



The Rooikat

A newsletter produced by the Friends of Vrolijkheid

No. 38 ~ Oct / Nov / Dec 2008

 Please consider the environment and print only if strictly necessary

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Feedback from our Readers

It was with great pleasure that I read the highly entertaining and intriguing little saga of the 'McGregor Phantom'. Unfortunately, the truth, although strange, is neither intriguing nor romantic, but rather mundane.

When we were setting out the Krans Nature Reserve and Maan was doing the fencing, he was instructed to leave one high pole at the stile on the dam wall to accommodate the notice board. The board was duly bolted to the pole but after being vandalised several times we decided to purchase a new board. In order to preserve the new one it was decided that it should be fixed as high as possible on one of the power line poles. Shortly after affixing the board, Rod and Val moved into their new house below the dam wall. One morning I received an urgent request from Rod to assist him in identifying the source of an irritating noise that was waking him in the early hours of the morning. After thrashing about for a while we found that the noise was coming from the board bolted to the power line pole. Whether it is the energy in the wires or the wind through the wires we could not determine. I've heard the territorial flight noises of the Ethiopian Snipe in the vlei beyond the cattle grid and it is quite a different sound.

Submitted by e-mail from Colin and Daph Burden

Any further comments regarding our 'mystery sound' (preferably audio recordings of both) are most welcome – Ed

Know Thine Enemy – by Val Mason, Entomologist and former Senior Lecturer, Cape Technikon (originally published in *fullcircle magazine*, July 2007)

While buying plants at a well-known nursery the other day, I become involved in a bizarre, but on subsequent reflection, obvious, case of ‘a little knowledge being a dangerous thing’. A gentleman had come in to enquire about what he could buy to kill the ‘worms’ in his compost heap. The assistant started to explain to him how it was better not to kill them because of their benefit to the compost but he rudely told her he was not interested in all that, he just wanted some poison! Intervening at that point to endorse the assistant’s advice and persuade him not to use poison, I received a ‘butt out’ stare, and retreated to consider the ‘ignorance of the world’. On further reflection, while driving home, I realised how often it is that people, like this gentleman (?), revelling in ‘their knowledge’, who remind us of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* – and leave the rest of us to deal with the ensuing result.

The actual ‘pest management’ that was required above was exactly that: MANAGEMENT, of the situation, the (now infamous) compost heap. All of this brings me to my favourite acronym, C.A.F. (*Consider All Factors*) – had any consideration been given to what exactly the “worms” were doing in the compost heap in the first place?

How many of us avid gardeners fall into the same trap – having spent time, money and, of course, love on the plants in our gardens we are indignant when they are ‘pruned’ or even worse boldly eaten (referring here to the ignominious, ravenous Spingid Hawk Moth Caterpillar) by something with more than two pairs of legs. Wouldn’t it be better for all concerned, if, in pest management situations, we could reason for ourselves why pests are there and possibly even work out a response to their presence and damage?

To do this we need to firstly know and understand that there is and always will be a natural order of things – good plentiful food, (your carefully tended garden) will be attractive, will be visited and WILL be eaten.

Secondly, we need to ‘Know our Enemy’ – not just its name but what it does, where it goes during the day and night, what else it eats; even its life cycle. At this point I must hasten to point out that I am not advocating a degree course in entomology – just some good old observation. Watch, observe, think, muse and go figure ... then think some more, till you are capable of ‘out-thinking’ your insect visitors.

To assist in out-thinking uninvited guests, the following may be helpful – as a general rule, insects are difficult to find, let alone manage, in their egg and pupal stages. Therefore, efforts should rather be directed at the immature stages (larvae and nymphs), usually the stages when they are doing the most damage. Happily for your observations (although unhappily for your garden) this is when there are very many of them – due to the bountiful supply of good nutritious food and also due to the fact that after mating, the females, determining the quality and quantity of food in your garden, laid a large number of eggs.



Good luck with your observations, have fun and most of all, enjoy your garden with all its guests. I can only hope that, whatever ‘poison’ was finally purchased for the compost heap, somehow a few lucky earthworms survived, as well as a number of beneficial aerobic and anaerobic bacteria to facilitate the process of decay.

One thing is for sure, unless a REALLY bad chemical was purchased, which, thankfully in 2007, I doubt, the offensive ‘worms’ will still be there – thanks to the ignorance of the past, these ‘worms’, their adult beetles, *Pachnoda sinuata* [Garden Fruit Chafer] and others have become resistant to most chemicals – so all the efforts to ‘control’ them will have come to no avail. Makes you think, doesn’t it, as well as wonder for what purpose the compost heap was being kept? ♦

The offensive ‘worms’: larvae of the Garden Fruit Chafer *Pachnoda sinuata*

Did you know ... by Dr Ernst Baard

Did you know that ...

Frog jumping competitions all started in 1867 with Mark Twain's story, *The celebrated jumping frog of Calaveras County*. Now every May, Calaveras County hosts the Jumping Frog Jubilee, complete with food stalls, brass bands, beauty contests, and, of course ... a frog jumping competition. Athletes compete under very strict rules and the winner is the one who covers the longest distance in three consecutive jumps. The current (American) record is 6.6 m, set in 1986 by a 16 cm American bullfrog, called 'Rosie the Ribite' and the Americans (typically), call it a 'world' record. However, the real world record of 10.3 m for a frog jump, as listed in the Guinness Book of Records, has been awarded to none other than the 5 cm-long South African sharp-nosed grass frog!

At a charity event in Cape Town in 1953, the famous herpetologist, Dr Walter Rose (did you know he is Guy Palmer's grandfather?!) entered an athlete (a sharp-nosed grass frog) which promptly outclassed the local Cape river frogs and cleared 9.9 m (truly a world-class act!). Two years later, a sharp-nosed grass frog was sent to America to compete in the Jumping Frog Jubilee and the Americans scorned and laughed at this puny little 5 cm South African athlete who clearly, according to them, didn't have what it took to beat the rest of the field. Unfortunately, the SA athlete was so taken by the moment that it sat motionless for the allotted 30 seconds in which it had to jump, and was disqualified, but then jumped – unofficially! Its first jump took it 4.2 m and the second took it way into the crowds and beyond! The Americans then quickly changed the rules of the Jubilee to say that no frog less than 4 inches may compete, and the SA sharp-nosed grass frog never exceeds 2.5 inches.

In the meantime, in the small town of Paulpietersburg at the Maroela Spa, the real records were being broken and it was on 21 May 1977 where athletic history was made by Mr Piem Fourie's 'Santjie', the sharp-nosed grass frog, which set the standing world record of 10.3 m!! ♦

Riverine Rabbit Update – by Corné Claassen, Manager: Langeberg Karoo Conservation Services

A field survey was organised by CapeNature at the end of September 2007, during which five critically endangered riverine rabbits were discovered in two new areas. This is very exciting news, as the species is faced with extinction due to extremely low population numbers.

According to the Red Data Book of the Mammals of South Africa (2004), the riverine rabbit is one of the ten most critically endangered mammals in South Africa, having the highest risk of extinction. It is also an endemic species (found only in the Northern- and Western Cape Provinces of South Africa). This conservation assessment estimates their global numbers to be no more than 250 mature individuals.

Five different properties in the Montagu area were surveyed last year by a team of 25 CapeNature staff members. A riverine rabbit carcass was discovered at the top of the Ouberg Pass earlier in September, which focussed our attention on a new distribution area for the species. As a result, farms in the surrounding areas were included in the survey. One riverine rabbit was recorded on the farm Bylshoek by the survey team. The owner of another farm between Montagu and Barrydale photographed two riverine rabbits a few months prior. During the September survey, four riverine rabbits were recorded on this particular farm. This brings the number of properties with confirmed riverine rabbit populations in the Montagu, Touws River and Barrydale areas to a total of eleven!

The University of Stellenbosch is currently busy with a research project to determine the genetic relationship between the different riverine rabbit populations across its distribution range. To date, samples from a total of 61 animals have been extracted and sequenced for their mitochondrial DNA. The combined data confirmed the presence of two evolutionary lineages (one above the escarpment, including Victoria West, Calvinia and Sutherland; and another below the escarpment, including Montagu and Touws River). However, additional sampling is needed before any conclusions can be drawn from the research. Nevertheless, both clades seem to be genetically healthy. Riverine rabbit carcasses have been used in another study on ecto-

and endoparasites. Tick species seem to differ between the area above and below the escarpment. However, there are still a lot of unanswered questions regarding the species biology and ecology, which will need to be addressed in future research projects. More surveys are needed and we are also considering fitting animals with tracking collars to determine the home range sizes.

Riverine rabbits are dependant on natural veld which is in good condition, within flat and low-lying riverine areas for their survival. In the Montagu area they have been found to occur in succulent Karoo and shale-type renosterveld. These secretive and solitary animals are predominantly nocturnal, and feed on young grasses, favouring shrubs like 'ankerganna', 'boegoebessie' and 'ankerkaroo'. Breeding takes place from August to May when one, and occasionally two, young are born. The adults have a limited lifespan of two to three years, which makes the population growth extremely slow.

The main threats to their future survival are fragmentation and habitat loss. Alluvial soil is favoured for cultivation, and overgrazing leads to trampling by livestock and loss of certain valuable food sources. In addition, erosion leads to further habitat loss. The clearing of indigenous vegetation and firewood collection removes essential plant cover, and exposes the rabbits to predation and the elements. Dams, weirs and constructions discourage or even prevent natural movement of riverine rabbits and further isolates any remaining patches of habitat.

Riverine rabbits have several distinguishing characteristics, which can help to prevent confusion between them and the other lagomorph species which also occur in the Little Karoo, such as the scrub hare, Cape hare and red rock rabbit. Riverine rabbits have a short fluffy brown tail, long ears, broad thick hind feet (which are also brown but with no white), a black-brown band on the side of the lower jaw (which almost looks like a smile), a rufous nape patch (on the back of the neck) and a white ring around the eye. Currently the species is not known to occur within formally protected areas, and as a result we rely on private landowners for the future survival of the species. ♦



**A riverine rabbit caught on camera on the farm
Keurfontein in the Montagu district**

Voëlklub Uitstappie na Nuy – deur Adrias Rabie

Ná 'n winderige, koue en reënerige week was dit onlangs heerlik om 'n sonnige Saterdagoggend in die natuur te beleef. Die veldblomme – en veral die pienk vygies langs die pad onderweg na Nuy – was 'n pragtige gesig. Dit, op sigself, het die uitstappie die moeite werd gemaak. Danksy Cecile van Niekerk en Piet Nel se indrukwekkende kennis van die veldblomme het diegene wat die uitstappie meegemaak het, tydens die uitstappie aansienlik meer geleer as net oor voëls.

Aangesien die getalle van die watervoëls taamlik beperk was, veral die eende spesies, is die aandag toegespits op ander spesies. Terwyl ons besig was om 'n Kaapse rietsanger uit die riete te lok, het 'n swerm van sowat 50 Rooibek Queleas hul opwagting in ons nabye omgewing gemaak – in die mooiste broeikleure wat ek nog gesien het in die Wes-Kaap. Vir ons was dit 'n uitsonderlike gesig, maar vir die boere voorspel dit sekerlik probleme.

Kort hierna het 'n Visarend digby die Broeikolonies van die Swartkqaeiers, Skoosteenvere, Slanghalsvoëls en Verlies verbygevlug en groot onstigting veroorsaak. Drie Dwegarende het ook gereeld verskyn, op soek na iets te aas. Selfs 'n Veldpou en vier Bloukraalvoëls was ander die groter spesies. Onder die watervoëls wat opgemerk is, was 'n Rooipotelries, 'n Groenpootruiter, 'n Moerasruiter, 'n Drielandkiewiet, 'n Slopend, Rooibek- en Geelbekeende, en immer-bedrywige Bleshoenders.

Die uitstappie het altesame 91 spesies opgelewer. Die Voëlklub waardeur al die bydraes van sy ondersteuners. Ons sien julle graag op 25 Oktober 2008 by Agulhas/Struisbaai. ♦

The Friends Return to Groot Toren – by Margaret Milne

It seems the Friends can't get enough of Groot Toren ... on 25 September Piet van Zyl drove 14 'friends' up to Groot Toren in the stolid old 'samel'. It was cold and windy, but everyone was warmly dressed and enthusiastic. The views on the way up were glorious, as was the flora passing beneath us. Jaci kindly drove ahead and opened up the cottage at the top for us to retreat into to get out of the icy weather!

He showed us a rare leucospermum which is endemic to the area and being monitored by Kirstenbosch, who have tried to grow it without success. The brown tips are caused, Jaci thinks, by some sort of slug. To the delight of the company he brought a selection of Lords wine to be tasted in the pleasantly warm cottage! The flora on the property is quite wonderful and needs an extended visit to appreciate it fully. ♦



All aboard: Friends climb into the truck for another full-filled trip to Groot Toren



The rare and unusual creeping leucospermum

Glamorgan University Students Visit South Africa

Marius Brand, of Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve, has qualified during the last few years as a field guide, and is passionate about people and education.

Marius studied with Johan Fourie of the Nature College near Swellendam, who then asked Marius if he would consider leading a field trip for a group of students from the University of Glamorgan in Wales. Marius agreed and took the group on a six week journey through the biomes of South Africa as part of their International Wildlife Biology course. He took on the challenge and the roles of driver, guide, surrogate parent and chef! A qualified medic also accompanied the group for the duration of the trip. The group began in the Fynbos region and gradually made their way through the Succulent- and Nama Karoo, Forest, Grassland, and Savanna biomes, studying various aspects of each, such as plant life, animals and spoor, birds and so forth.

Marius gave a talk about his trip on Thursday, 2 October and had the audience in stitches, regaling us with his tales of the highlights of the trip. The trip was immensely enjoyed by all and strong friendships were formed during the six weeks. Many of the students are determined to complete their courses and return to South Africa to pursue their careers in conservation.

Marius and his wife, Adri, have just been promoted to manage the Anysberg Nature Reserve near Laignsburg. We will sadly be losing them but give our heartfelt congratulation, and wish them every success and happiness in their new (somewhat enlarged) surroundings. Marius would like to continue with environmental education at Anysburg and is hoping to educational camps at Anysburg in due course. Think we'll need to add a visit to our schedule for next year ... ♦

Global Synopsis – by Alison M. Downie

Here follows an update on conservation issues in South Africa and further afield, with some items just barely off the newsstands and others a little older:

September 2008, Montana, US – a judge has been asked to return the gray wolves in the Northern Rockies to the endangered species list after population numbers declined for the first time in more than a decade. In 2007 more than 180 wolves were killed due to attacks on domestic livestock. The estimated population now stands at 1,455.

July 2008, Northern Cape – after spending three days caught in a gin trap on a farm, a young Cape leopard was euthanased after it was discovered that there were broken bones and that the paw had almost been severed. The mother of the cub had remained with the injured animal and at first it was thought that both animals had been caught. A tragedy indeed, with the last confirmed resident leopard in the area reported in 1922.

February 2008, California, US – a district court judge has dismissed a waiver issued by President George W. Bush, exempting the Navy from a previous court order requiring them to reduce injury to marine mammals such as whales. The mid-frequency, high-intensity sonar is capable of injuring and killing these mammals and other marine life. By adhering to guidelines set out by the Marine Mammal Protection Project, the Navy can perform its tests safely, without harming sea mammals. A 12 nautical mile buffer zone from the coast is also to be adhered to and any exercises halted should marine mammals be spotted within a two kilometre radius.

September 2005, Cape Town – plans for a new national park near Graaff-Reinet is announced by Environmental Affairs Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk. A significant portion of the land was donated the World Wide Fund for Nature South Africa. A name has not yet been determined for what would be South Africa's 22nd national park.

Dec 2006, China – a scientific expedition conducted in 1997 was able to locate only 13 white-fin dolphins while none were found on a recent attempt. The dolphin occurs in the Yangtze River, which is now very polluted. Although not yet official, this could be the first whale species to become extinct due to human activities. The black fin-less porpoise, living in the same habitat, is also seriously at risk with the numbers have decreased by half during the course of the last 12 years. Any white-fin dolphins found are to be relocated to a sanctuary in order to protect the species.

September 2008, Bristol, UK – with the help of a 'surrogate mom' camel teddy bear, a rare baby Siamang gibbon is being nursed back to health at Bristol's Noah's Ark Zoo. Zoo keepers intervened when the gibbon's mother was unable to produce milk. The gibbon, just over two weeks old, has been bottle-fed and the tiny creature has clung to the camel for comfort. Her biological parents, Salomé and Samson, are housed nearby at the zoo. A donated intensive care incubator is used during the day to keep her warm, while at night she sleeps with one of four zoo keepers.

September 2005, US – IFAW (the International Fund for Animal Welfare) has reported that the Internet is causing great concern for threatened species around the globe. The illegal trade is worth billions of American dollars annually. Mild penalties and small fines do little to curb those dealing in the illegal wildlife trade. IFAW has asked governments to introduce stronger laws, and modernise measures to police the Internet more effectively.

September 2008, Greenland – scientists working with the Pennsylvania State University have made a significant find. Life forms have been discovered living below a 3,2 metre ice core. The species of tiny bacteria have managed to survive for more than 120,000 years in very poor environmental conditions. *Now that is cool - very cool.*

September 2008, Utah – *Popular Mechanics* magazine has reported that university researchers are replicating the scales of *Lamprocyphus augustus*, an iridescent beetle from Brazil, in order to design supercomputers. The tiny scales amplify light very efficiently and scientists see the move as a definitive structure for photonic computers (computers which use light to transmit data). ♦

Boardwalk Bird Hide Project

As our members are aware, the Friends are holding a fundraising event at Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary on Friday 31 October. This will be a jazz music evening where visitors bring along a picnic. Debbie and Jimmy will be available with a well-stocked bar for all your beverage requirements. This even kicks off from 6.00 p.m. and promises to be great fun. During the evening, the draw for the raffle will take place. We would like to take this opportunity to say a very big THANK YOU to our sponsors:

- The Trossachs Lodge
- Amathunzi Game Reserve
- Thyme & Again B&B
- Cape Country Cottages
- The Jack & Grape Pub and Restaurant
- Temenos Retreat
- Jan Harmsgat Country House
- The Old Mill Lodge
- Deli Girls
- The Breede River Goose

We thank our club members for your support and hope to see you all there!

500 YEARS AGO IN ENGLAND - a contribution from Dave Harding

It was the accepted practice in Babylonia 4,000 years ago that for a month after the wedding, the bride's father would supply his son-in-law with all the mead he could drink. Mead is a honey beer, and because their calendar was lunar based, this period was called the 'honey month' - or what we know today as the 'honeymoon'.

committee a group of people who individually decide something should be done and collectively decide that nothing can be done

Treasurer & Newsletter	Barbara Jacobs	023 625 1484
Outings, Events & Bird Club	Gilly Schutte	023 626 6899
Projects	Bruce Milne	023 625 1374
Guest Speakers & Outings	Piet van Zyl	023 625 1621
Secretary & Garden	Ann van der Riet	023 626 3888
Walks & Rambles, & Garden	Frances Doering	023 625 1449
Newsletter	Alison Downie	023 625 1469

Rambler's Round-up – by Frances Doering

Kleinberg Trail: on a very windy morning earlier this month Piet van Zyl from Vrolijkheid, together with Colin Burden, Marge Campbell and the author, walked the Kleinberg Trail to see how best to mark the route as most of the poles along the way have either fallen over or disappeared.

We decided that footprints should be painted on rocky sections in the path. Suitable paint will be purchased by the Friends of Vrolijkheid, and, under Colin's guidance, a work party will undertake this task during the next few weeks. The start of the trail will also be clearly indicated.

Dassieshoek Hike: undeterred by the possibility of bad weather, four of us walked into the mountains above Robertson on Friday, August 31. Winter is the best time for this trail as the terrain is rather hot and dry and there is no water and very little shade on the first section. However a cool winter's day and a fresh breeze provided ideal conditions.

The walk is a circular route of approximately 20 km. This involves parking a car at either end, but as we were all in one car we decided to climb to the saddle, which is the halfway point, and return the way we had come. This is slightly less strenuous as there are some fairly steep kloofs to negotiate on the second half of the trail.

Gardens are lovely, but if you want to do flowers, follow in Wordsworth's footsteps and go into nature. We didn't have the daffodils, but up towards the saddle the mountains burst into extravagant and carefree displays of purple muraltia interspersed with pink pelargonium and yellow euryops. Further along the abundant stands of purple selago were breathtaking. This is definitely a worthwhile hike for late winter or early spring. ♦

Trails are not dust and pebbles
on a hill,
nor even,
grass and wild birds by a lake.

Trails are adventure and a hand to
still the restless pulse of life
that men would break their minds
with the weight of thinking

Trails are peace
A call to dreams
A challenge to ascent
Trails are the brisk unfolding of release
from bitterness and from discouragement

Trails are the random writing on
the wall
that tell us how every man
grown tired at heart
of things correct and ordered
comes to scrawl his happy
hour down
then, goes home
to start life over with
eagerness and zest

Who builds the trail funds labors
that is rest.

Benton MacKaye, *Appalachian Trail*

Outings & Events

OCTOBER

Sun 12th: Family braai at Vrolijkheid from 11.00 a.m.

**19th-22nd:
Sun-Wed** An excursion to the Cederberg has replaced the trip planned to the Groot Winterhoek. From the Driehoek camp site, day walks to the Wolfberg Arch and Maltese Cross will be undertaken. Campsites are R120 for four persons, plus R20 per additional adult. Day fees are applicable for non-Wild Card holders. Contact Frances on 023 625 1449 to book your place

Sat 25th: Bird Club outing to Agulhas

Fri 31st: Jazz and picnic evening fundraiser at Eseltjesrus Donkey Sanctuary from 6.00 p.m. This is a Kirstenbosch jazz and picnic-type event which promises to be loads of fun. This is a concert you seriously do not want to miss! Awesome prizes up for grabs. Contact Frances for tickets

NOVEMBER

Thurs 13th: Talk at 7.00 p.m. by John Moodie, Chairman of the Beekeepers' Association

Fri 14th: Walk to Elandspad. A popular day hike starting at the Worcester end of the Du Toit's Kloof tunnel, continuing for +- two hours before reaching the river where there are some lovely swimming spots. CapeNature permits are R25 per person and the trail must be booked in advance with Frances by Friday 31 October

Sat 29th: Bird Club outing to Dassieshoek

DECEMBER

4th: End of year Christmas brunch at Vrolijkheid from 10.00 a.m. Remember to bring a plate, cutlery and mug. Cost is R50 per person. Please call Alison on 072 258 5888 (after 2 p.m.) or alisonmdownie@yahoo.com to reserve your place

Weather Statistics for September

Rainfall (statistics since 1968)				Temperatures for Sept. (statistics since 1995)	
Totals		Max./Min. Recordings for Sept.			
Sept.	20,8 mm.			Minimum	0,7 ° C
2008 (to date)	201 mm.	Minimum	1 mm. (1998)	Maximum	32,7 ° C
2007	315 mm.	Maximum	48 mm. (1983)	Mean Minimum	4,8 ° C
2006	335 mm.			Average Maximum	20,7 ° C
2005	239 mm.				
2004	282 mm.				

The McGregor Magic does it again – by Alison M. Downie

In August someone by the name of Van Heerden Heunis slipped quietly into McGregor, intent on nothing more than a few days of peace and quiet. He came armed only with his camera and a vague idea of what our humble village might be all about. Seven days later he returned to the Cape, renewed, enthused and with a very tired 'trigger finger'. Two weeks after this he was back, exhibiting his photographs of McGregor at Restaurant Tebaldi and at the McGregor Food and Wine Festival. An ex-journalist, Van Heerden has been in law for the last 13 years but it seems as if a return to his great love of photography may well be on the cards ... we caught up with him as he set up his stand at last month's festival:

The Rooikat: what first piqued your interest in photography? *Van Heerden:* I received my first camera, a Kodak 133X, at the age of 10 or 11 as a gift from an uncle I dearly loved. He had multiple sclerosis, but was an incredible and wonderfully inspiring friend. We had endless fun and saw the most magnificent movies together.

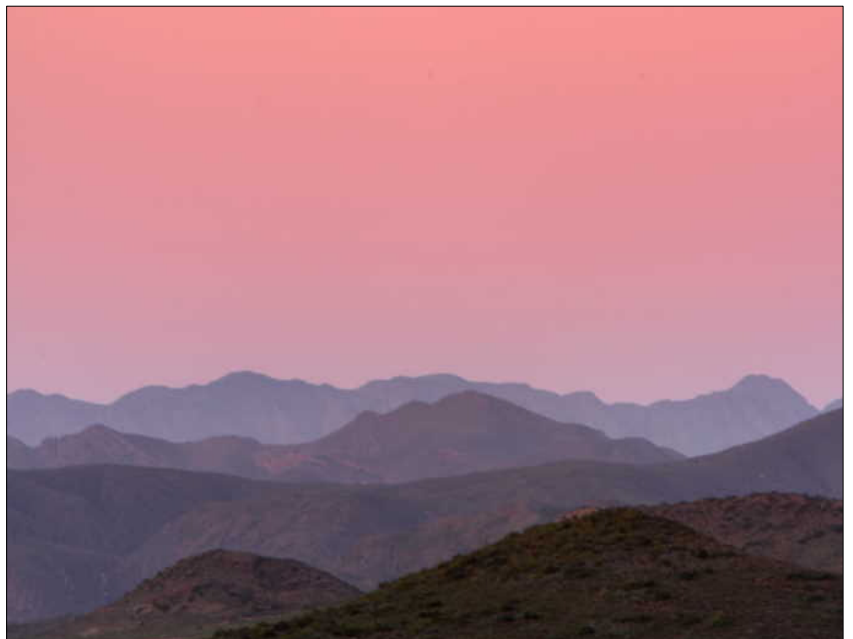
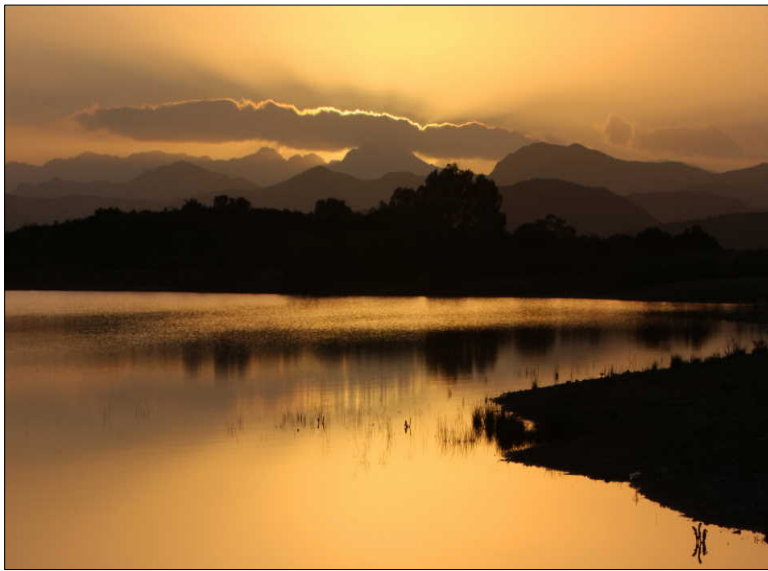
RK: what cameras have you used since then? *VH:* the Kodak was substituted by a 233X, a Minolta 70 and a Minolta 90, both pocket cameras with a sliding lens. The latter I used to take illegal photographs with during my stint in the operational area in 1975-77. The spools were smuggled back to South Africa in masterfully-camouflaged cigarette packets. The next camera was an Olympus Trip 35. Then the Canon era broke: AV1, AE1, A1, Ixus 40, 300D, 350D, Ixus 70 and 400D. Nowadays I mostly use two 40Ds, and keep a G9 Powershot in the car and an Ixus 860iS in my back pocket, just in case. When it comes to photography I am somewhat of a brand snob: I use only Canon lenses and other accessories. This way I can never blame my tools when things go wrong.

RK: tell us more about your work as a journalist. *VH:* during my stint as a journalist I worked for *Die Burger* (Nationale Pers) as, amongst other things, parliamentary reporter and at a later stage for the National Department of Communication as editor of a political magazine, *RSA Policy Review*. I still do freelance work for *Die Burger*, writing the leader article on alternate Sundays. I left Nationale Pers about what I regarded as a matter of principle. It involved a coloured colleague, whom I thought was being treated unfairly. I now think I should have handled the matter differently. I was founder director of the directorate of communications of the then Cape Provincial Administration when I decided to join the law firm which my father and one brother established in 1989. I was approached by them and thought I might as well give law a chance. I studied law through UNISA and did so out of mere curiosity.

RK: what brought you to McGregor? *VH:* a visit to McGregor was recommended by a trusted friend recently when I was going through one of the most difficult times of my life. I came to McGregor with no expectations or plans whatsoever. I have been seduced by its beauty and mystique, and the splendour of its light. And I am under the spell of the charm of its people. I could easily live and work here until the end of my days.

RK: you mentioned returning full-time to photography. Was this just wishful thinking or were you serious? *VH:* I have terminated my legal career and resigned. Although the legal profession provided some moments of excitement and satisfaction, I never really thought of myself as a lawyer at heart. During and after my first visit to McGregor I increasingly began to realise that I could no longer shy away from this clear-cut question: what do I want to do with my life? I am, and always have been, far more passionate about photography, writing, editing, translating and designing. *Herewith a small sample of Van Heerden's work:* ♦





I found a fox, caught by the leg
In a toothed gin, torn from its peg,
And dragged, God knows how far, in pain.

Such torment could not plead in vain,
He looked at me, I looked at him.
With ironjaw-teeth in his limb.

‘Come, little son,’ I said, ‘Let be ...
Don’t bite me, while I set you free.’

But much I feared that in the pang
Of helping, I should feel a fang
In hand or face ...
but must is must ...
And he had given me his trust.

So down I knelt there in the mud
And loosed those jaws all mud and blood.
And he, exhausted, crept, set free,
Into the shade, away from me;
The leg not broken ...
Then, beyond,
The gin went plonk into the pond.

- John Masefield, *A Fellow Mortal*
