



Newsletter December 2010

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN TAKES SHAPE

Chairman Ellen van Dongen and Deputy Chairman Pat van Nierop embarked on a mammoth project ... (months/years) ago to put together a plan for the management of problem invasive alien plants for the Modderfontein Nature Reserve.

Now, 97 pages later, the plan is well on its way to completion and has been presented to land owners, Heartland Properties.

The authors observe in the report that a balanced ecology has developed since the 1950s due to minimal human intervention. For this reason they recommend that changes to the Reserve must be effected cautiously, while carefully monitoring their impacts on the environment.

“Initial focus must be given to the removal of all black wattle and *Robinia*, along with *Mimosa pigra*, *Gleditsia* and kikuyu grass as these plants are rapidly invading the area, says the report. “Urgent attention must also be given to bug weed.”

Probably the biggest threat to the Reserve is pom-pom weed as this spreads at an alarming rate and poses a serious threat to the indigenous flora. This has been declared a Category 1 transformer species which means that it changes the environment and ecology wherever it invades. **It also means that you are obliged to remove it should it appear on your property.**

“Poplars are far less of a threat and can be removed at a less urgent pace,” continues the report.

“Only six eucalypts are classified as Category 2 invaders. Authorities are considering exempting the need for the control of eucalypts as they play a vital role in the support of bee populations. In the Nature Reserve they also provide an essential habitat for breeding, refuge and feeding of raptors. In some other Reserves, structures are being specifically erected in eucalypts to retain the raptors. In order to ensure a continued population of eucalypts sufficient young saplings must be left to mature as succession plants.”

The report goes on to emphasise that the removal of invasive alien plants must be balanced with the planting of indigenous species so as to maximise the biodiversity of the Reserve through the creation of different habitats while retaining the existing ecological balance.

“Careful consideration must be given to the management of riverine invasive alien populations in terms of legal requirements and dam safety. However, the preservation of stream banks is also vital.”



'Four O'clock' (Mirabilis jalapa) – lovely to look at

Starting point

The production of the report can be likened to the analogy of “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”

The report was the starting point to enable Pat and Ellen to tackle the project in a reasonable and rational manner, the newly delineated Reserve was divided into 26



Pom-pom weed – a big threat

‘camps’. Each was studied and invasive plants documented and recorded. The next step is to finalise the detailed action plan indicating which invasive plants are to be removed from each camp

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**“When one tugs at a single thing in nature...
He finds it attached to the rest of the world”**

JOHN MUIR

Vegetation plan takes shape

(Continued from page 1)

as well as the replacement plan which includes a list of indigenous plants that can be used in the replanting programme that runs in parallel with the invasive alien eradication programme.

If you're looking forward to seeing the end result of all this hard work, you're likely to be disappointed as it is expected that the entire project will take about 40 years to complete. **However, if you'd like to get involved and make a contribution to this gargantuan effort, please contact Ellen or Pat. Their details are in the committee list towards the end of the newsletter.**



Photo: Stuart Dickinson, News Ed, Fourways Review

The sad news is that one of Modderfontein Nature Reserve's fish eagles was euthanased on 14 October by FreeMe.

It all started during Pat van Nierop's birding walk at the beginning of October. The group came across a very distressed African Fish-Eagle, a dead cormorant, and a coot sounding in trouble below the wall of Dam 3a.

According to Pat the Fish-Eagle hadn't strength to fly over the upper reaches of Grebe Dam and just splashed into the reeds and water. The eagle ended up nearer the far side of Grebe Dam. "We walked over the wall and down to the left at the far side and could hear the splashing of the eagle and the 'croaking' of the troubled coot," said Pat. "Could this be poisoning?" she wondered.

Because it was a week-end, Pat had a problem raising either FreeMe or Lorna Stanton, but eventually managed to get hold of Nicci Wright at FreeMe to report the incident and ask for help. It was 16:30 before Nicci arrived at the Nature Reserve.

"Bless FreeMe," Pat exclaimed. "Nicci and company managed to find the Fish-Eagle by phone contact with me and treated it for poison ingestion." It was taken back to FreeMe's headquarters in Sandton for further treatment. "It is probably one of the breeding birds from the Fish-Eagle Dam environs," Pat suggested, "but we saw no sign of the mate." She expressed the hope that the other bird hadn't succumbed to a similar misfortune. (*The following week, the Tuesday walkers saw one bird and Leon Baben of Heartland reported that he had seen a pair*).

Following up during the week after the drama, Pat kept in touch with Nicci on her patient's progress. "The bird was extremely weak and 'flat

but 'hanging in there'," reported Nicci. It had been hydrated throughout the nights and was being given the very best chance of survival. "X-rays showed no trace of lead fragments or broken bones so it appeared that poison may have been the cause of the bird's distress, but age might also be a factor," said Pat.

"He was not improving despite all the care. FreeMe had been trying for two weeks to bring him back to health before the decision to euthanase." Onderstepoort conducted a full autopsy, including a neurological examination, but the results were inconclusive due to the medication the bird had received prior to death.

Society chairman Ellen van Dongen has made an appeal to residents in and around Modderfontein not to use poison. "This would help reduce incidences such as this," she said.

Marie-Louise bags it



Photo: Robbie Vermont

Occasional Tuesday walker Marie-Louise Navratil returns to Fish Eagle Dam with a large bag full of litter collected during a recent walk in the Nature Reserve. Plastic bread bags and bottles and cans are the most prolific items collected on walks.

MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MASTERPEICES

At first glance the 50th anniversary of AECI's Bird Calendar back in 1989 may not have seemed an event of much significance. However, it was a milestone in AECI's history and served to comment on 50 years of the Group's tradition while also making a statement on the future.

At the launch of the 50th Bird Calendar edition, the then Managing Director of AECI, Mike Sander said, "AECI is very proud of its traditions. Our roots go back nearly 100 years. Through the Bird Calendar we have taken a visible stance on the issue of protection of the environment ... For the Group the birds in our calendar are a symbol of our appreciation of and commitment to a clean, safe and healthy environment."

One of the undertakings at the time was the commissioning of 12 commemorative bird paintings. These were water colour illustrations by the late Ken Newman and Delta Environmental Centre's Geoff Lockwood.

The 'Golden Anniversary Collection' featured seven of the more unusual birds found on AECI properties and five endangered species. A limited number of prints – beautifully presented in



commemorative portfolios – were produced. The original paintings were donated to the Modderfontein Conservation Society and hung in the Old Barn at Isidleke for guests to admire at the 50th anniversary celebration function.

Soon after the event, the paintings were removed from the Barn as it was believed that there was a security risk. We think that Modderfontein factory management was asked to store the paintings until the Barn had been properly secured at which time the paintings would be returned.

The paintings were never returned and recent enquiries as to their whereabouts have been unsuccessful. If you have any knowledge of these paintings, or their location, please be kind enough to contact Robbie (see

committee list at the back of the newsletter).

- *Kenneth Newman illustrated: Blue Swallow, Greater Honeyguide, Hartlaub's Gull, Black Korhaan, Longcrested Eagle (which, incidentally was not mentioned as being seen at Modderfontein) and Roseate Tern. Geoff Lockwood's contribution was Orangebreasted Sunbird, Barn Owl, Wattled Crane, Giant Kingfisher, Blackrumped Buttonquail and Egyptian Vulture.*

Christmas gift suggestions

When trying to think up a 'different' Christmas – or even birthday – present, why not give a Conservation Society gift subscription. (Or even a 2011 Heritage calendar – just R20.00 from the Modderfontein Post Office). Subs are very reasonably priced and will help the Society in its efforts to promote environmental awareness and education.

You can order a gift subscription from Robbie Vermont. All you need do is deposit your money into our ABSA Bank account (No 29976791, Branch No 632005) and e-mail or fax proof of payment to Robbie (robbiev@netactive.co.za or 011-608-2693) and he'll e-mail you a gift certificate and membership application form which the lucky recipient will need to fill in and return to the Society to be registered with membership.

Membership fees are:

- Family: R150.00
- Individual: R 90.00
- Senior individual: R 60.00
- Senior couple: R 90.00

While membership is due for renewal at the end of February each year, this special offer will see gift memberships extended right through to 2012. Do it now.



ASPECTS OF HERITAGE BEING PRESERVED

By Keith Martin

Change is happening around and about Modderfontein at an alarming rate. We have seen the advent of the Gautrain; the demolition of the Gate House; the uncertainty surrounding the shops; the imminent closure of the Library; the threat to the St Francis wood; not to mention the imminent developments of Westlake on Lakeside's border and Long Lake in the vicinity of Fish Eagle Dam; the extension of Marlboro drive; and on our border the redevelopment at Sprinkell is yet another example of the "Path of Progress".

View of Hamburg showing Mixed Pickles St (later Antwerp) and Franz Hoenig House in 1895



Any development that has an impact on items of heritage value, (buildings older than 60 years) must be subject to an Heritage Impact Assessment. (HIA) (National Heritage Resources Act 25, 1999).

Heartland Properties commissioned such an assessment over a portion of the property, which has recently been approved by the Government, thus giving listed items protected status.

The survey made various recommendations, such as preservation of buildings of heritage interest as well as a requirement that these buildings should be returned to their original appearance (e.g. the concrete balustrades on the veranda of the Heartland Offices (the Casino) must be replaced with ones made of wood. (Similarly those at Franz Hoenig Haus must be replaced.)

In addition there is a requirement that three houses in Antwerp Avenue (between Centenary Road and the Gautrain line) must be relocated to a site at the western gate to Franz Hoenig Haus in High Street. They will thus fall within the proposed Heritage Precinct.

Nos 7 - 9 Antwerp in the 1890s



No 9 Antwerp (built in 1896) is a building that received a reprieve from demolition, when the Gautrain route was realigned. Unlike its neighbour (No 7) and two houses across the road, (circa 1920) which succumbed to the demolisher's equipment,

fittings that could be retrieved from the demolished houses (doors/windows etc) were stored in No 9 for future use in its refurbishment. Unfortunately a lot of these items were stolen and the building further vandalized during the Gautrain construction.

Heartland has recently commenced with the difficult relocation task using no 13 as a test case. The process requires intense documentation and photographic evidence. All items within the buildings will be marked, dismantled, cleaned and stored in containers. These will in due course be transported to their new site, within the Franz Hoenig Haus property.

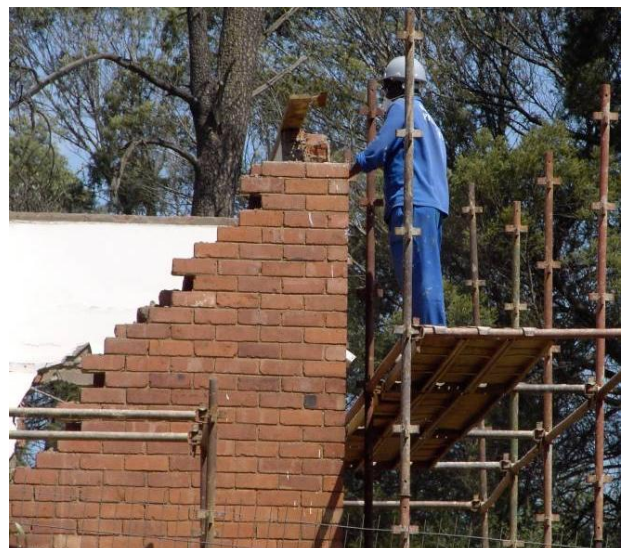
Although no decision has been made as to the future use of these buildings it is assumed that they will be as good as new when the project is completed and will certainly constitute a desirable business or even residential location.

The fourth house, No 15, will not be relocated, but items of value such as the dressed granite foundations will be used in the refurbishing of no 13 in order to match the elevation of the other buildings.

Discussions are presently underway to record this unique venture on film.



Demolition begins prior to relocation: 8 November 2010



The Post Office delivered

The address on the envelope read:

Ms Patricia Llewellyn
Environmental Officer
Modderfontein Conservation Socie
Modderfontein Conservation Socie
Riverside Close, 100 Laron RD

Can you believe that it was delivered to the Society's Modderfontein Post Box with a comment in red on the envelope "Try Box 50"?

Well, full marks to the Post Office!

Subscription increases

Due to generally increased costs, your committee has agreed to increase membership fees slightly from 1 March when annual subscriptions become due.

New rates will be:

- Family: R150.00
- Individual: R 90.00
- Senior individual: R 60.00
- Senior couple: R 90.00

WALKS & TALKS, PAST AND FUTURE

THIS HARLEQUIN IS NO LAUGHING MATTER

In the most amusing and passionate talk in ages, November speaker Riaan Stals from the National Collection of Insects outside Pretoria, told members all kinds of interesting things about insects and beetles; from pubic lice to dune crickets.

However, his main thrust was to focus on harlequin beetles which in the short space of about six years have spread incredibly quickly, not only in South Africa, but on three other continents simultaneously.

This insect looks like a lady beetle but breeds alarmingly quickly and appears to spread with the speed of light. Of particular concern is that it also has a voracious appetite and does not stop at eating aphids. "Once the aphids are finished, the harlequin beetle will eat just about anything else which, as you can imagine, could lead to disaster," says Riaan. "The beetle is totally adaptive to any climate or environment."

A vast amount of research is being done in the northern hemisphere in an effort to find some way of controlling the bug, but so far it mutates quicker than the researchers can find answers.

- For a good run-down on this problem visit <http://www.wynboer.co.za/recentarticles/200809-beetle.php3>
- Of interest: the lady beetles that congregate in the Nature Reserve are Potato Beetles. Their appetite for potato plants of all kinds – food and decorative – was first noted as long ago as 100 years and yet not much more is known about them today. Riaan's advice is to observe them and enjoy them.

MODDERFONTEIN CONSERVATION SOCIETY			
Programme of events: 2011			
January	Saturday	08	07:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve
	Thursday	20	19:30 Ria Milburn presents "Nature the Ultimate Classroom"
	Sunday	23	07:00 Walk in the Nature reserve
	Tuesdays	all	08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve – John Clark 082 509 9856
	Contact: Norman Doak (h) 011 608 2537 (c) 082 447 9293		
February	Saturday	12	07:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve
	Thursday	17	19:30 Dave Rudolph talks on "Environmental Impacts in Modderfontein"*
	Sunday	20	07:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve
	Tuesdays	all	08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve – John Clark 082 509 9856
	Contact: Carol Sherwood (h) 011 443 4114 (c) 082 906 5794		
March	Saturday	12	07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve
	Thursday	17	19:30 AGM & Outline of our "Plan for the Management of Invasive Plants"
	Sunday	27	07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve
	Tuesdays	all	08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve – John Clark 082 509 9856
	Contact: Janet Brodrick (h) 011 453 3910 (c) 072 679 6461		
April	Saturday	09	07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve
	Sunday	24	07:30 Walk in the Nature Reserve
	Thursday	28	19:30 Tess Rainer tells: "What BIOMIMICRY can do for us"
	Tuesdays	all	08:00 Walk in the Nature Reserve – John Clark 082 509 9856
	Contact: Keith Martin (h) 011 608 2864 (c) 082 450 4003		

- ***To be confirmed**
- **Saturday and Sunday walks** leave from the Nature Reserve gates in Ardeer Road at the advertised times
- **Tuesday walkers** meet in the CSIR parking area opposite the gates to the Nature Reserve
- **Be there 15 minutes prior to the start time**
- **Charges:** Visitors pay R10 for walks and R15 for evening talks; members pay R10 for evening talks

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	
Carol Sherwood		011-443-4114	082-906-5794	
Rajen Reddy			071-686-0631	011-709-8726
Stephen Burrow		011-608-1134	082-444-5467	011-501-2000
Sally Hogan		011-608-3089	082-291-8084	

REMINDER

Ria Milburn will be presenting *"Nature – The Ultimate Classroom"* on Thursday 20 January.
Diarise this date now!

IMPORTANT!

Your 2011 Conservation Society heritage calendar, featuring four more beautiful water colour prints of historical Modderfontein buildings by Honorary Life Member Ken England, is on sale at the Modder Post Office in Queen St. Still just R20.00.
Enquiries: Robbie Vermont on 011 608 2693 or 082 800 3704

VISIT THE SOCIETY'S WEB PAGE AT:

www.modderconserve.org
It's still under construction, but looking better all the time

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

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

"Until man duplicates a blade of Grass, nature can laugh at his So-called scientific knowledge"

Thomas Edison

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Dedicated to the 'Art of Green'.

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