



ORTHOLOPHA

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

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Hi Everyone,

The mad season is still upon us! The rains come and go....., then come again and go! Right now as I write this it feels like winter is all but upon us. The scientific media is threatening the World with another mini Ice Age! Walls are going up or threatening to go up all over the place. In Harare walls are tumbling down where they weren't erected properly, roads are pot-holed to hell, our money is spiralling out of control and it seems that there are no steady hands on the tiller, but plenty avariciously reaching for the till. It is The Dawning of the Age of Iniquity!!!! Every day that we wake up, we thank the Heavens that we retired 17 months ago and not now. Dollars in the bank are now bricks and mortar, glass, aluminium and steel. But who knows what will actually work for all of us in this mad country of ours. Where we have seen it all before, but it keeps coming back, fuel queues, bank queues, bread shortages, power cuts..... The list goes on and on. However the show must go on and the AGM beckons. New blood needed, so step up to the plate! Cheers, Mafungi.

Your Committee

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Vice-chairman – Hans Wolbert
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Committee members:

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Monthly Meeting Sunday February 24th 2019

This month's **Meeting** is being held at the house of the Jan and Lorna Shultz which is on Kenilworth Road, Highlands. Remember to bring a plate of eats to share, a plant or something similar for the raffle and probably a raincoat and jersey, the way the weather is as I write this.

The time: 10 for 10.30am start. Gate will open from 9.45 am.

Directions: Coming from Enterprise Road, turn left at the roundabout and then left into Kenilworth. Kenilworth bends around a right-hand corner, the Shultz's are on the right on this corner. It will be highlighted with the Society's flag.

Interesting Plant: February

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.

The lucky winner in January will be announced at the monthly meeting on the Sunday 24th February 2019. There were many clever people who correctly identified the Flame Lily!



You can win a box of chocolates!!!

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

The plant above is the February entry.

What is it?

A clue, it is not an aloe, nor a succulent. Photograph taken by Mafungi



The tree bole left could tell a thousand stories about what has happened to it in the course of its lifetime. There is no doubt that frost and fire have had an effect on its form: man, cattle, goats and wild animals have undoubtedly taken chunks that have probably threatened its very livelihood, but the tree has shown resilience and blends in magnificently with the environment around it. The mountain Brachystegia is one of the fairest trees in the land and if any of you are starting a new garden, or thinking of changing your existing set-up, you couldn't do better than to plant one of these trees. Anyone who knows the Christon Bank area, where these trees flourish would be surprised to hear that that entire woodland was decimated by the Capital city's need for firewood around the turn of the 20th century. So all trees you see today are relatively new. **Plant one!**

Annual Membership: Are due in January each year. Those of you who haven't paid yet, the radar is starting to beep and errant members will be struck off soon! In this day and age it is very easy to become digitally dead, Don't risk it! Remember for your \$20 per year, you get a monthly Newsletter, free issues of Ingens as they are printed and you get invited to at least 11 choice venues each year. Big-time Bargain Bonanza!

Membership is \$20 per person/couple per year. Children \$5 per year. Foreign membership US\$40 per year. Make payment to a committee member, **CABS Platinum: Aloe, Cactus and Succulent Society**

Acc #: 1002616336 Reference: kindly include your Surname as the deposit reference or through EcoCash: 0774 257 791 (Doreen Richards) Note this is a new number.



Hidden Valleys of the Northeast!!!!

It never fails to amaze me when going on outings with the Mountain Club of Zimbabwe just how many special places there are within an hour or so of Harare. A couple of weeks ago we ventured into the Nyauri River Valley, but parking at the far northeastern end of it, having driven down the road past Domboshava, through the bustling shopping centre known as Showgrounds and way past the turn-off to Ngomakurira. You eventually get to the head of a T-junction and if you turn right and then right again, down some fairly reasonable gravel roads, you can park in the shade of some Munondo trees, saunter down a well-used track and in no time you are gazing out over the top of the amazing waterfall above, where tributary water plunges down into the Nyauri River Valley. This river rises behind Ngomakurira Mountain and wends its way northeastwards, eventually joining up with the Mazowe system. In the rains it is often quite difficult to spot the succulent-type plants that our Society treasures so much. However by the side of the path with their feet well and truly-wetted by the seasonal rainfall were these *Crinum-type* lilies. At the right time of year they will undoubtedly be sporting top-heavy inflorescences of beautiful flowers, making identification easy. However now they are past flowering and their appearance led one know-it-all but definitely un-knowledgeable member of the Mountain Club to say that they were related to the famous

Welwitschia plant of Namibia and Angola!!!! Nothing, as I am sure you are all aware, could be further from the truth. Below we see flowers of the lily, photographed at Rockyvale here in Harare and on the right is a giant specimen of *Welwitschia* in Namibia looking like it has a mass



of strap-like leaves. There are only two per plant however!!!! Time, wind and stress shreds the leaves mercilessly.





The same empty vessel that expounded upon the lily above being related to Welwitschia was overheard telling some foreign tourists that the pretty little flowering plant left was a ground orchid.

Those of you in the know would be aware that in fact these are the hemiparasitic plants known as *Striga* spp. Though *Striga* has many species and forms, a common characteristic is the pretty flowers they sport. When their seed germinates it has to quickly find a root of a graminaceous host plant. They invade it aggressively using a combination of physical force and cell-wall eating enzymes, and then it can feed from the xylem vessels of the host utilizing a structure known as a haustorium. Interestingly these plants, by the time you see them flowering so brightly above-ground, have long since done the damage to the host plant, draining it of energy, nutrients and often causing death. *Striga* is a major weed of maize, sugarcane and millet crops throughout Africa as well as other parts of the World, however it is very prevalent in poor, sandy soils of low fertility. It is estimated that crop losses across Africa may amount to as much as 4 million tonnes of grain, more than double Zimbabwe's good season maize production.

Grasslands are essential to the well-being of our natural flora and fauna and undoubtedly many indigenous grass species are resistant to the depredations of parasitic weeds such as striga. As indeed are many of the landraces of ancient crops grown for hundreds and thousands of years by indigenous peoples as they gathered seed and kept the best for planting the next crop. An in-built, long term plant breeding strategy that has resulted in sorghum and millet varieties with good tolerance to this aggressive weed.



At Rockyvale we have long been interested in the interaction between plants and fauna of the natural grasslands and the Miombo woodlands of the Zimbabwean Highveld. If you allow the indigenous grasses to thrive, then butterflies and other insects are very common and the predatory animals such as chameleons, agamas, frogs and the like thrive. As well as all manner of birdlife.

There is no greater joy than finding a thriving ecosystem working year after year and in our case it allows us to run Chameleon Safaris during the months of January, February and March when the young reptiles hatch and can be found in profusion on the grass stalks at night in the beam of a torch.

We have found to our amazement that in these trying economic times, where politicians have long since drained our hard-earned resources, without us knowing just how they have done it, just like *Striga*, our Chameleon population has grown and we have an ever-increasing stream of tourists desperate to come on a safari to see these amazing animals. Perhaps the only growth industry in Zimbabwe right now.

Anyway we look forward,
just like the little chap on the right,
with both eyes open, looking for opportunities to expand!



The Health Column

A very positive response to last month's column from some readers, thank you for the feedback! Including one who almost fell off his chair, laughing his head off! Staying alive is a very serious business however and do not for one minute think that reading our column alone will keep you hale and hearty. Doctors have a role to play, but only when you are feeling crook, never visit your Doctor when you are feeling good. Like a car mechanic they will find something wrong with you and then stress kicks-in and hey presto, you need medication and care. Sometimes you have to let the surgeon with a sharp knife attack the bits that are extraneous to your well-being, or blast some funny growths with liquid nitrogen and the like to shut the bad guys down before they can take hold. However maintaining the body in a usable format through a combination of good nutrition, exercise and engaging body and soul in stress-relieving activities such as gardening, Sudoku and cross-words is undoubtedly the way to go. Television is a no-no. Sell your set right now.

Personally I have no doubt that refined foods are the root cause of many life-threatening afflictions so reduce them down to zero, or thereabouts. White sugar and bread, super-refined maize meal, powdered milk, margarine, sausages laced with preservatives, these are all products designed to take you down well before your due date.

One of the most amazing finds of the last decade or so is that the human body does not consist mainly of human cells. Apparently the vast majority of cells in and on our bodies is actually micro-flora and –fauna, some of which are good and some bad. When your body metabolism gets out of kilter, the good guys suffer and the bad ones multiply! So everything in moderation.

Remember also that the people who study the evolution of Mankind believe that we took a major step forward as a species when we started brewing. Bread and beer from yeasts, wine through fermentation and butter, yoghurts and cheeses allowed our bodies to intermingle with a much wider range of good bugs and our intelligence shot up consequentially. Technology, although outwardly appearing to increase our access to knowledge, is undoubtedly doing exactly the opposite. There is no doubt that a group of young people sitting in a public place, staring fixedly at their cellphones as they text, send selfies and talk twat on Twitter, often to each other, are headed for a later life of loneliness and vexation.

Well there you go folks we have come to the end of another Newsletter! I hope you have enjoyed reading it and that we will see those of you that can make it at the Monthly meeting this coming Sunday. One thing we do hope to do this coming year is to take members to readily accessible wild areas where we can see the plants we love in habitat. How I would love to have this little grouping of an *Aloe chabaudii*, an ancient granite boulder and a well-weathered but now disused termite mound in my own garden. One place that I think we should all aim to visit is Buchwa Mountain in the very centre of Zimbabwe. You can drive right to the top, up a concrete road thanks to the cell-phone providers and at the right time of year, the view of *Aloe arborescens* in flower is just unbelievable!



Enjoy your week and we shall see you on Sunday! Remember the AGM looms in March and we need new blood on the Committee to take our Society forward.

Besties, Mafungi!!!!!!