



## Newsletter: September 2015

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### **BACKYARD MARTIAL EAGLE IN EDENVALE**

One chilly morning in June, Alex Rae was rudely awakened by wife Lesley as she rushed into the bedroom yelling for him to bring his camera. "There's a big bird in the backyard being harassed by a crow, and I think it's an eagle!" she cried.

Not even pausing to don some suitable outdoor garb, Alex grabbed his camera and managed to capture this very rare sighting of an immature Marshall Eagle trying to maintain its dignity while being subjected to a vicious and unprovoked attack by no less than five Pied Crows; all in the Rae's garden in Edenglen.

Not entirely sure that her identification of the bird as a Martial Eagle was correct, Lesley brought the photos along on the next Tuesday walk. In consultation with Ken England, John D'Aquino and others, it was agreed that she was correct.

Ken then referred the photos to an overseas friend described as a globetrotting twitcher who modestly admits to having "seen and identified a vast number of birds all round the world". He had this to say: "My best guess would be a juvenile Martial Eagle. My only concern would be the overall brownish colouration. Alternatives would be a pale morph Wahlberg's Eagle or Booted Eagle, both eliminated on size and head shape."

The bird was also referred to Trevor Hardaker, BirdLife SA's rarities expert, who mentioned this occurrence in his South African Rare Bird News Report of 1st June 2015, where he stated: "It was a very unusual bird for the Gauteng Province and is not recorded regularly at all."

And there you have it. What was the bird doing in a suburban neighbourhood is, of course, the prime question.



## **Chance to join the Reserve Honorary Rangers**

**MCS members can volunteer a little of their time to act as Honorary Rangers in the Modderfontein Reserve at week-ends and receive free entry to the Reserve for their work.**

This involves patrolling the Reserve for a morning, afternoon or day or two in a month, depending on the number of people who volunteer. An early start is needed to collect Honorary Ranger decals from the security office at the Pineland Office Park and ensure that the gate is being manned.

Rangers will also be required to patrol the area and make sure that visitors are abiding by the rules. They should also alert the EWT of any untoward activity taking place or incidences of accident, illness or emergencies.

Anyone living close to the Reserve need not stay there all day, but should return from time to time to ensure all is OK, and to lock down the Reserve at the end of the day.

For your services you will be given free access to the Reserve at all times. Boaz Tsebe is coordinating this effort and allocation of duty days depends on how much help we can rely on. If this interests you, please contact: Ellen van Dongen on 082 813 9611 or drop her an e-mail on [Ellen.VanDongen@aelms.com](mailto:Ellen.VanDongen@aelms.com).

# NATURE ON YOUR DOORSTEP

## Boaz reports on his first year at Modderfontein

Just a year after joining the EWT and becoming Manager of the Modderfontein Reserve, Boaz Tsebe gave a report back on developments and challenges he had encountered during his time in the post.

The report was presented at the August evening meeting of the Society held in the Church on the Way Coffee Shop at the Old Town Hall.

Boaz's introduction included a reminder to members regarding the Reserve's presence on the web and he suggested one should keep an eye on <http://www.modderfonteinreserve.co.za/> and the Reserve's Facebook page to keep up to date with initiatives taking place there.

He also reminded us of the vision for the Reserve which is to create, within an urban setting, a natural open space which is socially, economically and ecologically sustainable.

He also showed that the 275-hectare area is the second-largest private park in Gauteng and includes a number of habitats incorporating portions of the Modderfontein Spruit, a number of dams, grassland and hills.

In a well prepared presentation, Boaz talked on a number of points which included:

- Alien vegetation
- Tree planting
- Environmental education
- Fauna
- Birds
- Remote camera monitoring
- Fire management
- Erosion
- Safety & security
- Thanks



### Alien vegetation

Great strides are being made in the control of a number of species of alien vegetation but occasional outbreaks of pom-pom weed were seen during the summer months. He has observed stands of pom-pom weed on AEL land adjoining the Reserve and is talking with AEL about introducing control measures to keep this threat at bay.

"We are making good progress," says Boaz. "But there is still a long way to go. Our main thrust has been along the Modderfontein Spruit valley and we will be expanding the programme as we go along. It's a case of working from the inside out."

Boaz also mentioned the problem relating to the large gum trees that are being attacked by some kind of bug and are dying off. This is being investigated, but in the meantime, many dead trees have had to be felled as they present a safety hazard. "Some of these are being recycled as chairs and table supports for cable drum tops, other aliens that have been removed have been used to build erosion control areas and for fencing." One example of the latter is the water hole in the 'Apies Bos' being screened to allow animals to approach without disturbance from nearby cycle tracks (see photograph on page 6).

Boaz has poplar species, bugweed and highly invasive kikuyu in his sights for future eradication projects.



### Tree planting

In December last year, we reported that 2 400 trees and shrubs had been planted along the length of the newly erected power lines. Boaz reported that a lot more have been planted in various locations in the Reserve but that one had to bear in mind that this region is naturally Highveld grassland and that the planting of trees had to be judicious and carefully planned. He also talked about the need for tall trees to provide a desirable habitat for raptors, particularly the eagles. He will be working with Pat van Nierop on a planting programme.



### Environmental education

Last year it was reported that the environmental education centre in the Old Explosives Magazine had received a set-back. A recent break in had resulted in the loss of a range of equipment from gas bottles to paper serviettes. Regrettably, there has been another break in there, but with little lost although some damage was done to the workbenches.

Serious attention is being given to securing the area and it's possible that electricity could be laid on. This, with the erection of additional toilets and the appointment of an education officer could see the centre put to proper use in the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile a number of school and scout groups has been hosted. There have also been groups of university students visiting and even some corporate team building outings. "Many of these groups have been given a new appreciation of 'nature on their doorstep' (the Reserve slogan). We have imparted a good deal of knowledge

and, with some fun and a goody bag, we have ensured that most of the youngsters will remember the Modderfontein experience for many years to come,” says Boaz.

### Fauna

Boaz reviewed the fauna in the Reserve, from crabs and barbel to Springbok and Wildebeest and talked about how the EWT’s fixed point monitoring cameras have enabled him to get photographs of some of the smaller denizens of the Reserve, including Duiker and Gerbil, the latter being quite prolific and probably one of the main reasons we have a good raptor population. He also mentioned that although we still have many larger animals in the fields, these would most likely have to be reduced to just one species – Springbok – once the Reserve has been ring-fenced.



### Recreational activities

Under this heading, Boaz brought to mind the six walking trails, four mountain bike trails, the bird hides, the Fish Eagle Dam picnic site and braai area, the Val Bonne restaurant and functions venue at Isidleke and the weekly Park Run which attracts between 500 and 600 people every week. He described how tricky a task it is to maintain a sustainable balance between all these activities and the educational and conservation objectives at the heart of the Reserve.



### Veld fires

In his report in this area, Boaz talked about fire being a somewhat controversial management tool, but emphasised that cutting and burning fire breaks are also an essential part of his management programme. “However,” he states, “a proper and well-planned burning regime is vital for the management of the veld and rehabilitation of the grasslands.

### Erosion

On the subject of erosion, Boaz reported that the large quantity of good topsoil which was laid over areas in the Reserve that have been affected by erosion, and seeded with veld grass, are rehabilitating well.

### Safety and security

In this critical area, Boaz emphasised how important it is for the ongoing success of the Reserve that people who made use of it are kept safe and happy. He also touched on the fencing that has been in place for some time and spoke about the ‘escape routes’ provided for small animals to pass through the fence in places. Cable theft remains a big problem and anti-poaching patrols still operate. Due to speedsters in the Reserve, there is a road kill problem with many of the victims being snakes which warm themselves on the tar. “Meanwhile, I am glad to report that Val Bonne has screened its rubbish skips and taken measures to clean them up,” he reports.

### Thanks

In conclusion, Boaz thanked the great many people who contribute to the management and maintenance of the Reserve, the Modderfontein Conservation Society, the Honorary Rangers and iMvula Quality Protection Services. He also mentioned that we are likely to see more co-operation between the Reserve and specialist areas of the EWT such as those dealing with raptors, frogs, water management and conservation, the carnivore and crane conservation programmes and the skills development programme.

## HERITAGE DAY SPECIAL



*Franz Hoenig Haus and The Dynamite Company Museum will be open on the day*

**24 September  
HERITAGE DAY**

**The Dynamite Company  
Museum and Franz Hoenig Haus  
Will be open for viewing between  
09:00 and 12:30**



# TWO DAY SCOUT HIKE

Sunrise and steam rises from Fish Eagle Dam – a view from the magazine

Nicholas Evans recently undertook a “first class’ hike in the Modderfontein Reserve supported by three fellow Edenvale Scouts. The group completed a demanding overnight hike which was supervised by an Honorary Ranger, from a distance and demonstrates another use of the area as a safe place for outdoor activities by the scouting community, reports Norman Doak.

Scout membership ages range from 11 to 18 and all scouts are expected to take on a range of tests in accordance with their age and under guidance of older scouts and their adult leaders. These tests are split into stages and each carries the award of a special progress badge which is proudly worn on the uniform.



Black-headed heron on the hunt

“One of the tests at ‘1st Class’ level at about age 16 is to arrange an overnight hike and lead a team of younger scouts through the exercise,” says Norman. “The leader also has to make a map and keep a log book of directions, activities, observations of

surroundings, animals, birds and natural features. The Scouts must carry all their food and kit for two days and all planning and preparation is done and discussed with adult leaders prior to the trip. At this level they have to hike for a minimum distance of 20 km and camp out.”

On completion, the log book – including appropriate photographs taken on the hike – is handed to adult leaders for scrutiny and judgement of standards being met. These photos, and others, were included in the log book.

Contact Norman Doak on 082 447 9293 or [normandoak@telkomsa.net](mailto:normandoak@telkomsa.net) for more information on scouting matters and activities.



Nicholas Evans with his team.

## Scouts take on community service – an inspiring story

A young girl scout from 1<sup>st</sup> Sandringham Scouts, Terry Qhobela, has recently brought teams of helpers to the Modderfontein Reserve on three days over two weekends in order to make up 20 hours of ‘community service’ reports Norman Doak who is not only an Honorary Life Member of your Society, but also District Commissioner of the Eland Scout District.

“This task has been performed by Terry, a girl patrol leader, who brought teams of helpers over several weekends to put in 20 hours of work removing invasive vegetation along the river pathways,” explains Norman. “The results of their efforts have been commented on by walkers who were impressed by the cleared and open pathway, from Otter Crossing to beyond Crab Crossing, and we owe a big ‘thank you’ to Terry and her team for this initiative.

“The rewarding thought is that we were able to offer an opportunity to young people to participate in this activity in a safe environment, all of which was to our mutual benefit.”

In her final report which showed a level of competency and professionalism that would have done credit to many a

corporate director, Terry concludes: “Now at the end of my project, I feel proud of the hard work I have done. I am aware I have learnt a tremendous amount that I would not

have learnt elsewhere. Skills such as good planning; keeping important contacts; working with a target market (the target market being the scouts, some of whom I had to beg to ensure their participation). I am also grateful for the support my family and fellow scouts have given me, and thank you to everyone who supported me and even to random spectators.”



<b>MODDERFONTEIN CONSERVATION SOCIETY</b>	
<b>Programme of events: 2015</b> (Updated 25.08.2015)	
September	Saturday 12 08:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Thursday 17 19:30 Heritage Talk: Robbie Vermont talk on "Modderfontein, then and now"
	Thursday 24 09:00 Heritage Walk - Robbie on 082 800 3704 to book
	Sunday 27 08:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Tuesdays: all 08:00 Walk in the Reserve with Janet Brodrick - 072 679 6461
	<b>Contact: Robbie Vermont (h) 011 608 2693 (c) 082 800 3704</b>
October	Saturday 10 08:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Thursday 15 19:30 Talk: A Peter Greaves adventure: "Fabulous Peru"
	Sunday 25 08:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Tuesdays: all 08:00 Walk in the Reserve with Janet Brodrick - 072 679 6461
	<b>Contact: Patricia Llewellyn (h) 011 882 4114 (c) 082 497 9241</b>
November	Saturday 14 08:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Thursday 19 19:30 Wetland Delineation Challenges on the Halfway House Granite Dome
	Sunday 29 08:30 Walk in the Reserve
	Tuesdays: all 08:00 Walk in the Reserve with Janet Brodrick on 072 679 6461
	<b>Contact: Sally Hogan (h) 011 608 3089 (c) 082 291 8084</b>
December	Friday 04 16:00 End of year walk and braai. The walk will start at 16:00 and the braais lit at 18:00. Come when you can and bring your own food, drinks, cutlery, crockery and something to sit on.
	Tuesdays: all 08:00 Walk in the Reserve with Janet Brodrick - 072 679 6461
	<b>Contact: Any committee member</b>

**SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Notes:**

- **Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday walks** leave from Fish Eagle Dam in the Reserve promptly at the advertised times.
- **Bird Walks** are held on the first Saturday of every month.  
For times and info: Pat Ayling on 082 465 3683 or Pat van Nierop on 083 326 6838.
- **Heritage Day walks – bookings essential.** Call Robbie (082 800 3704). Cost R30.00 per person
- **FOR ALL WALKS: BE THERE AT LEAST 15 MINUTES BEFOREHAND**
- **Evening meetings** take place in the Modderfontein Town Hall at 1 Casino Road.
- **Charges:** Visitors pay R10 for walks and R30 for evening talks; members pay R10 for evening talks. Conservation fee to enter Reserve – R30/adult and R15/child or pensioner.

Visit [www.modderconserve.org](http://www.modderconserve.org)



**UNISA STUDENT GIVEN A TOUR OF THE RESERVE**

Cheslynn Rhoda, who is studying towards a BA Degree in Environmental Management through UNISA, and her husband Liam, were recently hosted in the Reserve and given a tour by Robbie Vermont. For a special assignment, she chose Modderfontein Reserve as her ecotourism destination, the reason being that the Couple have recently moved to Johannesburg and are living in Buccleugh, close to the Reserve boundary.

## YOUR COMMITTEE

Name	Portfolio	Home phone	Cell phone	Office phone	E-mail
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Jenny Gough	Speaker Liaison	011-452-2201	082-685-0959		jagough@mailone.co.za
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Pat van Nierop	Birding CAER Committee	011-882-4392	083-326-6838		pat.nierop@mweb.co.za
Robbie Vermont	Membership Publicity	011-608-2693	082-800-3704		robbiev@netactive.co.za



*A hairy denizen of Modderfontein spotted and photographed by eagle-eyed Bill Blake*



*Lesley Rae and John D'Aquino inspect a new fence being built at the Apies Bos water hole. Behind John is a disused water butt which has been converted into a hide by cutting a door and a letterbox viewing window into it.  
Photo: Ken England*



### Assault on POI

Little did your committee think that some of the Point of Interest markers set up along Reserve trails would be obscured even as they were erected. It seems the birds like the angle at which the numbered plates have been set and are determined to perch on them. *Photo: Robbie Vermont*

### New braais at lapa

A number of new braai spots have been added at and around the lapa.



## 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 cannot unless we know where you are. Also, if your membership status changes, please let us know

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**"CONSERVATION IN ACTION"**

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