

GCA Ear to the Ground

Gauteng Conservancy Association Newsletter – No 22 - December 2009

www.conservancies.org / www.nacsa.org.za www.nacsa.co.za

*“Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world.
In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.”*

Margaret Mead, cultural anthropologist

In this e-newsletter:

Chairman’s end of year Message

NACSSA Feedback

Snippets from around the province

Chairman’s end of year Message

That time of the year is upon us *again* – the time when we all look back and remember all the wonderful things we were going to achieve in the past year. Well don’t be disheartened by those you did not achieve, rather inspired by those you did, whether part of the plan or not. Go into 2010 determined to carry on and make a difference.

Wishing you all a *Happy Healthy* festive season and a 2010 that is filled with positive changes for the environment.

NACSSA Feedback

At the beginning of November NACSSA members from around the country got together at Hubula Lodge in the Vredefort Dome area to share ideas, listen to interesting talks by various people and work on the NACSSA 5 year plan.

John Wesson (NACSSA Chairman) then presented an overview of the topic “*Conservancies in the next 5 Years*” which was the basis for the working group. The working group proved, at times, to be quite challenging for all present, as those participating were all individuals with their own ideas and views on NACSSA and the way forward?

John and Andrew Barker, who had agreed to play the role of facilitator, ran the sessions very well managing to maintain the balance between allowing individuals the chance to question areas they felt were not in keeping with their vision of NACSSA and express their ideas and keeping the process moving forward. The Saturday afternoon session was not helped by a huge storm and the loss of power.

The resulting strategic plan framework is available, for all interested parties, from the office.

Snippets from around the province

Drumblade Conservancy Member's Braai

Finally Spring has arrived in Drumblade and our Conservancy members got together for a braai. Like our gardens, and our wildlife, everyone had been in hibernation for the winter. Chairlady, Di Kruger, thought it about time we heard about the activities planned for the next few months. What better way than informally chatting around the fire! This was also an opportunity to meet with Bob Dehning and John Heywood who have been so helpful with the compilation of our species lists. John Heywood of the SA Bird Atlas Project expects the Drumblade pentad to reach **140** identified birds this summer. This includes the summer migrants to our area. Ivan Parkes managed to squeeze some time out of his very busy schedule to join us for a laugh and a chat and catch up on the latest news from Drumblade.



Drumblade Conservancy catches Nola dumping in the Midvaal area!

One of our members caught Nola red handed (and very red faced) dumping spent sunflower seeds on vacant land adjacent to the conservancy. We sent them the photographic evidence of their wrongdoing and some ideas of what to do with their waste product (no, not what you are thinking!)

Nola responded that they operate two crushing plants, each crushing approximately 15 000 tons of sunflower seed per month. Sunflower husk is a by-product of the process and currently Nola uses husk to replace coal as a fuel for their steam boilers. The balance of the husk is sold to chicken farmers who use it as bedding for broilers (which was one of our suggestions) In the production process one always has waste product, especially in August with all the wind. Husk being a very light product results in getting at least two loads of off-fall per plant per month. The off-fall product often mixes with foreign objects like stones - making it unfit for use in their boilers. Quite often the waste product becomes wet, also therefore making it unfit as bedding for broilers. Nola thanked us for bringing this to their attention, they will immediately source a company manufacturing compost (another of our ideas) to accommodate off-fall product in future.



Albert's Farm Do It Day

The first two people arrived at 09:30, by 10:00 there were 3 and by 10:30 7, and then there were 8 and one local resident who came to help for about an hour. A lady called Adri had called to say that she could not make it because she had to go to work. The other 28 people never arrived and no phone calls were received.

However, the super team that we had worked like Trojans and were such very special super stars!!! They saved the day and did as much as possible... sadly, 8 people can only do so much – we never got to West Street or Carel Venter Park.

A HUGE and very GRATEFUL thank you to:

Lance and Nikita Coetzee, Sam Marokane and Ronny Kubayi from Old Mutual, Ian, Martina, Renier and Bertu from Creative Licence

THANK YOU PIKITUP!!!!!! You are AWESOME!!!

Thorntree Conservancy Annual Country Fair

The 7th Annual Fair was again hosted by Thorntree Conservancy, and for the 3rd year in a row the Walkerville Showgrounds was their chosen venue.

Several days of rain ensured the grounds were looking their very best – clear air, luscious green grass and that fresh country smell – just what you need to attract thousands of visitors for a day out in the country side!

Add to that, lots and lots of stalls selling all types of handcrafted items. From jams and sauces to hobby requisites, Christmas decorations, books, paintings, plants ... the list was extensive. The main hall was choc-a-bloc with really up-market products – exquisitely decorated hand made candles, hand crafted Christmas decorations imported from the Philippines. All conservancy member's favourite book supplier – Adventures with Nature – were there to tempt us with delightful books on birds, spiders, snakes, frogs and every other nature subject you could think off.

Keep the children happy and entertained, and you keep Mom and Dad happy works every time! Pony rides, face painting, displays, art exhibition and a safe environment ensured there were lots to keep them busy.

The Fair is well supported by a number of environmental exhibits which are always popular with the public.

The usual "creepy crawlies" were there to enthrall and delight onlookers. Three metre long pythons started the morning very 'chilled' but as soon as they warmed up in the morning sun they were as curious as everyone else to see what the Fair had to offer, and their handler had to keep a sharp eye on the two of them. Spiders the size of your hand with huge beady eyes had Moms and little children scuttling past as quickly as they could.

Thorntree Conservancy's macabre display of the damage caused by trapping, speeding motorists and litter sends a hard hitting message - we need to be alert and protect our environment and everything that lives in it!

The Drumblade Conservancy focused on "Recycle, Re-use and Reduce" and had all sorts of practical items on sale. Candle holders made from tin cans, fire beaters made from black wattle and old fire hose reels, owl boxes made from wooden pallets. Not only does this reduce the amount of litter going to our rubbish dumps, it also creates employment opportunities for local residents.

The Tree Society also used photos to show the damage that old fences cause. Animals entangled in old fencing, owls caught on barb wire and wildlife unable to move around an area because their paths are blocked by fences. Their practical solution was to replace those fences with compact thorny hedges which offer shelter to our wildlife and grow into windbreaks as well!

The Department of Water Affairs was on hand with practical advice and booklets to assist landowners to protect their wetlands and natural waterways. Removing alien vegetation and rehabilitating the land is a very important step to ensure water supplies for future generations.

By late afternoon the grounds were full of people enjoying the sunshine, relaxing under the trees and listening to the music. The food and refreshment stalls were almost sold out. A handful of the more adventurous were still trying to conquer the mechanical bull. Screams of delight (or was that terror) emanated from the bungee jump and the camels slowly sauntered past, carrying another load passengers.

Another perfect day was drawing to a close in Walkerville. We look forward to welcoming you all back again next year.



Klipriviersberg Birding – Creating a Birding Atlas for the area

Thanks to everyone for participating in our first KNR/ atlas Birding BIG Day. Here are some stats:

Our KNR pentad list was 111 – this is the highest (known) day record for our area. New species – always exciting - Philip and team added Common Swift to the list which was seen in the reserve. Andy and I were happy to add White-browed Sparrow-weaver, at least 3 individuals were seen at the park adjoining the Kibler Spar parking, while we were devouring our pies!

Andy and I went on to atlas the area south of the Klipriver and were able to add another 5 species (Mountain Wheatear, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, SA Cliff Swallow, White-winged Widowbird and Red-capped Lark) to the overall list. While driving home Andy spotted a Reed Cormorant (back in our pentad) and so we added that to our list.

Overall tally was 117 - not too shabby a list at all.

Conservancy and Stewardship Association



Cullinan – Joan Du Toit sent in this worrying article

Honeybees Face Towering Threat From Cell Phones

Posted by: [Dr. Mercola](#)

November 07 2009

Studies have brought out evidence to support the theory of colony collapse disorder (CCD) among honeybees due to bioactive microwave radiation from cell phones and their relay towers.

Recent experiments have found that worker bees fail to return to their hives when their navigation skills are interfered by the mobile microwaves. Cell phones were placed near beehives. These hives collapsed totally in 5 to 10 days, with the worker bees failing to return to their homes.

The radiation also causes damage to the nervous system of the bee and it becomes unable to fly.

The parasites, wildlife and other bees that normally raid the honey and pollen left behind when a colony dies, refuse to go anywhere near the abandoned hives.

The phenomenon of CCD and resultant crop loss were first noticed in the U.S. several years ago, but it had spread to most European countries by 2007.

Renosterspruit – Recycling at its “best”

Bake a beer bottle

Tatz Junction on the R511 has a novel way of dealing with the pub's stream of empty bottles. They're baked. The results are glass dishes in different shapes and various beer bottle colours! Practical, sturdy and quite ornamental.

This unique recycling effort was the brainchild of Tatz owner, Oliver Reprich. “We inherited two kilns,” he said, “and decided to experiment with the bottles instead of just discarding them.” The bottles are simply packed side by side on a shaped container, heated to high temperatures and left to cool for 24 hours. The glass melts, fusing the bottles together. And voilà! - an unusual and very useful dish for display or for serving food.

Bongani Khoza, who makes the plates, is very proud of his handiwork. “I can make many different shapes,” he says. “We are not wasting the bottles anymore and that is good.” The plates are sold next to the restaurant and according to Bongani they sell “very fast”.

Conservancy and Stewardship Association

Please send us your news and notices of events for inclusion in “*Ear to the Ground*”. This e-newsletter goes to all the Gauteng conservancies and to a long list of “friends of conservancies” plus other interested people. The list grows by the day. If you would like to contact any of the conservancies or people mentioned in this “Ear”, let us know.

Visit the Enviropaedia's new website www.eco-logicallyliving.com The website provides insights into “ecological thinking” and is filled with practical information and tips on how we can each contribute to protecting earth's eco-systems and preserving our own future quality of living.