



KWAZULU-NATAL CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION

www.nacsa.org.za **THE GUINEAFOWL NEWSLETTER NO 2 – 2010**

Message from the Editor

Swallows searching for the Vickers?

It was reported that the barn swallows disappeared from the Mount Moreland roost for a while. Maybe they were searching for their friends, Hilary and Ted Vickers? Hilary and Ted Vickers were responsible for forming the Lake Victoria Conservancy more than 15 years ago and were active and enthusiastic members. Ted, Hilary and Angie were on hand to receive visitors every evening for six months of the year. They spearheaded the airport campaign and spent hours deliberating over comments for the EIA. The KZN Conservancies Association thank Hilary and Ted for years of invaluable input towards the conservancy movement and especially for their dedication to ensure the survival of the barn swallows and Lake Victoria wetland. We wish them a well deserved retirement in Howick and know that they will continue to make a valuable conservation contribution.

Jean Lindsay

Message from the secretary and co-editor

That there are people in our midst who believe the invasion of alien plants is a natural process that should be left to play itself out was a great shock to me. For a moment I thought I was the one who was naïve. To not know about indigenous plants and invasive aliens was one thing, but to actively oppose the eradication of aliens was a completely new game. But then Brian van Wilgen came to the rescue and reminded us with some excellent supporting data why we are doing this. The response from the conservancies was to double their efforts to get the message out there. Well done!

The problem of invasive plants in KZN was brought home to me while driving through Botswana and Zambia this Christmas season. Their roads departments regularly clear a large 10m belt on either side of the main road. The plants that grow on these verges are low growing indigenous herbs and coppicing trees – I couldn't even find Blackjacks! I envisioned clearing vegetation next to the road in KZN – and I couldn't imagine it without a fantastic invasion of exotic weeds, lantana, Blue weed and Datura. Somehow, this province gets a raw deal!

Alison Young

Alien plant conflict

In early November the Pietermaritzburg newspaper, The Witness, printed an article by Hilton resident Gloria Keverne damning the eradication of "aliens". Keverne, who is a writer of fiction books, put forward an article challenging the science of clearing our invasive alien plants from our environment. She sees this as leading to the "collapse of nature if tree destruction continued", that we waste millions so "that native plants can evolve without normal competition" and that "if we kill aliens, natives die". She added that "99.9% of raptors breed in alien trees", "the (WfW) project will empty our sky of birds while obliterate nature outside our reserves".

The Witness was prompt in publishing a response by Brian van Wilgen who is the chief ecologist at CSIR. He pointed out several misunderstandings and brought many of Keverne's statements in their correct context adding some useful background information. Some supportive letters with additional information also followed Van Wilgen's article.

Keverne was encouraged to send similar articles to other leading newspapers around the country. The Star newspaper called her "a novelist and environmentalist". At the end of her article Keverne asks why, if the planet had managed to police its own flora for billions of years, would we now need to control some species. Amazingly, there were readers who felt inspired to support Keverne. One supporter even refuses to allow her local conservancy onto the railway bordering her property to remove the invasive weeds there!

The Mercury also printed a counter article by Geoff Caruth, a Pinetown businessman and environmentalist. He conveyed similar corrections that Van Wilgen highlighted and emphasised that this is all really a man-made disaster. He stressed that "*we need to take immediate and on-going action against this peril*".

Copies of Keverne's article and the responses by Brian Van Wilgen and Geoff Caruth are available from Alison.

THE TOP 100 HEROES OF 2010

NO 7 HELEN DUIGAN

One of four conservationists who opposed the development of a golf estate next to a nature conservancy in Joburg. They faced a defamation claim of R 170 million. The High Court dismissed the claim by the development company Wraypex Pty Ltd. (See story on page 3)

EIA WORKSHOP

March 18 : Queen Elizabeth Park Auditorium, PMB. Details to follow.



2010 Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Awards

Karkloof Conservancy

Karkloof Conservancy received a certificate from KZN Ezemvelo Wildlife at the last KZN Conservancies AGM.

Chairperson: Carolyn Goble

Established: 1998

Number of members: approximately 90



Carolyn Goble receives the certificate from Jamie Physick

For the following through outstanding commitment to conservation:

- Annual game counts for the last 14 years.
- Annual environmental education projects at the four local Karkloof farm schools. Each school is supplied with art materials and the children then design a poster on the topic for that year. Conservancy members vote on the artwork at our annual AGM and the school that has produced the best poster is awarded a picnic at a conservation destination.
- Conservancy members are involved in the running of the annual Karkloof Adventure Quest, which is a fund raiser for Bird Life S.A.
- Conservancy members are also involved in the annual Karkloof 3 Cranes Challenge which is organised by the Wildlands Conservation Trust. This event highlights the fact that all three crane species occur in the area and the threats which challenge their survival.
- The Karkloof Conservation Centre office provides information to our Conservancy members, as well as visitors to the area, about the importance of protecting the many vulnerable species which occur here for example the Wattled Crane, the Oribi and the Southern Ground Hornbill etc.
- The Conservancy has been instrumental in getting four local bird guides trained by Bird Life South Africa, one of whom is currently employed at our Conservation Centre.
- Raising awareness of the amazing bio-diversity of this region and the need to protect it at all costs.

Dargle conservancy

Chairperson: Andrew Anderson

Established: 2003

Number of members: 60 -70

The Dargle conservancy has been involved in the following projects:

- The minister has provisionally approved an area of approximately 2.500ha as meeting the criteria for nature reserve status under the Biodiversity Stewardship programme. This project involves 10 different landowners and successfully links the climax forests and pristine grasslands of the Dargle with those of the Lidgett Valley up to, and including, the Michael House Oribi Reserve. The process is now in the hands of KZN Wildlife to finalise legal agreements.
- Through financial support the DC has been able to sponsor the annual fees for the two farm schools in the Dargle to participate in Eco Schools programmes run by the Midlands Meander Education Programme.
- The conservancy facilitated a successful programme of presentations over the year on various issues relating to biodiversity conservation of our threatened grassland and forest ecosystems.
- The Global Climate Change series of current documentaries was attended by an average of 30 people per session. It gave the audience an insight into the issue in a global context and on communities that are working on solutions.
- The DC initiated a programme involving an appropriate landowner as well as the public in a project that saw the reintroduction of 40 dassies in 2009 and a further 30 in 2010 into the main section of the Dargle Forest. for more on this project visit www.dargleconservancy.org.za.
- Through a Dargle Conservancy lead initiative the conservancies of the Midlands have formed the Midlands Conservancy Liaison Forum which has been very well received. The inaugural meeting was held in July.



Andrew Anderson of Dargle Conservancy receives a certificate from Jamie Physick

JEANS'S JOTTINGS

While the eThekweni city officials jet all over the world confering and debating about climate change, spewing out tonnes of carbon we, 'citizen-scientists', are extremely concerned about the degradation of our natural areas and the loss of biodiversity at the grassroots level. Local environmental NGOs and CBOs have noticed with grave concern the deterioration and degradation of our POS (Public Open Spaces), parks and Nature Reserves.

There has been a huge increase in the growth and species of IAPs throughout the municipality. While the city has a good policy we are still waiting for the strategy to be implemented. The decimation of more than 300 strelitzias in the Palmiet Nature Reserve during the breeding season of birds and bats caused a public outcry. The reason put forward was that they were encroaching on the grassland – but most of those destroyed were in the middle of the forest?

In an article in The Natal Mercury dated 23 September 2009, Sabine Marschall and a group of friends investigated parks in the municipality to establish their user-friendliness for 2010 visitors and she concluded that the "city reserves are being lost to vagrants and neglect".

In a letter to the Mercury dated 06 October 2009 in reply to the above, Christo Swart, Deputy Head of Parks, stated that "this is untrue as only some are under the control of the city's Parks Department. Queensburgh, Glenholme and Ilanda reserves are managed by local conservancies."

This is utter rubbish. Conservancies are volunteers with full-time jobs and are happy to assist only over week-ends and are in no way able to "manage" any reserve. Perhaps Swart should read a city publication entitled: "A guide to Durban's Nature Reserves and other protected open spaces." Queensburgh is not listed, maybe he means North Park Nature Reserve which is managed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife? Glenholme is managed by WESSA and the SPCA. And the Ilanda



50 year old *Ficus natalensis* destroyed

Wilds Nature Reserve is managed by the eThekweni municipality – one would assume that the Deputy Head would know more about the management of the reserves under his control?

While thousands of invasive alien trees abound in the city, our Parks Department are extremely busy exterminating many 50+ year old indigenous trees on our verges – some of them by mistake? The resident asked for the branches of the tree hanging over his property to be trimmed, but the official decided to remove the whole tree. Two letters to the Mercury on 23 and 26 November 2010 from residents on the Berea 'mourning the death of strangler fig of life'. Four indigenous trees on a verge in Sarnia removed 'for crime' but no Case numbers for these incidents have ever materialised. An 80 year old Olive tree was chopped down in Berea West because it was obstructing traffic. The South African Heritage Act No 25 states that permission must be sought to remove trees older than 60 years. We are often told that the Parks Department is understaffed and under-resourced but they still seem to find time to destroy our natural heritage.

Property developer gets a Slapp

MERCURY DECEMBER 7, 2010

By Tony Carnie

A "Belligerent and insolent" property developer who tried to bully and intimidate his neighbours has been cut down to size in the high court by a ruling in a landmark environmental justice case which has had ripple effects across the country. Judge Stanley Sapire, of the Pretoria High Court, yesterday dismissed the R 170 million damages and defamation claims lodged against four members of a local environmental conservancy by golfing estate developer Robbie Wray's company Wraypex.

The Wraypex judgment has national implications for environmental whistleblowers and other activist groups who find themselves facing expensive 'Slapp suits'. The term Slapp suit (strategic litigation against public participation) refers to the legal threats used by wealthy developers and corporations to silence or intimidate citizen groups who raise concerns about environmental damage by developers.

Judge Sapire said there was no substance to Wray's complaints that his company had been defamed or had lost any money and dismissed all claims against Rhenosterspruit Nature Conservancy members Helen Duigen, Arthur Barnes,

Edward Gaylard and Lisa Essberger.

He found that all four were "sincere, truthful and responsible" people who had a genuine concern about how the golf estate would effect a pristine countryside. They were entitled to express these fears and to oppose Wray's development. Duigen, who was being sued personally for R40m, said the case had lasted six years and she was delighted with the outcome. "The developer's lawyer threatened us verbally and in writing as soon as we started questioning aspects of the development, but we had a duty to stand up in defence of the environment."

The Wraypex case dates back to 2004, when Wray proposed building 300 homes and an 18-hole golf course outside Lanseria Airport, close to the Cradle of Humankind world heritage site and the Rhenosterspruit Nature Conservancy. When the four conservancy members questioned the impacts of the development, Wray resorted to litigation. Advocate Adrian Vorster representing the conservancy members, urged the judge to grant an adverse costs order against Wray. However, the judge deferred his decision on costs until early next year, when further arguments will be heard.



Winterskloof Conservancy

Greening and securing our valley!

We re-launched in the latter half of this year and established the Conservancy as a member of the Winterskloof Bobbies Sector Forum, which strives to make our Valley safe and secure for all who live, work and visit the area. Great strides have been made and we are extremely grateful for the great work they do with their partners, the SA Police Force and the Bobbies.

We have teamed up with Wildlands Conservation Trust to assist with recycling. We managed to divert over five tons from landfill and this has contributed to the amount of new raw materials that were not used to make new, as well as avoiding using landfill airspace and generating greenhouse gases. We only started the recycling collection in October this year, so this was a great effort by our members.

We have formed a coalition with the World's View Conservancy to work together on the areas where we share boundaries and streams. We are also working with them to develop a proposal for funding our Alien Invasive Plant Eradication plan, as well as rehabilitation of water and forest ecosystems. We are forming a Trust and are in the process of developing an integrated plan for application to Lotto for funding. We are being assisted in this process by the nSimbi Programme of the African Conservation Trust.

We have received fantastic support and encouragement from other Conservancies, especially the Everton Conservancy in Durban. They helped us to conduct training for our members and their gardeners in how to identify and eradicate alien invasive plants. This has helped to galvanise our members to start the work in their properties, as it is much easier than we



We had a wonderful response to our Alien Invader Plant training course for gardeners at Cowan House. Joan and Sipho from the Everton Conservancy came to share their expertise with us, starting with a presentation on alien invasives, the law, why they are a problem and what to do. We then went out into the Cowan House grounds to implement the theory. It was really worthwhile and lots of interesting discussion was generated. The skills Sipho shared with us, made the work so much easier and Joan showed us how to “eat the elephant” one bit at a time. I think we all came away from the training with a renewed sense of passion to do the work, knowing that it can be done.

previously thought. We will be establishing a team to start eradicating the alien invasive plants in our public spaces.

Ferncliffe catchment conservancy

Problems identified for action

In October 2010 the FCC held a special meeting to assess the conservation needs the Town Bush and Chase Valley stream catchments. The problems were:

1. Alien weed infestation, particularly of the riverine areas,
2. Loss of soil from eroding river banks and plantation areas (particularly after felling),
3. General pollution particularly in plantation areas.

The projects were hindered by a lack of funds and publicity and so a lack of public involvement. The priority was the “Control of alien weeds and the restoration of ecosystems”. These catch-

ments are considered to be the most weed encroached areas in the country. Some 20 years ago it was common to see blue duiker on the plantation roads but today they are never seen. Their natural habitat has been completely destroyed by Invasive Alien weeds. Competition from Mauritius Thorn, Bugweed, Cestrum and Ginger have eliminated indigenous plants that provided browsing. Commercial timber provides no fodder.

Many alien weeds are poisonous to wildlife. An impala was found dying in agony after eating *Cestrum*. Invasive Balloon Vine and Cat's Claw creeper together destroy mature trees. These threaten the *Acacia* woodlands to the east of Pietermaritzburg.

The FCC also recognizes the need to rehabilitate these areas. Initially grass is planted to protect the soil and then trees are planted in the grassland: this has been done with great success in the Green Corridors. A huge number of plants will be needed so the Ferncliffe Carbon Bank programme shifts focus to riverine areas. This will be more visible and create public awareness of our activities.

Adopt-a-stream is a major part of this weed removal project. The FCC, in recognition of the valuable contribution made by these members of the public, presents “Green Custodian Awards” at their annual AGM. Other projects include the protection of Kettelfontein where the threatened Hilton daisy grows.



Gardens signs

Please advertise our garden signs and promote "proudly planting indigenous". There will be a small profit which will print our conservancy handbooks and used to promote new conservancies.

A3 colour signs R 55;
A4 colour signs R 35.
Contact Jean Lindsay on
082 5504427/
lindsayjd@mweb.co.za or
Alison Young on
YoungA@ukzn.ac.za



The Institute of Waste Management KZN Branch: Awards 2010

Clifton Hills Homeowners Association

Service Industry: Gold Certificate and Trophy

Through the dedicated and impassioned efforts of Ron Joubert, the Estate Manager, Clifton Hills has established a waste management system for the estate that is unique and, indeed, ground breaking in the gated estate sector. Residents are compelled to separate their waste and errant residents are sent letters of reprimand if they fail to comply with the requirements. Domestic workers and staff on the estate are also trained in waste management. Separated wastes are collected from the homes and the recyclables are taken to a recycling facility on site where they are further separated by a dedicated workforce and stored for resale to recyclers. It is estimated that about 50% of the waste generated is recycled. Garden refuse is composted and sold back to the residents. Glass bottles have been crushed and used under the security fence line.

Sue Benningfield, Chairman
Ron Joubert can be contacted
on 082 883 4327



Cooperative Conservancies

The KZN Midlands is home to 50 pairs of the less than 250 Wattled Cranes left in South Africa and also home to 11 Conservancies. There can be little doubt that this area is a hot spot of biodiversity.

South Africa ranks as the 3rd most biologically diverse country in the world. However, 34% of terrestrial ecosystems fall within the vulnerable and critically endangered categories. A decrease in ecosystems' biodiversity is cause for considerable concern because it leads to a reduction in ecosystem services, such as a reduced capacity to generate clean water. The KZN Midlands is an important water catchment area, has forests which are home to the rare Cape Parrot, some of the last moist mist-belt grasslands (which are an important carbon sink) and includes habitats of many endangered species. The very first conservancy established in SA was in Balgowan in 1978 and since then the area has become renowned for commitment to stewardship of natural resources.



© Cyril Laubscher

Recently, these Conservancies got together to form the Midlands Conservancy Forum to share ideas, knowledge and discuss common challenges. Working together will support to those who are facing daunting tasks and offer advice to the newer conservancies, too. Learning from one another is a vital component of the new forum, as everyone has different experiences to share. For instance the Karkloof Conservancy recently held a successful game count (an annual event), while Boston compiles a monthly species list of birds, flowers and mammals spotted in the area. Balgowan Conservancy hosts the annual Michaelhouse Mountain Bike race and landowners in the Dargle have come together to create a 2000ha nature reserve. Curry's Post Conservancy has just recently been formed while the Lion's Bush conservancy has been employing game guards in Fort Nottingham many years. This diverse range of activities all contribute to raising awareness of the importance of our role as custodians of the land.

The group plans to meet quarterly and offer an opportunity to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Endangered Wildlife Trust and other organisations to make presentations on conservation issues to representatives from a range of Conservancies at one occasion. Should you be interested in making use of this opportunity to spread your environmental message, contact secretary@dargleconservancy.org to book a slot.

DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development is a fairy tale starring the three little pigs (or is it the three blind mice?) called Economic Growth, Ecological Balance and Social Progress. Who call in the help of Robin Hood (or conservancies) to remove the Fat Cats from the Gravy Train before it reaches Candy land and destroys Ubuntu and our life support systems.



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