

Message from the Chairperson

We are grateful to all of you who sent us good wishes after the loss of our three dogs due to poisoning. It is not pleasant to see animals die in this way, and the callousness of the people concerned is especially difficult to deal with. The poisoned meat could just as easily be swallowed by a child. Please, continue to be on your guard and let's immediately share information when further intrusions occur in the Conservancy, thereby contributing to each other's safety.

Jane

Conservancy dues

Invoices (and reminders!) have been sent to you all. Please try to keep your contributions up to date. The conservancy cannot function effectively without you!

Giraffes and other animals

The three giraffes now seem to be settling in and have been seen in various places around the Conservancy. The next crop of youngsters from our various game species should be arriving on the scene soon! A newborn duiker was sighted a day or two ago.

Conservancy awards

Following on from our Biodiversity award received from the Gauteng Conservancy Association, we have been nominated for an award by the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, in respect of the rehabilitation work done in the Conservancy. Thanks go to Raymond for showing the government officials around – we'll just have to wait and see if we actually get an award! The other conservancies in the running are Elandsvlei, Klipkop, Haartebeesfontein, Gecko, Wilger Veld & Youth Conservation Club and Smuts Farm.

Watercrest

The owners of Watercrest (on Lynnwood Road) have shown interest in joining the conservancy. They have applied for extended business rights and also sub division into three 8 Ha properties. This process started about two years ago and is near completion. They have asked about the possibility of including one or two of the "new" properties into the Conservancy. Our current feeling is that there is no immediate benefit to us to include small properties particularly where the intention may be to sell the property once it is inside the Conservancy.

Wattle and other invasive plants

To those of you who still have extensive stands of wattle on your properties – please, try to get them removed! There are people who will pay for the wood and come and cut it for you. Wattle is a declared invader plant and does not belong here.

Rubbish

The mess in the picture below was recently photographed by Angelique Kieser. It seems the younger generation is showing a greater sense of responsibility than some of their elders! Please, we rely on all of you to get your rubbish taken to the dump (preferably), but failing that to at least bury it properly.



Nature News – The Pollinators

Already Spring blossoms have appeared on some of our trees, particularly the Coral tree (*Erythrina lysistemon*), the wild pear (*Dombeya rotundifolia*) and the wild elder (*Nuxia congesta*), as new life returns to the veld. The red-leafed rock fig is bringing colour to the rocky slopes.

Most of us pay little attention to the species that pollinate our flowers, which include bees, wasps, flies, beetles, moths, birds, bats, rodents and the wind. Even among the bees a plant has many options, since there are at

least two thousand bee species in sub-Saharan Africa, and about half of these occur in southern Africa.



Honey bees are the most well known pollinators



Butterflies can also act as pollinators

There is a close relationship between a plant and its pollinators. The colour and shape of the flower, its scent, nectar composition and taste are all designed to attract the right pollinator.



The coral tree flowers are designed to attract sunbirds

Plants that are pollinated by birds such as sunbirds need to produce a tasty and nutritious nectar. In the case of the coral tree, the nectar is sufficiently attractive that a sunbird will protect its food territory aggressively.

Fig species, including our red-leafed rock fig, *Ficus ingens*, each rely on a single specialized species of fig wasp for pollination. In turn, the wasp relies on the fig species for survival. A female wasp enters a ripe fig through the small hole at its tip. Once inside, she deliberately pollinates the female flowers inside the fig with pollen that she has collected in special pouches. She then lays an egg in some, but never all, of the pollinated flowers (an evolutionary strategy to make sure that some of the seeds will ripen undamaged). Here the larvae feed on the developing flower ovules. The male wasps emerge first. They are wingless and never leave the fig, but search for galls containing female wasps. After mating they die. The newly emerged female wasps then collect some pollen from the male flowers, creep out of the fig and fly off in search of another fig tree of the same species in which to lay their eggs (drawn by chemical cues produced by figs at the correct stage of development)¹.



Rock fig showing the small holes in the fruit where the wasps enter. Unusually, the flowers are inside the fruit.

¹ Information taken from the book *South African Wild Flowers: Jewels of the Veld* by John Manning and Colin Paterson-Jones.