



KWAZULU-NATAL CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION

www.nacsa.org.za THE GUINEAFOWL NEWSLETTER NO 1 – 2010

Message from the editor

I hope many of you will host an event to promote the 2010 Year of Biodiversity because this is what we are all about. Last year I spent a July week-end in Creighton at the Aloe Train Festival and it was an unforgettable experience. The scenery with the beautiful aloes alongside a river with the majestic Berg in the background is the reason for living in Africa. The trip to the Centocow mission was most interesting and you can squeeze in a Button Birding outing on the Sunday morning – a week-end of a lifetime – don't miss it – details in this newsletter.

No doubt you are all embracing the spirit and vibe of the soccer world cup and flying flags !

Jean Lindsay.

Message from the secretary and co-editor

"The 29th AGM is over and as you will have heard your ExCo have just been involved in putting together a Strategy or a plan of action. We resolved several issues like what do we want from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and what do they expect from us? And where do we fit into Stewardship. Once the CEO of Ezemvelo signs this living document, they are committed to deliver.

One of the issues that used to regularly emerge at meetings was the registration process. Ezemvelo have always been the guardians of this process. One of the problems was that once a conservancy was registered, we lost touch with them if they didn't join the Association. And the Conservancy would lose contact with Ezemvelo if the District Conservation Officer showed no interest.

So one of the decisions made was that the Association would take on the registration process which Ezemvelo will then endorse. Each conservancy will pay an annual Registration fee. This may go some way in controlling groups who call themselves Conservancies but do not follow the conservancy ethos.

There is more about the Strategy in the Chairman's report."

The Rhino Award 2009: Richard Winn



Johann Vermeulen, Jean Lindsay and Richard Winn

Richard Winn is a gentle soul with a giant vision and great love of the African soil, the ecosystems and all its creatures. He has worked and lectured in the rehabilitation field for more than 30 years and long before it was even heard of in this country.

Richard is a most worthy recipient of the KZNCA eThekweni's annual award for 2009. He has been working at the Mariannhill landfill site (MLS) and has been the Conservancy manager for 13 years. He was years ahead of his time with these rehabilitation works and projects. Landfill sites can be dumps but MLS has shown the way with its conservancy status (the only one in the world) and what can be achieved on a landfill site, which are normally the dirtiest places on earth. MLS has won many awards with many city officials flying all over SA and the world to receive these awards. While I do realize that most of the awards are for engineering practices I am sure it is the conservancy appearance that wins over the judges. I have yet to read or hear Richard's name ever mentioned and he has not received any recognition from the city. MLS was the first landfill in SA to do rehabilitation while in operation (most are only rehabilitated at the end of life), the first to treat the leachate in a natural way, the first to convert the gas to electricity and the first to have an environmental education boma on site.

Every visitor who has participated on Richard's tour of MLS has left with a new vision of rehabilitation, a better knowledge of our indigenous plants and knows the difference between a landfill and a 'dump'. We salute Richard for taking a stand on his vision of rehabilitation many years ago. You are an inspiration to us all.

Jean Lindsay



Black-headed dwarf chameleon

Text and photos by Adrian Armstrong, Conservation Planning, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife



Black-headed dwarf chameleon (*Bradypodion melanocephalum*)

The black-headed dwarf chameleon *Bradypodion melanocephalum* is a small brown lizard. Another name for it is the KwaZulu dwarf chameleon. It differs from the flap-neck chameleon *Chamaeleo dilepis* in various ways. The flap-neck chameleon has a flap, sometimes rudimentary, at the side of the neck (absent in dwarf chameleons), a flatish back of the head (dwarf chameleons have a casque), a longitudinal row of triangular scales on the belly (absent in dwarf chameleons), and a longitudinal double row of closely-spaced white or cream scales along the lower part of the flank (absent in dwarf chameleons, which have lateral rows of enlarged, relatively well-spaced scales). Both chameleons have a longitudinal row of enlarged scales on the throat and back. Adult flap-neck chameleons are much larger than adult dwarf chameleons.

The black-headed dwarf chameleon is found in tall, thick grassland (including that with bushes and trees) and at the edges of, or sometimes some way into, forests and reed wetlands. The factors that threaten the long-term existence of

the black-headed dwarf chameleon include destruction of its grassland habitat, habitat degradation through overgrazing and alien plant invasion, too few fires which allow alien plants to invade its habitat, and too frequent and extensive fires that degrade its habitat. Fires kill dwarf chameleons and at the same time kill their offspring because the females bear live young, unlike the flap-neck chameleons which lay their eggs underground and thereby protect their eggs from fires.

Black-headed dwarf chameleons are found in some gardens with suitable habitat structure, usually close to natural or semi-natural areas. However, their long-term existence in gardens is not assured. Factors that reduce their survival in urban areas include increased numbers of predators such as cats, dogs, and common mynah birds, motor vehicles that run over dwarf chameleons, and electric fences which kill chameleons unless of the pressure-sensitive type. An electric current is only sent down the wires of the latter after a certain amount of force is applied to a wire, and this force is usually much more than the weight of a chameleon. Pesticides and other chemicals can affect black-headed dwarf chameleon sub-populations through reduction of their insect prey numbers and through pollution of their drinking water sources. These dwarf chameleons require drinking water provided by rain drops, mist and dew to survive.

Conservancies can assist dwarf chameleon populations to survive by managing natural and semi-natural areas in a way that does not unduly affect their numbers, e.g. by burning only one part of a grassland area and not the whole area each year, by controlling or eradicating invasive alien plants and by restricting the access of domestic animal predators to dwarf chameleon habitat.



Flap-neck chameleon *Chamaeleo dilepis*

ALOE FESTIVAL: 26 & 27 June

Presented by **Lower Mpushini Vallet Conservancy**

BEAUTIFUL ALOE WALKS ● SPECIALIST TALKS ● ALOE SALES ● INDIGENOUS PLANT SALES

9am – 4 pm **ENTRY R20.00 p/p** (Children under 14 Free) Tea & Cake R10 **CONTACT** Darlene Bond 082 933 5036

VENUE 1: NYALA PLACE

Tea Garden

Trail Start— 2 guided trails per day —10.30am & 2.30pm

Val-lea Vista Indigenous Plant sales

VENUE 2: IMPALA BEND

Lunches

Craft Market

VENUE 3: ROCKY WONDER ALOE NURSERY & GARDEN

Over 200 South African Aloes on view

Aloe Nursery sales – Special offers

Book Sale (Elsa Pooley) –Saturday morning

Saturday 26th

10.30am Sat Elsa Pooley: Indigenous Trees and Flowers

10.30am Sun Ben Botha: Aloes, Hybrids, Pests & Diseases

Colin & Hilary Hex —Red Earthworm Farm demonstration & sales.

VENUE 4: SPENCER 'S PLACE

Self Guided Trail for Bird Watchers. Open from 6am.

SOUTH AFRICAN SUGAR ASSOCIATION



2010 is International Year of Biodiversity

The United Nations has declared 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, as a celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity for our lives. The world is invited to take action in 2010 to safeguard the variety of life on earth: biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of life forms. It is the habitat that they live in that makes up a community of wildlife. The greater the number of different species of plants and animals, the greater the biodiversity. So, for example, the **biodiversity of a wetland** includes the plants which are many different grasses and restios; the animals such as frogs, reptiles and insects; the birds that breed in it, the large animals that graze it. A healthy wetland would provide for the communities around it as well whether it is wildlife or humans. Biodiversity would also take account of the use and value that wetlands have for humans, e.g. the restios (**incema**) are used to make mats. Fire also plays a very important role in wetlands. The value of the wetland:

- Provides rivers with clean water to drink and grow crops
- Rich, nutritious grasses for grazing in the summer months
- Protects rivers from flooding

Caring for our biodiversity.

Again, taking the same example of the wetland

- Keep the wetland clean, free of litter and invasive weeds
- Care to keep cattle and other grazers out in the dry months
- Care to see that the plants do not get over-grazed
- Do not disturb the wetland by ploughing it to grow crops
- Burning at the end of the dry season once every 2 or 3 years



South Africa's exhibit at this year's Chelsea Flower Show in May maintained its innovative and unusual interpretations of our spectacular plant heritage. Top designers, David Davidson and Ray Hudson, designing the exhibit for the 17th time, have explored the theme of biological diversity in celebration of 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. They produced a thought-provoking exhibit for the South African National Biodiversity Institute's (SANBI) 2010 Kirstenbosch – SA Chelsea entry titled 'Bio[logical] diversity of life' and received a silver medal.

Bugs bring eco message

Recently, facilitators (aka The Bugs) for the Midlands Meander Education Project (MMAEP), Bongi the Butterfly, Siza the Spider and Gugu the Grasshopper welcomed new schools to the programme. Nestled in the Karkloof is Triandra School where the Bugs received a warm welcome as raptors swirled overhead and the learners sang their school anthem. Triandra, and nearby Yarrow Primary, plan to get their food gardens flourishing this year and learners showed the Bugs their existing gardens, telling them all their favourite vegetables. These schools are supported by the Karkloof Conservancy and the MMAEP will be working in conjunction with them to encourage everyone to feel proud of living in such a beautiful part of the world and take care of their precious environment. Then it was off to Dargle Primary, where learners were delighted to wear the big, bright Magic hats and giggled when the teachers wore them too. The Dargle Conservancy has supported the MMAEP for a number of years, and recently, the Bugs conducted lessons on forest ecology, encouraging all the children to see the Dargle mist-belt forests opposite their school with new eyes. The lesson included acting out the various forest inhabitants from dassies, snakes and monkeys to a big black eagle and was unforgettable fun. This year the Dargle School will focus on Resource Use, starting a recycling depot for Dargle residents to make use of. These three schools join 12 other schools supported by the MMAEP in their efforts to achieve WWF/WESSA



Eco-School status. In past years, The Boston Conservancy and the Balgowan Conservancy have made grants to the project, entrusting the MMAEP to conduct environmental education on their behalf in local schools. N3Toll Concession (Pty) Ltd. is the major funder of the programme, as part of their commitment to communities alongside the N3 National road, generously encouraging The Bugs to spread their environmental message. See www.mmaep.co.za for more details.



Karkloof Three Cranes Challenge

The Three Cranes Challenge held recently in the Karkloof was part of the Bonitas Wild Series. This event was extremely well organised by Heidi Mocke from the Wildlands Conservation Trust and it was a fund raiser for Wildlands as well as the Karkloof Conservancy. This event involved three days of running through some of the most magnificent areas of the Karkloof and the participants were in awe of the natural beauty and the amazing biodiversity which they have. Some of the runners even ran past a pair of wattled cranes and they were delighted to see them in their natural habitat.

Wildlands, Mondi, Karkloof landowners and conservancy members all pulled together to create an amazing event which was televised on SuperSport. Carolyn, Britt and Lesley wish to thank everyone involved for their support.

Ethekwini Conservancies Workshop December 2009

The workshop held in December 2009 at the Mariannhill landfill conservancy (MLC) took on a different format this time. The seminar was held during the afternoon followed by a braai enabling the members to network. As the sun set we donned our headlamps and set off searching for dwarf chameleons. The MLC is a rescue site for dwarf chameleons and we found 14 dwarf chameleons and one flap-neck chameleon – it was amazing to compare the different sizes of the two species – the dwarf being at least a quarter of size of the flap-neck chameleon. An exciting event for those who stayed the course !

At the seminar Johann Vermeulen gave feedback from the Strategic Planning week-end workshop. Bridget Ringdahl (of 'Blond on a bike' fame) informed us about the exciting work that the WESSA/WWF Eco-Schools programme is conducting in SA. There are now more than 500 Eco-Schools in SA and more than 20 schools that have earned their International flags for 5 years of sustained efforts. We as conservancy members need to support and promote more schools to join this worthwhile programme. Phone the Eco-schools office on 033-330-3931 or kznecoschools@wessa.co.za.

Gina Shroeder of Enercheck and the Kloof Conservancy assisted us with many handy hints to reduce the energy consumption in our homes and offices. Richard Boon from the municipality's Environment Planning and Climate Protection Department (EPCPD) updated us on all the latest Town Planning issues regarding Conservation Reserves and Conservation Servitudes. This Department has produced a most useful booklet entitled "Development Assessment guidelines" which I think is very useful for those participating in EIAs. I will try to bring some to our next workshop on 7 August 2010.

PLEASE DIARISE 7 AUGUST 2010 FOR THE NEXT WORKSHOP

Jean Lindsay

Creighton Aloe festival

10 & 11 July 2010



Also Departs on the weekends of 3rd & 4th and 17th & 18th July

Enjoy an amazing return steam train ride from Creighton, alongside the Ngogwaan river, through thousands of beautiful & colourful Aloes where you will be able to take a spectacular photo.

Festival Weekend 10 - 11 July

Enjoy an eventful weekend with birding tours, mission tours, scenic Cycle ride; Art exhibitions, vintage engines on display & Delicious meals & a country market.

Train trips depart at 10am and 2pm on Sat and 10am on Sun (arrive 30-45 before departure)

Cost: Sitter coaches: R150 per person (children R100)

Lounge coach: R175 per person

Duration: Approx 2 hours

All bookings essential

Sunday sunrise 11 July

Sunday sunrise and bike Steam train trip to Donnybrook and an approx 40km MTB ride back through the beautiful Xumeni Forest to Centicow Mission (Part of the Freedom Challenge route) and back to Creighton.

Departs: 7.30am

Cost: R250.00 pp includes train trip, guided bike ride back and Lunch. Bring your bike and enjoy a stunning ride

Duration: 1 hr to Donnybrook then you're on your Bikes!

Approx 4 hrs.

Aloe Steam Train Trips 3, 4, 17, 18 July

Aloe Steam train trips and lunch departs 10am

See costs above

Duration: Approx 2 hrs then lunch at the Country Club (opposite the station)

Bookings essential for delicious country lunch @ R50 pp.

Make a weekend of it and book into a B&B.

Bookings

Contact Glynnis on 083 273 8037 or

email: glynnis@toocoo.co.za



Potential Invasive snake grass

By Kay Montgomery

Equisetum hyemale

Common names: horsetail rush, dutch rush, rough horsetail or scouring rush.



Although not listed in the CARA legislation, it is listed in the NEMBA IAP plant lists (due to be passed later this year) as a Category 1a plant that must be removed and destroyed by law. Despite warnings snake grass is sold in local garden centres. In a joint campaign to self-regulate, Working for Water Nurseries Partnership Programme (WFW NPP) is appealing to all growers, retailers, landscapers and homeowners to destroy all specimens of snake grass.

Indigenous species. There is a non-invasive form: *Equisetum ramosissimum*. Note the many thinner branches that occur in whorls at the nodes. *E. hyemale* rarely branches.



Indigenous *Equisetum ramosissimum*

Why is snake grass (*E. hyemale*) a problem?

Seen along the Vaal River near Emerald Casino. We certainly do not want this to happen anywhere in KZN. If we can contain a new weed like this one, it will save thousands of rands in control measures.

How it spreads...

Underground rhizome connects all the plants. The root system goes straight down and then spreads horizontally. Broken pieces grow into new plants.

A danger to livestock...

Contains sharp silica crystal making it painful if ingested. Makes cattle sick.

Where does it come from...

Eurasia and North America, (commonly found in wet places, including pond margins, swamps, floodplains and ditches). Historically used for scouring metal or "sanding" wood. A primitive plant once dominant in the late Paleozoic Era (360-250 mya).

Where else is it a problem...

Australia (<http://www.weeds.gov.au/weeds/lists/alert.html>)

For any KZN spotting or information, contact Lynne at Stop the Spread, WESSA. 031 266 2603 or stopthespread@wessa.co.za

Invasive weeds SINGAPORE DAISY



Used to be called *Wedelia* but now has a new name, *Thelechitonina tribolata*.

This used to be a popular plant for dry, hot banks in the 1980's. A native of tropical America, it has been used as a ground cover, especially in sandy coastal areas where it can invade dunes. It also invades riverbanks, wetland margins, roadsides and urban open space. It has been declared a noxious weed in Australia as well. Indigenous alternative: *Arctotis* or *Gazania*



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