

DRAGONFLYING ON MMABOLELA ESTATES, LIMPOPO RIVER, SOUTH AFRICA, 8-12 FEBRUARY 2009

Mmabolela Estates (www.mmabolela.co.za) is a 6500 ha game farm in Limpopo Province bordering on Botswana and it extends along 12 km of the Limpopo River which forms the border between Botswana and South Africa. The coordinates of a central point along the river (at Raaswater) are 223836.88S, 281543.77E. WT and MT spent 4 days here in February 2009 dragonflying the river and adjacent pools and stream inlets. The Limpopo River was full and flowing strongly, in contrast to its usual situation of being a dry sandy river-bed with scattered permanent pools along its course; the flood water had reached Mmabolela a few weeks before our visit. The riparian forest gallery which fringes the river is between 50-200 m wide on Mmabolela, and the river verges are overhung along much of the river by these large trees, with grassy, or occasionally, reed edges. There is an extensive stretch of rocky rapids at Raaswater.

Weather was good for dragonflying during our stay - hot and sunny with variable cloud build-up in the mid-afternoon (but no resulting rain). We covered the length of the Limpopo in the 4 days, but focussed on just a couple of sites (Raaswater, Mmabolela Pool, Sun Pan). A couple of species were caught to confirm identification but most were identified visually; 13 species were photographed.

SPECIES RECORDED

A total of 35 species was recorded (see list). The most interesting, from our perspective was *Paragomphus sabicus*, a new species for South Africa. One female was seen and photographed (on a fence 30 m from the river) and two males were seen perched on dry twigs close to the river. We were not able to catch any of these. Two other *Paragomphus* spp., *genei* and *elpidius*, were frequently seen, and *sabicus* was immediately distinguishable from them by being yellow-and-black (not green) and being substantially larger with prominent foliations, in both sexes, on the terminal segments of the abdomen.

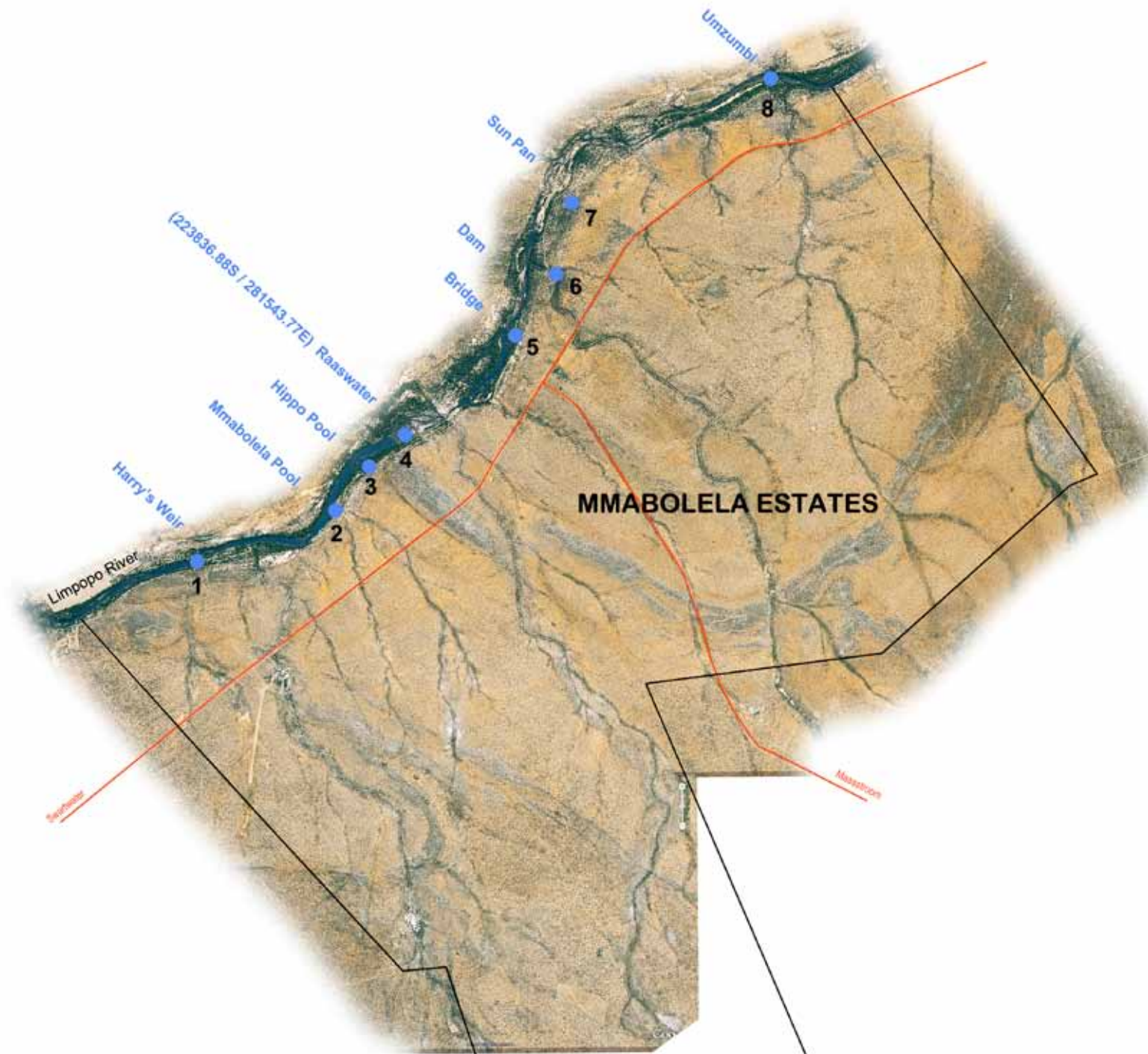
Brachythemis lacustris was abundant in places on the river and at dusk literally hundreds could be seen here hawking low over the water, close to the reeds or grass in which they collected during the day - this is clearly a crepuscular hunter. We searched the pink granite rocks at Raaswater, in vain, for *Crocotthemis saxicolor* but found numbers of *Bradinopygia cornuta* instead. This site also had many *Trithemis donaldsoni*, single males occupying virtually every emergent rock in the river. (We also searched in vain for that other riparian species, *Trithemis wernerii*).

Images of the species photographed at mMabolela are on the website - see 'Dragonfly Images'.

Warwick & Michèle Tarboton, 20/2/2009



Limpopo River upstream from 'Raaswater'



At the "Bridge" crossing the Limpopo River



Rocky outcrops at 'Raaswater'

DRAGONFLIES RECORDED ON MMABOLELA ESTATES, LIMPOPO RIVER, SOUTH AFRICA, 8-12 FEBRUARY 2009												
ZYGOPTERA (Damselflies)	These numbers refer to the sites shown on the map		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	notes	
	Family LESTIDAE	<i>Lestes pallidus</i>	PALLID SPREADWING							3m		coll 1m
Family PROTONEURIDAE	<i>Elatoneura glauca</i>	COMMON THREADTAIL					1f					
Family PLATYCNEMIDIDAE	<i>Mesocnemis singularis</i>	RIVERJACK				1m						
Family COENAGRIONIDAE	<i>Pseudagrion acaciae</i>	ACACIA SPRITE		5		3m,3f	3m				photo	
	<i>Pseudagrion commoniae</i>	BLACK SPRITE					1m			1m		
	<i>Pseudagrion hamoni</i>	HAMON'S SPRITE		10+		1m	1m		10+		coll 1m, photo	
	<i>Pseudagrion sudanicum</i>	SUDAN SPRITE		2m							coll 1m, photo	
	<i>Ischnura senegalensis</i>	AFRICAN BLUETAIL						1m				
ANISOPTERA (Dragonflies)	Family GOMPHIDAE	<i>Ictinogomphus ferox</i>	TIGERTAIL	3	1		10+	2				photo
		<i>Lestinogomphus angustus</i>	FAIRYTAIL				2m					
		<i>Paragomphus elpidius</i>	CORKSCREW HOOKTAIL	2			1m	1m				coll 1f, photo
		<i>Paragomphus genei</i>	GREEN HOOKTAIL				5+		5+			coll 1f, photo
		<i>Paragomphus sabicus</i>	SABI HOOKTAIL				1m	1f				photo
	Family AESHNIDAE	<i>Anax ephippiger</i>	VAGRANT EMPEROR							1m		
	Family CORDULIIDAE	<i>Phyllomacromia picta</i>	DARTING CRUISER		1							
	Family LIBELLULIDAE	<i>Orthetrum chrysostigma</i>	EPAULET SKIMMER			1	1m,1f			2		coll 1m
		<i>Orthetrum stemmale</i>	STRONG SKIMMER							1		coll 1m
		<i>Nesiothemis farinosa</i>	BLACK-TAILED SKIMMER		5+	2	5m			5		
		<i>Palpopleura deceptor</i>	DECEPTIVE WIDOW			1m						
		<i>Diplacodes lefebvrei</i>	BLACK PERCHER							3m		
		<i>Diplacodes luminans</i>	BARBET		5	5+				10+		
		<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>	BROAD SCARLET							1m		
		<i>Bradinyga cornuta</i>	DON DWALA				8					photo
		<i>Brachythemis lacustris</i>	RED GROUNDLING	2	100+		100+					photo
		<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>	BANDED GROUNDLING		5	10+	20+		50+	10+		
		<i>Trithemis annulata</i>	VIOLET DROPWING	5	10+		50+	5		10+	5	photo
		<i>Trithemis arteriosa</i>	RED-VEINED DROPWING		10+	5	20+		5	10+		
<i>Trithemis donaldsoni</i>		DONALDSON'S DROPWING				50+	5				photo	
<i>Trithemis kirbyi ardens</i>		KIRBY'S DROPWING	1			50+	5	10+		5		
<i>Zygonyx torridus</i>	RINGED CASCADER		1		1	1						
<i>Zygonoides fuelleborni</i>	FULLEBORN'S BOTTLETAIL	3				2			1m,1f	photo		
<i>Olpogastra lugubris</i>	SLENDER BOTTLETAIL	5										
<i>Tholymis tillarga</i>	TWISTER				1t							
<i>Pantala flavescens</i>	PANTALA				10+		20+	10+	2	photo		
<i>Tamea basilaris</i>	KEYHOLE GLIDER							5+				