



Newsletter: January 2021



Hey ho, hey ho and off to work we go

5 000 TREES AND SHRUBS PLANTED IN THE RESERVE



A highly ambitious project to plant 5 000 trees in the Modderfontein Reserve was initiated early in December by an organisation, Plant Nation, which is on a mission to plant a million indigenous trees across Africa.

The Modderfontein project is being sponsored by Baines Cape Mountain Whisky and was expected to be completed before the end of December 2020.

Founders of Plant Nation David Jaffe and Saul Abelson are excited about this project which was completed by the end of the year. The majority of the plants are located around the education lapa.

David Jaffe reports: "5 000 Indigenous trees and shrubs have officially been planted! The stone circles and mulching stages have also been completed. The Johannesburg rains arrived perfectly on time to ensure that our trees are off to a good start in their new homes. The trees are currently all growing well, and the local wildlife, butterflies and birds are all loving them too."

"Please find on the Dropbox link below many highlight photos of weeks one, two and three of the planting. I can't emphasise how precious this space is to Johannesburg and also how central it is within the city! You will also enjoy some general photos of the Reserve and our national bird the Blue Crane."

"We look forward to planting again with you all soon and thanks again for opening up the reserve for us." (See more photographs on page 2)



<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/5ukyazpug5zk27q/AABoFm5Q7tslcfxfDJ3eUjkAa?dl=0>

Deaths of Robina Ayling and Sheila Williams

It is with sadness we record the deaths of Robina, wife of Pat, and Sheila, wife of Keith, both of whom passed away in January after a long illness. Pat has been leader of our Society's bird group for the past many years while Keith and Sheila have been members for 15 years.

Deepest sympathy to both and their families.

DISCUSSIONS UNDER WAY

Since the beginning of the year, chairman Ellen van Dongen has entered discussions with Emily Taylor of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) regarding activities within the Modderfontein Reserve.

The EWT consults for the Greater Modderfontein Property Umbrella Association (GMPUA) which has the responsibility to manage, maintain and develop the Reserve.

The discussions involve all aspects and issues of the GMPUA's activities in the Reserve including fishing, education, invasive alien vegetation, wildlife monitoring and management, cycle and hiking trail maintenance and record keeping.

The current board of the GMPUA comprises representatives of AECI, M&T and developers.

While this is not a new initiative – your Society has played an advisory roll over the past several years, it is a new channel of communication between the MCS and the GUMPA.

Any volunteers for a work party?

Your committee is contemplating organising work parties to help control some of the alien vegetation that is re-appearing in the Reserve. If you would be prepared to assist, please give one of the committee members a call and volunteer your services, or those of someone who is bigger and stronger.

PLANT NATION IN OPERATION

(Continued from Page 1)



John Cruickshank chats to David Jaffe at the heart of the project.



Photos supplied

John and Peter Olive keep a close watch on the development and maintenance of the walking trails in the Reserve. They work with representatives of M&T, Taroko Trails, and AECI Property Services. John prepares a weekly trails report which he shares with these organisations and others as the need arises. His report covers the condition of the trails, any hazards or blockages that could spoil a hike and any other matters that need to be addressed to ensure the safety and enjoyment of walkers in the Reserve.

END OF YEAR BRAAI AS GOOD AS EVER



A lovely day came to a perfect end with your Society's end of year walk and braai last month. Covid protocols were observed but did not impede any of the camaraderie members experienced on the evening. **Top picture:** Peter Ewen checks that there is fire where there's smoke while Nick Lotz looks on. **Lower left:** Jen and John Cruickshank and **lower right:** Sigi Hudson, Anne Ireland and Jenny Carliell.
Photos: Peter Olive

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.

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MODDERFONTEIN RESERVE

ANIMAL RELOCATION

Due to pending development of the area to the north and north-west of the Modderfontein Reserve by M&T Development, 145 animals were captured in the Modderfontein Reserve during the latter half of 2020 and relocated to Tshwane's Rietvlei Nature Reserve, a 4 000-ha open space on the outskirts of Pretoria. This number was made up of 17 zebra, 37 black wildebeest, 56 blesbok 28 red hartebeest and 8 surplus springbok rams. A group of about 20 springbok and a family group of 3 red hartebeest remain.

As that side of the Modderfontein Reserve will be fenced to accommodate M&T's planned developments, the remaining 263 ha of the Reserve was just too small to retain the larger antelope.

The translocation of the herds was contracted out by the landowners, AECI Limited, to Pretoria Wildlife Services, a professional game capture and relocater. AECI sponsored the operation and donated the animals to Rietfontein as part of its social responsibility outreach programme.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) which consults with the Modderfontein Reserve supervised the operation.

"It is very sad to see those animals go," says Emily Taylor, EWT Communications Officer Project Coordinator: People in Conservation Unit. "There was a time when I would go and watch them for a little while every day so that I could pretend I was in the bush.

"Things definitely won't be the same when they have gone, but I am actually quite happy for them. Not only do they have more space and less bustle of the city around them, but they will also be less vulnerable to snaring or being hunted with dogs, and they will also be better able to strengthen the diversity of their gene pools.

"I also understand that there are always concerns around the risk of trauma, injury, or even death during operations such as these. To minimise the risk, the EWT was contracted to bring their expertise and experience on board. We were involved throughout the planning process and were there for the duration of the capture and transport phases as well. I was on site for some of the time but my colleague, Constant Hoogstad, was there throughout – and he was definitely the man for the job, with a wealth of experience in these sorts of operations.

"We are confident that we did what is best for the animals under the circumstances."

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2021/22 SUBSCRIPTIONS 😊 😊 😊

This is where we usually remind you that subscriptions are due at the end of February. This year, however, we are pleased to tell you that your committee has decided not to levy any subscriptions at all. "As we have been unable to offer you, our members, much during the various phases of the COVID-19 lockdown, we think it only fair that we do not charge you for next year," says chairman Ellen. "All members who had paid up for the 2020/21 year will be included in our books for the 2021/22 period and we thank you for your support."

PHOTO ALBUM Items worth recording



THE RAES CLICKED TWICE

Alec Rae took the above photographs late last year. They show the resident Spotted Eagle owl family at the Near Range: dad, mom and junior.

Lesley Rae captured these images of two mongooses, one at either side of the road. She was shooting from the driver's seat in her car. "It appeared that the two were playing peek-a-boo, eyeing each other under my car," she says.



MIRACLE PLANT TAKES ROOT IN MODDERFONTEIN

The January committee meeting was held in the lapa at the Education Centre where we noticed that a virtual barrier of Spekbooms has been planted right around the wall of the lapa.

We are seeing more and more of these trees in Modderfontein. A large number of them have been planted by the Flamingo Shopping Centre and many more have been noticed in private and business park gardens.

Why this sudden popularity of *Portulacaria afra*?

Also known as Pork Bush, Jade Plant or Elephant's Food, this indigenous evergreen is an environmental miracle worker, with the potential to tackle carbon emissions like no other plant can. Whether you're a fan or have yet to hear about this magnificent tree, here are five things you probably didn't know about this wonder plant. (Info thanks to [Samara Private Game Reserve](#), a luxury 5-star destination with a passionate conservation mission.)



Photos: Robbie Vermont

SPEKBOOM IS PROUDLY SOUTH AFRICAN

It is found predominantly in the Eastern Cape, and especially in the [semi-arid Karoo region](#), where growing conditions are ideal for this resilient plant. It favours North-facing slopes where it is exposed to maximum sunlight. Thriving in poor soils, it tolerates both drought and frost.

SPEKBOOM IS ONE OF THE BEST CARBON SEQUESTRATORS IN THE WORLD

Hectare for hectare, in optimal conditions, Spekboom thicket can be as effective as the Amazon rainforest at removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere – quite a feat for a plant endemic to semi-arid areas. One hectare of Spekboom can sequester between four and 10 tonnes of carbon per year. This makes it a powerful tool in the fight against climate change and the move towards a zero-carbon world.

SPEKBOOM CAN LIVE UP TO 200 YEARS

And Spekboom trees can grow as tall as **five metres**. Prior to the advent of large-scale livestock farming, some areas of the Eastern Cape had Spekboom forests so thick that it was said a grown human could walk across the top as if walking on a carpet. Spekboom propagates very easily, and a broken-off branch can quickly grow roots and create a whole new plant.

SPEKBOOM is EQUIPPED WITH A UNIQUE MECHANISM FOR ADAPTING TO ITS SURROUNDINGS

In the wet, cool months, Spekboom photosynthesises like other plants, opening its stomata during the day to absorb carbon dioxide. During drier times, the plant has the ability to open its stomata at night to prevent water loss during the heat of the day.

SPEKBOOM IS EDIBLE, WITH A VERY HIGH NUTRITIONAL VALUE

It is a favoured food of black rhinos, elephants, and kudus. The good news is that we can eat it too. With a slightly lemony taste, Spekboom leaves are juicy and full of moisture, making them the perfect 'pick-me-up' during a long day's hiking in the arid Karoo.

...and if you live in an apartment, you could consider having a Bonsai version. This one is no more than 18 cm tall.

