

Ear to the Ground

e-Newsletter of the Gauteng Conservancy Association (GCA)

June 2004 no 7

In this newsletter: Greening the Future Award; Next general meeting; Map of your area/conservancy; More new conservancies! Karee Chronicle; Development: "tools" to handle the growing pressure. And more...

Hi! In good GCA style, everything is happening at great speed!

Greening the Future – GCA gets the Merit Award

The Mail & Guardian's annual Greening the Future Awards draw entries from all over and the competition is stiff. So, when the GCA won the Merit Award in the NGO category we were turning somersaults. Well, almost. The overall winner in this category was the Botanical Society of South Africa. They do excellent work but seeing they have been around for decades, and the GCA for a mere two years, we decided we still have something to shout about.

The ceremony took place at the Joh'burg Country Club with all kinds of dignitaries attending and GCA chairman, Ivan Parkes, was forced to wear a suit for the occasion. His tie was cute and environmental – lots of elephants on it. A bit disloyal though, seeing the GCA does not go for the Big Five but prefer to pay tribute to the small things eg the Meerkat.

The M&G carried a supplement on June 3, detailing the winners and their contributions. The GCA got an entire page describing what it is and what it does. For next year we'll do it the Avis way: We'll try harder.

Thanks for all the messages of encouragement and congratulations we got from individuals and from conservancies in Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. Wendy Carstens writes: *"On behalf of the Melville Koppies Management Committee, I would like to congratulate you on the Mail and Guardian Merit Award. What you have achieved in two and a half years is really impressive. We know that it was due to hard work, dedication and persistence - without remuneration. The relationship that you have developed with the Department is also a real advantage in so many ways. Good luck and sterkte for the future."*

Next general meeting

Anyone is welcome at the GCA's quarterly meeting which takes place on Saturday June 25 in Zesfontein Conservancy on the East Rand (not Cloverdene as stated before). A map will be available. Time: 09:00 for 09:30 with a bring and braai afterwards for those who would like to network and relax. The speaker will be Lala Steyn of the Grasslands Programme of the SA National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). Seeing the bulk of Gauteng is endangered grassland, the topic is very relevant. To quote from a recent workshop:

"Gauteng falls within both the savannah and highly threatened grassland biomes that together constitute six vegetation types. Approximately 83% of the province falls within Highveld Grassland, of which an estimated 0.8% is currently conserved in South Africa. An estimated 3303 plant species, 125 mammal species, 483 bird species, 23 amphibian and 101 reptile species occur in the province. 25 plant species are endemic or "near endemic" to the province, all of them threatened with extinction with at least 56% critically endangered or endangered."

Let's save our grasslands!

During the meeting there will be ample time for news from the conservancies present – always fascinating to see what we have to cope with and how well it is done (not discounting the *bloed, sweet en trane*). The Zesfonteiners will have goodies for sale to strengthen their funds, so bring a few Rands along.

Map of your area

The most amazing maps are available nowadays. The aerial maps are so good that you have to think carefully before you go skinny-dipping. Aerial maps can also show property boundaries. For advice on how to go about getting a map of your area, contact Bob Dehning on dehning@mweb.co.za.

New conservancies

Recently registered Francolin, in Elandsfontein, north of the Schurveberg, covers 136 ha. Chairman Cobus du Plessis reports finding several leopard in the area. Francolin lies on the southern slope of the Witwatersberg. Zesfontein and Blesbokspruit Etatwa (East Rand) got registration and Greater Chartwell River and Kalkheuvel Conservancies are almost in place.

Mpumalanga conference

The third national conservancy conference took place at the end of April at Sudwala's Kraal in Mpumalanga, expertly organized by Rob & Sylvia Vollet, Mary Lebotschy, Ralph Kirsten, Philip Owen and Neil McCormick. About 100 delegates from all over the country attended. For more info, see the NACSA website: www.nacsa.org.za and the next Karee Chronicle.

Green Trust can promote your event

Nedbank's Green Trust sends out a monthly e-newsletter ("Grass Roots") to 3 000 people. (The printed copy goes to 100 000.) They welcome news from the ground – conservation stories, projects, activities and even events, eg fetes, markets, festivals – whatever – anything to do with fund-raising for conservation. Here's an excellent vehicle to promote what you are doing. The contact is Leighanne Imbert and her e-mail: Leighanni@Nedbank.co.za. You can subscribe to this free newsletter – go to www.nedbank.co.za. For more info on what the Green Trust does for conservation: www.nedbankgreen.co.za.

A job for Martin?

We got a letter from Martin de Wet, looking for work in conservation. He is a qualified nature conservator with a wide range of experience (game and veld management, patrolling, research, eco-tourism, environmental education, etc). While there may not be one person/conservancy that can employ him on a full-time basis, there may be multiple short-term opportunities. If you have part-time needs or even a once-off project, contact the GCA : conservancies@conservancies.org. Martin's full CV is available.

Development Blues

If you are being confronted by run-away developments threatening your part of the world, we were given a valuable checklist to send to the consultant involved, to make sure you get the necessary information EARLY IN THE PROCESS. The sooner you know what's on the table, the sooner you can decide on the best way to approach the issue. Interested and Affected Parties (I&As) usually hear far down the line what is being planned under their noses, and then fall about trying to handle the situation. E-mail duigan@global.co.za for a copy of this document.

We (Rhenosterspruit) had our first taste of a Tribunal Hearing on a proposed development next to our conservancy recently. This was a valuable experience (more such applications pending in our conservancy!) and a good learning exercise. Our database of contacts in Tshwane Municipality and DACE is growing. (And our understanding of who in those departments are worth their salt...and salary.) The GCA is also working on a better communication system with DACE – so that GCA is informed when development applications near / in conservancies arrive at DACE. At the moment we get to know about it by chance and good luck. Not good enough. We are the custodians of biodiversity and conservation on the ground and we should be the first to be notified.

Karee Chronicle

The June Karee Chronicle is hot off the printer. Your copy/copies will be mailed this week. Please let me know if you want more than one – I don't mind sending a couple or a healthy batch if I know they are going to be used.

Green Book

Copies of the Green Book (How to start a Conservancy) are available – contact ivan.parkes@conservancies.org. Two thousand copies were printed with funds made available by DACE.

Websites

GCA: www.conservancies.org and NACSA: www.nacsa.org.za

2005 GCA committee: Ivan Parkes (Chair), Helen Duigan (Vice-chair), Hilton Butler, Anne Mearns, Ollie Olwage, Norman Jeffery, Cheryl Dehning, Anthony Duigan. New members: Joan du Toit (Cullinan); Patrick Kwelepeta (Soweto), Christopher Mthombeni and Basil Chaza (Etatwa Blesbokspruit)

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2005 NACSA chairman: Hilton Butler

Groete!
Helen Duigan