



ORTHOLOPHA

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

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Hi Everyone,

Welcome to this rather long newsletter, which I have enjoyed putting together mainly for our own historical record, but hopefully you too will enjoy it. All I know is that if I lived my life again there are some things that I would do differently and when your final house destination is within 100 metres of your home for the past 40 years, the options are much broader than the complete upheaval that most of us would otherwise face in a normal downsizing from family to aging-couple status. Perhaps the biggest lesson for all of us in this topsy-turvy world is to recognise what is enriching, fulfilling and really important and shed the clutter. Do it as you go along, believe me!

But before you chuck the errant spouse, partner and/or not-so-prodigious youngster, out the door, remember they too, have good and bad points and perfection is a very elusive trait. And like readying a house for tenants, you must learn to build on the strengths and plaster over the cracks, but above all keep gardening. Headless though we may be, check the plumage before bedding down! You need to keep flying.

Cheers, Mafungi.



Your Committee

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Monthly Meeting

There will be no monthly meetings for the foreseeable future until this Covid-19 health crisis is under control. Take the time to use the social media platforms we have to share any ideas, plants, pest and disease problems you may have with the full membership of the Society.

Interesting Plant: April

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.



You can win a box of chocolates!!!

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

Photograph taken by Mafungi

Clue: Not a Zimbabwean aloe but from a neighbouring country. People who follow WhatsApp groups will have seen this recently.



Our lives are very transient at the moment. I am sure that there is not a single one of us who is confident about the present and especially not the future. We have all seen the insidious effect of too much, false and no-news upon our lives. This terrible Covid-19 viral disease will undoubtedly run its course, but it increasingly looks like it is a genie that will not go easily back into the bottle. Taming it will be the trick and perhaps the only way out will be managed exposure over a long period of time.

Let's be ready to ride that wave.

Red Alert: Treasurer Mike Caulfield reminds all members that subscriptions are now long overdue for 2020 and that unfortunately to keep up with inflation, the Committee decided to increase subscriptions to ZWL200. Corporate members pay ZWL 400 and foreign members US\$40.

Annual Membership: Are due in January each year. Now is the time to renew. Remember for your \$100 per year, you get a monthly Newsletter, free issues of Ingens as they are published and you get invited to at least 11 choice venues each year. Big-time Bargain Bonanza!

Membership is ZWL\$200 per person/couple per year. Children ZWL\$20 per year. Foreign membership US\$40 per year. Make payment to a committee member, or

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.



Gardening through time, an opportunity to reset!

I guess many Zimbabweans have had the opportunity to live in the same house spanning at least one or two generations. Farming folk would probably hand over the main house to the younger generation and move into a purpose-built cottage nearby. That of course all came crashing down in the 2000-2010 decade. Indigenous folk at one time probably looked forward to moving out to the Kumusha, perhaps building a pleasant suburban-type house in the rural areas. This too is a less and less followed plan as services have deteriorated in the towns and cities and the self-service of water and electricity provision, by boreholes and solar systems, has become the norm. Rural electrification is more or less a joke and water out there has always required a well or borehole. No-one wants to leave these comforts and the convenience of nearby, well-stocked shops and malls for the ubiquitous dust, mosquitoes and predatory relatives! However probably a greater number would have moved on with time, upgrading as the family came and grew and then downsizing to fit only absolute essentials into a lock-up-and-go in a retirement village or flat complex. The kids of course, no matter which demographic you come from, have almost universally dispersed to the Diaspora.

We have recently moved from our front yard into a purpose-built house in the backyard. So the normal abandonment of long-established garden structure which would inevitable come from a retirement-era move does not apply. We don't know at this stage what tenants we shall have and if they will share our passion for the various treasures we have carried out of the wild places in Zimbabwe (and beyond). So to minimise risk we have moved almost everything movable we own from the front garden of the old house to a purpose-built mound and area in front of the new house, not even 100 metres away. The old house has had a lick of paint, second time only in 40 years! And suddenly some of the established plants are showing a burst of life and colour that we had not noticed before. One thing we did do in recent times is remove shade-giving trees from the front lawn so that the full effect of the winter sun bathes the house from May to September. And the flowering shrubs and aloes positioned in front bring an array of jewelled sunbirds and butterflies when the nectar flows. The house is crying out for loving tenants.





And so at the moment the mound and surrounding area in front of our new house is a conglomeration of fifty years of collecting, logs, stumps, driftwood, river and other rocks, skulls, bones, potted and transplanted plants, half-century bonsai, and even a sandy beach. There are aloes, cacti, jatropha, stapeliads, sanseverias, adeniums, adansonnias and of course a medley of mad cyclists, dogs, crocodiles, elephant, iron and bead-work birds, animals and reptiles, guinea fowl, stone sculptures and the like that we have collected from an endless stream of talented Zimbabwean artists we have met and inter-acted with over the years.

Interspersed are many bird baths, most derived from the labouring of past generations of Zimbabweans who had to grind small grains and perhaps quartz-ore to get basic food and gold. Some are just rocks we have found with natural depressions to hold water. Our birds are undoubtedly some of the cleanest in Africa with this proliferation of places to take a splash. No unhygienic bird-flu for them.

Over time we expect to eventually move this aggregation of memories into some sort of better order. We need to see how the sun moves, is frost going to be an issue, what plants thrive, why and where. Do away with water-guzzlers and make sure that all treasures maximise their effect, their memory for us and yet require the minimal amount of maintenance. Today it is untidy, but there is no wasted opportunity, yet.

I still have a 100-year old steel donkey-driven hay baler and a reciprocating mower to move. And we have to decide how and what to include in the water feature in the pond we have planned to be outside the front of the house.



In the 1980's when we moved from Kadoma to Harare I clearly remember the farm labourers asking: "Are you leaving nothing behind?" as we loaded the truck.

Well here forty years later the yellow Sanyati rocks on the left and the green Umniati rocks on the right have hopefully moved for the last time! Their question answered, **"No we are not!"**





The deck above, an extension on the living area of the house, similarly has precious rocks and sculptures. We noticed whilst the building was ongoing that during the winter months, quite a large volume of water was shed by the roof from overnight dew and condensation. We originally planned to cover the concrete with screed and build into it some mosaic pictures of plants and animals for variety and colour. However one day we woke up with a really bright plan to turn the deck into a pebbles/sand beach, position some choice rocks and driftwood around the edge, have a high bannister and effectively have an uninterrupted view of the transplanted garden down below and of the surrounding forest and bamboo in front.

Right next to the house we have planted a sausage tree, *Kigelia africana*, because I want to look directly into its canopy at flowering time and see exactly what manner of wildlife is responsible for pollinating the flowers. Bats are the prime suspects, but we have often seen night-apes spend time in another that we have deeper into the property. In front, in time, pride of place will be taken by a fever tree, *Vachellia (Acacia) xanthophloea* and we know that the huge specimen featured in the photograph higher up in this article has been a meeting place for generations of weavers, night-apes, red-billed hoopoes, doves and squadrons of every other type of bird you could imagine in suburban Harare at the back of our old house.

So in the photograph left below you can clearly see that the pebble beach idea is working, every night a drenching of dew splatters down and soaks into the adjacent sand. Maize has germinated and below right an old tin trunk we have set up as a grow box is a source of mint, lettuce and salving gel from *Bulbine*!





One of the joys we have found was the early set-up of a bug hotel bought from long-standing ACSSZ member Val Brown's stall a couple of years ago. We placed this right in front of our deck and have watched a growing community of insects start to occupy its nooks and crevices. Lately two skinks took up residence and just this past week they have been joined by a blue-headed agama. Cleverly they hang out on the top of the hotel and snatch unwary morsels all day. The structure is hanging from the trunk of a dead gum and the upper branches of this feature is almost always in use by birds, butterflies and carpenter bees. Dead trees are a crucial part of the ecosystem, so if at all possible leave them where they stand to slowly revert down to the proverbial dust and ashes. In our case we lopped off any offending branches that hovered dangerously above our house and hope that the one remaining long-limbed branch that heads westward from the trunk, will fall when we are not directly underneath.

Of course this down-time in our lives has given us even greater opportunity to watch the comings and goings under our noses. Owls come at night, doves and drongos are there almost every day, and on one bright morning an Egyptian goose sat and honked incessantly on top of the trunk for an hour or more. He was very lucky not to end up as buttered Christmas Fare that day.





Unfortunately one of the unintended consequences of this lock-down is that our usual health-carer advice-giver, Liz Small has been happily trapped out at Lake Chivero with partner, Norman Conlon and is therefore unable to give us her normal erudite and well-researched article. No doubt they will enjoy watching Norman's bountiful garden burst into its autumn and winter colours of fiery aloes and the bright splashes of the adeniums in flower. How we envy them.

Another unintended consequence is that our kids are now very concerned about our welfare and I am sure many of you are in the same boat. They have secretive Whatsapp groups titled "Our Parents" with a local intermediary and furtive exchanges of brown paper bags with cheese, bread, milk products, vegetables and sometimes even cash, take place through the bars on our gate. We are peppered with phone calls from America, United Kingdom and Australia. Advice flows freely. Even the dogs look concerned, sniffing us closely every morning to see if we are still OK.

So far, so good. Keep safe. Sneeze alone.

So Everyone,

We don't know at this stage exactly how we shall come out of the worldwide crisis. No doubt our lives will be very different going forward and it may be some time before we have the confidence to return to some sort of normality in what we do. Maximise your use therefore of such tools as the WhatsApp and Facebook groups we have set up for members. Be active in posting your own pictures, questions and answers. Keep gardening!

Stay tight!

Cheers Mafungi



The only advice I can give you this month is grow your own pomegranates and eat them! Very cathartic peeling them and pecking the seeds one by one. Each segment has about 240 seeds and with the base segments there will probably be around 2 000 juicy seeds to chew. 1 seed per second will take thirty-five minutes to finish a single fruit. And the chewed seed scours your system out better than a colonic cleanse at a health clinic. **Do it!**