



Members' Newsletter August 2008

Message from the Chairperson

Your new committee has already had two meetings, and its members have been hard at work on various matters including game capturing, firebreaks and defining an appropriate legal framework for the Conservancy. This newsletter updates you on some of these issues. Invoices for the current financial year have been distributed to everyone, and we urge you to please pay your dues at your earliest convenience. Many thanks to those who have already been prompt with their payments – you set an excellent example!

We plan to have some events in the Conservancy in the next few months that will give you all an opportunity to get involved. A Conservancy clean-up day is being scheduled, as well as a “walk-and-talk” on the geology of the area. More details will follow soon.

Jane

Contact details

In case you need to contact any of the committee members, their portfolios and contact details are as follows:

Jane: Chair/Communications

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Heinrich: Deputy chair/Game/Business form

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Joe: Game/Fires

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Hennie: Fires/Game/Security

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Franso: Business form

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Raymond: Ecology

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Flip: Fires/Game/Security

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Mark: Game

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Derek: Website

dsabson@gmail.com

Liz: Secretary

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Please note that Jane will be overseas from August 16-25th. In her absence please contact Heinrich as Deputy Chairman or one of the other committee members for matters that fall within their specific remit.

The next Committee meeting will take place on 2nd September at 18:30h at Flip Marx's lapa, Plot 70, Klipkop. All are encouraged to attend as we will be going through the draft Constitution for the Conservancy in detail.

Firebreaks

The firebreaks are almost finished. There have been suggestions that we should do some block burning of areas with old grass, but it was decided not to do this while we are still overstocked with game.

Security

There has been a lot of fence cutting recently. A gang of armed robbers attacked a property on the other side of Lynnwood Road. Please, be vigilant! If you notice anything please inform Hennie or Flip who handle the security portfolio.

Game

We still need to reduce the number of animals in the Conservancy, especially the Wildebeest. One option that is being explored is to drive the animals into the Eastern section of the Conservancy (Adams/Marx properties) where they can be captured in a smaller area by professionals. The fence between the Kieser and Adams properties has only been partially opened up, and could easily be closed again on a temporary basis. We will let you know how the plans are progressing.

Website

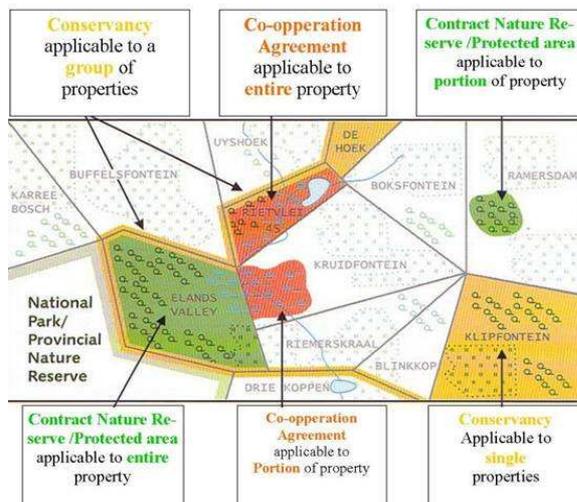
We are busy doing a complete revision of the Conservancy website. We would like to include some more photos of the Conservancy, as well as the animals, birds, insects, reptiles etc. If you have any interesting photos for inclusion, please send them to dsabson@gmail.com. Your name will be credited on the website.



News from around the Conservancy

Did you know that we are affiliated to the Gauteng Conservancy Association (GCA)? The GCA has gained agreement with various government departments on some new models for stewardship of natural areas. GDACE¹ is currently finalizing a stewardship programme proposal for Gauteng. A variety of options are possible, ranging from the Conservancy as we know it, to more stringent models for conservation. The Conservancy model has very few limitations on land use, provided that the area retains its natural character, but for this reason is not regarded as a good model if the land contains rare or endangered habitats.

To take account of the new models, the GCA plans to change its name to GCSA (Gauteng Conservancy/Stewardship Association).



Did you know?

We are now well past the shortest day of the year and Spring is on its way. But the days are lengthening faster in the evenings than in the mornings.

June 21st: 6.53am, Sunset 5.25pm
(shortest day)

Aug 12th: Sunrise 6.38am, Sunset 5.47pm
15 minutes longer in the morning, 22 minutes longer in the evening!

¹ GDACE is the Gauteng Department for Agriculture, Conservation and the Environment

Nature news

In last month's newsletter we discussed how some plants get through the Winter months. This month's article is about how some animals get through the cold dry period.

One of the common animal residents of our Conservancy is the dassie, or rock hyrax (*Procavia capensis*). There are several colonies of dassies in the Conservancy – one of the biggest is at the back of the Absons' house where the dassies can be seen, young ones perching on their mother's backs to warm up in the morning!

The dassie is independent of water as long as it can eat sufficient green or succulent vegetation, otherwise it has to drink. Dassies can concentrate urea and electrolytes and excrete large amounts of undissolved calcium carbonate. The crystallized calcium carbonate forms white deposits on the rock surfaces. These crystals, known as "dassie piss" were believed to have medicinal properties and



were used by both Africans and Europeans.

Dassies have a poor ability to regulate their body temperature and a low metabolic rate. They can let their body temperature drop by up to 3°C to conserve energy. They become active after sunrise and usually bask in the sun for some time before moving off to feed. During cooler periods and at night they often huddle together to keep each other warm. Dassies spend a lot of time crouching motionless on rocks and seemingly staring directly into the sun. This is important for survival as birds of prey often attack directly out of the sun. The dassie has a special membrane that shades the pupil of the eye.

We should all do our best to ensure the survival of these engaging creatures!