank of the Nyajiiwa Falls Gorge one can gaze over crystal quartzite rocks down into this scene. The Falls themselves are dead centre of this picture and this year they are deceptively innocuous. However when the Gairezi rages, swollen with floodwaters from the northeastern slopes of Mt Nyangani, this spot becomes a boiling pot of roiling whitewater destroying everything in its path.

Aloe cameronii (right) is present in small colonies on the westward rockfaces of the cliffs that tower over the Gorge. In a small area we found several different flowering forms, in both colour and shape of the inflorescences. In the literature this aloe is described as common on the granite kopjes and dwalas of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi. These rocks are however quartzite in origin and maybe there lurks a new species or subspecies to be discovered by a modern-day taxonomist with access to genotyping tools that can distinguish between close relatives.



On the Mozambican side (left) the quartzite rock rises up in an unbroken expanse that probably reaches a kilometre at its apex. This is wonderful territory for finding plants that probably don't occur anywhere else because of the base rock, aspect, altitude and geographical isolation.

The orangey rock at the centre right of the picture is what the Falls themselves are named after by the local people. Njuwa is the Shona word for dove or pigeon and the rock that the Falls rage around is the roosting place for rock pigeons. These days very few are seen however.



Looking northeast from the cliffs at the top of the Gorge, the Gairezi meanders along the Zimbabwe/Mozambique border for about thirty kilometres before heading into Mozambique. It's course looks deceptively flat and the river faces serious challenges from banks of quartzite ridges that lie at right angles to its course. Navigation is difficult!



On the right a small *Euphorbia* spp. lurks in the warmth of a sedge's embrace. Both have adapted to living on cliffs that are buffeted by howling gales that rampage down the Gairezi River, vortex through the Gorge and blast over the cliffs at hurricane force!

Below some favourite trees of the dry lowveld frame the woodlands that cling to the steep screens below the cliffs. *Sterculia* and *Albizia* spp in this case.



Above is a version of *A. cameronii* that has a smaller, pink inflorescence.

Seen a few metres away from the plants on the previous page. On the slopes below there were isolated populations of *A. cryptopoda*, *Sanseverias* and *Huernias*. None unfortunately were flowering so I'll save their posting for another time when all evidence for naming and shaming, is to hand.

Below, right, is a grizzled *Sterculia* seen along the road on the way to the campsite on the river. Magical trees, matching the environment.





Warm evening light calms the Gairezi as it emerges from the Gorge. From here there is only a six hundred-metre vertical drop down to the sea but it is joined by the Ruenya River, feeds into the Mazowe and then they join the Mighty Zambezi and brave flotillas of crocodiles before emptying into the Indian Ocean. Any fleshy detritus missed by the crocodiles that line the river's sandy shores will almost certainly be snapped up by Zambezi sharks that patrol the warm Agulhas Current that sweeps down the East Coast of Africa taking anything still living into the jaws of the Great Whites of Antarctica!

In the next couple of months we expect to mount an expedition to climb to the top of this tantalisingly bleached granite monolith seen almost due north of Nyanga village. Any budding botanist who wishes to join in this expedition should keep in touch. Depending upon the angle of approach the mountain looks slightly climbable from both the right and left hand sides. A full frontal assault will almost certainly end up in disaster. The chances of finding localised endemics on the top must be quite good because the mountain is granite amongst the banded ironstone ridges of northern Nyanga, geographical isolation is clear and altitude will also play a role.

A luta continua!





This has completely nothing to do with the business of the Aloe, Cactus and Succulent Society of Zimbabwe. But whilst chewing the cud, after an expedition we mounted to the Pungwe River and a mammoth one day hike we undertook along the southern edge of this gorge and then back down to the river where the new hydro-plants have been installed. I thought how wonderful it would be if our whole landscape looked like this on a warm summer's day. The northern edge of the Gorge is amongst the wettest places on the planet, recording metres of rainfall each year. The montane grassland above acts as a sponge and the multiple rivers seep out and flow down into the Gorge year-round driving the insatiable turbines of the hydro-plants. Fire keeps the forest at bay. Mt Nyangani stands head and shoulder above everything else on the horizon, innocent in its treachery. The forest is impenetrable. Tread carefully in this neighbourhood for danger lurks for the unwary and unprepared.

The Health Corner:

Last month we recommended emptying the brain as part of your health drive to immortality. Once emptied, one must refill the glass so to speak. So engage in activities that challenge and stimulate the grey cells that are as yet undestroyed by excessive consumption of alcohol and caffeine-laden beverages.

Television is not good, chuck it out! Except of course during the Rugby World Cup, Football World Cup, Cricket World Cup and the Olympics. Read books, play games, group games are better than those for one or two people. Get a pool table in the lounge, join a quiz team and a book club. Buy the newspapers every day and do the crosswords, codewords, targets and Sudoku puzzles. Don't read the News nor listen to it. This is senseless.

Climb a monkey-puzzle tree.

Engage in a conversation every day with a complete stranger, preferably one above your station in life and one or more below. Listen to what they say! If you see your neighbour, talk to him/her.

Join every Society and Club that remotely appeals to you. Find ones where you fit and become passionate about what they and you do.

Recruit others, younger ones will last longer.

If you see a pig, tickle it on its tummy, there is no more rewarding activity than this.

Be good, if you can't do good, do nasty with aplomb, but without malice!

Cheers,
Mafungi