



Newsletter: February 2010

PARK RENAMED AND DEVELOPMENT PHASE BEGINS

The Modderfontein Conservation Park will in future be known as the Modderfontein Nature Reserve.

The change of name follows a recent meeting of the development team comprising members of the Modderfontein Conservation Society and Heartland at which it was proposed that a new name for the redefined 275 ha property would be appropriate.

"Following some debate and deep thinking, we agreed that 'Nature Reserve' would best describe the area and the activities that will take place in it," says Modderfontein Conservation Society chairman Ellen van Dongen.

"The development team commenced planning the three-year development phase in 2009. The first project is to control and manage the invasive alien vegetation in the Reserve. To facilitate this work the Society commenced with the production of a guide for the control of invasive alien vegetation in January 2010. Heartland, who are facilitating the development of the reserve as a special project under project manager Rod de Klerk, have already appointed a work team to commence with the eradication of the highly invasive pompom weed and Robinia. During this time the Society will be working closely with the work teams and other appropriate consultants to ensure that invasive alien control is done to minimise impact on the ecosystems in the Reserve and to ensure that indigenous vegetation is planted"

It is envisaged that the Reserve will provide a green link between the Modderfontein Golf Course to the east and the Waterval Cemetery to the west. Plans for the Reserve include a dedicated environmental centre, public access to recreational facilities, nature walks and talks and environmental education programmes.

Roberts Birds lays library foundation

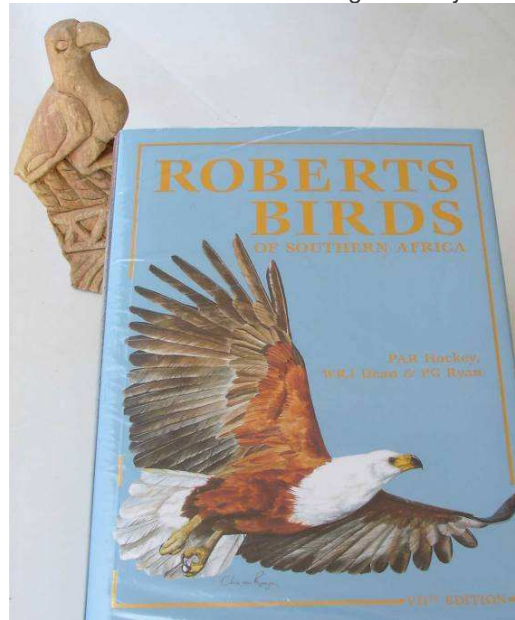
Congratulations to Barbara Maschwitz and Dave Gordon who recently tied the knot and are settling down after a brief but "wonderful" time at a game park in the Waterberg.

When the happy couple decided to merge their assets, they found that they would have duplicate copies of the new edition of Roberts Birds of Southern Africa; you know the one that weighs in at a hefty 5 or 6 kg.

Barbara had the idea to approach your Society to see if we wanted a copy. This set up a train of thought which said: "We're about to embark on a development phase for the Nature Reserve, one aspect of which will be an environmental centre so why not plan to have a reference library there? Barbara and Dave were delighted with this idea and presented a copy of the tome to Robbie Vermont at the November evening meeting. They also included a couple of other books they thought would be appropriate to an environmental library.

Thanking the couple, Robbie remarked that the Roberts book will make a suitable

cornerstone on which to build the library and will be a suitable reminder of their generosity.



FLOODS RAVAGE MODDER

The night of 25 January produced a deluge “of biblical proportions” in Modderfontein. The following day, Tuesday, residents woke to flooded homes and gardens. The Conservation Society’s regular walkers are an intrepid lot and turned out as usual. They were advised that the road through the Reserve was closed as Stone Bridge had been badly damaged. They left their cars in the CSIR parking area and took a walk along the road to observe the damage.

Ken England toted his camera and produced a number of photographs to record this extraordinary event.



Below the wall of Dam 3a



Tricia Llewellyn surveys some of the damage



Workers begin repairing Stone Bridge

Disaster averted in the village

Conservation Society member Stephen Burrow lives in Thornhill Estate. He reports on the flood:

After one of the wettest winters on record last year we now appear to be having a very wet summer.

All this water is causing untold problems for the Modderfontein Golf Club as well as the surrounding estates and the Modderfontein Spruit, a tributary of the Jukskei River.

From my veranda I have a clear view of the Spruit and the golf course as well as the bridge and tight bend that feeds to Valley Road.

Around 11pm on Monday 25 January we heard a scream and people shouting for help as the river rose and flooded over their car. A few minutes later my phone rang, it was Armour Gittings from Thornhill Estate Security Committee telling me that Security staff could see people in the water and they needed some help. Within ten minutes or so we were on the scene with the Fire Brigade and AEL’s security team. We could see people holding onto the poles of the bridge with only the tip of the car roof showing above

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Below the wall of Dam 3



John d’Aquino at Crab Crossing

Disaster averted

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the raging waters. Further down the road there was another car under water, the driver nowhere to be seen. All we could do was stand and watch as the water continued to flow fast and furious over the road. It must have been at least 45 minutes before anyone arrived with a rope long enough to allow a Fireman to wade out and get the people off the bridge.

If you had seen the lack of preparedness you would have been shocked and saddened by just how far our mighty emergency services have fallen. I live next door to the Fire Station, I know most of the men and women there and respect that there are times when they have to put their lives on the line for the rest of us, but to lack a simple thing like a length of rope is a real shocker.

What was even more shocking is people's reaction to flooded areas. What on earth were they doing trying to cross a flooding bridge in heavy rain, a bridge, which anyone who lives or works here knows, floods every time there is heavy rain. The sheer stupidity of their actions is beyond belief. By being so stubborn they put themselves at risk as well as the rescue team that had to come to drag them to safety.



Water cascades down from the spillway of Dam 1

I sincerely hope they close this road when they open up the extension to the one that goes past the Golf Club as this road floods so often now that the Greenstone area has been developed. This has meant runoff water is now really excessive causing flooding a lot more often than before. Even the bridge below the wall of Dam One was under water that night so we can see just how much Greenstone is changing our environment.

So next time you are driving in the area with heavy rain, stick to the main road into Thornhill or risk losing your car to the elements if not your life.



Damaged bridge in Thornhill Estate

BEWARE THE DREADED POMPOM WEED

Written by Linda de Luca – Random Harvest Nursery and published in the December issue of the Lakeside Village Community Newsletter

The pompom weed (*Compuloclinium macrocephalum*) is an alien invasive that originated in South America. It suddenly exploded out of the Fountains Valley and took just five years to reach Krugersdorp along the highway. This is scarily fast for a plant.

When next you see thousands of tall pretty pink flowers in the grasslands (*NOT Cosmos – Ed*) it is the pompom weed that invades grasslands (our most threatened biome) and wetlands. This plant is so dangerous to the environment that it has been declared a Category 1 transformer species. This means that it changes the environment and ecology wherever it invades. **It also means that you are obliged to remove it if it grows on your property.**

It has large underground rhizomes from which it can reproduce but the scary one is the seeds. I picked a flower which I thought had not been pollinated to look at it more closely. I put the flower on my desk and was totally horrified as these flowers morphed into tens of thousands of fluffy seeds. The amount of seed from one flower head was inconceivable.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that it is another relatively innocuous weed like *Cosmos*. The pompom weed is particularly dangerous to the environment and will probably be impossible to eradicate.

There is a chemical called Brush-off made by Du Pont that has been used with some success. The Plant Protection Research Institute is working on biological control of pathogens and insects that are in quarantine at the moment. Hopefully these will be successful and help to save our grasslands.

It is believed that this plant was a garden escapee. Next time you are tempted to smuggle some seeds into South Africa, THINK TWICE. Remember that those same seeds could become a huge problem for the environment, so resist the temptation.



The dreaded weed in the Nature Reserve

NORMAN TO THE RESCUE

Committee member Norman Doak rescued a male grey duiker which was running scared around Lakeside Village in Modderfontein shortly before Christmas.

Norman received a call at 06:45, saddled up his bakkie for the search and set forth to rectify the situation.

With the help of a few residents and a team of iMvula Security and Rand Aid gate guards the little bokkie was apprehended when he ran under the security boom into the Thornhill Manor retirement village.

"We loaded him into the back of my bakkie and zipped the canvas to give him darkness and protection," says Norman. "He just lay down exhausted and in a state of shock."

Norman drove to Gate 3 in Ardeer Road where he called Leon Baben of Heartland for permission to enter with a vehicle. "Leon suggested I drop the Duiker deep inside the Conservation Park so I drove to the magazine area, close to our "bunker" where I released him near the reed beds on the northern side of Dam 3," relates Norman.

"He just lay there when I opened the canvas and dropped the tailgate but when I spoke to him he got to his feet and jumped out of the vehicle to scamper off through the grass and into the reeds.

"I guess he will be safe there for a time and there is now one less bokkie outside our fenced area."

Show us the pick of your pix

Dave Gordon is arranging another of his popular Members Photo Evenings in conjunction with the AGM on Thursday 18 March.

This is your opportunity to share the best of your nature-related travels and experiences with other like-minded members. All members are invited to participate.

To move the evening along, we suggest that you restrict your contribution to no more than 10 pictures. A short write-up should be included so that we can tell everyone the story.

There will also be presentations by Dave and John Coumbias, both members of the Edenvale Photographic Club.

The presentation will be in electronic form so please call Dave before the end of February to tell him what you'll be bringing along and discuss with him what he needs to show your efforts in the best possible light. Dave's contact numbers are (H) 011 609 5427, (C) 083 625 6778 and e-mail is dave.gordon@iburst.co.za.

Contributions are welcome. Please send to Robbie at the fax number or e-mail address in the committee list.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Modderfontein Conservation Society.

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Tell us about it

If you've changed your phone number or address, please remember to tell Membership Secretary Robbie Vermont about it. We'd like to stay in touch, but can't unless we know where you are. Also, if your membership status changes, please let us know.

Membership categories are:

- Individual
- Family
- Senior single (over 60)
- Senior couple (over 60)

Banging the Tim drum for conservation

A lighthearted look at nature photography is sure to attract a large audience when naturalist/conservationist Tim Neary comes to the Modderfontein Conservation Society meeting on Thursday 18 February. The meeting will take place in the Modderfontein Town Hall at 19:30.

Tim's anecdotal talk "Conservation through the lens" takes the form of a cheery chat about some of the funny, unexpected and surprising experiences that can befall a nature photographer. He'll illustrate his talk with some brilliant still and video photography, some of which may reveal a few flubs and fluffs that can befall even a professional photographer.

Tim Neary is probably best known for his radio presence. "I have been broadcasting on radio covering wildlife, conservation and water safety since 1991," says Tim. He gained valuable experience managing Radio Safari and taking it live for Red Cherry Marketing, conceptualizing creating and managing AfriCam radio over a 12 month period for

Tim Neary to speak in February

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the Internet. In addition, he is a wildlife/conservation correspondent for BBC radio. Locally, Tim's radio programs include the Sappi Nature Journal on Radio Today 1485am and the 60 min Wildlife Program on Radio 702/Cape Talk at 06:00 every Sunday. The latter is the oldest running conservation program on radio in SA.

In 1995, Tim made the weighty decision to opt out of the corporate world where he had been involved in the technical field of construction equipment and took on a conservationist role for which he does not have formal qualifications. "As a result I am referred to as a naturalist conservationist and through this I enjoy learning and telling stories of the wonderful experiences we have been afforded."

Tim's talk comes at a good time to inspire a great crop of photos for Dave's March member's photo evening.

MODDERFONTEIN CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Programme of events: 2010 (Issued 10.11.09)

| | |
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| February | Saturday 13 07:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Thursday 18 19:30 Tim Neary – Conservationist & famous "Nature Journal" presenter on Radio Today and Radio 702 |
| | Sunday 28 07:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Tuesdays: 08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve with John Clark 082-509-9856 |
| | Contact Norman Doak on (H) 011 608 2537 (C) 082 447 9293 |
| March | Saturday 13 07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Thursday 18 19:30 AGM and members' photographic presentation |
| | Sunday 28 07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Tuesdays: 08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve with John Clark 082-509-9856 |
| | Contact: Janet Brodrick (H)011 453 3910 (C)072 679 6461 |
| April | Saturday 10 07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Thursday 15 19:30 Tracy Eccles talks on her book Pot Plant Owl |
| | Sunday 25 07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Tuesdays: 08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve with John Clark 082-509-9856 |
| | Contact: Keith Martin (H) 608-2864 (C) 082 4150 4003 |
| May | Saturday 8 08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Thursday 20 19:30 The Importance of Wetlands – Garth Barnes of WESSA |
| | Sunday 23 08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve |
| | Tuesdays: 08:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve with John Clark 082-509-9856 |
| | Contact: John Clark (H) 011 454 1801 (C)082 509 9856 |

Your committee

| Name | Portfolio | Home phone | Cell phone | Office phone |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Ellen van Dongen | Chairman | 011-462-3067 | 082-813-9611 | 011-606-0843 |
| Pat van Nierop | Vice Chair | 011-882-4392 | 083-326-6838 | |
| John Clark | Tuesday walks | 011-454-1801 | 082-509-9856 | |
| Norman Doak | Community liaison | 011-608-2537 | 082-447-9293 | |
| Robbie Vermont | Membership | 011-608-2693 | 082-800-3704 | |
| Patricia Llewellyn | Treasurer | 011-882-4114 | 082-497-9241 | |
| Keith Martin | Heritage | 011-608-2864 | 082-450-4003 | |
| Janet Brodrick | Speaker liaison | 011-453-3910 | 072-679-6461 | |
| Peter Ewen | Reserve development | 011-608-4043 | 076-377-3263 | |
| Daryl Fuchs | Technology | | 083 395 0778 | |