



MODDER RESERVE – NATURE ON YOUR DOORSTEP



This extraordinary photograph BY Colin Parr illustrates just how close our little patch of heaven is to the warehouses of Marlboro and the hustle and bustle of Sandton. It's published after a remarkable coincidence when Robbie Vermont mentioned to Colin that he had always wanted to take a photograph of a zebra against a background of Sandton, but did not have a camera lens capable of doing the deed. Colin responded: "Funny you should say that, I took exactly that just last week".

See more of Colin's great photos further on.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

AGM postponed

Unfortunately, we had to cancel the AGM and Rolf Wiesler's eagerly anticipated talk on bagging 847 bird species due to the Covid-19 lockdown. We are considering the feasibility of conducting a virtual AGM and will keep you informed in this regard. The talk will be scheduled later in the year.

Death of Karl Köhler

It is with deep sadness that we record the passing of Honorary Life Member, Karl Köhler. On behalf of your committee and our members, we extend heart-felt condolences to his wife, Wendy and the family. See pages 2 & 3 for tributes.

FAREWELL TO KARL KÖHLER

To most of our members Karl Köhler was a stranger. To those who knew him, he was a friend; one who was kind, helpful and caring. Someone who happily shared his vast store of knowledge with anyone who evinced an interest in the history of Modderfontein, social or technical. Last month Karl passed away at Elphin Lodge, the retirement village where he stayed.



Karl at Olga Westoll's 90th birthday party in July 2007. Photo: Robbie Vermont

Ten years ago your committee elected to confer the Society's highest honour on Karl – that of Honorary Life Membership. At the time, we reported:

"A simple ceremony at the lapa alongside Fish Eagle Dam in the Nature Reserve on 26 May 2010 came as something of a surprise for Karl Köhler.

"The function was arranged by Keith Martin to enable Chairman Ellen van Dongen to award Karl Honorary Life Membership of the Modderfontein Conservation Society.

"As Karl is not even a member of the Society, the award

came as a particular surprise. However, your committee decided to honour Karl for his support over the years and his willingness to share his encyclopaedic knowledge of Modder with us at all times."

Karl was instrumental in setting up The Dynamite Company Museum and, indeed, was its first curator.

An article in AECI's internal newspaper *Reporter* in July 1969 sets the scene: "Karl's efforts in assisting both the museum and Modderfontein Dramatic Society (Mod-Dram) productions are the result of a very real interest in Modderfontein. This stems from his long association with the company. His grandfather was the first Köhler to work at Modder – he was one of the original team who started the factory as we know it today. He arrived in South Africa in 1897 from Cologne in Germany.



Karl at work illustrating the *Olde Tyme Variety* programme with wife Wendy and daughter Shirley looking on.

Photo: AECI Reporter



"Karl's father worked for Modderfontein all his life – starting as a Policeman in the Compound in 1926, and finally retiring as a Foreman, Roads and Drainage, Civil Section, Engineering Services Department, in 1966."

Karl featured in that issue of the newspaper under the headline: **Amateur artist makes good** when he designed and illustrated a magnificent 56 page programme for the Mod-Dram production, *Olde Tyme Variety*. The article began: "An arty-crafty type, Karl Köhler of Personnel Department at Modderfontein does not look it. He is quiet, unassuming and dresses ultra-conservatively ..."

Karl was no different in later life when, in retirement, he was always happy to take a back seat and lend his support wherever it was needed. He contributed substantially to the Modderfontein Heritage Impact Assessment commissioned by AECI and compiled by Heritage Architect Rocco Bosman.

Karl was the third Honorary Life Member of the Society. The others are Ken England and the late Pat Wark.

(Continued on page 3)

KEITH CONTRIBUTED A EULOGY AT KARL'S MEMORIAL SERVICE

(Condensed)

An article in a 1974 issue of *AECI Reporter* (the AECI house newspaper) said: "The name Köhler originates from German, meaning charcoal burner. As charcoal is an essential ingredient for gunpowder it is pertinent that the longest serving family at Modder is the Köhler family. Altogether they have served for 124 years (in 1974), Karl's grandfather having come to Modder as the workshops engineer in 1897. Karl's father also worked at the factory. They must have been a great source of Karl's extensive knowledge.

Within the Heritage community we are most fortunate that Karl was a prolific writer and had a wonderful memory. He compiled many essays. He numbered them methodically and there is a record of 102. These covered topics such as:

- Electricity at Modder (the first electric lights in SA after Kimberley)
- Baden Powell (copy in Museum of Military History)
- Andrew Brown the cobbler
- Trees (initially as sun protection but also to emulate the European landscape)
- Bus service
- Thunder storms
- Selection of the Modder factory site (Karl was able to identify the site of a house owned by a descendant of the de Beer family who owned the farm called Modderfontein).



During a visit to the Modderfontein Cemetery in March 2015. Photograph: Robbie Vermont

As the first curator of the Dynamite Company Museum in its present home at 2 Main Street, he must have been in his element. The work he undertook in that capacity still gives much pleasure to many, particularly when we conduct our Heritage Walks. He was able to assist

in various projects, some that I know of were: the Gillian Darling photo album, a copy of which is in the museum, a voluminous work containing 55 articles covering the many varied processes that took place within the factory, an archaeological student's excavation in Italy Village and a tour of the cemetery for the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation.

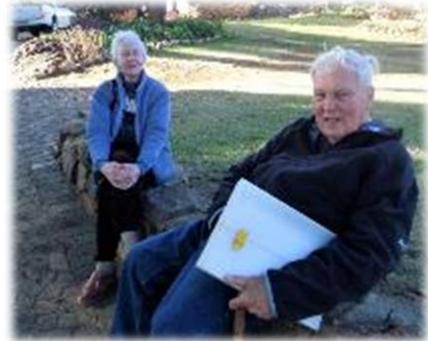
I do have wonderful memories of times spent reminiscing together. They were all too few. Your memory will continue to be reinforced with the living plants, the

orchid and the grapevine you gave me and also the walking sticks you made which, when used, will always bring you to mind.

Keith Martin

As a member of the MCS with the Heritage portfolio, it was inevitable that I would be led to Karl.

I knew who he was as I was at school with both his sisters, Elizabeth and Helen. We attended the same schools, but at different periods.



Pat van Nierop with Karl at Mountain View on a heritage outing in 2017.



Karl at the factory's detonator campus in June 2013. Photograph: Robbie Vermont

PHOTO ALBUM

Items worth recording

In this first sequence of photographs, Colin Parr snapped a heron capturing and eating a vlei rat. The bottom two shots show the heron with bulging crop and then, satisfied, taking off into the blue.



Three photographs taken by Janet Davies at your Society's end of year braai and walk:



Peace and tranquility at Fish Eagle Dam.



A tumble weed in full flower.

PHOTO ALBUM

Continued



The "Main Manne": Colin Parr, Peter Olive, John Cruickshank and Keith Williams. Photo: Janet Davies



A most unusual visitor to the Reserve: A Yellow warbler Photo: Clive Hopcroft.



A Fish eagle looks on while a Long-crested eagle is harassed by a Black-shouldered kite by Colin Parr. **All these photos deserve to be shown on a big screen as their quality is superb and a PC, laptop or tablet can't do them justice.**

Have you paid?

We would hate to lose you

Every year when we send out a reminder that subscriptions and/or conservation fees are due, we implore you to include your name as a reference when paying, especially by EFT, so that we can receipt you with the amount, issue a membership card and ensure the continuity of your access card, if you have one.

Every year there are those who do not do this and we have no idea where the money came from.

If you have paid, please ignore this reminder, if you have not, you can make an EFT to Modderfontein Conservation Society, ABSA Bank, Account No: 29976791 and make sure you let Robbie know. (See your committee list).

Fees have not changed. The MCS membership rates are still:

Family:	R170.00	Individual:	R100.00
Senior (60+):	R70.00 (Individual)	Senior (60+):	R100.00 (Couple)



YOUR COMMITTEE

Name	Portfolio	Home phone	Cell phone	E-mail
Ellen van Dongen	Chairman Education	011-462-3067	082-813-9611	ellen@vandokem.co.za
Janet Brodrick	Minutes & Tuesday walks	011-686-1930	072-679-6461	janet7@vodamail.co.za
Alison Coppin	Speaker liaison	011-608- 3927	083 2925406	alisoncoppin@mweb.co.za
Peter Ewen	Reserve Development	011-608-4043	076-377-3263	petemar@gam.co.za
Daryl Fuchs	Technology		083 395 0778	cyclotron@freestateprojects.org
Jenny Gough	Speaker Liaison	011-452-2201	082-685-0959	jagough@mailone.co.za
Patricia Llewellyn	Treasury	011-882-4114	082-497-9241	llewellyntricia35@gmail.com
Keith Martin	Heritage	011-608-2864	082-450-4003	keith2864@gmail.com
Peter Olive	Education & Special Projects	011-609-4708	083-461-6221	polive@mweb.co.za
Carol Sherwood	Special Projects & Treasury	011-524-0296	082-906-5794	csherwood@telkomsa.net
Pat van Nierop	Birding & CAER Committee	011-882-4392	083-326-6838	pat.nierop@mweb.co.za
Robbie Vermont (ex officio)	Membership & Publicity	011-608-2693	082-800-3704	robbiev@netactive.co.za



John Clark – a friend and companion

For those members who received the flurry of WhatsApp messages from and to John Clark early in the month and do not know him: John joined the ConSoc in 2001 and served on the committee for a number of years. He's a very hard worker and made a significant contribution to our Society. Due to changed circumstances, John moved to Cape Town in August 2014 but keeps in touch. Those who know him were obviously very pleased to hear from him and eager to acknowledge his message with fond memories and responses.

TELL US ABOUT IT

If you've changed your phone number, address or status 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.

Photocopying of hard copies with thanks to



Visit: www.thetaonline.co.za or phone 011 608 2880

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

BIG PLANS FOR ISIDLEKE

What has become of Isidleke now that Val Bonne has closed down? This is a frequently asked question and, to provide some answers, Gregg Straw, the new tenant of the area, attended your committee's last meeting in March to share his plans and vision for Isidleke:

- Greg is a landscape architect and horticulturist and has had his own

company, Landarch (Pty) Ltd (<http://landarch.co.za/>), for 28 years.

- He is the developer and owner of the Fourways Farmers Market. He bought Keith Kirsten's nursery to make a picnic park on 3 March 2013 and started the farmer's market. It has grown to attract 3 500 to 5 000 people on weekends and as a result the current venue became too small and he needed a new place.
- M&T approached him to move the Fourways Farmers Market to Modderfontein to the Isidleke area. His site extends from the Isidleke sign for 550 m towards Baben Bridge, south of the tarred road up to the middle of the bypass canal and the current car park behind the barn plus 4 ha upwards towards Linbro Park. The 4 ha will comprise a 2-ha farm with grazing for cows and a 2-ha nursery.
- The concept for the new farmer's market is to recreate a farmstead which will be called Longmeadow Farm (after Keith Kirsten's farm – but co-incidentally is also the name of the erf on which Isidleke is situated).
 - In order to create a farmstead atmosphere R6.5 million of landscaping is being done.
 - **The Shooting Lodge** will become Greg's office. A 15 m x 6 m steel barn (meeting room and design studio) will be put up next to it.
 - The grotto will be made an attraction.
 - **Beit's Barn:**
 - The external building modifications done by Val Bonne are being removed to restore the old Barn. An undercounter bar will be built at the far end, which was previously under-utilised, lights will be changed to create a feeling of a wine farm.
 - The upstairs area will remain as a conference venue.
 - The paving in front of the barn and the amphitheatre will be pulled out and grass planted with a skirting of lavender. The Koi pond will be repaired.
 - The colour theme is lavender, green and white.
 - A cold room and a storeroom will be added.
 - **Dobbs House:**
 - All boarding that was placed in the windows has been removed.
 - The wooden balustrading is being repaired.
 - The paraplegic ramp will be removed.
 - The iron roof from the kitchen will be extended.
 - The Brewery will remain and will become a tenant of Greg's.
 - 35 m x 50 m sloped lawn in front of Dobbs House and the Barn.
 - Further north will be a 650-seater barn.
 - Into the blue gum forest is going to be a big amphitheatre like that in Kirstenbosch.
 - Consideration is being given to a ramp to be built over the by-pass canal to the Hogsback (Modderfontein Reserve)
 - Greg advised that no people traffic should pass from Longmeadow Farm to the Modderfontein Reserve and vice versa,
 - The entire area below the road will be fenced to ensure the security of visitors to the farmstead. Barbed wire/razor wire is being considered into the bypass canal – MCS advised that other options for this must be sought.
- A big cycling barn will go in on the upside of the road. A new company operating at Groenkloof – Trail Wolf – will take over the cycling and trail running and will clean the trails.



Greg stated that his development must be environmentally sustainable and as such looks forward to working with the MCS. Peter Ewen has already spent some time with Greg regarding the heritage aspects of Isidleke. Greg hopes to obtain Johannesburg Heritage blue plaques for the Shooting Lodge, Barn and Dobb's House.