



The Rooikat

A newsletter produced by the Friends
of Vrolijkheid

No 40 ~ June 2009

 Please consider the environment and print only if strictly necessary

In This Issue:

Readers' Feedback	page 1	Goodbye to Gilly and Barbara	page 8
Honey Bee Disease Imminent	page 2	Global Synopsis	page 9
Frog Facts	page 3	Frances and Friends	page 10
Cape Leopard Trust & Our AGM	page 4	Earth Hour 2009	page 10
Cooking the Eco-friendly Way	page 5	Angus Rose Presents	page 11
Saving Energy this Winter	page 6	Weather Stats	page 11
Voëlklub Uitstappie	page 7	Outings and Events	page 12
A Fowl Affair	page 8	Readers' Competition	page 12
		China's True Colours	page 13

Feedback from our Readers

Just a note of appreciation for the excellent *Rooikat* newsletter. Congratulations to the editor and all those who contributed to a very newsworthy edition. The article "Land of Great Thirst" is well worth printing and keeping for future reference.

A great read – Marge

We are "swallows" from America. This newsletter is so fabulous and we look forward to receiving it via email. It nourishes us as we wait for our return trip to Montagu. This issue is particularly wonderful. The photos are magic! Thanks to the people who contribute and do all the work – Wim & Nancy

Thank you to all. As long of FoV members remain the intrepid adventurers that they are, we will continue to feature interesting articles on their escapades!

Your article on saving water was informative and I have started this in my own home. It's amazing how habitual we are: I am re-learning brushing my teeth and switching the tap off, and I can now see how much water can be saved by not leaving the tap running – Mark

Water saving is something every one of us can do with ease. All it requires is simply adjusting the ways in which we do things and thinking consciously about the small differences each of us can indeed make.

We would love to hear from you, our members and readers. Your article in English or Afrikaans, comments and/or feedback are most welcome. Please write to us at alisonmdownie@yahoo.com or send a letter to PO Box 436, McGregor 6708.

Serious Honey Bee Disease Detected in the Western Cape – by Corné Claassen, Manager: Langeberg Karoo Conservation Services

In the beginning of March 2009, the Department of Agriculture (DOA), issued an Advisory Notice, informing the beekeeping industry of the discovery of American Foulbrood (AFB) in four apiaries across the Peninsula, from the Helderberg to the Swartland.

AFB is an extremely serious brood disease of honey bees worldwide, caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Paenibacillus* larvae. Thus far this disease has never been reported in sub-Saharan Africa. In other parts of the world AFB has caused large-scale colony losses; it is extremely contagious and very difficult to eradicate. It is also the major reason why honey and other bee products entering South Africa are required by law to be irradiated in an effort to prevent the disease from infecting the local honey bee population.

At present it is not known how serious or extensive the disease outbreak is, as there is a time lapse between the contamination of a swarm and the first signs of clinical symptoms. The disease has no effect on humans or other animals and only infects the brood component of a honey bee swarm. (Be assured that honey is perfectly safe for human consumption and will not affect consumers in any way.)

The workers, drones and queen are unaffected, although they inadvertently spread the spores of the disease throughout the hive and even between hives when workers drift into the wrong hive or rob a weaker colony. The spores of the disease contaminate the whole hive, including the hive bodies, frames, wax, pollen, honey and propolis. The disease causes the capped brood (larvae and pupae) to die within the cells, with the result that the loss of adult bees to natural die-off is not replaced by young emerging bees.

The swarm eventually dwindles down to an unsustainable unit and dies out. The spores are extremely resistant and long-lived, which makes disease control difficult. No effective antibiotic is available at the current time. The extent of infection among wild bee swarms is unknown and we can only speculate as to the possible effect on bee-pollinated flora. AFB has the potential to devastate the commercial bee industry and related activities such as commercial crop pollination. A precautionary approach requires that we consider there to be the potential for a full-scale AFB outbreak in South Africa.

At the time of writing, the DOA was in the process of formulating regulations to contain and, if possible, eradicate the disease, which has been confirmed on bee farms in Durbanville and Stellenbosch. These regulations might entail quarantine and destruction of contaminated colonies. In the interim, the department suggests the following measures:

- Beekeepers should endeavour to keep apiaries distinct from each other
- Beekeepers should not place colonies in close proximity to colonies belonging to other beekeepers
- Beekeeping equipment should not be moved between apiaries or colonies
- All beekeeping equipment should be sterilized with a strong bleach solution after use
- Extracted frames and honey containers should not be put out to feed bees
- Colonies should not be fed with anything containing honey or pollen
- Beekeeping management should be kept to an absolute minimum, to prevent bees robbing neighbouring colonies (opening up hives disrupts the colony's defences and makes them vulnerable to scavenging bees from other colonies).

Any colony suspected to be infected with AFB should be reported to DOA, as it is a notifiable disease. If you notice any of the following symptoms your swarm may be infected: the brood is discoloured and sunken; the diseased bee larvae or pupae has formed a black or brown scale at the bottom of the cell; larvae have a mucous-like texture and are extremely "ropy" before they dry to form hard scales. Badly affected combs have a shotgun-like appearance.

AFB has been widespread in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and America for many decades, and beekeepers have adopted techniques of dealing with the disease. Elsewhere the occurrence of the disease is restricted to one per cent of all managed colonies, where the so-called "barrier method" is employed. This entails marking all the components of a specific hive with a unique number (hive bodies, frames, floorboard, entrance reducer, inner lid and outer lid). Hive components must not be interchanged. Once supers are extracted, they must go back to the original hive, together with the original frames. Beekeeping equipment (gloves, hive tools, etc) must be sterilized when working between hives with a strong bleach solution. Contaminated hive components can be treated with heat (160°C for 10 minutes) to destroy the spores.

Our South African bees managed to deal with the exotic varroa mite parasite, which entered the country in 1997. Only time will tell how the bees will deal with this new exotic threat, which is considered to be, by far, the worst disease of honey bees worldwide. ♦

Did You Know – by Dr Ernst Baard



Did you know that ...

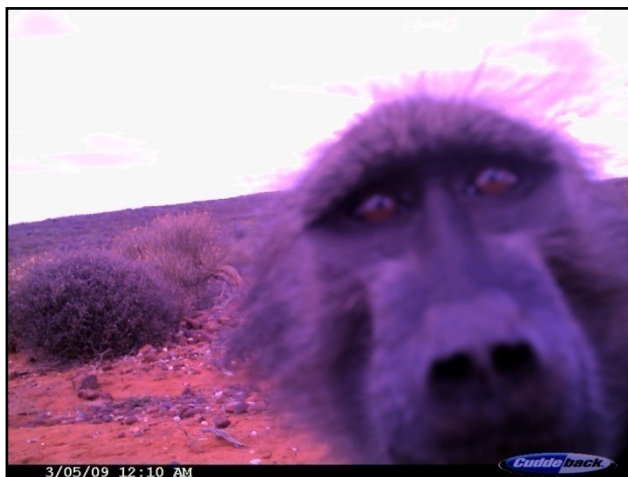
- amphibians come in three shapes: four-legged and tail-less (frogs and toads), four-legged with a tail (urodeles and salamanders of the northern hemisphere) and legless, worm-like caecilians from rain forests?
- South Africa only has frogs and toads and no urodeles, salamanders or caecilians (ha, but you knew that, because we are not in the northern hemisphere and we don't have rainforests!)?
- frogs are amphibians which means they have a dual life cycle – the tadpole and a four-legged adult (*amphi* = two; *bios* = life – get it?)?
- strictly speaking we only have frogs (toads only refer to those with warty skins), and that all toads are frogs, but not all frogs are toads?
- with a few exceptions, frogs are nocturnal (= active at night) or crepuscular (= active at dawn or dusk) and can best be found by tracking their calls at night?
- each species has a distinct call, only males call and that females are attracted by those males who call the loudest and from the best position at the pond?
- frogs don't have vocal chords, but call by using paired or single vocal sacs that vibrate to produce the call?
- if an intruder approaches, a male will utter a special territorial call, while during the frenzy at breeding sites, some males will try and mate with and grasp other males, upon which the "grasped" male will utter a release call. Females will also utter a release call to terminate mating – sounds familiar? ("Let me go, you man-frog!")
- frogs lay eggs and fertilization is external, that is, the male deposits sperm onto the eggs as they are laid by the female?
- eggs develop into free-swimming tadpoles which eventually metamorphose into young frogs?
- while the majority of frogs need to lay their eggs in water, rain frogs lay their eggs inside their burrows and have no free-swimming tadpoles?
- frogs can absorb (and lose) water through their skins?
- frogs have lungs and breathe air, but oxygen is also absorbed by the skin, enabling them to remain underwater for longer?
- frogs don't have a diaphragm and breathe by pumping air into the lungs using continuous movements of the throat (remember the tortoises?)?
- frogs are mostly insectivorous, have no teeth, use their tongue to pick up food items and swallow their prey whole?
- use their eyes to push prey down their throats (have you seen them "blink" when they swallow?)?
- a man walks in to a doctor's office with a frog on his head. The doctor leaps up and says: "Good grief, how on earth did you get that great ugly thing!" The frog looks down and replies: "I dunno, Doc, it started out as a little wart on my bottom!"
- what happened to the frog's car when his parking meter expired? It got toad!! ♦

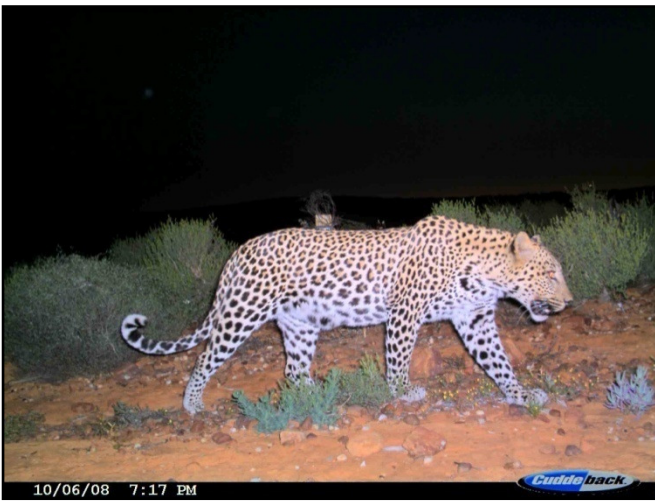
Of Friends and Felines

Ben-Jon Dreyer of the Cape Leopard Trust attended the Friends annual general meeting in early June. Programme coordinator for the Namaqualand region, he travelled 500 km from Kamieskroon to come and tell us about the project, which first began some ten years ago in the Cederberg. It has since been expanded to accommodate an additional two areas, namely the Namaqualand uplands and Gouritz corridor, and is achieving amazing success in what they set out to do.

Conservationists work hard at building relationships with farmers in an attempt to reduce conflict between livestock and the wild, indigenous creatures. The attitude of farmers in Namqualand appears to be slowly changing and new methods are being introduced to help in the protection their livelihood. The project has two main priorities: to research the Cape leopard and to help find solutions to the farmer-predator conflict.

The team make use of motion-sensor cameras set along game trails; the photographs below are a small selection shown to us by Ben-Jon which shows the incredible variety of animals that manage to survive, albeit unseen, in farming communities.





The well-attended evening was without doubt one of the most interesting talks in the last year and left us all with the feeling of gratitude for Ben-Jon and his colleagues for their hard work and dedication, and hope for the future of the Cape leopard and other animals. More on the Cape Leopard Trust in the next issue ...

The AGM itself was informal and members were given a synopsis of the activities of the Friends over the past year, followed by Ben-Jon's fascinating talk and, of course, our famous soup and fresh rolls. Our main project going forward is the construction of the bird hide, with the boardwalk having been completed by Bruce Milne and Gerhard Botha. Interested parties are invited to contribute to the project by purchasing one log pole for the hide, at a cost of R100. Once complete, the boardwalk/bird hide will provide access to a world-class bird watching facility for disabled persons and those who are unable to walk far. The committee is also interested in setting up a braille trail at the reserve in the forthcoming year.

We thank all our members for their support at our fundraisers and other events over the past year. We hope that you have enjoyed these occasions while contributing to the preservation and improvement of our reserve and environment. Please feel free to get in touch with any committee member to find out more about a project or to share your ideas. ♦

Photographs used with permission from the Cape Leopard Trust

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are due annually in June; these can be paid to Frances Doering in McGregor or to Ann van der Riet or Gilly Schutte in Robertson. You may also deposit your R50 directly into the following account:

Bank: First National Bank
 Name: Friends of Vrolijkheid
 Branch code: 620 452 192 86
 Account number: 200 413 00
 Reference: Name Surname Subs 2009

Eco-friendly Cooking – by Marilyn Poole

Over the years, "hot boxes" have proved invaluable for cooking without the sustained use of electricity – a great saving financially and environmentally – and invaluable during power cuts. All one needs to do is to bring a saucepan or dish up to heat and pop it in the hot box. It continues cooking on its own.

Now a group of HIV-positive women living in the Kayamandi community on the outskirts of Stellenbosch have started producing these ovens under the cooperative name of Salathiso. The proceeds of the sales (R140 each) are shared amongst the women, who usually have no other source of income. The ovens consist of two cushions of beautiful Shweshwe fabric filled with recycled polystyrene – yet another way of going green. Simply put the cushions and your saucepan in the cardboard box and come back hours later to a delicious casserole.

Wendy Walton is helping these women and an order will be delivered to Marilyn Poole in McGregor in a few weeks' time. If you wish to place an order for yourself, friends or staff, you can email Wendy on waltfam@telkomsa.net or call her on 021 712 6424 and she can include the additional item/s in the McGregor order. ♦



Every Watt Counts – by Alistair Upton

With frosty mornings and cold, windy afternoons having arrived in the Breede River Valley, most readers will no doubt have already made ample use of their electric blankets and heaters, and enjoyed slow-cooked stews in front of the telly. Along with the joys of winter, our electricity bills are sure to skyrocket. With a 30-plus per cent Eskom price hike imminent, it would seem in our best interests to reduce our energy consumption this winter. Here are a few tips on how to go about just that.



Heating

- Purchase and install a gas stove or consider a “hot box” (see “Eco-friendly Cooking”)
- Ensure pots cover stove plates completely and lids fit well
- Covering a pot or pan with a lid reducing heating time
- Don’t open the oven door unnecessarily
- Only heat the minimum amount of water required, in a pot or kettle
- Once the kettle has boiled, store the excess heated water in a flask
- Do not use a higher setting than required and switch off your stove a few minutes before you remove the pot or pan
- Defrost frozen foods overnight instead of using the microwave

Refrigeration

- Do not open the fridge door frequently or leave the door open
- Food should be left to cool before being placed in a fridge or freezer
- A fridge and stove should not be situated near one another
- Newspaper can be used to “fill up” a freezer, thereby using less electricity
- Fridges should be defrosted on a regular basis whilst freezers should be done biannually
- Check the seals of the doors and replace/repair if necessary

Dishwashers

- Use a short wash cycle and only start the cycle once you have a full load
- Clean filters regularly – blocked filters waste energy

Washing machines

- Wait for a full load before washing
- Front loaders use less energy and water than top loaders
- Use cold water for washing
- Dry clothes naturally instead of using a tumble dryer

Bathrooms

- Insulate your geyser by purchasing a geyser blanket (R150) or by wrapping it in newspapers or blankets
- Lower the temperature of the geyser – 55 degrees is the norm
- Showering instead of bathing uses 66 per cent less energy
- Switch off the cylinder when not in use, such as when you are on holiday. Switching your geyser off for several hours each day saves electricity

Appliances

- Switch off lights that are not in use
- Switch off the television on the set and not by using the remote
- Disconnect items such as cell phone chargers, radios and computers when they are not being used

Swimming pools

- Cover your pool to reduce heat loss and cleaning
- Reset your pump to the minimum number of hours required for each season

General

- Replace your bulbs with those that are energy efficient (lasting six to 10 times longer), which can reduce energy consumption by 80 per cent
- Purchase tap aerators and low-flow showerheads
- Draw curtains earlier in the day, in order to insulate your home
- At work turn off the monitor, CPU, photocopier and lights before leaving the office! ♡

Robertson Voëlklub se Besoek aan Draaivlei Dam by Brandvlei – deur Maurits Perold

28 Maart 2009

Net na sewe vertrek ons vanaf die poskantoor: dit is weer een van die mooiste dae. Ons ry in gelid tot by Aan-de-Doorns Wynkelder, waar Joel du Plessis vir ons wag met die sleutel. Jy ry deur twee hekke tot by die drie pragtige baksteenhuise met platdakke. Hulle is so honderd tree vanaf die water gebou. Die grasperke is baie mooi gesny en die tuine is netjies. Daar is wilgerbome geplant by die bote vasmeerplek. Die dam is groot, seker 'n paar honderd tree lank en ongeveer drie honderd tree wyd. Dit word omring deur riete en op die water groei blou waterlelies.



Net daar sien ons die eerste **Grootkoning-riethaan**. Ek het nog op geen ander plek so baie van die spesie gesien nie. Meer na regs sien ons 'n wyfie van die spesie met 'n jongeling wat nog nie eers sy kleure het nie. Met al die ander soorte en getalle voëls wat ons die dag gesien het is dit 'n bewys dat die omgewing baie gesond is. Dit kan jy aan die helder water toeskryf.

Ons stap aan die dam se westekant af. Hier is die riete op die droë grond mooi plat gesny. Elke vyftig meter of so is daar groepe boompies aangeplant. Vir dié is daar water aangelê. Die soorte wissel van doringbome tot karee en nog ander. Daar is baie moeite gedoen en dit het baie geld gekos om die dam en omgewing te verfraai. Links van die paadjie is kort grasveld. Dit is hier waar ons twee grasveld tipe voëls kry: die **Oranjekeelkalkoentjie** en **Skaapwagter**. Ek het byde van hulle al by ander geleenthede gesien, maar nog nooit saam nie. Toe ek die kalkoentjie se opgeneemde geluid speel raak hy baie opgewonde en vlieg reguit tot naby ons.

Ons stap verder aan en sien verskillende spesies. By die end van die dam draai ons om en stap terug na die wilgerbome om ons verversings en drinkgoed te geniet. Die aantal spesies wat ons gesien het beloop **55** soorte. Van dié was die **Afrikaanse Vleivalk** en **Swartriethaan** ook besonders. Dit was 'n uitsonderlike uitstappie en al ons dank aan die Quenet's vir die voorreg om die besonderse "paradys" van hulle te geniet het. ♦

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A Fowl Affair – by a Friend of “Vrolykheid”

Making drinking glasses out of glass bottles

Tinkling glass invades dry rustling leaves
As Gerrit and I under a blue gum in “Die Kamp”
Convert scrap bottles into drinking glasses.

Everything’s as it was forever
Whispers of ageless past and unchanging future
Yellowing grass captures sun’s slanting rays.

Metallic clinking calls of guineafowl;
“*Daar kom die manne,*” says Gerrit
As every day they come around this time.

Do you know how to catch a guineafowl?
No? Easy: show me their path and give me a spade,
A *spitgraaf*.

A hole in the ground
One spade by one spade by one spade
A trail of mielies or bread, some in the hole.

The bird finds the crumbs and follows the trail
Jumps into the hole and can’t jump out
Can’t spread its wings.

I dig the hole
I lay the trail, some crumbs into the hole
A second trail from the other side increases our chances.

Back at the tree we work and wait
In the loud silence we wait.
Most bottles don’t break cleanly, pings of cracked glass.

“*Daar’s hulle,*” says Gerrit.
One bird darts ahead, neck stretched low
Shorts jabs at the ground pecking the crumbs.

He reaches the hole, he pauses
The memory of sound hangs in the air
Thin neck swivels left, swivels right ... will he jump?

The ageless flow of all time past halts abruptly
The tender fabric of nature about to be torn.
What have I done?

A clever trick preserved from boyhood
Fifty years this knowledge slumbered, waiting
Was this bird’s death ordained? For fifty years?

I mastered the power of life and of death
Until this instant to discover
The power of life and of death masters me.

Has mastered me from birth
Has ruled my every waking moment
Rules every motive, rules hunger, thirst and sex.

Riveted, our eyes, our thoughts, our conflicts of the soul
Impinge upon the bird, hovering in the mottled light
What have I done?

It jumps. Too late. No! Over the hole!
Over the hole it jumps and runs along the second trail
Short jabs to the ground, peck-pecking away.

The silence breaks, metallic clinks resound
Nature’s fabric is whole, untorn; life flows again
In harmony I live again.

My new name in the village
Is “spade by spade”. Smiling, I toast the guineafowl
From one of the few surviving glasses:
‘Matthew Gloag & Son’. ♦

A Fond Farewell

This month we sadly say goodbye to long-time committee stalwarts Barbara Jacobs and Gilly Schutte.

Barbara, who was the FoV treasurer, has taken on a development project that is keeping her extra busy. You will find her in Voortrekker Street liaising with the owners of the new shops at her property: Karoux Restaurant, Jacob’s Larder Health Shop, and a hairdresser.

Gilly acted as our liaison for the Robertson Bird Club and was instrumental in ensuring the Friends were always “fed and watered” at our evening talks and family braais. Happily, he has agreed to stay on as an unofficial committee member.

Barbara and Gilly’s sound advice, hard work and good cheer over the years has not gone unnoticed and is most appreciated. Barbara and Gilly, we salute you! ♦

Global Synopsis – by Alison M Downie

April 2009, Cape Town – A private residential development in Hout Bay is turned down. Proposed for the beach dunefield in Hout Bay, the development was refused as it would “benefit a few at the cost of many”, according to the environmental management unit of Cape Town. The sub council decided not to rezone, due to the sensitive nature of the area.

Feb 2009, Mississippi – PETA awards the Gulfport Fire Department in Mississippi a PETA Compassionate Award for rescuing a pitbull, trapped 16 feet underground in a water pipe. The pup, holding her head only centimetres above gushing water, was rescued after firefighters used a catchpole to lift her to safety.

Jan 2009, Rwanda – Despite continuing conflict in the area, a recent count of the mountain gorillas in the southern Virungu National Park indicates an increase in numbers, from 72 to 81. In 2007 rangers were compelled by rebel forces to leave the southern section of the park. Only in December of last year were they able to return, after the park director negotiated with the rebels. During the five-day census, two rangers removed 400 snares, set for antelope but which severely injure gorillas. Just over 700 gorillas survive in only two areas: the Virunga National Park, spanning the borders of Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda. In recent years more than 100 park rangers have been killed protecting the gorillas and their habitat.

Oct 2008, Cambridge, UK – The World Bank and TRAFFIC (the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network) release a report examining what factors most influence wildlife trade in south-east Asia. More than 80 scientists in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Vietnam were consulted in compiling the report. The majority of those consulted felt that one of the major causes is the rising affluence and demand in consumer countries rather than as a result of poverty. The report aims to highlight effective methods in which to combat trade in wildlife, a complex and multi-faceted crisis.

April 2009, Cape Town – The Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning approves a sum of R2.5 million to assist CapeNature in combating fires in the Western Cape. The money will be used for staff training, daily provisions, destroyed equipment, housing, supplies and transport. This past summer has seen devastating fires in much of the province, including the Cederberg, Stellenbosch and Somerset West.

March 2009, Mexico City, Mexico – Palaeontologists reveal the discovery of the oldest fossil remains of a sea turtle, found in northern Mexico. Seven fossils were found in Coahuila, an area scientists refer to as the “paradise of palaeontology”. Belonging to the Chelonia family, the fossil is the oldest sea turtle of its kind. Experts say it lived in the late Cretaceous period 72 million years ago and is the ancestor of the green turtle. The extinct chelonian had a length of one metre, a width of 70 centimetres and differed from other turtles by having a rounded head.

Nov 2008 – April 2009, George – Several proposals to convert an old crocodile farm, now a heronry to a tourism complex are submitted by the Friends of the George Heronry (FROGH) to the George municipality. Ideas for the development include a restaurant, traditional village, medicinal plant nursery and a spa, amongst others. The 4,7 ha property is in danger of being sold to the highest bidder. In April a bird count of the area revealed small numbers of Darter, Spoonbill, Grey Heron and Lanner Falcon, but large numbers of Reed Cormorant (123), Sacred Ibis (271) and Cattle Egret (1989). To voice your support of the project please send a letter to wessageorge@isat.co.za before 15 June 2009. To find out more about the project contact Colin Ralston (email: colinral@hotmail.com; phone: 044 801 4088 or 082 338 2121).

Feb 2009, Detroit – For the first time in 75 years, a beaver is spotted in the Detroit River, indicating that efforts to clean up the area are making a difference. The US Fish and Wildlife Service’s John Hartig says that the clean-up has resulted in the return of birds and fish, including the Peregrine Falcon and sturgeon.

Aug 2008, Hanoi, Vietnam – The 13-man crew of a Vietnamese fishing vessel is arrested off the coast of the Philippines after 101 Hawksbill Turtles are found drowned in their cargo. The men were taken to El Nido in the Philippines; they are to be charged with breaking two laws and, if convicted, will face substantial fines and up to six years behind bars.

April 2009, McGregor – The Lepidopterists’ Society of South Africa release a report based on three-day research on the Boesmanskloof Hiking Trail. Scientists found 11 species of butterfly, including the Karoo widow, citrus swallowtail, painted lady and the rare dark opal.

May 2009, Israel – The world’s first nationwide bill to ban fur has been introduced by Israeli Knesset Member Nitzan Horowitz. If the bill is passed, it will prohibit the sale, production and importation of all fur products throughout the country. ♦

Sources: *Simply Green* e-zine (www.simplygreen.org.za), PETA (www.peta.org), WWF (www.panda.org.za or www.wwf.org/), TRAFFIC (www.traffic.com/), News24 (www.news24.com), Yahoo daily news (www.news.yahoo.com/), Lepidopterists’ Society of South Africa (www.lepsoc.org.za/)

Ramblers' Round-up – by Frances Doering

Our recent walks have enabled us to explore the mountains and valleys lying between Bainskloof and Du Toit's Kloof. On our first outing ten of us followed the fourteen-kilometre Happy Valley trail which lies within the CapeNature (Limietberg) Reserve at the top of the Bainskloof pass. This is an easy walk along a valley to Junction Pool, where the Wit and Krom rivers meet.

On our subsequent hike a party of six walked from the top of the old Du Toit's Kloof pass to the Kromrivier hut. This small hut in a delightful setting is carefully tended by the Paarl/Wellington section of the Mountain Club. We spent an enjoyable evening



sitting on the stoep watching the sun go down and the stars appear in the night sky. Earlier in the day we had gone a short distance into the valley in which Junction Pool lies – we could see it in the distance. The youngest and most energetic member of our party went all the way to the pool and back.

The next morning we made a leisurely climb part of the way up Kromrivier peak but as the day became progressively warmer we decided it would be better spent in one of the pools downstream from the hut – or on the stoep reading some of the back issues of the Mountain Club journal.

Before leaving the area the next morning we drove to the Telkom tower from where there are spectacular views to the Paarl valley and across to Table Mountain and the sea.

Our next visit will take place when the weather is cooler so that we can make a more determined effort to reach one of the peaks in the area.

Ramblers Frances Doering, Ann van der Riet and Marge Campbell enjoy the magnificent scenery of Bainskloof

A proposed two-night trip to the Anysberg Nature Reserve (now managed by Marius, formerly of Vrolijkheid) is planned for springtime as well as a day visit to Bontebok National Park near Swellendam.

The Anysberg NR is situated in the Little Karoo between Ladismith, Laingsburg, Touwsrivier and Montagu, and is approximately two hours' drive from Robertson.

Accommodation consists of five self-catering cottages sleeping 20 people (approximately R150 per person per night) or campsites (R100 per night for up to six people). The cottages are fully equipped with bedding, cutlery and crockery. Only provisions and bath towels need be brought along. The cottages are very neat and beautifully situated.

This is a tranquil, scenic reserve where walking and cycling can be enjoyed; guided overnight trails on horseback are also popular. If sufficient people are interested we are planning a visit on 4–6 September (Friday to Sunday). It is recommended that only vehicles with high ground clearance be used (4x4 not necessary).

Please inform Piet van Zyl at Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve (pvzyl@capenature.co.za or 023 625 1621) **by end June** if you wish to make a booking for either of these outings. They are both sure to be unforgettable and loads of fun. ♦

Earth Hour Feedback

Held on 28 March, Earth Hour was a WWF initiative to raise an awareness of climate change. In South Africa, one million households switched off their lights, saving 400 megawatts of electricity. Worldwide, 88 countries in nearly 4 000 cities cut their lights for one hour.

Said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, "Earth Hour is a way for the citizens of the world to send a clear message [that] they want action on climate change." The UN conference on climate change, to be held in Copenhagen in December, is charged with coming up with a replacement to the expiring – and inadequate – Kyoto Protocol.

One thousand global landmarks signed up for Earth Hour, including the dome of St Peters, the Eiffel Tower, the Acropolis and the Pyramids. The event, which began at a remote albatross sanctuary in the southern Pacific Ocean, crossed a total of 25 time zones. Every person in South Africa who participated in Earth Hour contributed to the saving of 224 tons of coal, 400 tons of carbon dioxide and 576 kilolitres of water. ♦

Night of the Stars

On a cold and rainy evening in May, FoV member Angus Rose gave a most interesting and entertaining talk on the night sky, beginning and closing with the following poem, of which he is most fond:



Angus and friends enjoy a bite to eat after the talk

The Learn'd Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
 When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
 When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and
 measure them,
 When I sitting, heard the astronomer where he lectured with
 much applause in the lecture room,
 How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
 Till rising and gliding out by myself,
 In the mystical moist night air, and from time to time,
 Looked up in perfect silence at the stars.

– Walt Whitman

Weather Statistics

Rainfall (statistics since 1968)				Temperatures (statistics since 1995)	
Totals		Recordings for May			
				May min temp	5,3 ° C
Year to date (end May)	99,8 mm	Min	1 mm (2000)	May max temp	31,6 ° C
2008	414 mm	Max	91 mm (1998)	Average May min	8,0 ° C
2007	315 mm	May 2009	29,5 mm	Average May max	22,5 ° C
2006	335 mm				
2005	239 mm				

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN ENGLAND – a contribution from Dave Harding

Many years ago in England, pub frequenters had a whistle baked into the rim or handle of their ceramic cups. When they needed a refill, they used the whistle to get some service. "Wet your whistle" is the phrase inspired by this practice.

Your committee:

Bank Account, Guest Speakers & Outings	Piet van Zyl	023 625 1621
Secretary & Garden	Ann van der Riet	023 626 3888
Treasurer, Subs, Member Records, Walks & Rambles	Frances Doering	023 625 1449
Newsletter & Chair	Alison Downie	072 258 5888
Events & IT	Alain Roux	023 626 6074

JUNE

Sun 28: Family braai at Vrolijkheid from 11.00 am (should it be raining the braai will be postponed to the following Sunday, 5 July)

JULY

Thurs 9: Day trip to Bontebok Park. Seating is limited so please book your place as early as possible with Piet van Zyl at pvzyl@capenature.co.za or on 023 625 1621

AUGUST

Wed 12: Boesmankloof Trail to the pools. A lovely day hike in the mountain near McGregor. Contact Frances on 023 625 1449 to find out more

Sat 29: Robertson Bird Club outing to Vrolijkheid

SEPTEMBER

Fri–Sun 4–6: Weekend at Anysberg Nature Reserve

Identify the Spoor and Win!

Can you name the animal track in the photograph? (Location: Laingsburg district).

Email your answer to alisonmdownie@yahoo.com or send a postcard to PO Box 436, McGregor 6708 by no later than 31 July.

The first correct entry wins a dinner for two at the popular Café Tebaldi in McGregor! The winner will be drawn on 1 August 2009 and informed in writing or by telephone. ♦



Photograph: Frik Linde

Sensitive readers might find the following article disturbing. It was decided to retain the article but to shorten it and remove graphics. Should you prefer not to read about China's fur trade, continue to the end of page 14 – Ed

Exposed: China's Fur Trade – by Alison M Downie

In the month of May, a documentary on the life of Ingrid Newkirk, co-founder of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), was featured on television. Viewers would have found the movie both disturbing and enlightening. PETA frequently finds itself embroiled in controversy; it often employs extreme tactics (think naked people running through the streets and activists painting themselves red in designer stores) to draw attention to the plight of animals and to those companies who choose to ignore the rights of animals. In recent times, PETA has targeted McDonald's ("McCruelty: I'm hatin' it"), Kentucky Fried Chicken ("Kentucky fried cruelty"), Iams pet food ("10 out of 10 cats prefer NOT to be tortured by Iams") and Giorgio Armani ("Armani: save our skins"), to name but a few.

After Swiss Animal Protection (SAP) sent an investigative team into China, the horrific plight of raccoons and other animals on fur farms in the country was brought to light. What the covert operation uncovered is almost too barbaric and inhumane to comprehend. The following was made public on PETA's website:

When undercover investigators made their way onto Chinese fur farms recently, they found that many animals are still alive and struggling desperately when workers flip them onto their backs or hang them up by their legs or tails to skin them. When workers on these farms begin to cut the skin and fur from an animal's leg, the free limbs kick and writhe. Workers stomp on the necks and heads of animals who struggle too hard to allow a clean cut.

When the fur is finally peeled off over the animals' heads, their naked, bloody bodies are thrown onto a pile of those who have gone before them. Some are still alive, breathing in ragged gasps and blinking slowly. Some of the animals' hearts are still beating five to 10 minutes after they are skinned. One investigator recorded a skinned raccoon dog on the heap of carcasses who had enough strength to lift his bloodied head and stare into the camera.

Before they are skinned alive, animals are pulled from their cages and thrown to the ground; workers bludgeon them with metal rods or slam them on hard surfaces, causing broken bones and convulsions but not always immediate death. Animals watch helplessly as workers make their way down the row.

Undercover investigators from Swiss Animal Protection/EAST International recently toured fur farms in China's Hebei Province, and it quickly became clear why outsiders are banned from visiting. There are no regulations governing fur farms in China – farmers can house and slaughter animals however they see fit – meaning miserable lives and excruciating deaths. The investigators found horrors beyond their worst imaginings and concluded, "Conditions on Chinese fur farms make a mockery of the most elementary animal welfare standards. In their lives and their unspeakable deaths, these animals have been denied even the simplest acts of kindness."

On these farms, foxes, minks, rabbits, and other animals pace and shiver in outdoor wire cages, exposed to driving rain, freezing nights and, at other times, scorching sun. Mother animals, who are driven crazy from rough handling and intense confinement and have nowhere to hide while giving birth, often kill their babies after delivering litters. Disease and injuries are widespread, and animals suffering from anxiety-induced psychosis chew on their own limbs and throw themselves repeatedly against the cage bars.

The globalization of the fur trade has made it impossible to know where fur products come from. Skins move through international auction houses and are purchased and distributed to manufacturers around the world, and finished goods are often exported. China supplies more than half of the finished fur garments imported for sale in the United States. Even if a fur garment's label says it was made in a European country, the animals were likely raised and slaughtered elsewhere – possibly on an unregulated Chinese fur farm.

Because a fur's origin can't be traced, anyone who wears any fur at all shares the blame for the horrific conditions on Chinese fur farms. The only way to prevent such unimaginable cruelty is never to wear any fur. Take PETA's pledge to be fur-free today! ¹

There is no doubt that this is one of the most brutal stories of animal cruelty that has resurfaced in the last year. Sadly, this situation has been ongoing for many years and with every day that passes more animals die in agony. Would it be a great leap of the imagination to say that this is nothing less than torture? Put yourself in the same position and decide for yourself. As long as there is a demand for fur and body parts this cruelty will not end.

People who have wept watching the video of the skinning of one of these animals are the very people who may be unaware that they are guilty of perpetuating the fur trade. Garments which are supposedly "fur-free" are not. Even if a garment states that it is not *made* in China, this does not mean that the materials/furs were not sourced from there.

Says Swiss Animal Protection, "Mixing fur with silk, wool, suede and leather, employing new manufacturing processes such as shearing and knitting, as well as new fashionable colours, have added novelty and versatility to fur.

"Steadily increasing marketing of fur accessories and clothing and footwear with fur trim has almost imperceptibly brought fur back out onto the streets."

While one can understand that diverse cultures have beliefs and consumption patterns different from our own, all animals, whether bred for consumption or not, have the right to freedom from pain and hunger and to live out their lives in a natural environment. It is the care and treatment, together with the method of death that is totally unacceptable.

How can any man look a helpless animal in the eye and then butcher it in the most agonizing way? Sadly, in China there are no laws protecting animals, who are regarded as possessions, just like a television or a car. The country is the largest producer, processor and exporter of fur clothing worldwide: 85 per cent of the world's fur originates on fur farms in China. The wild species most utilised in the fur trade include Rex rabbits, mink, arctic and red foxes, and raccoon dogs. Increasingly, international dealers have moved their businesses to China due to the cheap labour and lax regulations. (Remind me again why China got the nod to host the Olympics?)

How can you help? By choosing what you wear and choosing what you purchase, for starters. You don't need to be a genius to know that we should in any case all be supporting our fellow South Africans. Contribute to organisations that are working in countries like China – this will enable SAP, PETA, TRAFFIC and many others to continue their work with the aim of ending these and other kinds of animal abuse. Consider a monthly donation or bequest in your Will. Foster a mindset of caring in your own community and support local animal shelters, lest our own beloved country reach the same depths of depravity.

"To my mind," Gandhi once said, "I hold that the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man." He spoken often of animals, stating, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

"It ill becomes us to invoke in our daily prayers the blessings of God, the Compassionate, if we in turn will not practice elemental compassion toward our fellow creatures." ♦

Information used with permission from PETA and Swiss Animal Protection/EAST International

For more information on the fur trade in China visit:

Swiss Animal Protection/EAST International: www.animal-protection.net/furtrade/report_fur_china.pdf or www.animal-protection.net/furtrade/chinafur_video.html

PETA: www.peta.org, www.all-creatures.org/anex/raccdog.html, or www.petatv.com/downloads/fur_farm_med.mov



"We are part of the earth and it is part of us
The perfumed flowers are our sisters
The bear, the deer, the great eagle,
these are our brothers
The earth is precious and to harm the earth
is to heap contempt on its creator.
What is man without the beast?
If all the beasts were gone man would die
from a great loneliness of spirit.
For whatever happens to the beast
also happens to the man.
All things are connected.
Whatever befalls the earth,
Befalls the sons of the earth."

– North American Indian Chief Seattle, 1854