

Report on Zimbabwe's Commemoration of World Wetlands Day on Monavale Vlei, Harare, 2nd February 2009

The Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO) had the privilege of hosting Zimbabwe's national commemoration of World Wetlands Day on Monavale Vlei.

Such concentrated effort had been put into the planning of this successful day with weeks of meetings with the Ministry of Environment and various other government departments and environmental organizations the weather turned out to be perfect – not pouring with rain – the tents were in place, displays set up and the visitors arriving in crowds. (250 + attended). The Vlei Scout's shelter / lookout tower had been completed the day before and its structural safety checked the previous evening by our Member of Parliament, an engineer, unbeknown to the Community! The Honourable Minister of Environment opened the structure and he, the Harare Mayor and the MP climbed up and were shown the panoramic view of this remarkable intact wetland / grassland. They were very impressed! It was an uplifting, happy occasion

The success of the World Wetland Day celebration in Zimbabwe is probably best summed up in a letter received by COSMO

“ ‘Newbugs’ Impression on National World Wetland's Day”
By Ginnie Chadwick

World Wetland's Day on February 2nd meant little to me as I had attended only two COSMO (Conservation Society of Monavale) meetings and had not come across the event before. As a regular early morning walker on the Monavale Vlei I decided I would support the ceremony arguing that attendance would be poor and my support welcome.

I COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE WRONG!

A huge crowd of Government officials, Parks Department personnel, Town Councilors, students, school children and dedicated local homeowners arrived to celebrate the occasion. All were housed in tents arrayed with wetlands posters and photographs and environmental information to catch the attention and educate.

A well developed programme included speeches of high interest by both our Minister of Environment, our city Mayor and our Member of Parliament, as well as a delightful offering of song and drama by school children and students.

All contributed to a wonderful event to celebrate Zimbabwe's World Wetland Day and reinforce the message that we should all do what we can to "Love Our Wetlands" and preserve this precious heritage.

Congratulations to all concerned for convening this impressive occasion and for all their hard work. It was indeed a happy and educational morning in the most enthusiastic atmosphere.

I am SO glad I was part of it!

(Ginnie's son had seen it announced on American TV!)

Background to Monavale Vlei

Monavale Vlei, a unique, 35 hectare, seasonally inundated urban wetland within 4 kilometers of Harare's CBD, contains a wide biodiversity and has long been known to local and international birdwatchers who visit the Vlei in the summer months to search one of the few remaining breeding habitats in Southern Africa for the elusive Striped Crake and Streaky-breasted Flufftail. Some 210 other bird species have been recorded, as well as bullfrogs, freshwater crabs, clawless otter, water mongoose, Serval cats, bushpig, duiker and several more species, which are to be found in this habitat of pools, marshes, and seasonally inundated short grassland, which is studded with anthills and occasional trees. It is a relatively undisturbed remnant of the once intact vlei systems, rich in wild flowers and indigenous grasses, which followed river courses in the area, but which are now largely lost to urban development and informal cultivation.

The preservation of Monavale Vlei is due principally to the efforts of the local community, working together as the Conservation Society of Monavale, with the assistance of local NGO's BirdLife Zimbabwe and Environment Africa, The City of Harare, the Ministry of Environment and others. Legal protection has been secured and COSMO manages it under a licence from the Ministry of Environment.



Minister of Environment , Hon Francis Nhema, opening Lookout at Monavale Vlei on World Wetlands Day 2nd Feb 2009



Dignitaries and World Wetlands Day attendees on Monavale Vlei



Monavale Vlei showing Lookout Shelter 2nd Feb 2009 – these grasslands are under water at this time of the year



The crowds listening to speeches at World Wetlands Day Monavale Vlei 2nd Feb 2009



Snakes are a part of Monavale Vlei life – school children handling snakes dispels fear and promotes understanding of these persecuted creatures



Chiedza and Linda are members of COSMO Kids Club who are accustomed to snakes. They teach others in the community to respect them