



WESSA at Work

July
2011



Mumsie Gumede (WESSA CEO) celebrates WESSA's 85th birthday with members young and old at Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve.

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WESSA IN ACTION!

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. (Margaret Mead)

The above quote captures so much of what WESSA is about... many small groups of thoughtful and committed people shaping a different future by caring for the Earth. WESSA at Work is both an opportunity and an invitation for these many small groups to share what they are doing, and in so doing to coalesce into a powerful national movement that literally is changing the world.

WESSA at Work is a monthly newsletter that is distributed to WESSA staff, members and partners. It is an important communication and mobilisation tool - we encourage you to send the link on to anybody that you know who does or should have an interest in environmental issues and positive action in South Africa and beyond.

This month has been characterised by the power of partnerships and collaborative action both within and beyond WESSA. Internally, the meeting with members in the Western Cape and the vibrant annual members meeting in the Northern Cape, have been opportunities for strengthening the links between staff and members. Similarly a national strategic session that brought education and conservation staff together provided the chance to link the many different projects that WESSA implements in South Africa.

Externally, the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) has recognised WESSA as an Institute of Sectoral or Occupational Excellence (ISOE) and agreed to invest R1million in enhancing WESSA's capacity to deliver environmental capacity building to local governments throughout South Africa. At the same, USAID and WESSA have hosted a number of environmental project implementers including the WESSA Stepping up to Sustainability project that has been given R13 million over the next three years. This project is designed to promote public engagement with sustainable technologies and build

environmental capacity in civil society, local government and business.

It is this constant, joint, innovative, forward thinking and seeking practical solutions that personifies the work of WESSA. In July, WESSA was invited to participate in the The Re-imagining Forum which consisted of a series of lectures, workshops, exhibitions, performances and crafts that explore collective understandings of contemporary environmental concerns and creative practice in sustainability. The forum was part of the Grahamstown National Arts Festival. An open lecture by WESSA CEO, Mumsie Gumede, focused on drawing inspiration from the successes of WESSA pioneers in order to face the current realities leading to re-imagining and re-imagining (reshaping) our country's future.

Most importantly however, hundreds of WESSA members throughout South Africa have, through the WESSA Regions, Branches, Friends Groups as well as individual actions, added their voices and actions to conservation in South Africa. In this issue of WESSA at Work, a few of these groups share what they have been doing.

It is our hope that WESSA at Work will provide a platform to make links between the many initiatives that staff, members and other partners are engaged in. By combining these initiatives under the banner of a truly national, membership based environmental organisation, the small groups of thoughtful committed citizens come together with a force that is changing the world for the better for the children of all species for all time.

Thank you for your support and commitment.

Mumsie and Mike



Mumsie Gumede (WESSA CEO) and Mike Ward (WESSA COO).

Special dates in August:

9 August:
National Women's Day

12 August:
International Youth Day



Newsflash

- WESSA Share-Net wins the first ever “Green Office Week Competition”, held in South Africa!

Some very exciting news from the WESSA Share-Net team – we recently won the 2011 Europcar Green Office Week Competition, which looks for and rewards green offices with novel eco practices. We shared ‘our story’ of reducing our carbon emissions by using



Tsepang Khena, Clare Peddie, Hazel Lake, Ernest Khena (all from WESSA Share-Net), happily receiving a R25 000 cheque from CEO of Europcar Southern Africa, Dawn Nathan-Jones.

four solar panels to run our printers and book collator machines; we use parabolic solar cookers to prepare lunches and suppers; we use hot water bottles and blankets in winter and dress appropriately so air-conditioners and heaters are not necessary during the summer and winter months; and we have started fitting our offices with skylights to reduce the use of electrical lighting by making use of natural light. We were absolutely thrilled when we received the news that we had won! One of the reasons the judges liked our entry was because, even though we were up against big corporate organisations who had spent a lot of money on greening their offices and businesses (there were 294 entrants in this year’s competition!), we had done small things that didn’t require a huge budget and most people could also do them. We will use the R25 000 prize money to continue greening our offices.

The Green Office Week Competition, held in South Africa for the first time this year, is a platform to market green products and services and a recognition of those companies and services who are finding innovative ways of reducing their impact on the environment. Europcar, who sponsor the Green Office Week, have a number of innovative ‘green’ initiatives in their company. The one that really impressed us was their water recycling plants which have been installed at all depots. These plants provide a simple, sustainable and environmentally responsible solution for the recovery and cleaning of wash-bay water, resulting in a dramatic reduction in water consumption. The “e-washa” system focuses on recycling water through rain harvesting and utilises a natural biological process that breaks down soap and grease in used wash-bay water. Well done, Europcar!

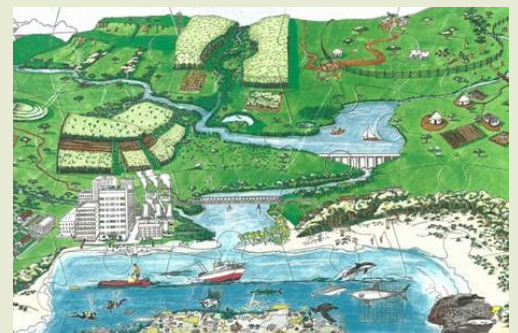


Congratulations to Gill Broughton (now Graaf), WESSA’s Group Financial Manager, who got married to John Graaf on the 28th of June at an intimate ceremony at the Kobb Inn on the Wild coast. The couple took everyone by surprise, slipping away for a ‘group holiday’ and coming back married, after organising the wedding in just one week! Best wishes to the two of you.

New from WESSA Share-Net

All of us can ‘Build a Better World’!

In celebration of WESSA 85th birthday year (1926-2011), and two important days coming up in August (National Women’s Day on 9 August and International Youth Day on 12 August), WESSA Share-Net is offering all FOUR Enviro Picture Building Puzzles in the ‘Build a Better World’ series (Madlusuthe’s Farm, Urban Jungle, Catchments to Coasts, and Reserves and Neighbours) for R100!! (usual price is R154 for four puzzles).



The ‘Build a Better World’ Puzzles are unusual jigsaw puzzles. The pieces do not match the base picture. This is for a specific reason. The idea is to build a better world over the scene that shows some common environmental problems.

To order your pack 4 puzzles ar R100 (incl. postage), please contact Hazel at WESSA Share-Net on 033 330 3931 x 124 or email hazel@wessa.co.za.

Why not consider buying a pack for yourself or your school and another one for an under-resourced school? There are many schools across South Africa who would really benefit from a gift of environmental resource puzzles and you could either give the four puzzles to the school of your choice or request that we choose a deserving school for you and post the four puzzles onto them. Contact Hazel (hazel@wessa.co.za) if you would like to be part of this exciting and caring initiative.

News from Eco-Schools

• International Flag and Special Merit Eco-Schools visit Bushpigs Outdoor Education Centre

At the 2010 Eco Schools awards in Polokwane in February this year, International flag and Special Merit winners were presented with a voucher from Bush Pigs Outdoor Education Centre for a two day sponsored stay at the Centre in June 2011 for one educator and five representatives from each school. Seven Schools with eager children and educators arrived on the 13th of June and five schools arrived on the 15th. The first seven schools were represented by: Matlou Memorial, Sekanekamoyi (Mokamole), Mpepula, Kgomoshidkwena, Matholo Primary, Mmbara Primary, and Marken Primary.



A wormery in a converted bath tub!

The second group that arrived on the 15th was represented by: Palaborwa Foundation, Masesane Baloyi Primary, Chuckekani Primary, Rethusitswe Primary and St Patrick Primary. The number of children and educators totaled to 64 learners, and 16 teachers from as far as Sibasa and Lephalale. Unfortunately, one of the schools could not attend due to the public holiday on the 16th of June. The learners enjoyed two energetic days of activities, where the children were engaged in meaningful, yet fun games with strong environmental messages. Learners shared with us their School Eco-code and some outstanding poetry. There were large amounts of fun and laughter with Chief Chocolate and the Educators.

The entire week was most beneficial to everyone who attended and Bush Pigs looks forward to hosting workshops for Eco-Schools in the near future. Our thanks go out to all the schools who made a donation towards planting a tree in the arboriterium. A plaque with the sponsoring school's name and the tree name will be placed at each tree. Well done to the schools and keep your Flags flying!

• Recycled Fashion Show in Limpopo

Learners from PEPPS College in Polokwane took to the catwalk in ball gowns, casual and business attire all made from recycled materials and designed by learners. Mealie meal bags were transformed into a two in one outfit where the outer skirt could be removed to reveal a body hugging mini. Fascinators (those strange-looking mini hats that ladies wore at the last British Royal wedding) were made and worn very stylishly. A can cut open as a flower, a paper mache top hat a sawn off coke bottle were all saved from the rubbish heap and made into something beautiful.



• Eco-Schools Conference

Limpopo province hosted educators and partners from Gauteng, North West and Mpumalanga at the 'Partners for our planet' Eco-Schools Annual Conference during the June/July school holidays. Organising the conference was a joint effort between the WESSA Northern Areas office (Liezl van Lingen and Zanele Khumalo) and the Limpopo Eco-Schools team scattered throughout the province. Emails flew between Limpopo, Gauteng, KZN and Mpumalanga to get everyone's inputs for a rigorous and informative programme. Joe Matimba of Food and Trees for Africa heartily thanked the organisers and said "The conference was one of the most fruitful conferences I ever had attended in South Africa". Bookings had to be closed before the event as the response had been greater than anticipated with 152 teachers and Eco-



Schools supporters attending. Talks ranged from the latest news from the Department of Education to including edible insects in lessons and the role of Ancient sunlight in our lives today. PPC cement sponsored custom made mugs for the event so that the use of bottled water or disposable cups was not needed. The theme 'Partners for our Planet' recognized that we need to collaborate with other schools, with local and provincial authorities and with the private sector to make a better future for all a reality. The Department of Environmental Affairs and De Beers sponsored the event while Tzaneen Country Lodge did not charge for the venue.

• ASPnet Conference

On the 21st of July the Eco-Schools team assisted the Department of Basic Education with the facilitation of its National ASPnet workshop held in Pretoria. The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) is an international network of schools committed to the promotion of UNESCO's ideal of world peace and international understanding. Established in 1953, the network involves, to date, some 7000 schools and other education institutions in 175 countries. The DBE Directorate: Multilateral Affairs (formerly UNESCO) first piloted the ASPnet in 1998, in a cluster of 5 schools in Gauteng and North West. To date it involves 50 high schools in all 9 provinces. 50 educators, some of which were school principals, attended the workshop and were introduced to the Eco-Schools programme and to projects done by Eco-Schools that promote ESD principles and which align closely to the goals of this UNESCO project.



News from the Regions

Farewell for Justine and Kim

This month the Northern Areas Region said farewell to another member of staff, Justine Bolton. A small farewell party was held at the Northern Areas offices for Justine and Kim Webb, who has also left WESSA, as we wished them good luck in their future ventures. The theme was crazy hats and some staff members rose to the occasion, even showing the multi-use of pot warmers.



Presentation at Alberton

John Wesson recently did a presentation on WESSA, *Conservation and Gardening for Wildlife* for the Southern Johannesburg Garden Club in Alberton. A lot of interest was shown, especially in Gardening for Wildlife (that is, structures like Owl boxes, feeders and various suitable plants for birds, animals and butterflies).



Outing into the Magaliesberg

On Sunday 17 July John Wesson hosted and led an outing into the Magaliesberg for the Tree Society of South Africa. There was great excitement at the size of some of the trees like Quinine, Red Leaved Figs and Common Wild Figs. This particular Red leaved Fig, pictured left, is possibly one of tallest of the species recorded in South Africa.

Outing into the Magaliesberg

The WESSA Northern Areas Region Co-Ordinated Water Bird Count took place on the Hartbeespoort Dam and surrounding wetlands and rivers on Saturday 23 July.

Seven teams took part, once again thoroughly covering the area by boat, vehicle and on foot. Despite the very cold, almost pre-dawn start, a number of interesting birds were recorded, although numbers were down on last winters count. There was a dramatic increase in birds like Caspian Tern (65) and Little Grebe (over 200), while Cattle Egrets numbers were extremely low. Now that the 6th count has been completed one will be able to see how the various seasons and conditions affect the birds.

The dam was looking very clear with only a few patches of water Hyacinth on the edges, while the Kariba Weed seems to have been completely removed by DWA from a small river entering the Crocodile River in Broederstroom to the South of the Dam.

These type of counts will be important nationally in time to come as one starts seeing the effects of climate change.

Pictured here is the Green Team led by John Wesson of WESSA Northern Areas, who organizes the event twice yearly, heading out at sun rise from one of the estates surrounding the dam. The CWAC project is managed by the Animal Demography Unit of the University of Cape Town.



Farewell to Sharon



Sharon Bosma moved on from her position as Regional Manager at the end of June after three years of committed service to WESSA Western Cape. Sharon had served on the regional committee for a number of years and chaired the group before taking up position at the helm. She led the regional office through a period of transition, helping it to become part of a nationally united "One WESSA" organisation, working with all involved to put in place new administrative and financial procedures and systems to streamline operations. She put effort into maintaining a strong team of conservation, education, marketing and support personnel in the region during her tenure. The staff is grateful for her support and they join WESSA COO, Mike Ward, in thanking her for the contribution to the organisation and to the Western Cape Region in particular. Sharon is looking forward to pursuing her love for the environment and her holistic approach to conservation of all species on a more practical level and we wish her all the best for the future.

Sustainable Livelihoods Trust now in operation

Represented by Patrick Dowling WESSA has joined Abalimi Bezekhaya, the Bicycle Empowerment Network and Mannenberg Self Help to form the Sustainable Livelihoods Trust. The Trust entity enables this coalition of NGOs to be beneficiaries of donations and bequests that can help fund small businesses and other enterprises that will operate according to responsible social and environmental guidelines. Setting up the trust was a long and arduous process made possible by the generous help of an American lawyer who saw patiently to the many legal and banking requirements. NGO partnerships are sometimes tense because of funding rivalry but we hope that the Trust vehicle will encourage real trust and cooperation in a much needed sector. The government talks about a million green jobs. Perhaps the Sustainable Livelihoods Trust can add to this number.

Westlake Wetland rehabilitation project completed

The Westlake Wetland rehabilitation project was recently completed by Table Mountain Fund Intern Phindile Mangwana and Brett Sutherland – a Rhodes University Environmental Science student on a short internship with WESSA – under the guidance of Western Cape Funded Projects Manager Mandy Noffke.

The aim of the Westlake Wetland Rehabilitation Project, made possible through the sub council's Grant in Aid ward allocation, was aimed at improving the wetland while simultaneously involving the public by providing economic relief through labour employment and creating public awareness of the importance of wetlands. The project applied a holistic approach in the rehabilitation of the Westlake wetland allowing for a sustainable environment for the wetland to improve. The approach encompassed a number of dimensions including economic, social, environment and political to obtain the full benefits of the project.

50 diverse trees were planted, of which 10 were kindly donated by Just Trees. The project also involved the removal of litter from the wetland and the removal of alien invasive vegetation. As with any project there were a number of challenges that needed to be identified and resolved. Our first challenge concerned the goats owned by a community member which were eating the recently planted trees.

Another challenge involved dealing with sewage that was leaking from a pipe within the wetland, affecting the quality of the water and as such the health of the wetland. We were also faced with a prominent member in the community who refused to let us cut down an alien plant species (category 3). The final challenge involved the pollution of the river upstream from the nearby shopping centre. Thankfully, due to the commitment from the team, Councillor Denis Joseph and various other stakeholders, the first two of these challenges have been resolved. WESSA intends to follow up on the last two challenges. In spite of these challenges, the project has successfully met all its objectives and there has been considerable buy in from the local Westlake Village community, with many residents having voluntarily participated in the project. Westlake Primary School has also expressed great interest in getting involved in the project and will be registering on WESSA's Eco-Schools programme before the end of the year.



The Climate Change Discussions are underway

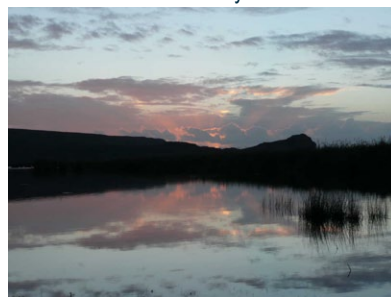
The WESSA-facilitated series of four Discussions around Climate Change has 'kicked off' in the Western Cape with the first discussion - on Energy - having taken place on Saturday at a lively, joint seminar with the Greater Cape Town Civic Alliance. Approximately 80 interested people participated and excellent presentations were given by the City of Cape Town's Sheryl Ozinsky (Electricity Savings and Climate Smart Campaigns) and Hilton Trollip (principle in City's Energy and Climate Change Branch) on Cape Town's Energy and Climate Change Policy; Kobus Carstens (solar and renewable energy consultant) on Renewable Energy; and Jeremy Wakeford (Association for the Study of Peak Oil in SA) on Peak Oil. The last item on the programme was a panel discussion on Nuclear Energy which resulted in a lot of 'hot air' and some healthy debate!

The second Discussion – on Water - will take place on Tuesday 2 August from 4pm – 6pm, with Waste and Biodiversity being covered on 23 and 30 August respectively. For more information on the discussions visit www.wessa.org.za/WCEvents.htm

Shocking development: Prospecting rights granted at Verlorenvlei

The 1 July decision by the Department of Mineral Resources to grant Bongani Minerals prospecting rights in the Mouton's Hoek Valley could have dire consequences for all in the Verlorenvlei catchment. Situated in the West Coast District Municipality and feeding into the sea at Elands Bay, the extensive estuarine wetland system of Verlorenvlei is registered as a Ramsar site and an Important Bird Area yet is afforded little environmental protection. The Verlorenvlei Coalition and WESSA are shocked at this decision and will continue to resist this process. This is a rich agricultural area and many farmers and their labourers will be displaced should mining go ahead. Mining in Mouton's Hoek is a serious threat to precious water resources (the valley provides 60% of the ecologically-sensitive vlei's water), tourism and biodiversity. WESSA has been working with the Verlorenvlei Coalition since its inception in 2008 and are now actively pursuing options for a more proactive approach to land-use management in the area.

To read more about and to join the Verlorenvlei Coalition - a group of over 1550 individuals and 48 organisations opposing the proposed mining operation – visit www.verlorenvlei.co.za



85th Anniversary Celebration in the Western Cape

You are warmly invited to join WESSA Western Cape for a special evening in celebration of WESSA's 85th Anniversary:

Thursday 18 August, 6.00 for 6.30pm, in the Silver Tree Restaurant at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town

Our guest speaker Braam Malherbe - extreme adventurer, conservationist, 50/50 presenter and Life Member of WESSA - will present an inspiring talk entitled "Re-connect with the wilderness, both without and within".

Local artist Bowen Boshier will be exhibiting a selection of his exquisite wildlife art and 50% of the proceeds from the sale of his works on the evening will be donated to WESSA's Rhino Fund. The programme for the evening will also feature the presentation of our annual Regional WESSA Awards as well as an abridged Annual General Meeting with a National and Regional report back. A light finger dinner will be served, with wines generously sponsored by Vondeling Wines.

Please RSVP by Wednesday 10 August on 021 701 1397 or admin@wessa.co.za
WESSA Members free; non members welcome at R120 per person.

Please visit www.wessa.org.za/WCEvents.htm to view full details of the event, as well as a preview of Bowen Boshier's artwork.

Southern Cape Eco-Schools wild about birds *Lorraine McGibbon*

The highlight of the second school term for Southern Cape Eco-Schools was the celebration of National Bird Week. Thanks to BirdLife SA's donation of R1000, we were able to supply Eco-Schools with posters of the southern Cape migrant birds. Accompanied by our local expert, Peter Ginn, who developed the poster, we visited several schools in George, spreading the message of healthy habitats for birds.

Farm children were excited to escape the confines of the classroom to walk about the veld and down to the river looking for birds. Of great interest was the names the farm children had for the different birds and the meanings attached to these names. We discovered that the bokmakerie is locally known as the kokowiet or the 'bird that calls the police'! Outings like these are so beneficial to learners who see their home area in a new light as they discover different birds and learn about their habitat and the threats to this habitat. For the teachers too it is an opportunity to link topics to several subjects and to use the teachable moments which unexpectedly present themselves. Back in the classroom, the learners were very eager to use the Roberts Birds of Southern Africa and the Sasol Afrikaans bird guide. Funding from Coca Cola Fortune and Eden District Municipality enabled me to provide the teachers with the Afrikaans Wild about Birds pack. This resource provides many opportunities for teachers to engage with the learners using the subject of birds.



Fracking Updates *Junaid Francis, CER (Centre for Environmental Rights)*

On the 29 April 2011, the Minister of Mineral Resources, Ms Susan Shabangu, declared that a moratorium had been invoked on shale gas extraction. According to her media statement, the Department will not accept any new applications or process existing applications until a comprehensive feasibility study has been conducted. The Minister has put together a team of experts to look in to the implications of shale gas extraction through the controversial technique called fracking. The details of the moratorium and the study remain unclear, and the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) has requested information about:

- a. the composition of the team;
- b. the terms of reference for the study;
- c. the timeframe for the study; and
- d. whether the Minister intends publishing the research report.

The CER (in an initiative supported by WESSA) conducted a series of environmental rights workshops in the Karoo aimed at informing communities about the proposals by Shell and other companies to explore for gas in the Karoo. The workshops were held in 19 different towns and included about 100 community organisations. The trip was a resounding success as community members were engaged in debate about the positive and negative aspects of gas extraction. The workshops empowered community members by providing them with the necessary knowledge to meaningfully partake in these important decision making processes.

Prickly porcupines: a gnawing nuisance or a positive plant promoter?

Christy Bragg, UCT PhD candidate working on a four-year long project on porcupines, delivered an inspiring talk to a large, captivated audience in the WESSA Barn in July, sharing the results of her research on the positive – and negative - effects that porcupine foraging has on different Cape ecosystems, at Nieuwoudtville in the Northern Cape and in the Kalahari Desert as well as in Franschoek. Christy, otherwise known as 'the porcupine lady' has a wonderful way of delivering scientific data in a very accessible way and dispelled many myths about these prickly rodents, and highlighted some of the life skills humans can learn from them, such as their commendable fathering habits! To learn more about Christy's research visit www.porcupinequest.com

News from our Branches

Springs/Nigel Branch: Update and planned events

The Branch has just purchased a spray unit that we will use to help with 'reed management' all along the Ramsar site. Reed encroachment is severely affecting ideal habitat for waders. Reed growth is also evident in front of existing bird hides. A spray program will be drawn up and spraying should take place in early October. The Branch continues to monitor the Aurora Mine pollution and watch with disgust how untreated acid mine drainage pours into the Ramsar site, while Government seems to be 'blind and toothless'.

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|---------------------------|--|
| Sunday 31st July 2011 | CWAC Count at Marievale Bird Sanctuary
Meet in the picnic area at 07:00 |
| Saturday 13th August 2011 | WESSA Committee meeting at 08:00 at Marievale Bird Sanctuary Conference Centre, followed by Friends of Blesbokspruit work Party. |
| Sunday 28th August 2011 | Outing to Treehaven in Vereeniging. Meet at Treehaven at 09:30. |

Grahamstown Branch: The Elephant Experience

The Elephant Experience, organised by the Grahamstown branch of WESSA, between 12 and 22 May was an event to remember. The brainchild of committee member Margaret Crampton, the series of events kicked off with Mark van Wijk and Gareth Patterson's film about looking for Knysna's secretive elephants. Patterson, most famous for his work with lions alongside George Adamson in Kenya, argues that there are possibly five elephants there.



It was hoped that Patterson himself would deliver the inaugural Jack Skead Memorial Lecture (this will be an annual prestigious event both celebrating a great Eastern Cape conservationist, and showcasing WESSA). In Patterson's unfortunate absence, Professor Graham Kerley of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) delivered an excellent and provocative scientific overview of the elephant situation in Addo National Elephant Park.

This was preceded by a more literary take on elephant-human relations in Dan Wylie's inaugural lecture at Rhodes, *Elephants, Compassion, and the Largesse of Literature* – and was followed by the highlight of the series: a fully-booked two-day trip to Addo itself, with three buses conducted by knowledgeable commentators including Dr Dan Parker and Professor Roy Lubke. Some of us were treated to magnificent sightings not only of the elephants, but of buffalo, caracal and lion.

The last event was a discussion panel, featuring the two Dans, Parker and Wylie, and the botanical expertise of Dr Tony Palmer. This proved both fascinating and sobering: the problems of elephant population, genetics, and human pressures will be with us for, well, as long as there are elephants.

George Branch: Talks and Geology Tours

On a monthly basis WESSA's George branch are fortunate to avail ourselves of excellent speakers who we source locally or who come to visit the Garden Route. A classic example of "local" is Enrico Genari, a PhD scientist and co-star of National Geographic footage on the enlightening shark research ongoing at the Mossel Bay Marine Lab. His research focus is on the thermal eco-physiology of the white shark aimed at obtaining holistic insights into this apex predator's thermal niche and thermal physiological abilities, using advanced telemetry methods and anatomical dissections.

The Lab is the flagship and most established research laboratory within the Oceans Research network. His lecture gave fascinating insights into the lifestyle of the sharks and certainly removed much of our fear of these predators.

Alan Lee PhD is another "local" who gave a fascinating talk on *Wildlife of the Peruvian Amazon*. He spent two years monitoring mammals as part of a study looking at the impact of tourism on wildlife, and five years studying parrots and claylicks for his PhD in the rainforests of Tambopata. The Tambopata holds world records for the most number of birds, dragonflies and butterflies for a single site; as well as being home to many monkeys, Jaguar, Tapir and Giant Otter.

A high calibre visitor was Dr Duane P. Moser, associate research professor of the Desert Research Institute of Nevada, USA. He is a microbial and molecular ecologist focused on life in the terrestrial deep subsurface, lakes and oceans, and arid lands. His lecture on: *The Dark Planet: Explorations of Earth's Intraterrestrial Biosphere* was extraordinary, insofar as he took utter laymen through some of the methodology and results of deep mine research.

Starting in 1997, an international team of researchers endeavoured to use the mines of South Africa as windows into this deep biosphere. Coordinated by Princeton University, the Witwatersrand Deep Microbiology Project discovered microbial communities which operate in isolation over geological timescales in the complete absence of solar inputs. In every mine sampled from across the Witwatersrand Basin, at depths of greater than 2.5 km, a single bacterial species dominated - *Candidatus Desulforudis Audaxviator* or the "Bold Traveler". This is the first and only life form known to exist as a single species ecosystem and to directly utilize radiochemical reactions for growth. In the years since this paradigm-shifting discovery, close relatives of *D. Audaxviator* have been discovered in underground nuclear weapons detonation cavities in the United States and less closely-related forms are proving abundant in the marine crystalline crust.



Geology Tours: Our 3 "tame" geologists, Peter Ginn, Paul Rixom and Colin Ralston gave generously of their time, energy and knowledge and led a total of 3 full day expeditions through the geology of the Mountains of the Klein Karoo and a further 3 exploring the Coastal geology from Mossel Bay to Wilderness. With a total participation of nearly 300 individuals we count these tours amongst our greatest successes.

Wilderness Trails sponsorship(s) for young George conservation enthusiasts

The committee of the WESSA George Branch recently invited applications from young people aged 18-35 to participate in a sponsored Wilderness Trail, which is offered by the Wilderness Leadership School founded by Dr Ian Player in 1958. It was a difficult choice to make, but the selection committee selected Anien Venter, a second year Nature Conservation student at NMMU Saasveld Campus, to complete the trail. The return flight to Durban will be generously sponsored by Harvey World Travel in George. The motivation of young people in ways like this is very close to our Chairman's heart, and he has found additional sponsors (who wish to remain anonymous) to allow a second candidate to participate. Robin Fourie, matriculating from York High School this year and intends to study Conservation Ecology at Stellenbosch, also greatly impressed the selection committee. We hope Anien and Robin will thoroughly enjoy camping in the wild bush under the stars in an area where the big 5 roam freely!

WESSA Friends Groups

WESSA has over 50 active Friends Groups throughout South Africa. These are groups of volunteers that band together to conserve, rehabilitate and protect a natural area or space of special interest, and are guided by the mission statement, policies and position statements of WESSA. In this section WESSA would like to pay tribute to these groups of committed individuals who embody and encourage WESSA's mission of building public participation in caring for the Earth.

Friends of Van Staden

FOVS are a group of volunteers working at the Van Stadens Wild Flower Reserve. We meet once a month to work in the Reserve, removing alien trees as well as *Podalyria calyptata* from the Western Cape that have taken over large areas of the Reserve. We also include interesting walks so that our members can enjoy the beauty of the Reserve. Every Wednesday a group of us work in the Nursery or the Reserve and we have an Indigenous Plant Sale once a year.

Our main task these last few months has been the laying of a pipe line to bring water to the nursery, as we have been unable to use municipal water and lost a lot of our plants last year.

At our next event on Saturday the 2nd of July at 9:00, we will continue to work on the fynbos trail - a short trail in front of the flowerhouse which leads past the pond and through the many Protea species there. We want to lay out the path and decide on suitable locations to do some more planting.

Anyone who would like to join us is very welcome and can contact Jenny on 0843279702 or eldridge.j@vodamail.co.za.



Friends of Nylsvlei

The team spirit is at an all time high since Friends of Nylsvlei staff worked so hard together for 3 weeks burning firebreaks at the Reserve. Some 41km was achieved and everyone is very proud of themselves. The reserve now has a good working relationship with 'Working for Fire' who has committed to helping with block burns in a few months time. At present it does seem that it may not be possible to burn the vlei areas as there is no way to stop the fire. We hope and pray that at least one section dries out enough to enable a quick burn.

We are thrilled to announce that Trevor Cowie has accepted the nomination to become our Chairman and Dr Salomon Joubert to be our Vice Chairman. We look forward to working with both and admire Dr Salomon for taking on a new challenge as he turns 70! We welcome Warren Jordaan and family to Friends of Nylsvley and thank all the Friends that have renewed their membership - we have sent your receipt and lovely new bookmark. May we inform you that, as decided at the AGM, the family membership will increase to R250 from 1 January 2012. R12 345.00 was raised in our sun pump, measurements were due to be carried out this week and at the same time the Stemmers water point pump is to be installed.

Brian Frank apologises but is unable to host the work party, planned for 5-9 August on his farm *Sandfields and Forests*. Instead, we are thrilled to announce that we will be going to the Farm Barrowdale, just 7 km off the R101 between Modimolle and Mookgophong, along the Groenfontein Road (back of Sable Valley) the following weekend (12-14 August). John and Jean Barrow are offering us accommodation in their bush camp. This includes a full kitchen, lapa, swimming pool, 3 bedrooms with double beds and a room with 4 bunk beds and two more double beds in another cottage just over the river. Anyone wishing to sleep in their own tent is welcome. As usual, the work party will be self catering and please plan to bring a picnic lunch for the Saturday as the working area (follow up on wattle) is quite a way from base. John just loves showing visitors round his 3000ha farm as it has some very beautiful spots and views. We will send a tool list and directions when you book.

Feral cats have an embarrassment around the Nylsvley campus for sometime. The local SPCA was called in and removed 11. We are working together with the staff to eliminate attracting cats to dustbins etc. An organisation called Recycling Solutions has also been invited to give advice on rubbish control.

Friends of Doringkloof Spruit

In 2008 a group of residents in Doringkloof, Centurion, started a Friends group with the idea of taking ownership of the spruit that runs through our suburb. It was in a poor state of neglect and we felt challenged to do what we could to make it into an area that would be an asset to our community.

We have seen many of our dreams coming to fruition in the past three years. We have regular monthly clean ups, ably assisted by local residents and scout members, and have planted indigenous trees to replace exotic trees that have been removed. Our local primary school will be involved with our next planting ceremony in September and, with the help of Nature Conservation, we are planning a two-day program involving the school children during that week. A previous program, held in the spruit one Saturday morning, included a talk on snakes. It was a great hit, especially with the children.



One of our great joys is to see bird life returning to the spruit and we have erected a birding platform next to a wetland area. We have also erected benches, dustbins and signboards, and are in the process of putting up fences. In all these activities we have been wonderfully encouraged and supported by Nature Conservation and we greatly appreciate their involvement with us.

Our newest project is the purchase and erection of two owl boxes for the Barn Owl and Spotted Eagle Owl. We are hoping that this will encourage new inhabitants into our spruit!

The reward for our labours is to see Doringklowers using the spruit for walks and jogging, or just enjoying nature in the midst of our busy suburb.

Friends of Liesbeek

The Friends of the Liesbeek Maintenance Project has continued with the mapping and clearing of Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) along the Liesbeek, work having started in December 2010 after the plant was identified as a Category 1 invasive alien. The team works with SANBI's Early Detection and Rapid Response unit in an attempt to eradicate this newly identified invasive plant species before it spreads into other natural systems.

Since December 2010 the locations of all Purple Loosestrife plants found on the Liesbeek have been mapped using GPS, and the plants have been measured and stems per plant counted to establish how these European invaders grow in our South African conditions.

The plants flower from spring to early summer, producing attractive sprays of purple flowers. Purple Loosestrife is a prolific seed producer, out-competing indigenous plants, producing more than two million seeds per flowering plant. Seeds can stay dormant for two years or more with an 80% survival rate. Therefore all cut plants are bagged and left to rot. Cutting, mowing, fire, water table management and other methods have been ineffective in the United States and therefore the LMP team and SANBI are investigating chemical means of control.



A big thank you to all who attended the FOL AGM on 11 May. The talk by Neil Armitage on SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) was entertaining and informative and it is encouraging to see how simple and effective methods of reducing storm water runoff can be implemented by individuals and cities. For more information on this topic read the "More on SUDS" article on our website (<http://fol.org.za>), especially in the light of ongoing problems with developers and siltation of the Liesbeek. Trevor Hughes has taken over from our outgoing chairman, Kevin Winter. Liz Wheeler is also "retiring" and FOL really appreciate all the hard work and commitment over the years. Her role is taken over by Francine Becker who can be contacted at secretary@fol.org.za. A welcome addition to the committee is veteran Louis Villiers. Our quarterly newsletter can be read on the FOL website and includes a piece on alien plants, which will be continued as a regular feature.

Friends of Loskop

In 2011 Friends of Loskop have been working extremely hard on the preservation of the Loskop Dam Nature Reserve.

Several sponsored events have taken place to raise funding for anti rhino poaching on the reserve. At present there are 19 members on the Anti-Poaching team, who are employed by MTPA (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency) on a full time basis and spend most of their time out in the reserve monitoring the Rhino. This team had their jobs made a little easier when The Ridge Casino came on board as a corporate sponsor and donated tents, sleeping bags, water bottles, boots and much more. Some of the other sponsors include The Holiday Club who has sponsored a Midweek break at the beautiful Hazyview Cabanas; a local educator who donated a wildlife painting of a rhino which will be sold later in the year and Forever Resorts Loskop Dam, the organisers of the Loskop Marathon, who donate cash every year from the Adventure Run held within the Reserve.

One of the most exciting events that will take place this year is the "Wildlife Art and Photographic Competition" for local school learners. Friends of Loskop and the Ridge Casino will be finalizing the rules and criteria for this competition soon and all the schools in the Witbank and Middleburg areas will then be notified. The final showing is to be held on Saturday 25th November 2011. Prizes so far include a bursary from Damelin, a laptop, free framing for the three best photographs and painting lessons for the best painting by an amateur. We hope to secure many more prizes.

To date a shocking seven white rhino have been poached on the Loskop Dam Nature Reserve, which has now lead to the MTPA cutting the horns off the remaining rhino on the Reserve. All funds raised are pushed back into the reserve specifically to aid in the protection of our white rhino. Data capturing and educational equipment has also been purchased to aid the management of this project.



As a nationwide effort we must all do what we can to aid in the protection of our wildlife. Our environment cannot and will not survive another generation of neglect.

Friends of Kirstenhof Wetland

The Friends group was able to hire Constantia Valley Environmental Services in March to remove remaining alien invader bushes, using our donation received last year from the Rowland and Leta Hill Trust. The environmental services contractor recently returned to clear the tangled Buddlejias and prune Waterberry trees (planted long ago by the Parks department) as part of his community work project. Parks department have removed some of the felled branches to date. We had received more trees last year, mostly endemic to the Western Cape, donated by Tony and Maria Conradie from Noordhoek. Although this area would not normally have trees it is essentially a recreational area so we agreed with Council to plant them where they could provide shade along the river bank and playpark areas. We planted the largest tree, a *Scolopia mundii* (Red Pear) near the WESSA Western Cape offices last year and it grew well through the summer months. In June this year we planted three Pock/Fineleaved Ironwoods and a Cape Beech along the river course below Oranje Road. We now plan to plant a Bladder-nut next to them, a Cape Ash near the WESSA offices, and four Milkwoods donated last year by James Forsyth from Constantia Valley Greenbelts. Our four gardens survived the summer months with borehole water from WESSA and another neighbour. Unfortunately, as soon as the school holidays started, stakes started disappearing from some trees. We have purchased longer stakes and stapled on green shade-cloth on three sides, in the hope it will deter young boys who we suspect are using them for constructing a tree house. We have also had to replace our attractive plastic-bag dispensers for use by dog owners, with milk jugs and bread bags, as all have been damaged or burnt.



Friends of Die Oog

The Friends committee of nine meets monthly. Sadly, falling membership is a problem and our main source of income is from donations, school visits and the notelets we sell. This enables us to employ a knowledgeable gardener one day a week.

Recent activities:

Aquatic weed removal - Parks sent a weed harvester from Zandvlei and worked for over a week, clearing at least ten lorry loads of weed. We are very hopeful that this year will see a successful breeding of Western Leopard Toadlets. Last year, over 600 toads were recorded at Die Oog in August, but no toadlets developed. The theory is that the tadpoles were unable to feed because of the proliferation of the weed.

Wetland area - Virgil Jacobs arranged for Jenny Moses and her team to clear the alien plant growth in the area and they worked on this for two weeks. The wetland area is looking really good and there is a great deal of bird activity there.

Rehabilitation of the wetland - Under the guidance and supervision of Suretha Dorse of Biodiversity Management, Parks cleared the island of dead bamboo and oleander and a replanting programme has started. We have applied to the Rowland and Leta Hill Trust for funding for plants. The fact that the island no longer provides roosting for larger birds means that the guano does not leech into the water, making it over rich in nutrients. The new planting should encourage smaller birds to nest there.

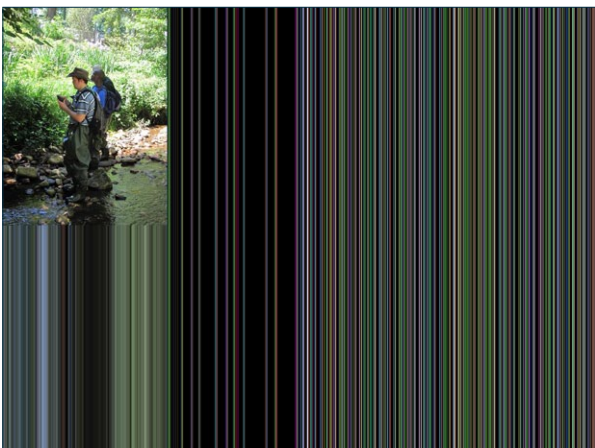
Repair of the historic dam wall - Although ward funds had been granted for the urgent repair of the dam wall, the repair has not happened due to a series of blunders and delays and we are left with a water-filled trench and a mound of slippery mud! The path is now a considerable hazard and we are worried that someone could slip in to the water as children frequently run around there. It is extremely frustrating that the money granted has now been lost, apart from the purchase of bollards which now cannot be installed until 2012.

Uitkamp Action Group

We are beginning to wonder what we are going to be able to do. The TMF/WWF-SA funding that has been our source of funding to pay our Site Manager, Ms. Elana Kellerman's salary is going to exhaust in about four and half months time. It has been possible to maintain the salary stream for three years now, which has been wonderful and the benefits that have been secured by Elana and her team together with the Uitkamp Action Group volunteers have been very gratifying. All our efforts to find further funding have been unsuccessful, so we are using every bit of Grant in Aid we have secured to assist with the physical needs of Uitkamp identified by Elana. This will include the erection of signage; reconstruction of fences and the provision of indigenous plants for propagation in the Durbanville Nature Reserve nursery and eventual re-planting in Uitkamp. We have also planned to erect a boardwalk. This will be done by the excellent Biodiversity's Roving Team that undertakes the heavy duty work in the area in pursuit of the Biodiversity objectives.

Our long term attempts to have the sewerspills checked have paid off. The City Department responsible has responded magnificently. We think that we have put the problem to rest at last. This has been a vital step for the extensive Wetland. We have built up a reserve of herbicide that the volunteers will continue to use in their attempts to combat the spread of the invasive and dominant grasses as well as the Typha. As a team we are covered for the application of the herbicide as one of the squad is a licensed Pest Control Operator with the Department of Agriculture. The areas that were the subject of a controlled burn earlier this year have responded beautifully. The geophytes are growing and the experts tell us that there are some that are putting in an appearance which have been seldom seen before. Great news!

Walking and working in the area known as the Management Block is such a rewarding experience and a delight to the senses. This is the area that was allocated to the UAG volunteers by Elana. It must around five hectares in extent. We have removed the Typha and the Kikuyu grass and controlled the rampant spread of the indigenous buffalo grass. Now, after the controlled burn and with the "nasties" out of the picture, the natural grasses and shrubs are a spectacle on a winters afternoon. Other invasive flora to be controlled include the Bristly Ox Tongue, the Patterson's Curse and small outbreaks of kikuyu. As an action group we will keep going as long as we can. We may not have Elana Kellerman to guide and direct us in the future but we have gathered sufficient knowledge to press on with the creation of a little bit of heaven in Uitkamp. We will continue to do it for Elana and because we love our spot in the Cape Floral Kingdom.



Friends of Die Swart Tobie

Using a kilometre of stone, WESSA Friends of Die Swart Tobie (Matzikama Municipality) recently built the West Coast's very first labyrinth. This Friends group has also rehabilitated a bird route to promote eco-tourism in their area.

This picture and story sent in by Suzanne du Plessis, beautifully illustrates the link between environment and spirituality, acknowledging the diversity within WESSA and the connecting contributions that Friends Groups make to this diversity.