

# *Ear to the Ground*

Gauteng Conservancy Association Newsletter – No 13  
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[www.conservancies.org](http://www.conservancies.org) / [www.nacsa.org.za](http://www.nacsa.org.za)

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## **People power**

### **Nicole takes Airport to court**

East Rand environmental activist, **Nicole Barlow**, was sued for R6 million by Petro Props after she raised cain about them building a filling station in a wetland. She won the case and she has now taken on ACSA, the Airports Company of SA after a horrific spill of over a million litres of aviation fuel into the Blaauwpan (the third spill to date). Nicole, who heads up the Environmental Conservation Association, decided that was enough. She is now suing 11 employees of ACSA, including the MD, Monhla Hlahla, for criminal negligence. "Up to 5 000 cubic metres of soil have been contaminated," Nicole said. "In 10 years the effects will still be felt." Nicole's action received wide media coverage.

### **"Klein maar ge'train'" – Anne Mearns wows Namibia**

**For those of you who have not met the diminutive Anne Mearns, she's a recipient of the United Nations' Environmental Global 500 Role of Honour and she quietly moves mountains (only after a proper EIA of course).**

Anne (GCA committee member, East Rand) was recently invited to speak on wetlands at the University of Namibia. Her presentation was so well received they have asked her to return next year and to produce a booklet on wetlands for the university. She is quite prolific, having produced the second Cosmos youth booklet, a training guide for conservancy officers and a range of booklets for school projects. Earlier this year she was invited to speak at a conservation conference in Malawi.

### **SLAPP suit used to intimidate**

The R210 million SLAPP suit (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participants) lodged by Wraypex, the developer of the Blair Atholl Golf Estate near Lanseria, against five members of the Rhenosterspruit Conservancy is moving towards conclusion. Wraypex did not follow the required legal processes for this multi-million development and when Conservancy members blew the whistle, the developer retaliated with summonses of “damage and defamation”, aimed to intimidate. The court date is 26 April 2007.

In spite of considerable cost and much pressure, the Conservancy has held fast to its decision to ensure that all local developments follow the legal processes.

### Development monitor

At last count the GCA has monitored 50+ developments in Gauteng. This entailed a whole spectrum of actions: registering as I&APs, listing concerns and objections, attending public meetings and Tribunal Hearings (DFA), alerting GDACE and/or councils to irregularities or illegal activities. In short - keeping an “*Ear to the Ground*”... **Bob Dehning** is the central contact point re all development issues and enquiries: [dehning@mweb.co.za](mailto:dehning@mweb.co.za).

### Urban sprawl – an aerial view

**An excerpt from the *Bateleurs newsletter*** (Flying for the Environment in Africa)  
"Although the focus of our flight was on the unscrupulous granite mining in the Brits area, flying over Midrand, Pretoria and then Brits, one could not help but notice the massive urban sprawl which connects and forms a virtually continuous urban landscape from Johannesburg to Pretoria to Brits. This development consisted largely of burgeoning complex developments, golf estates and informal settlements along the outskirts of Johannesburg, Pretoria and Brits.

“An aerial view of this unprecedented development provided me with the scope to imagine what the landscape *should* look like and then to view it as it is now. One can only but imagine the negative environmental consequences that this sprawl must create, particularly with the informal settlements confined to the outskirts and next to river ways.

“Flying on to Brits ... the most shocking was the sight of the uncontrolled and unscrupulous granite mining that is presently taking place on the koppies near Brits. No environmental precautionary measures were being undertaken, nor was any rehabilitation evident. In some cases hills were literally being chopped away from the sides and tops - if these activities are to carry on the hills will be completely levelled. It is obvious that no thought has been given to the habitats that these koppies may provide, or their climactic roles, or even their geological importance.”

### Incentives for conservation

At a recent meeting of the National Biodiversity Stewardship Programme, attended by GCA representatives, the issue of incentives to conservancies and in particular to their members was high on the agenda. The Department of Environment and Tourism

finances this stewardship programme, headed by **Claret Walker**. The EWT acts as secretariat. While DEAT initially agreed to finance this programme for one year, it has now decided to extend its funding – great news for the community-based conservation movement. NACSA is part of the Steering Committee.

## IUCN membership

NACSA has applied for membership of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Backed by good references from EWT and from the Cape Stewardship Programme, it is fairly certain that membership will be granted. This will enhance NACSA's standing and widen its circle of influence.

## Yebo Amablomo and Yebo Gogga – 200 year-old 'granddads'

The NACSA and GCA stand at Wits University's annual Amablomo / Amagogga Exhibition in October elicited much interest. It featured a muti plants display set up by Thorntree Conservancy, with plants ranging from a couple of months old to 'granddads' aged 200 years. NACSA also represented GDACE's Plant Rescue Programme.

The curator of the Life Sciences Museum, Caroline Crump, was so taken with GCA chairman, **Ivan Parkes'** interaction with the public that she invited him to lecture to students. Kids TV also did an interview. **Bob and Cheryl Dehning** of Smuts Farm Conservancy assisted at the stand and represented the Tree Society as well. An estimated 6000 people visited the stand and NACSA information booklets were snapped up.

***We need funding for reprinting the popular NACSA booklets. How about a Christmas gift to NACSA, labelled "For Printing". All donations welcome – big or small.***

## News from conservancies

### **A royal patron for Rhenosterspruit**

The Rhenosterspruit Conservancy's Patron, **Princess Irene of the Netherlands**, paid the Conservancy a visit on Saturday 9 November. "The more conscious we become of being part of Nature, the more responsible we will feel for Earth and everything that lives on this beautiful planet," she says, adding that a major shift is needed to redress the loss of respect for Nature and the striving, driven by greed, to meet material goals.

Princess Irene owns a large reserve in the Karoo and has done wonders in restoring the veld there. She runs week-long "*Spirit of the Wild*" courses on the reserve for the public and as training for SANParks employees. "This course helped us to explore beyond what the guidebooks teach us," said a SANParks participant. "It made me receptive to all life forms, not just as a 'caretaker' of nature, but as an equal partner."

### **Fly-fishing**

Magalies Barbus Haven (one of the founding members of the Magalies River Conservancy) is offering people the opportunity of learning and polishing up on the fine art of fly-fishing. "We manage one of the finest small stream yellowfish fly-fishing facilities in Gauteng and (possibly South Africa), with pristine surroundings and clear unpolluted river," says **Wayne Sinclair**.

Wayne is a member of the Yellowfish Working Group (Initiative of Federation of Southern African Fly-fishers) which is an initiative established to protect the Yellowfish species in Southern Africa.

"The clinics we offer train guests on how to fly-fish as well as education on environmentally friendly principles related to fishing including: Entomology studies, Catch and release of fish, Treatment of the environs etc." Cost of clinics to GCA members is R 165.00 per person. Fly-rods are available for hire. Contact Wayne Sinclair on tel: (011) 315-4503 or [sundown@iafrica.com](mailto:sundown@iafrica.com).

### **Hunting dogs and falcons**

Residents of the Rhenosterspruit Conservancy recently rallied *en masse* when a call went out about three men with a pack of 30 dogs hunting and killing rabbits. No-one was apprehended but vehicle licence numbers were taken and will be followed up. The police said their hands were tied unless an owner reported the hunters trespassing on his/her property. By law such dogs can be shot if found hunting on your property. Small wildlife are being decimated by these hunting dogs.

A Conservancy member earlier came across a man hunting with falcons. "When I confronted him, his falcons had already killed two rabbits and about six Red Wing Francolin." Add to this the many animals caught in snares and the numbers of wildlife killed are considerable.

Thorntree Conservancy reports problems with illegal hunting as well. Anyone else?

### **Cullinan se spinnekoppe en ander "creepy crawlies"**

**Joan du Toit**, voorsitter van Cullinan Bewarea, het onlangs 'n Spinnekopdag gereël. "Dit was 'n belewenis!" skryf sy. "**Ian Engelbrecht**, die voorsitter van die Spinnekopvereniging het vir almal touwys gemaak hoe en waar om die spinnekoppe te soek, hoe om klippe op te tel en terug te plaas, hoe om die spinnekoppe in die buisies te vang en dan watte proppe op te sit.

"Grootmense en kinders was gou aan die soek en het vinnig buise volgemaak met allerhande spinnekoppe en skerpioene. Twee ure later lê die tafel vol monsters (nog in die buisies) en toe kom die mikroskope uit en almal besigtig die vangs van die dag. Hulle lyk nog meer "creepy" wanneer hulle vergroot word! Na hulle geïdentifiseer is, het lan die kinders terug veld toe geneem om die vangs van die dag te gaan bevry. Hulle dehidreer blykbaar vinnig.

“Die kinders wou weet of ons nie asseblief weer ‘n dag sou reël nie en die lede van die Vereniging het dadelik aangebied om ‘n Spinnepokklub vir kinders te stig. Die klub gaan in Februarie gestig word.”

### **Aliens beware**

Cullinan Conservancy roped in **Harmen den Dulk** and **Nick van Rensburg** of GDACE to assist with training on the eradication of alien vegetation. A training course for 18 unemployed people was given. This entailed identification of syringas, poplars, bugweed and lantana, plus safety precautions and safety clothing when using chain saws, saws and choppers. The course covered types of herbicides used for specific trees and correct mixing of herbicides. It also included methods of eradication, eg debarking, chopping, frilling and spraying.

### **The ABC of Christmas cheer**

Thorntree Conservancy’s End of Year Braai at the Thabeng Bush Camp also benefited the community. “What made it special for all of us was that we combined it with a Christmas Party for the ABC (Abandoned Baby Care) children,” said chairman **Ivan Parkes**. “Each child received a gift sponsored by our members and friends.” **Charmaine Humphrey**, a guest from Welverdiend Conservancy, said: “These children crept into my heart. Their smiles and happiness will be remembered for a long time. A conservancy is not only about conservation - it is also about the people living in the conservancy.”

### **Welverdiend’s Faire – a resounding success!**

The Welverdiend Triangle Conservancy’s Spring Country Faire “was a huge and resounding success,” says chairman, **Reg Humphreys**. “The purpose of the Faire was to create awareness of and to promote ‘conservation’ within the local and surrounding community. The success was also owing to the support of Midvaal Council, plus other conservancies such as Thorntree and Cullinan, as well as the Tree Society and various reptile, snake and spider clubs. Between 4 000 – 6 000 people attended the Faire – some from as far as Nylstroom, Heidelberg and Sasolburg.” With all that hard work, did the Faire make money? “Lots and lots!” says Reg.

### **Welcome support from SAHRA**

A team of three officials from the SA Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) visited the Rhenosterspruit Conservancy in mid-November. They investigated fossil sites, ancient lime kilns (“*of the best-preserved we’ve ever seen,*” they said), and huge stone circles hidden in the long grass, the cultural leftovers of ancient Iron Age settlements. **Dr Trish Hanekom**, CEO of the Cradle of Humankind (adjoining the Conservancy) suggested getting PhD students from Wits to help with further research.

### **Frog Ahoy!**

Calling all able-bodied men! Thorntree Conservancy members were called out to rescue a giant bullfrog in Sicelo township early in December. “What was worrying about this call-out was that the intention was to kill the frog as people believed it was poisonous to touch and could bite!” said one of the team. The Meyerton Sun carried a front page picture of the frog and rescuer **Richard Malindie**, with a caption explaining to the public that these frogs are harmless and should be protected.

The Giant Bullfrog (*Pyxicephalus adspersus*) is the largest, and perhaps most bizarre amphibian in southern Africa (males may weigh more than a kilogram). Unfortunately, only when environmental conditions are conducive do these frogs breed in large numbers. Prior to 2004, the last known large-scale breeding event took place during 1992-1994. The core of this species' distribution range lies in Gauteng, which represents the current epicentre of urban development in South Africa. Large tracts of grassland and wetlands are increasingly being developed, leaving virtually no undisturbed habitat. The survival of the Giant Bullfrog is in danger and it is listed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) as "Near-Threatened" in southern Africa. “Measures to protect Giant Bullfrogs are urgently required to prevent the extinction of significant populations of this species in southern Africa,” says **Caroline Yetman** of the Giant Bullfrog Project Endangered Wildlife Trust. For more info: [www.giantbullfrog.org](http://www.giantbullfrog.org).

## Welcome to the new conservancies registered in 2006

- Tswelopele (west of Meyerton) - informal settlement
- Elandsvlei, Benoni - rural
- Kathstan School, Benoni - school conservancy
- Alberts Farm, west of Johannesburg - urban
- Klein Jukskei, in Craigavon, north of Johannesburg - urban
- Welverdiend, south of Suikerbosrand - rural
- Klipkraal, south of Meyerton - rural
- Brumeria Action Group Conservancy, Pretoria - urban.
- Wilge River Nature Conservancy - rural.

## EWT Toolkit – a great help for mere mortals

The Endangered Wildlife Trust recently launched its “**Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Toolkit**”. This is a user-friendly, practical guide to EIAs, EIA processes and specifically the new EIA Regulations. It is aimed at helping ordinary citizens and Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs) confronted by development issues through the maze of big words, processes, regulations and requirements that stymie most of us.

The Toolkit has answers to frequently asked questions, process flow charts, document templates, general and specific information as well as sections on how to consider biodiversity and other environmental concerns in the EIA process. The Toolkit is intended to be used throughout South Africa and therefore a section on relevant provincial specific information, ie contact details, guidelines etc, is included.

**Dr Nick King** and **Anique Greyling**, who put the Toolkit together, would appreciate feedback and updated information. Go to: [www.eiatoolkit.ewt.org.za](http://www.eiatoolkit.ewt.org.za).

**Good news:** A one-day course on the Environmental Impact Assessment process will be held in February in Gauteng by the EWT. As you have seen above (*Development Monitor*), Gauteng is exploding with developments and those at the grassroots need to know how to handle them. Cost: R750 pp incl lunch. Date and venue to be announced in the new year. To book, contact **Anique Greyling** at [aniqueg@ewt.org.za](mailto:aniqueg@ewt.org.za). The course will be repeated throughout the year.

## Pink Peril - the Pom-pom campaign

Pom-pom is one of the most destructive weeds that have ever invaded Gauteng. While valuable research was being conducted by the Agricultural Research Council and GDACE, authorities such as Gautrans did absolutely nothing about the rapid spread of the weed along main routes. Baled grass, cut next to these roads, was actually sold to farmers for feed and wind dispersal of the fine seeds deposited trillions of it everywhere in the province.

Pom-pom's perennial rhizomes add to the problem, because trying to dig it out leaves a scattering of small roots, ready to shoot again. Cutting the plants adds vigour to the root growth.

For four years the GCA (mainly via the *Karee Chronicle*) tried to get the relevant authorities to act. By January 2006 the first effort was made by Working for Water along the R55, N14 and R21, in collaboration with GDACE and Gautrans. But by then the Pom-pom had already seeded.

Your Pom-pom checklist:

- Know what it looks like - very pretty but a real menace. If you need an info sheet, send an e-mail to [duigan@global.co.za](mailto:duigan@global.co.za).
- Check your property regularly.
- Work out a plan with your neighbours – no point in eradicating it on your property if it blows over from next-door.
- Use the correct poison (Brush-off and Access are registered for Pom-pom).
- Use it early – before the flower heads dry out and a trillion seeds blow over your property.

## Raffle – help needed

To raise much-needed funds for NACSA a framed set of six wildcat prints, signed by South African artist Fuz Caforia, plus a limited-edition set of wildcats series phone cards (total value of both:

R3 000), is being raffled. Tickets are R50 each and all conservancies have been asked to help sell the tickets. Booklets of 20 tickets each are available - please all help to sell some! A pic of the prints will be sent to you separately from this e-mail, so people can be shown what can be won.

## Next GCA general meeting

Gauteng conservancies get together a few times a year, to discuss mutual issues – successes, problems, solutions. The venues are shifted from east to west and north to south, to make it more accessible to more people. (Don't complain, Gautengers – imagine the problems conservancies face in provinces such as the Northern Cape!)

Cullinan Conservancy is the first to kick off in 2007, with a meeting scheduled for Sunday 14 January, at 09:00 for 09:30 at Elandshoek. Directions will be sent early in the new year.

## The Meerkat and Friends

Who will win the Meerkat 2007 (top conservancy)? Or the Four Frogs (wetlands)? Or the Cheetah (biodiversity)? Open to all registered conservancies. Start preparing your entry – the competition is getting fierce! The winners will be announced at the AGM in May next year.

## NACSA meeting, Sandveld, Free State, 13,14 November 2006

The NACSA conference in the Free State was packed with info and ideas. Not all provinces were able to attend but there was fair representation from across the country. **Happy Baloyi** and **Melissa Hansen** from GDACE attended, as did **Claret Walker**, co-ordinator of the newly-established National Biodiversity Stewardship Programme, financed by DEAT for a year and run by EWT.

**NACSA committee:** Chairman: **Anthony Duigan**, Vice-Chairman: **Trafford Petterson**, Secretary: **Helen Duigan**, Treasurer: **Reg Humphrey**.

**Portfolios:** Media coordinator: **Charmaine Humphrey**, Publications: **Ivan Parkes**, Biodiversity: **Jean Lindsay** and **Bob Dehning**, Hunting: (a sub-portfolio of Biodiversity) **Malcom Stainbank**.

**Chairman's Award:** Please send your nominations for this award to **Anthony Duigan** ([anthony@jcp.co.za](mailto:anthony@jcp.co.za)) – any person whom you feel has made an exceptional contribution to conservation in the past year(s).

**Next meeting and AGM:** The 2007 NACSA annual general meeting will be held near Suikerbosrand in Gauteng in June 2007. Date and venue to be finalized.

Warmest wishes for the Christmas Season and the New Year, from the GCA committee,  
Helen Duigan

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## ACRONYMS:

NACSA: National Association of Conservancies of SA  
GCA: Gauteng Conservancy Association  
ECA: Environmental Conservation Association  
DEAT: Department of Environment and Tourism  
GDACE: Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Environment  
EWT: Endangered Wildlife Trust  
DME: Department of Minerals and Energy  
DFA: Development Facilitation Act  
SAHRA: SA Heritage Resource Agency  
IUCN: World Conservation Union  
EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment  
I&AP: Interested and Affected Party  
SLAPP: Strategic Litigation Against Public Participants  
NPO: Non-Profit Organisation