

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

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Mmabolela Estates ([www.mmabolela.co.za](http://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*).

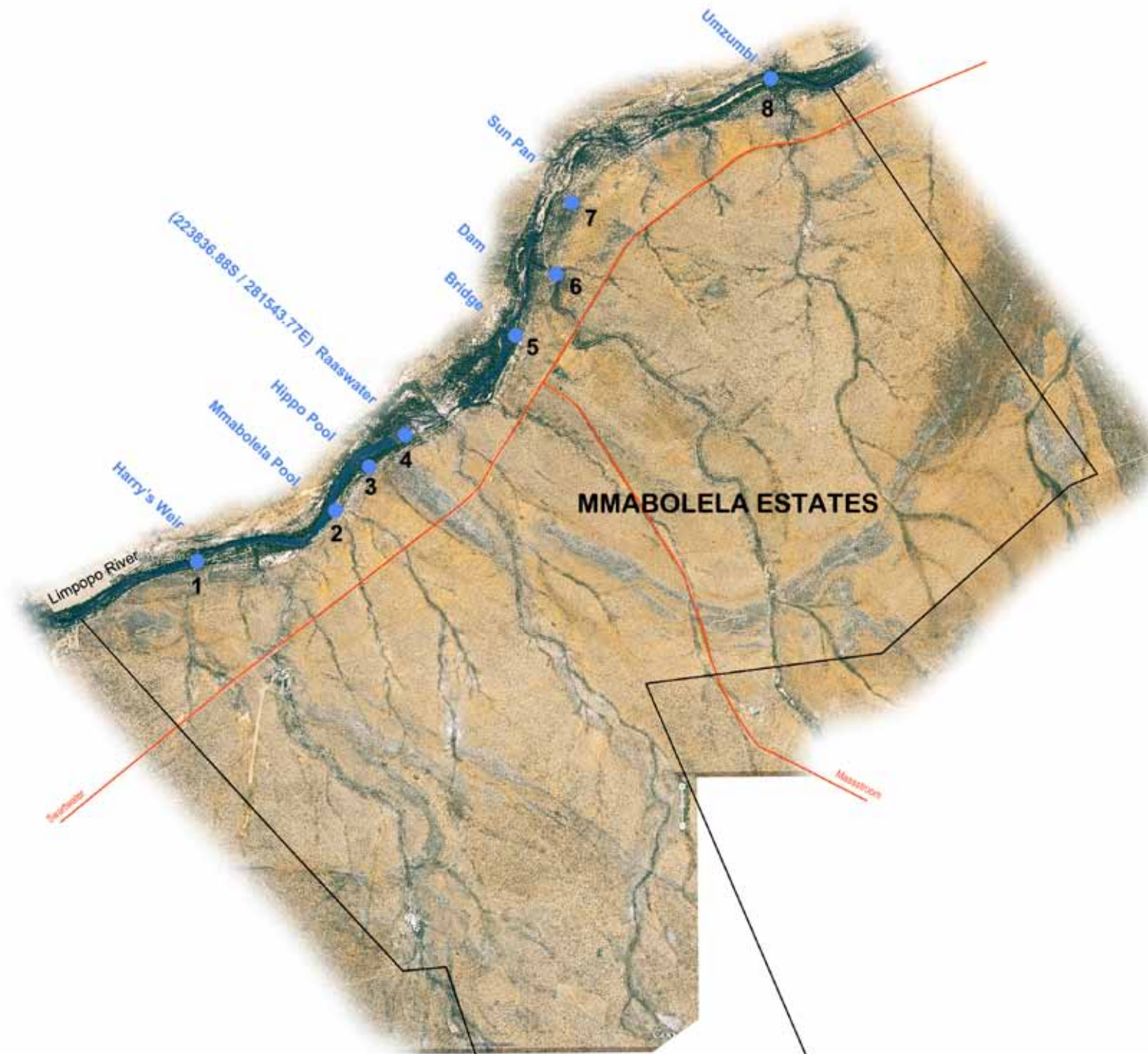
Images of the species photographed at mMabolela are on the website - see 'Dragonfly Images'.

Warwick & Michèle Tarboton, 20/2/2009



Limpopo River upstream from 'Raaswater'





At the "Bridge" crossing the Limpopo River

