

## Manicaland branch petitions National Parks

### ● Row over white rhino in Cecil Kop 5427

MANICALAND branch of the Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe has drawn up a petition to fight moves by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management to move a female white rhino out of Cecil Kop to its breeding programme dubbed the Zimbabwe Rhino Policy and Management Plan.

The president of the WSZ, Shirley Cormack said at least 4 000 people had signed the petition aimed at helping stop the DNPWM from grabbing Daisy, as the rhino is affectionately called. The petition signed by thousands of people was sent to the Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism who are said to be studying it.

However, recently elected Lowveld chairman, Paul Wood, suggested that "in the interest of both the animal and the nation" Manicaland should consider swapping the rhino for "an old male, past its prime". This rhino would still serve the branch's main purpose that of attracting visitors to the park and educating them, while at the same time it would allow conservation of the endangered species.

Daisy is 17 years old and many ecologists say could be the linchpin in the national rhino survival programme, announced by National Parks to beef up the rhino stock.

"Does Manicaland want to keep a rhino or Daisy? If it's a rhino then they can discuss the possibility of a swap with National Parks - they could swap the white rhino for an old male way past its prime - that way they can still continue their programme. We should separate the emotive issues from the real, practical and ecologically important issues," Paul said to murmurs of agreement from the National Council members at a council meeting held in Harare on February 22.

After a lengthy debate, in which Mrs Cormack said she had reconsidered her intended move to distribute copies of the petition to other branches for support, council agreed that Manicaland should approach National Parks and ask them to consider a swap.

"I was one for sending out copies of the petition, as I was in favour of the branch's stance. But now I think this and other alternatives could be considered by the branch," she said, adding, however, that copies were available to any branch wishing to render support.

The Lowveld chairman pointed out that this was a national campaign and "do we as the Wildlife Society want to oppose it or support it?"

"If we are opposing this strategy, what reasons do we have. Daisy is a viable female and should be allowed to breed. She should be part of the bigger and most important strategy," Paul said.

Manicaland was not represented at the council meeting as branch chairman, Beatrice Hitschmann was involved in an accident three days before. In a letter to Mrs Cormack, the branch had expressed its desire to put in few other rhinos for breeding purposes. Losing the white rhino would jeopardise their plans, which were at an advanced stage.

The white rhino, arguably the biggest attraction at Cecil Kop and to the eastern Highlands as it is probably the only white rhino in the province, had sparked controversy before, as National Parks a couple of years ago tried to get it.

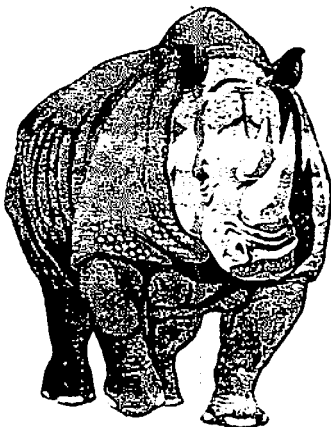
"We should look at the global picture," pointed out an ecologist attached to National Parks, "the rhino is a protected species, that is threatened with extinction and efforts to increase the numbers should be welcomed especially by an organisation of such a stature."

Asked to comment, a member of the Manicaland Branch committee,

Mike Hitschmann said, "Our projects are independent of national office. Cecil Kop is our project and national council cannot and should not tell us what to do or what not to do."

"In any case, the petition has already gone to the Minister of Mines, Environment and Tourism. The council's decision came three days too late - we are going ahead with our petition," he said.

Mike said that the branch had drawn up a breeding programme and "why should it be frowned upon, when twice Daisy managed to breed."



## This and that in the branches

### MASHONALAND

THIS branch held a successful fun cycle ride in which 300 cyclists from all walks of life and all ages participated. The ride was won by David Dickinson, who pedalled to victory in a show of pedal power.

The branch organised the race to raise funds for the Wildlife and Environmental Trust Fund of Zimbabwe, a move that was hailed by WSZ president, Shirley Cormack.

"We are still doing the accounting but indications are that we will give about \$10 000 to the Trust Fund," announced branch chairman, Gary Davidson.

### LOWVELD

THE Lowveld Environmental Education Programme, LEAP, might soon approach national for funding assistance, as the branch-run environmental education project is cash-strapped.

The branch came to the rescue of LEAP with a loan of \$30 000, as bridging finance pending the receipt of German Development Service funds. It was probable that LEAP would have to seek assistance from national, as it awaits the DED funding.

Outgoing chairman, Peter Gill said the land designation issue was a real threat to wildlife, conservation and biodiversity in the Lowveld, where well in excess of 800 000 hectares of land was listed for compulsory acquisition. Confidence was now low.

"I see no logic in resettling people in an area where crops fail seven years out of ten," said Peter, who is also a vice president of the WSZ.

Peter, had, however, handed over the reigns to Paul Wood, who is not a newcomer to council as he had often attended meetings with Peter in the past. Paul attended his first meeting in February.

### MATABELELAND

A LAST MINUTE turnaround saw the promised South African funding being withdrawn and both national and this branch are making renewed efforts to raise the needed \$800 000 to repair Mandavu Dam in Hwange National Park.

Tenders had been sent to the Department of Water Development but nothing can be done as there is no finance for the construction

### MATABELELAND (CONT)

project.

"The stability of the existing wall remains a cause for concern, unfortunately or fortunately, depending on one's point of view, no significant rain had fallen in the catchment area of the dam at the time of writing this report," said branch chairman, Karl Schmahl, in his quarterly report.

### MIDLANDS

FIVE of the six chalets being constructed by the branch at Sable Park, are now complete and have already been used by pre-school trainees. Chalet six still required grass for thatching and needs to be completed before the arrival of the OAZ members for their annual general meeting in March.

Although bookings to date would generate \$106 000, the branch had applied to the Wildlife and Environmental Trust Fund for a loan to complete the dormitory. Construction workers had already left the site, because of lack of funds, and branch chairman, Iain Lendrum applied for a speedy response to their urgent application.

Shirley Cormack promised that it would be tabled by the trustees during their next meeting.

### CHIPINGE

THE president and chief executive recently visited this branch to familiarise themselves on its operations and problems.

During the visit, Mrs Cormack announced that the Wildlife and Environmental Trust Fund of Zimbabwe trustees were calling for project proposals for educational outings by school children to places of interest in Chipinge area.

The branch would approach various schools to sell the idea.

### MAKONDE

MEMBERSHIP increased to 181 members. However, three members of the committee, including the vice-chairman, Andy Bone, Paul Stidolph and Howard Matthews, resigned.

Paul helped in organising the Mana Pools game count while Howard helped with the environmental education programme. Andy raised \$18 000 for the branch. They will all be missed.