

Ifa Lemvelo

The Newsletter of the Natural History Museum
of Zimbabwe, Vol. 1 No.6; 2019



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+263292250045



natmuse@netconnect.co.zw



www.naturalhistorymuseumzimbabwe.com



Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe

Offices at: Centenary Park, Corner Park Road &
Leopold Takawira Avenue,
Bulawayo

Regional Director's message

Welcome to this issue!

The traditional role of museums is to collect objects and materials of cultural, religious historical and natural importance; preserve them, research into them and present them to the public for the purpose of education and enjoyment.

In this newsletter, we present the role we play in the conservation and preservation of our Historical Buildings and how its important to work with the citizens of Bulawayo to achieve this. We also discuss some of the ongoing research in the Arachnid department and introduce one of the many people that have made it possible for us to be the best museum in Africa!



Entrance fees

Locals: Adults \$3

Children (5-14yrs) \$1

SADC Countries: Adults USDS7

Children (5-14yrs) USDS5

International: Adults USDS10

Children (5-14yrs) USDS5

**The Museum is open
daily from 9am-5pm**

Events!!!!

- ➔ The Mushroom Artwork Competition has been judged and prize giving will be on Wednesday 26th June at 5.00pm. All are invited to this event. The Artwork is currently on display in the museum courtyard. We thank all the schools(11 in all) that participated. You will find the standard extremely high.
- ➔ The screening of the Nazi Megastructures continues. Join us every Wednesday at 1pm. Free entry, donations are welcome.
 - June 26 - Himmler's SS
 - July 3 - Hitler's Vengeance Missile
 - July 10 - Kamikaze Suicide Bombers
 - July 17 - Hitler's Seigfried Line

Did you know???

The south-central African endemic African Moon moth, *Argema mimosae*, on display in the entomology gallery has no functional mouth parts and does not feed. Meanwhile the caterpillars feed on Marula trees and can cause substantial defoliation. They also produce two broods a year, the first attacks the Marula tree in October-December and the second one in February-March



Dinosaur research in Zimbabwe

For those that were unable to make it to the talk at the museum on our new dinosaur discovery, here is a link(<http://www.geologicalsociety.org.zw/sites/default/files/news-attachments/06%20Tim%20Broderick%20-%20%20Archosaurs%20to%20Dinosaurs%20-%202017%20Expeditions.pdf>) to the work that is being undertaken by Chris Griffin and the staff at Wits University, both of whom are working closely with the staff at the Natural History Museum. Chris is planning to come back towards the end of the year and spend time in the department of Palaeontology to prepare many of the fossils that he was unable to transport back with him. Hopefully he will do another presentation for us all on his return.

By Moira FitzPatrick



Many different kinds of spiders live in and around dwellings. Some, such as the daddy-long-legs spider, construct webs to help entrap their prey. Others, like the wolf spider, are free roaming and make no webs. Most spiders are harmless and in fact beneficial because they prey upon flies and other pests. Spiders are themselves eaten by birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals and are an integral part for the garden food-web. Learning about the wildlife in your garden is a fascinating and rewarding pastime. It might surprise you to know that even in your gardens new species of spiders have been discovered and described by the Museum Staff and there is a wealth of arachnids occurring that we know very little about and this is a report of just one of the many interactions discovered.

Pitfall trapping is a useful technique for catching active ground dwelling arachnids. A medium-sized plastic or glass container is set into the ground so that the top is flush with the ground level. Alcohol or a solution of water and detergent is placed in the container to kill specimens and prevent the larger animals eating smaller ones. This capture technique was used in a garden in Hillside for just over a year and daily the captures were emptied. Not only were new species discovered but interesting dynamics were recorded between a small solifugae (Sun Spider) *Blossia falcifera* and the harvester termites, *Hodotermes mossambicus*, that are also active in the garden.

Blossia falcifera is a nocturnal species of sunspider about 15mm in length and is found in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe where they occur in sparsely vegetated rocky or gravelly areas.

Although adults of this sunspider were collected throughout the year (with over 700 specimens collected), there was a significant increase in numbers of both sunspider adults and juveniles trapped between

August and November in an area in the garden where harvester termite activity had left the area bare from July until November. After which the rains fell and the grass rejuvenated and the numbers of the sunspiders drastically reduced.

It has been suggested that termites provide abundant prey for many species of sunspiders. The most abundant termite in the garden was the harvester termite. These termites eat leaf litter and dry grass which is gathered during the dry season and is then used to feed the colony during the rest of the year. They are therefore intensively active during the early dry season and into the winter months and foraging by these termites becomes more sporadic in the summer months. It is likely that these termites are the main prey item for this sunspider as the termite's nocturnal activity periods coincide with the activity and high numbers of *B.falcifera*. Additionally, the removal of the grass layer by the harvester termites creates a habitat most favourable to *B. falcifera*. This has been written up as a scientific paper *Arnoldia Zimbabwe 10(33)* and available on our website soon.

This is just one of the many dynamics occurring in your gardens if you do not spray with pesticides. Many wildlife species are important pest control agents in their own right and arachnids are the most abundant predators in most landscapes. "If you want to live and thrive, let a spider run alive" as a most apt verse.

Meet the staff (Francis Nyathi)

By P. Chauke

Francis joined the organisation at the young age of 18 as a messenger cum office orderly with the then

Historical Monuments Commission in 1971. A year later the Historical Monuments Commission was to merge with National Museums giving birth to National Museums and Monuments of Rhodesia and the young Francis who was affectionately referred to by colleagues as “Pick ninny” for his tiny frame, found himself in a much bigger set up with a wider variety of opportunities. This saw him being moved to the Technical Department (now known as the Exhibitions Department) in 1973 where he was the one who painstakingly attached all the feathers on the Zimbabwean dinosaur *Coelophysis rhodesiensis* on display. Since then his trajectory within the organisation was to be what he described as “nomadic” moving back and forth repeatedly between the Technical department where he was part of the team responsible for mounting exhibitions and the Ornithology department where he was responsible for preparing study skins. It was about a decade later in 1984 when he settled in the Invertebrates department where he spent the most of his working years and energy.



Francis recalls the challenges of his early years with the organisation when he began participating in expeditions for specimen collection. He vividly recalls the incident when he together with the taxidermy team consisting of Musa Ndiweni, Thomas Chidyagwayi, Peter Phiri and Terry Coffin- Grey shot a Spotted Hyaena in the Zambezi valley and after skinning it he had difficulty trusting his hands to handle food at dinner even after washing them thoroughly.

During his time he traversed the length and breadth of Zimbabwe on inter-departmental expeditions collecting specimens for the museum. For the Invertebrates department alone he did sixty-six expeditions and in a number of them he shared territory and breathing space with Hippos, crocodiles, elephants, lions and a host of other dangerous animals. He also participated in numerous field trips organised in conjunction with other stakeholders of the organisation including Falcon College, Biodiversity Foundation Africa, Girls College, Lorenzo Prendini, CIRAD, and Black Crystal among many others. The

man gave his entire productive life to museum service and he did a sterling job at it.

“I came in here very young, along the way I made contributions to the organisation, they may be small but I am proud of the mark that I made” remarked Francis upon his retirement. In the Invertebrates department Francis worked with Mrs J. Minshull and later Dr. M. FitzPatrick, both of whom helped him grasp the useful concepts in specimen collection, identification, accessioning, preservation and documentation. He assisted numerous students in the department, some of whom have passed with outstanding grades in their work related learning and progressed remarkably even to Doctoral levels. At some point he had to manage the department and keep everything running in the absence of the curator. He continued to assist in the department even after his promotion to the post of Regional Security Officer in 2012 until his retirement in 2018.

Mr Nyathi was the first substantive Regional Security Officer for National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe’s Western Region charged with the responsibility of ensuring the security of the organisation’s property, staff and clients. “Being given the responsibility to head the Security Department was a sign of management’s confidence in me and I’m grateful”, Francis reflected. He was an astute and disciplined worker who was very sharp on observing time and did not tolerate people who could not keep time.



Socially he is a happy soul who was described by colleagues as a father, friend, instructor and mentor who associated with both young and old. He always availed himself to assist workmates in times of need and he would appreciate the little things others did for him, often to the point of tears. He made immense contributions to the development of skills in the organisation, imparting the skills and knowledge accumulated over almost 5 decades upon the younger generation of museum staff. He indeed has a big heart that can accommodate many, but not many people can put on the shoes left by Francis and walk the distance. He finally put a wrap on the lengthy and illustrious service upon retirement in August 2018 after serving the organisation for 47 years.

Britain. The landscape went through a dramatic change particularly on land use. Large tracks of land were opened up for agriculture, mining and large scale manufacturing industries. The effect of this change was the creation of cities and town which later on become important settlements and industrial hubs. One of the most important urban centres which was created is Bulawayo. Bulawayo grew to become Zimbabwe the second largest city after Harare. It is a city which is rightly regarded as the ‘historical heartland of Zimbabwe’.

The city of Bulawayo displays architectural signatures of over a century of modern urban development in Zimbabwe. The Bulawayo townscape is a gallery of the world’s finest architectural designs which range from Victorian to Gregorian, Edwardian to Regency, the city retains almost all the world architectural styles. Several buildings come to mind: Wesleyan Methodist Church (1895), Exchange Building (1895), Drill Hall (1901) and St Marys Cathedral Basilica (1903). Historic buildings are important because they give us a sense of the past and belonging. They are also an inexhaustible subject of study for present and future generations. The qualities of Bulawayo’s historic buildings have become an economic gateway by attracting thousands of tourists annually.



Agency Chambers



City Hall

Historic buildings protection in Western Region

By Todini Runganga

In the last decade of 19th Century, the land between Zambezi and Limpopo rivers was colonised by



Drill Hall



The Grand Hotel



The Bulwayo Public Library



Salvation Army

As we celebrate these past achievements, it is critical that we also make deliberate efforts to preserve this heritage for generations to come. This is particularly important as we are faced with growth and expansion of cities. Bulwayo, like any other city in developing economies, is in need of more space to construct high rising buildings and roads to accommodate heavy traffic. It is against this background that National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe and other stakeholders have come together to establish

mechanisms that ensure preservation of historic buildings but at the same time not stifling growth of the city of Bulawayo. This article is going to discuss some of the strategies which have been put in place for this cause:

1. Legislation

Historic buildings are defined in National Museums and Monuments Act (Chapter 25:11) section 26-30. The act outlines that any building which was constructed before 1 January 1910 is a protected building. The act protects such buildings at two levels; a. by creating a detailed list of all the buildings which it deems to be worthy of preservation, b. by declaring outstanding buildings as national monuments. In Bulawayo there are is one building which is listed as a national monument and there are six (6) which are on the waiting list. The NMM Act makes it mandatory for owners, tenants or developers of historic buildings to notify NMMZ at least fourteen days before commencement of work. This will allow time for assessment, documentation and production of reports.

2. Creation of curatorial office

NMMZ has created an office to coordinate the preservation and management of historic buildings both at national and regional level. The office is responsible for documenting, researching and publishing buildings for both academics and the general public. The office also regulates developments around buildings.

3. Documentation of historic buildings

The Natural History Museum has also created an inventory of all historic buildings in Bulawayo. The current list has 202 buildings, although there is need to revise and update the list. The recording of buildings is important because: it informs the exact location of buildings, decision making relating to the approval or implementation of a scheme of development; it informs which parts of the building will be lost as a result of demolition or alteration and it also informs academic researchers across a range of disciplines. The museum is in the process of updating the photographic record of these buildings.

4. Pre-development impact assessments

The National Museums and Monuments Act makes it mandatory for a predevelopment impact assessment to be carried out before alteration or total demolition of a building is carried out. The assessment entails the submission of development plan to NMMZ office before any work commences. A curator then carries out an assessment and produces a report with recommendations which may include; an alteration to the development plan or stop the development.

In cases where development cannot be avoided the curator will have to document as much as possible for the creation of records.

5. General condition assessments/surveys

The condition survey provides for an assessment of physical property condition. The survey identifies deficiencies and maintenance issues including but not limited to structural mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection, drainages, environment set up and safety systems. The survey results in the production of a report which gives the client a clear understanding of the current condition of the building.

6. Historic Buildings Advisory Committee

The committee is made up of volunteers who act as advisory body to NMMZ and relevant authorities, buildings owners and developers. It is also a watchdog group for the prevention of unauthorised demolition and alteration of historic buildings. The committee also researches and identifies buildings worthy of preservation. The current sitting committee which was constituted in 2018 is made up of representatives from NMMZ, National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo City Council, Local government, estate agents, independent researchers and consultants. The body meets every month to deliberate on the state of buildings conservation.

Conclusion

Historic buildings are an important part of our heritage which we can exploit for economic, educational and research. Their preservation and protection is entirely on our shoulders. The NMMZ has taken a technical and multi-stakeholder approach to conserve this heritage. The idea of protecting the buildings is not “trying to keep every old building - old age is not of great value in itself. This is a history that is not just to be in books, it is there for all to see” Peter Jackson (former chair of Historic Buildings Advisory Committee Harare Chapter).

Historical Buildings pictures courtesy of Rob Burrett

Design and layout by P. N Tshabangu