



The Rooikat

A newsletter produced by the Friends
of Vrolijkheid

No 42 ~ December 2009

 Please consider the environment and print only if strictly necessary

In This Issue:

Have Your Say	page 1
Fun with the Friends	page 2
KingsRiver Hiking Trail	page 4
Copenhagen Climate Change Conference	page 4
Vakansie by Kruger	page 5
Cape Leopard Trust Update	page 7
Concert at Eseltjiesrus	page 8
New Aloe Species	page 9

Back in Time with Gilly	page 10
Global Synopsis	page 11
Weather Stats	page 12
Readers' Competition	page 12
Old England	page 12
McGregor in the 1800s	page 13
Cape Peninsula's Baboons	page 14
Friends Christmas Party	page 15

Feedback from our Readers

Please consider putting the events section on the first page. That way, people won't miss out on events.
– Annemarie

After due consideration we decided to continue to feature the forthcoming events at the end of the newsletter, as is customary with publications. The forthcoming activities and events will appear as per normal as the second last article in all newsletters (apart from the final year's issue). We will continue to send out reminders of forthcoming events. Consider one of the following:

- 1) Print the page of events. To do this go to File -> Print -> Pages (select page number, left side of screen) -> OK -> Print*
- 2) Write down the events directly into your diary*
- 3) Contact Alison at alisonmdownie@yahoo.com to receive separate list of events via email for easy printing*

Hello – many thanks for a wonderful "Rooikat" newsletter. You really put so much effort into getting it together and it must take a huge amount of your time. Much appreciated.

– Ann

Congratulations on an excellent issue!

– Johan

The Editor and staff: Well – this wonderful newsletter becomes more interesting as the years go by. You are to be congratulated on the way you lay everything out – very professional. You have selected a wide variety of stories which every member will enjoy reading. My favourite this month [issue 41] is June's interesting report back on "Magical Madagascar". Dave Harding's explanations of sayings always raise a laugh! I love to retell them to my friends! We always keep the newsletter ... it is placed in our B&B for our guests to enjoy. We always look forward to anything that FoV organises. Thank you and your small committee for the wonderful job you are doing. I look forward to No 42!

– Denise

We owe a lot to our founder, Dave Harding, who came up with the idea and started the newsletter many years ago. I'm sure you'd agree his choice of name was a true stroke of genius. Dave's enthusiasm and vision for the publication has resulted in what it has become today and, together with the hard work of the committee, is something we as members can all be proud of.

A warm welcome to new members Ray Gregory, Rob Leiper and Rose Kent, Friik Linde and Tom Lewis (the Witteberg Private Nature Reserve), Dave and Barbara Giraudeau, Hester Bothma, Yvonne Courtin, Bill Doertenbach and Kristina Svensson, Tania and Michael Garcia-Warner, Richard and Naomi Schutte, Penny Urquhart, Sylvia and Eric Buchanan, Gawie and Tineke Malan, and Erika Viljoen.

We trust you will gain much enjoyment from becoming a member of the Friends and we look forward to your participation in the forthcoming year's events.

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.

Fun with the Friends – by Frances Doering

Visit to Anysberg Nature Reserve: 4–6 September

Piet, from Vrolijkheid, in consultation with Marius, previously at Vrolijkheid and now managing Anysberg, kindly arranged this outing for us, including obtaining very special rates for accommodation. Many thanks to them both and to CapeNature.

We arrived at the reserve on a windy Friday afternoon. Those who had opted not to camp were soon snugly ensconced in their charming cottages while the rest of us occupied ourselves with selecting the least exposed campsites and subduing our tents sufficiently to allow us to erect them. Unfortunately one tent refused to comply and as a result Alain and June had to admit defeat and retire to the comfort of a chalet.

But the wind soon dropped (slightly!) and we were able to take a walk to the dams and do some bird watching. We came across a herd of gemsbok, of which there are many on the property, and the reserve's horses (used for overnight and day excursions) on the way back. Then it was time to get out the camp chairs and gaze at the mountains as they reddened in the deepening glow of the sun until darkness fell and an impressive moon rose over Towerkop to the east.

The next morning, having been driven part of the way by Boris, we walked through the veld for a couple of hours to Tapfontein, the overnight camp for the horse trails, set in a delightful tranquil valley next to a dry river bed. In the evening we enjoyed a communal braai at Alain and June's chalet. We had enough time on Sunday morning for another walk to one of the larger kloofs which opened out into a breathtaking amphitheatre. We did not have enough time to explore it – we will have to do this on our next visit. On the way we disturbed a small snake lying in the path. Our subsequent research revealed that it was either the spotted beaked snake (*Rhamphiophis multimaculatus*) or a juvenile mole snake (*Pseudaspis cana*).

All that was left was for us to enjoy more of the beautiful scenery in the area as we made our way back to Montagu after a memorable weekend.



Thomas Hut: 2–4 November 2009

A five and a half hour climb to get to the hut at 1,392 m with a backpack weighing 12 kg – it doesn't sound too bad if you say it quickly.

But walk away from the car and slowly trudge, trudge, trudge up that mountain and it's another story. The first stop is at the "Sitkamer" – a shady overhang less than an hour from the start – after which there are some fairly steep and rough zigzags to "Fairview" where we were at a respectable height but still a lot of mountain above us.

On again, taking longer, more gradual zigzags which become shorter and steeper as we near the top. Then we are at "Lemoendraai" where the path turns back around the mountain, heading west. Not far to go now – we can have a long lunch stop and gather ourselves for the final climb. But we are getting tired and the packs grow heavier on our backs.

At last we are at the hut and can leave our packs on the stoep while we walk to the river, feeling so light that it seems one jump will take us high into the air.

The strenuous climb is forgotten when the sun sets and the sky around us turns orange, pink and yellow and the peaks glow red. Then the moon rises behind the clouds.

The next morning we are still in climbing mode so we follow the cairns to the Brandwag beacon another 400 m up. What bliss to carry an almost empty pack! The views from here are stupendous – Worcester and the Brandvlei Dam on one side; the Waaihoekseberg peaks on another; behind us the Hex River valley; further south, endless mountains running towards Swellendam; and from Chavonnesberg peak a dark, forbidding chasm falling precipitously towards Slanghoek far below.

Back at the hut there is some excitement as Alain has discovered an outside shower, an innovation since our previous visit.

We enjoy another beautiful evening in the spectacular surroundings before making our way early the next morning downhill to our vehicle.

Thank you MCSA for allowing us the use of this special place. ♦



"Wish you were here!"

A Humbling Walk on the Wild Side – with Dr Andrew Baxter

Mountaineer, CEO of Cape Storm Outdoor Apparel, renowned archaeologist and expert in paleoecology [ecology that deals with the interaction between ancient organisms and their environment] and environmental change and conservation biology – this is Dr Andrew Baxter, who led the hike through the Koningsrivier kloof, where the river ran for many millions of years before being dammed for agricultural purposes in 1964.

My walk through the Kloof Trail on KingsRiver Estate proved to be as fascinating as I had anticipated.

With water being the essence of all life it is only natural that this river became a rich source of sustenance for the San people who would have been the first of the settlers along its banks, trapping the smaller animals of the area which came down to drink from the river and harvesting the wild bulbs and berries. They later became culturally integrated with the pastoral Khoikhoi as they migrated from the south-west through the rugged terrain of the Little Karoo, seeking food and water for their herds.

This gentle walk leads past ancient Bushman caves (easily accessible) and a Stone Age workshop etched into the prehistoric rock face of this exceptionally beautiful water-eroded terrain reveals evidence of Later Stone Age lithics as well as clay potsherds from the area proximal to the cave. There also appear to be Early Stone Age hand axes in river cuttings. Some of these are forged from the stone found in the area but there is also evidence of tools which have been brought in from other regions where the stone is harder and would then have been used to cut into the indigenous rock in order to create these artefacts. As the river levels rose and fell, archaeological deposits from different settlements and ages have been left in the riverbed.

The incredible excitement of finding these ancient relics (which becomes quite easy when you know what you're actually looking for!) was enhanced by Andrew's expertise which allowed things like determining where the stone was quarried, when the stone was worked, what kind of technology was used to make the stone tool, and what evidence there is of the tool's use. Andrew also insists that there are also lithics on the koppie behind the farm, where the Kleinberg Trail weaves along the top of the mountain, with a view over McGregor that rivals no other, and also within several sites in the Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve, which borders the estate.

The trick here is not to get obsessive only with what's on the ground around you and remember to look up from time to time. The surrounding rugged rock face is not only breathtakingly beautiful, but also rich in plant and animal life indigenous to this area – steenbok, klipspringer, Cape clawless otter and baboon keep a close watch on you from the rocky ridges. Along the way you will follow rock pools to the waterfalls, spot the pairs of Black- and Fish Eagles and hear their cries which have echoed in this crevasse since time immemorial. It is really difficult not to be awe-struck by the monolithic rock structures that have existed for millennia and will probably be around long after mankind, as we know it, ceases to exist. A truly humbling moment. ♦

Originally published as the KingsRiver Estate Spring Newsletter. Used with permission.

Copenhagen 2009 – by Alison M Downie

The Climate Change Conference, currently underway in Copenhagen, is bringing international leaders from 192 countries together in an effort to discuss the cataclysmic issue of climate change. The annual conference, taking place during 7–18 December this year, is being hosted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and aims to bring heads of state, scientists and organizations together. The Kyoto Protocol, though 12 years distant, came into effect only four years ago and the reduction targets set at the conference ends in 2012. The climate treaty needs to be negotiated and, going forward, will take over from the Kyoto Protocol. The amount of financial aid required and technology available will come under the spotlight but it is also a significant political issue.

Should governments alone be responsible for a sustainable future? Surely each of us should play our part in reducing the impact on the blue planet. Ask yourself: how many bottles of water do you buy each week when you could refill a glass one? How many imported products do you still buy, instead of making use of local goods? How often do you drive when you could walk, cycle or carpool? Without doubt, climate change is the single biggest economic, social and environmental challenge we face this century and we all need to play a role.

A climate petition, signed by hundreds of thousands of people from all around the world, will be handed over to heads of state at the event. To make your voice heard or to find out more, visit www.panda.org.za or www.earthhour.org. ♦



Kruger Wildtuin Vakansie: 2009 – deur Piet van Zyl

Ek en my vrou, Johanna, het 'n heerlike 13 dae in die Kruger Wildtuin deurgebring!

Ons is op 9 Augustus by die Phalaborwa hek in en het die eerste drie nagte in die Shingwedzi ruskamp oorgebly. Vandaar het ons die noordelike deel van die wildtuin platgery. Dit is vir my een van die mooiste areas van die Wildtuin, omdat ek 'n boomliefhebber is en daar sulke pragtige bome voorkom. Daar is bv. njalabome, jakkalsbessie, koorsbome, ens. Dit is ook olifantwêreld en ons het baie olifante gesien!



Daarna was ons vir twee nagte in Letabaruskamp met sy mooi groen grasperke en bome.

Ons het aangeskuif vir twee nagte in Olifantsruskamp met sy pragtige uitsig oor die Olifantsrivier. In die omgewing het ons onder andere hyenas, leeus en 'n luiperd gesien.

Daarvandaan is ons na Onder-Sabieruskamp en op pad soontoe het ons net voor Satara weer op 'n trop van vier leeus afgekom wat besig was om aan 'n blouwildebees karkas te vreet. By Onder-Sabie, wat ons gunsteling ruskamp is, het ons vier nagte deurgebring en baie wild gesien waaronder leeus, 'n luiperd en 'n jagluiperd. Die kersie op die koek was 'n trop van agt leeus wat aan 'n buffel karkas gelê en vreet het! Ongelukkig was dit 'n bietjie ver om met 'n gewone kamera fotos te neem maar ons kon hulle darem met ons verkykers dophou. Die aasvoëls en rooijakkalse was natuurlik 'n groot lastigheid vir die leeus om van die karkas af weg te hou!

Daarna is ons na Berg-en-Dal ruskamp vir twee nagte. Dit is ook 'n pragtige ruskamp in die suide van die wildtuin tussen die koppies en in daardie area het ons heelwat witrenosters gesien.

Natuurlik het ons baie ander wild ook in die wildtuin gesien soos buffels, kameelperde, zebbras, impalas, seekoeie, krokodille, waterbokke, bosbokke, njalas, koedoes, bobbejane, blouape, 'n witkwasjakkals, 'n vaalboskat, vlakvarke, verskeie kleinwildsoorte, verskeie kleinsoogdiere, verskeie voëlsoorte, roofvoëls en aasvoëls. Alhoewel ons op die uitkyk was vir skaarser diere soos wildehonde, swartwitpense en bastergemsbokke, het ons hulle ongelukkig misgeloop.

Ons is op 22 Augustus by die Numbi hek uit en het nog 'n paar plekke op die pad terug, besoek soos die Karoo Nasionale Park by Beaufort Wes. Daar het ons twee nagte oorgebly en weer ander wild gesien het soos rooihartbees, bergzebra, swartwildebees, bakoorkakkals, ens.

Die Kruger Wildtuin bly een van ons spesiale vakansieplekke en ons sal gereeld soontoe teruggaan! Die rustige atmosfeer, ongerepte natuur, afwisselende plantegroei-streke en aangename winterweer maak dit 'n baie aantreklike plek! 'n Mens voel steeds veilig daar, die personeel is oor die algemeen baie vriendelik en die fasiliteite is grotendeels skoon en netjies.

Vir voornemende Kruger Nasionale Park-besoekers, hier is 'n paar wenke:

Bespreek vroegtydig: Toe ons dogter nog op skool was en ons die skoolvakansies moes benut om Kruger te besoek, het ek altyd bespreek sodra die bespreking vir die betrokke maand oopgemaak het. Met ons laaste besoek het ons te laat besluit dat ons Kruger toe gaan en kon nie in die Junie vakansie plek kry nie. Toe het ons vir Augustus bespreek en heelwat makliker plek gekry.

Die gewildste seisoen: Vir ons is die gewildste seisoen vir Kruger in die winter omdat die weer in die laeveld dan heerlik is! Die laeveld se somers is te warm vir ons. Ongelukkig is die plantegroei in die winter baie vaal. In die somer is alles mooi groen en ek sal glo dat dit 'n gewilde tyd sal wees. In die Laeveld in die winter loop 'n mens dag en nag met somer klere. Neem steeds iets warm saam.



Neem saam: Ons neem alles saam want dit is heeltemaal te duur vir ons om kos in Kruger te koop of om in restaurante te gaan uiteet! As ek sê dat ons alles saamvat, dan bedoel ek alles behalwe brood want dit moet jy daaglik koop om vars brood te hê. Ek vat my eie brandhout want ons braai gewoonlik elke aand en ons vat 'n klein vrieskassie vir ons vleis. Ek het 'n lekker groot sleepwa om alles wat ons saamvat in te pak. Ons is nie kampmense nie maar bly in die goedkoopste hutte of rondawels. Iets anders waarsonder jy nie Kruger toe moet gaan nie is verkykers vir elkeen in die motor! Dit gebeur so baie dat iets net te vêr is om met die blote oog waar te neem en dan is die verkyker onontbeerlik en mis jy dalk iets!

Bestudeer vooraf: Ek bestudeer vooraf net die pad waarlangs ek Kruger toe gaan ry. Ons slaap gewoonlik twee keer langs die pad oor, by Gariepdam in 'n gastehuis en by vriende in Pretoria. In Kruger besluit ons gewoonlik die vorige aand watter paaie ons die volgende dag gaan ry.

Besoek die webtuiste: As ek vir Kruger wil bespreek besoek ek gewoonlik die SANParke webtuiste want daar kan jy baie gou sien by watter ruskamp is nog plek en vir watter datum. Dit is baie gerieflik en jy kan self jou roete en tydskuur bepaal en die bespreking daarvolgens maak.

Kampeerspesies: Soos reeds genoem is ons nie kampeerspesies nie maar ek moet sê die ruskampe in Kruger het baie lekker kampeerspesies!

Diere: Ek het 'n paar jaar gelede vir my 'n boek gekoop: "Wild Ways – Field Guide to the Behaviour of SA mammals" deur Peter Apps. Dit is 'n fantastiese boek en behandel elke soogdier spesie se gedrag apart bv. sosiale gedrag, paringsgedrag, aggressie gedrag, ens. As jy dus 'n sekere gedrag by diere opmerk, kan jy gaan lees oor die diere se gedrag. Dit is baie interessant! Verder sorg ons ook dat ons 'n afmerklys en veldgidse in die motor het vir diere, voëls en bome. Dit hou jou ure lank besig!



Besondere bome: Vir my is een van die besondere bome in Kruger die jakkalsbessie – *Diospyros mespiliformis*. In Kruger kry jy hierdie bome langs die riviere en by Shingwedzi is daar pragtige voorbeelde van ongeveer 25 m hoog. Bas: donker grys, grof en met diep kurwes; blare: glansend groen bo-op maar donker groen onder; vrugte: 'n ronde vlesige vrug of bessie tot 2.5 cm in deursnit. Die vrugte se sade word gereeld in jakkalse se mis gekry en van daar die naam jakkalsbessie.

Bespreek vroegtydig: Toe ons dogter nog op skool was en ons die skoolvakansies moes benut om Kruger te besoek, het ek altyd bespreek sodra die bespreking vir die betrokke maand oopgemaak het. Met ons laaste besoek het ons te laat besluit dat ons Kruger toe gaan en kon nie in die Junie vakansie plek kry nie. Toe het ons vir Augustus bespreek en heelwat makliker plek gekry. ♦

Baie dankie aan Anneen Steyn-Durant vir sy hulp met hierdie artikel

Ever wondered if lemmings really commit suicide by marching over cliffs? Is the daddy longlegs the most poisonous spider in the world? Did a zookeeper die after being buried in elephant dung? How about the belief that the female praying mantis bites off the head of her mate? To bust these myths and other old wives' tales, visit the fascinating website www.snopes.com. In the "critter" category there are 12 sections, with each entry sorted into "true", "false", "multiple truths", "undetermined" or "unclassifiable".

Cape Leopard Trust Update – by Ben-Jon Dreyer

The Cape Leopard Trust (CLT) has recently confirmed the occurrence of the striped weasel (*Poecilogale albinucha*), way beyond its suggested distribution range, in Namaqualand. According to Smithers (1983) and Maberly (1990) this smaller mustelid does not occur in the Northern Cape at all. Other literature declares that the striped weasel only occurs in a small section of the Northern Cape. This discovery was made possible by using one of the motion-sensitive camera traps in the Namaqua National Park (NNP) during an extensive mammal/predator survey.

The striped weasel is quite similar when compared to the striped polecat (*Ictonyx striatus*) (compare pictures below) in terms of its markings. The main differences are fur length, dental formulas, size (the weasel is about two thirds the size of the polecat) and also the white markings that are more prominent on the weasel.



Striped polecat



Striped weasel

In addition to this find, a total of 11 leopards have been identified since the start of the Namaqualand project. The most recent addition to our Namaqualand list of “bontkatte” was photographed in the Wildepaardehoek area in the NNP (pictured below).



The leopards in the research area appear to be predominantly active between 6.00 pm and 6.00 am, with activity peaking at around 2.00 am. On one or two occasions researchers have snapped photographs of them beyond these parameters. Another interesting observation is that other secondary predators (such as caracal and black-backed jackal) have a more relaxed activity curve on conservation land as opposed to predators on farming land. This may well be due to differing land management systems and objectives. ♦

Picnic and Jazz Concert

It was with not a little anxiety that the committee of the picnic and jazz concert fundraiser, held at Eseltjiesrus Donkey Sanctuary in mid-November, observed the weather for the preceding week. As luck would have it, the winds abated and the rain stayed away.

As members are aware, the concert was held in aid of the bird hide project, which is nearing completion. Having finished the wheelchair-friendly boardwalk, Bruce Milne and Gerhard Botha are now hard at work on the hide (see pictures below). The bird hide will be the third on the property, but one that will provide access to disabled persons.



Although the evening was a little on the cool side, the 120-odd guests soon warmed up sipping the superb Breede River red wines and boogying on down to the accompaniment of well-known local band "The Whole Shebang".

We are happy to report that the event brought in just short of R4,500. The Friends raised a significant amount, thanks to both the concert and the raffle, and this means the group's valiant architect, Bruce Milne, and his trusty engineer, Gerhard Botha, will be able to complete the bird hide within a few weeks.

A big thank you must go to all the sponsors and to everyone who supported the event. The Friends hope to see you all there again next year for more fun and hilarity!

Even in these tough economic times, a number of restaurants, wine estates and other establishments generously offered prizes and we thank them very sincerely for their contribution. Please support them!

Anysberg Nature Reserve – 62,000 ha CapeNature reserve near Laingsburg which offers a variety of activities including game viewing, bird watching, hiking, mountain biking, kayaking and guided horse riding. Camping and self-catering accommodation available. *Contact details: 0861 CAPENATURE (227 362 8873), www.places.co.za/html/3663.html.*

Breede River Goose – relaxing and best-value boat cruise along the scenic Breede near Bonnievale, and camping along the banks of the river. *Contact details: 082 759 5727, www.route62.co.za/route62activity.php?activitiesID=93.*



Deli Girls – deli in McGregor where one can find anything from rollmops and garden utensils to cookery books and handmade chocolates; also serving breakfasts and light lunches. *Contact details: 023 625 1446, www.mcgregoraccommodation.com/1999/index.html.*

Fairy Glen Game Reserve – game reserve providing an excellent opportunity for game viewing and one of the few properties that offer day visits, which includes a sumptuous buffet breakfast and lunch. Overnight lodge accommodation available. *Contact details: 021 423 3266, www.fairyglen.co.za.*



Green Gables – restaurant and pub with one of the best views of the village of McGregor, located at the Old Mill Lodge, guaranteeing excellent country fare and a welcoming atmosphere. *Contact details: 023 625 1626, www.tourismmcgregor.co.za/members/Green%20Gables%20Country%20Inn.htm*

Jack and Grape Pub and Restaurant – well-loved watering hole with friendly hosts who serve the best steaks and ribs south of the equator! *Contact details: 023 625 1257, www.mcgregor.org.za/subscribers/.../the-jack-and-grape.html*

Sanbona Wildlife Reserve – 54,000 ha property with free-roaming big five and several luxury lodges. The reserve has a white lion project which aims to reintroduce the animals into the main reserve. The reserve also boasts some remarkable rock art sites and rare succulents. *Contact details: 041 407 1000, www.sanbona.com*

Tebaldi's at Temenos Retreat – popular a la carte restaurant serving breakfasts, lunches and dinners as well as the best coffees in McGregor! The retreat is an ideal venue for small conferences and workshops. Accommodation is in the form of self-catering cottages and a variety of body therapies are available.

Von Loveren Wines – wine estate that hardly needs introducing, being world renowned. Their weekend sweetcorn fritters are legendary! The estate shares a boundary with Vrolijkheid and a delightful cottage is now available on the premises. The wine estate organises and hosts one of the most scenic runs of the Western Cape each October, which is breathtaking in more one ways than one! *Contact details: 023 615 1505, www.vanloveren.co.za.*



Reuben's at the Robertson Small Hotel – fine dining restaurant offering patrons a myriad of dishes to suit every palate, revealing a constant striving for the ultimate synergy of texture, flavour and juiciness. The dishes are an ever-changing eclectic combination of flavours prepared with passion and creativity. *Contact details: 023 626 7200, www.therobertsonsmallhotel.com.* ♦

Thank you to Gerhard Botha (aka Johan Kotzel!) for supplying photographs for this article

Local Villager Honoured – by Alison M Downie



As some readers may be aware, Friends of Vrolijkheid member Mike Kamstra is usually to be found on some exploratory trip, his adventures frequently involving an aloe of some kind, vehicular challenges and near-death experiences.

Mike and his fellow explorer, Philip Nel, brought to the attention of esteemed botanist Ernst van Jaarsveld the possibility of a hitherto undiscovered aloe species.

The aloe is from the Doorn River valley region, between the Gifberg and Cederberg mountains near Clanwilliam. The new species, named *Aloe kamnelii*, is similar to that of *A. glauca* and *A. lineata*. It features upright arborescent growth and spreading striate leaves but has dense, tufted growth; glossy, green leaves, and yellow flowers.

It occurs in dense stands on shale outcrops, growing up to 2 m tall. The plant flowers from August to October and is usually found on cliffs or hillsides, usually on the north-facing slope.

Mike, modest as always, admits he and Philip have a lot of people to thank for seeing the project through – from landowners and friends to fellow aloe enthusiasts and Kirstenbosch botanists. Locating, describing and naming a new species is a drawn-out process and requires patience, determination and enthusiasm, maintains Mike. Watch this space for Mike's next adventure! ♦



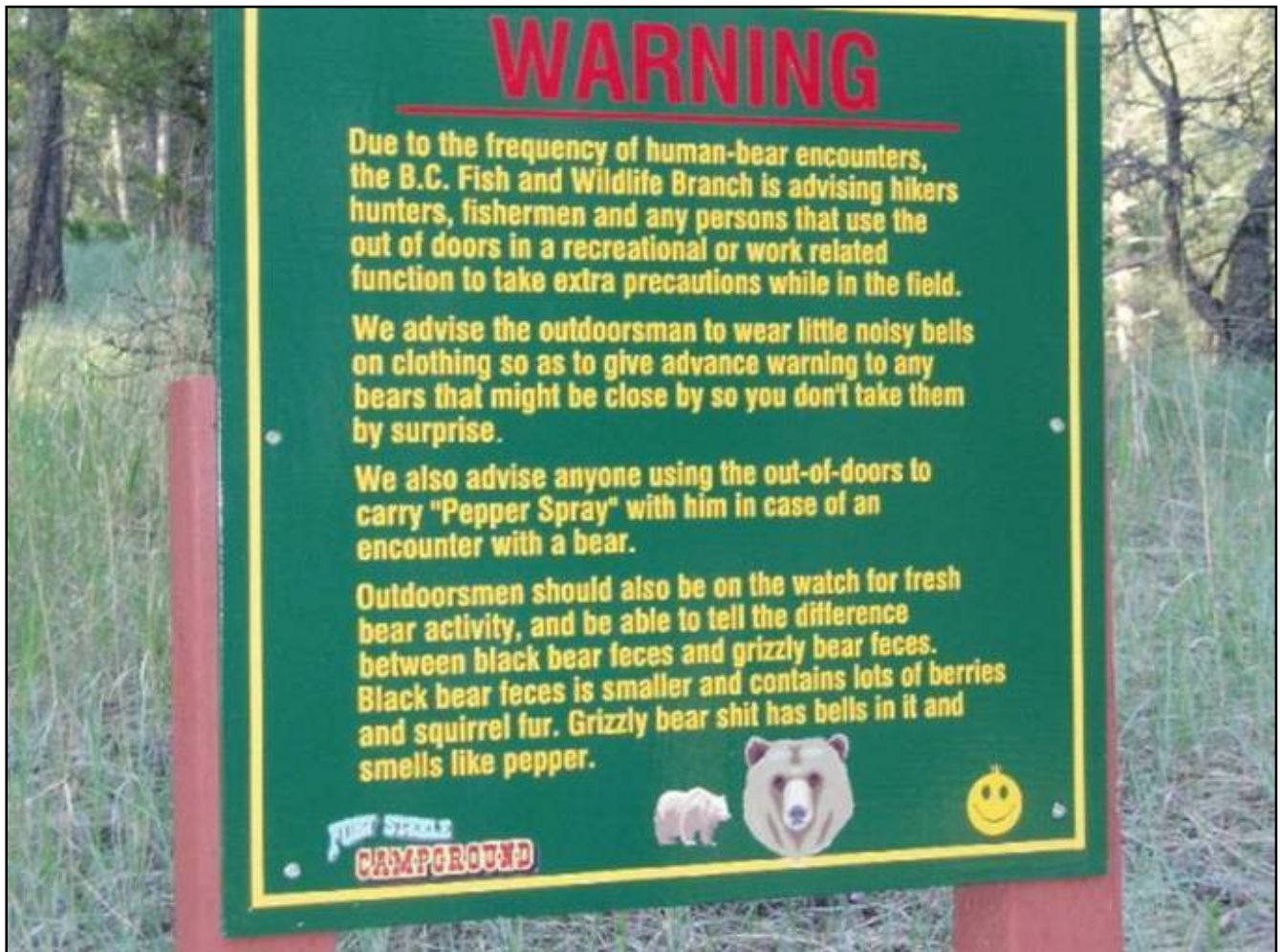
Gilly's Chronicles – by Alison M Downie

Picture it: Ndumu Game Reserve, Zululand, 1971. Ranger Gilly Schutte reports to Dr Ian Player, chief conservator for the region (now KwaZulu-Natal) an increase in water fowl being attracted to the mudflats of the game reserve, exposed due to the closing of the Jozini Dam and the low level of the river. He was quoted as saying, "Large flocks of White-faced Duck, Egyptian- and Spurwing Goose have been sighted. I have also seen the Avocet ... feeding with Blackwinged Stilt and a variety of other waders."

He recalls an amusing incident involving a Hamerkop that bit off more than it could chew. "We recently saw a Hamerkop with a tilapia it had caught, obviously too large for it to swallow. We watched as it repeatedly washed the fish in the water in a vain attempt to make it easier to get down its gullet. Eventually its mate arrived on the scene and was presented with the fish, but the same thing happened – washing, trying to swallow and [then] dropping it, over and over again until it too gave up and just left the fish and flew off.

The reserve encountered problems with poaching on a regular basis and rangers needed to constantly be on the look-out for signs of poaching activity. Gilly reported that a game scout in the Ukondo sand forest in Ndumu came across footprints, which the scout followed until he came upon several set snares. In one a dead adult nyala bull was found. The scout remained at the location and promptly arrested the poacher when he returned for his ill-gotten spoils.

In another area a smouldering fire and remains of a crocodile was found on a river bank. It became evident that the poachers were using hooks baited with the carcasses of a vervet monkey and bush baby in order to lure the crocodiles. The poachers were pursued but not apprehended at this time. The proximity of Ndumu to Mozambique enabled many poachers to slip over the border with relative ease, making pursuit and capture more difficult for game scouts intent on bringing them to justice. ♦



Global Synopsis – by Alison M Downie

September 2009, Papua New Guinea – A team of scientists finds a lost world of fanged frogs and small bear-like creatures in the remote volcanic crater of Mount Bosavi, a Pacific island of Papua New Guinea. The team found more than 40 previously unknown species when they descended into the crater and found a jungle habitat. The team of biologists included experts from Oxford University, the London Zoo and the Smithsonian Institution and was filmed by the BBC's Natural History Unit. "It was mind-blowing to be there and it is clearly time we pulled our finger out and decided these habitats are worth saving," said expedition leader Dr George McGavin. Steve Backshall, a climber and naturalist, became so friendly with the never-before-seen Bosavi silky cuscus, a marsupial that lives in trees, that it sat on his shoulder.

March 2009, Drakensberg – One hundred and fifty yellowwood trees, a protected species, are inadvertently destroyed near the Drakensberg Sun Hotel. The Working for Water (WfW) contractor, who had been working for WfW for six years, confused the precious trees with wattle. Some trees were 48 cm in diameter and were subsequently used for road building in plantations. The contractor had already been paid when it was discovered, received only a warning and the contract was terminated. *(No surprises there ... Ed)*

December 2008, Bangkok – WWF releases a report stating that "between 1997 and 2007, at least 1,068 species have been officially described by science as being newly discovered species". The report said that a rat thought to have become extinct 11 million years ago and a cyanide-producing, bright-pink millipede were among creatures found in what the group called a "biological treasure trove". The species were all found in the rainforests and wetlands along the Mekong River, which flows through Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the southern Chinese province of Yunnan. "This region is like what I read about as a child in the stories of Charles Darwin," said Dr Thomas Ziegler, curator at the Cologne Zoo, who was involved in the research. The new species include 519 plants, 279 fish, 88 frogs, 88 spiders, 46 lizards, 22 snakes, 15 mammals, four birds, four turtles, two salamanders and a toad.

September 2009, Oudtshoorn – Three hikers die in the Swartberg Mountain near Oudtshoorn after suffering from hypothermia. The group of six, from Cape Town, began the hike in the morning, but were overcome by freezing weather conditions later in the day. The situation appears to have been made worse when the group split up. *(Note that in most cases the individual does not recognise his/her symptoms and that the condition can result in death after only a short period of exposure – Ed)*

October 2009, Cape Town – Seven beaches are awarded Blue Flag status, the most for any city in the country. This is an international award which recognises beaches that meet certain standards of cleanliness and environmental management. Thirty-one beaches in South Africa have Blue Flag status, with 4,000 declared internationally, representing 59 countries.

August 2009, Skukuza, Kruger National Park – Fifty-seven new field rangers complete their training, a move made by South African National Parks (SANP) in order to step up the crime fighting ability against the brutal poaching of animals within the park. SANP Chief Executive Dr David Mabunda attended the ceremony and stated: "Since the beginning of the year the country in general has lost a total of 94 rhinos, in which 38 was lost in KNP, seven in Gauteng, nine in Limpopo, five in Mpumalanga, 10 in North West, four in Eastern Cape and 21 in KwaZulu-Natal."

November 2009, Pretoria – Minister for Water and Environmental Affairs Buyelwa Sonjica confirms that he intends setting up environmental courts in the country in order to assist with the fight against animal anti-cruelty, poaching and the like. It is hoped that the courts, located in existing buildings, will be up and running in about six months' time.

September 2009, Australia – Bundadood, a small rural town south of Sydney, bans all bottled water, replacing it with refillable bottles and public drinking fountains. A world first, activists say bottled water causes the unnecessary use of plastics and fuel for transport. A 2006 study found that the industry was responsible for releasing 60,000 tonnes of gases blamed for global warming. "Whilst our politicians grapple with the enormity of dealing with climate change, what Bundadood shows is that at the very local level we can sometimes do things that can surprise ourselves, in terms of our ability to bring about real and measurable change that has a real benefit for the environment," said John Dee, spokesperson for the campaign.

December 2009, Denmark – WWF commends President Jacob Zuma's announcement that he and a delegation from South Africa will be attending the climate summit in Copenhagen. SA has committed to a 34% emission reduction by 2020 and 42% by 2025. This will allow the country's emissions to peak between 2020 and 2025, stabilise and then decline. WWF CEO Morne du Plessis: "Within Africa, South Africa is by far the largest emitter of greenhouse gases and it has therefore been key that the South African government delivers such a bold statement. President Zuma has thrown down the gauntlet for others and it is up to world leaders to show the political will necessary to secure a positive outcome in Copenhagen. The science is clear, the urgency even clearer." ♦

Sources: Mountain Club of South Africa (www.mcsa.org.za), Care2 Petition Site (www.care2.com), WWF (www.panda.org.za or www.wwf.org/), Wild magazine (www.wildcard.co.za), News24 (www.news24.com), Yahoo daily news (www.news.yahoo.com/), Time magazine (www.time.com), Cape Times (www.capetimes.co.za), Simply Green magazine (www.simplygreen.org.za)

Weather Statistics for November

Rainfall				Temperatures	
Totals		Recorded stats			
				Nov min temp	7,7 ° C
Year to date (end Nov)	277 mm	Min	0 mm ('69, '70, '72, '75, '79, '87, '93, '03)	Nov max temp	41,3 ° C
2008	417 mm	Max	161,0 mm (2008)	Average min	12,8 ° C
2007	315 mm	Nov total	36,0 mm	Average max	27,7 ° C
2006	335 mm				
2005	239 mm				

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

In 1740 Admiral Vernon of the British fleet decided to water down the navy's rum. Needless to say, the sailors weren't too pleased and called Admiral Vernon, Old Grog, after the stiff wool program coats he wore. The term "grog" soon began to mean the watered-down drink itself. When you were drunk on this grog, you were "groggy", a word still in use today.

Your committee:

Bank Account, Guest Speakers & Outings	Piet van Zyl	023 625 1621	pvzyl@capenature.co.za
Secretary & Garden	Ann van der Riet	023 626 3888	borisann@telkomsa.net
Treasurer, Subs, Member Records, Walks & Rambles	Frances Doering	023 625 1449	andredoering@netactive.co.za
Editor & Chairperson	Alison Downie	072 258 5888	alisonmdownie@yahoo.com
Family Events & General	Alain Roux	023 626 6074	rouxaj@telkomsa.net
(Unofficial Member at Large)	Gilly Schutte	023 626 6899	~

Readers' Competition

Answer the following question and win! What is the term that refers to an animal which is active at dawn and at dusk?

Email your answer to alisonmdownie@yahoo.com or send a postcard to PO Box 436, McGregor 6708.

The winner will be drawn on 10 January 2010 and informed in writing or by telephone. The competition is open to FoV members only.

Congratulations to Margaret Milne who correctly identified the plant in the previous issue as that of *Crassula rupestris* (sosatiebos, also known as the concertina plant).



The picture on the following page was kindly donated by Willie Brönn, after he had an old postcard in his possession photographed. The Brönn family lived on the premises where Temenos Retreat is currently located for about 100 years. Note the original church steeple, the cattle "mis" in the middle of the street and the couple on the right.



Is There a Baboon on Your Stoep? – by John Hargreaves

“Wilful baboon slaughter”, “Shoot to kill”, “Hell bent on killing”. These are just some of the angry comments arising from a dispersing male baboon protocol presented by UCT’s Baboon Research Unit doing away with the protected status of these primates on the Peninsula.

A spokesman for CapeNature has called for them to be deemed as “damage-causing animals” which allows for repeat male raiders to be captured and put down. The outcry that followed the shooting of a troop of 18 by Cape Nature Conservation in 1990 led to the launch of the Kommetjie Environmental Action Awareness Group. Pressure from this and other groups made it an offence to shoot the animals. But although monitors were employed in 1999 to keep baboons from entering residential areas, in recent months baboon-related incidents have once again begun.

Authorities have been blamed for poor management but certain activists are convinced that residents should take more responsibility for baboon-proofing their homes, according to them a relatively simple process often involving little more than containing food waste.

Baboon Bart, one of a number of male raiders who has a reputation for being non-threatening, has twice managed to escape after capture. For him it won’t be “third time lucky”. Dr Ernst Baard of CapeNature’s Wildlife Advisory Committee has stated that killing him is the very last thing they want to do but that with this animal they have no choice. Relocating him is also not an option as he may be infected with a viral disease that could be passed on.



Eric, one of Kommetjie’s baboons, recovering at a veterinary clinic after he was attacked by two pitbulls earlier this year

However, experts such as primatologist Dr Tim Newman and Jenni Trethowan of Baboon Matters disagree. They claim that after sterilization, relocation to private reserves willing to have them is feasible, albeit risky. Not so, maintains Dr Baard. He says that apart from the transfer of disease, there is a real possibility of translocated males disrupting social structures in mainland troops. He is also adamant that the actions of CapeNature are defensible and are aimed at ensuring the future conservation of the baboons of the Peninsula.

The baboon “problem” is not new and will continue as long as the urban sprawl prevents dispersing males from seeking mates, thereby creating their own troops in areas historically open to them. Members of the public who have felt threatened have in many instances reacted violently towards these animals, often with tragic consequences. This fear and mistrust was heightened by reports of a four-year-old child being attacked at a Kogel Bay picnic site. Is this a case of excessive baboon aggression or irresponsible human behaviour? Clearly the authorities and residents in the Peninsula have a duty to work together towards a better understanding of these indigenous primates.

The good news is that according to the latest initiative of UCT’s Baboon Research Unit, this co-operation may already have begun. The way has been paved for the Peninsula’s baboons to be elevated from a much-maligned status to one that could prove to be the benchmark for the successful management and conservation of “primates in conflict with humans”. So says Onno Huyser of the Table Mountain Fund, an associated trust of WWF South Africa. Digital maps have been created, which means that both of the authorities responsible for land use and development in the Cape Peninsula are now equipped with information about current baboon landscape requirements. These maps warn that failure to protect low-lying habitats will inevitably result in escalated human-baboon conflict.

It is clear that an educated and non-emotional approach be adopted by all interested parties before man and nature can reach a harmonious balance. ♦

For more visit www.baboonmatters.org.za, www.brublog.co.za, www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=7195 and www.panda.org.za/index.php?section=News_AboutUs&id=273

A Night to Remember – by Alison M Downie



Saturday, 5 December found the Friends of Vrolijkheid enjoying their final function of 2009 at the scenic Vrolijkheid picnic site. The committee decided to depart from the usual brunch by way of a change and came up with the idea of a potjie supper. As it turned out, the weather was perfect and the evening a superb end to a busy year.

The usual suspects Ann van der Riet and Frances Doering decided on the recipes and were responsible for purchasing the ingredients as well as preparing mountains of vegetables and chicken.

Alain Roux and Andre Doering were our firestarters, ensuring a steady supply of coals to the many potjie pots bubbling away with all manner of good things. By this time, the members had started to gather and visitors were in the throes of enjoying sundowners and snacks, to the accompaniment of birdsong and nocturnal insects.

The evening was thoroughly enjoyed by all and was rounded off, in celebration of the McGregor Apricot Festival, with a delicious dessert of ice cream and homemade apricot coulis.

“The best yet”, “superb” and “absolutely divine” were just some of the comments received by departing guests. We are most pleased that the members enjoyed the event, which incidentally raised more than R1,000.

Your support at our various events and your generous donations are much appreciated. We are hopeful that we have now raised sufficient funds to cover the cost of the materials required to complete the bird hide.

Of course all our efforts would have been in vain had it not been for the amazing contribution made by Bruce and Gerhard who are undertaking the construction work on a voluntary basis.

As is customary, we will be taking a breather for the duration of the festive season and warm summer months. It is, however, likely that we will schedule a few events between now and March, and we will inform members accordingly. We wish all our members a safe and blessed Christmas and a New Year that is filled with hope, happiness and adventure. See you in 2010! ♦

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
the rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

– Irish blessing

Next issue: March/April 2010