



The Rooikat

A newsletter produced by the Friends
of Vrolijkheid

No 45 ~ November 2010

 Please consider the environment and print only if strictly necessary

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Feedback from our Readers

Thank you for prodding me into looking at the *Rooikat* competition. I realise that I now know more about genetids that I did before: that there are two kinds; and you also got me to look a lot more closely at the animal. This may well be the objective of having the competition – an incentive to learn a bit more about nature. Your competition has reminded me of something. Here's a question that has puzzled me for a long time and which you may be able to answer: Years ago I had four geese which lived on the plot below our former house in Darling Street. One winter's night – in the very early morning – we heard the geese screaming madly. I rushed outside but was stopped in my tracks when an animal ran past me and jumped over the gate and away. Then another, close to me, hissed, like a cat. I hastily retreated!

The next morning we called Vrolijkheid and one of the staff came with a trap. Two of the geese were injured, one very badly. The gentleman said the cats were 'muskelaar katte', and that several geese and ducks had at the time been attacked and killed in the village. One of our geese died and the others were promptly moved to Whipstock Farm where they lived happily ever after, sheltering on an island at night.

My question is this: were the culprits genetids or civets? I looked it up in books but one said 'muskelaar katte' were genetids while another said civets.

– Christine Lawley, McGregor

We are pleased that the competition has tweaked your interest in genetids, Christine. Vrolijkheid Reserve Manager Piet van Zyl confirmed that a 'muskelaar kat' is a genet. The only one in our area is the small-spotted genet or 'kleinkolmuskelaar kat', Genetta genetta.

Rooikat Trail Run – by Alistair Upton

While the softies in Cape Town were huddled under duvets listening to the rain pelting down and feeling miserable on 28 August, in McGregor locals and visitors were exchanging pleasantries as they lined up for the start of the inaugural Rooikat Trail Run at Vrolijkheid.

It was reserve manager Piet van Zyl who dropped the seed of an idea into the ear of Angie Wilson, who owns and manages Target Events, a company specialising in mountain bike races and trail runs. The two of them had been chatting about the forthcoming Bushman Blitz, a 32- and 12 km trail run along the Boesmanskloof Hiking Trail, starting in Greyton. ‘How about holding a mountain race at Vrolijkheid next year?’ suggested Piet. The idea blossomed and before long Angie had enlisted the help of Vrolijkheid staff and the Friends in confirming the routes and making the necessary plans.



The FoV committee assisted with some of the background work, such as scouting various routes, measuring distances, organising drink and food stalls, and allocating marshals, sweepers, and timekeepers. An immense amount of work goes into ensuring the smooth running of these events, and many runners now take part in *Runner's World* magazine's 'rate your race' system, which has stringent standards.

Volunteers and members were up early on race day, which coincided with the McGregor Food and Wine Festival, to set up tables and signs, and get coffee brewing for the early arrivals. The morning was windy at first but turned into a beautiful day: slightly cool, providing ideal running conditions.

A good turnout of mountain warriors lined up to tackle the hills of the 19 km route, while a milder and very scenic 9 km option appealed to all ages. About 150 runners participated in the event, including Waldorf's Felipe-John Nsodi and Alison Downie representing the Friends. After completing the race, each runner received a complimentary drink from sponsor Peninsula Beverages (Coke/Powerade) and had some time to grab a boerie roll before settling down for the prizegiving. Target Events has a reputation for superb giveaways and this event was no exception. Wine, restaurant and accommodation vouchers, backpacks and goodie bags were all given away and few returned home empty handed.

The feedback from the run was most positive and it seems likely that the Rooikat Trail Run will be a permanent fixture on the trail running calendar. The event was aired on SuperSport Trail TV in October and received media coverage on various websites, including YouTube and *Runner's World*, and in various magazines and newspapers.

We were able to not only make a positive contribution and promote Vrolijkheid but also use the event as a fundraiser, bringing in over R1,000. Well done to Angie, Piet and his staff, and to all the FoV volunteers who assisted on the day. We anticipate a bigger and even better Rooikat Trail Run in 2011. ♦



Animal Encounters – compiled by Alison M Downie

McGregorite Roger Verrall, up to his elbows in soap suds one sunny morning, suddenly spies an intruder in his garden, this one of a different variety.

As is my habit, I had placed our dog's partly-eaten food bowl outside the kitchen at our home near the municipal reserve in Van Reenen Street so that our 'Twenty-one Bob Chickens' [guineafowl] can eat their fill. Thinking of my comfy armchair and an exciting game of cricket, I was busily doing my household chores in my wife's absence when I glanced out of the window, hearing an odd noise – and the aforesaid 'chickens' are not noted for quietness.



There, before my very eyes (as the saying goes) was a small grey mongoose devouring the dog food, with every evidence of enjoyment. (I tried one of those little pellet things once before and thought it was 'orrible ...') After searching frantically for a towel, I managed to snap a few photographs through the kitchen window.

I think we should forget all this 'global warming' business and look more closely at 'global wilding'. We at Sheepstor Cottage are already being squeezed out by Karoo vlei rats from one side and grey mongooses from the other, with the loud-mouthed guineafowl in the middle. I keep a close watch for vultures on the roof – it won't be long, mark my words ... ♦

In this quarter we welcome new members Konrad, Shelley and James Brownlee (McGregor); Mike Jacim (Ashton); Victoria Wolff (McGregor); Arjen Beaufort (Cape Town); and Hugh and Millie James (Ashton). We hope you gain much enjoyment from joining the Friends and look forward to seeing you at our next event.

Filmer's Spiders Revised Edition Now Available

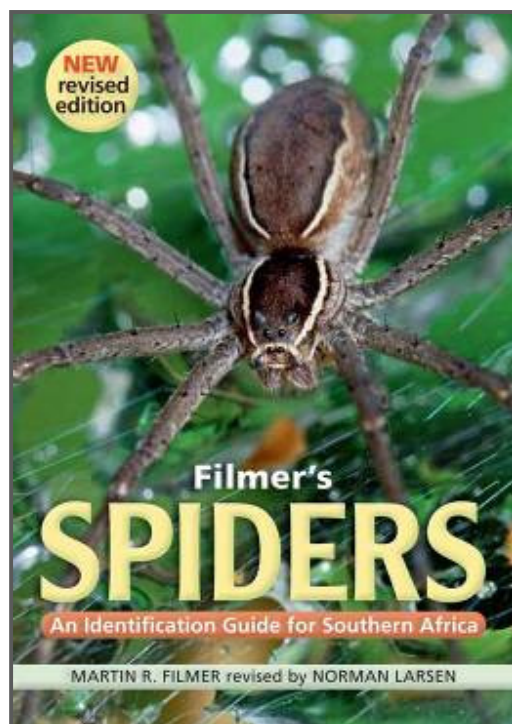
Fully revised and updated, *Filmer's Spiders: an Identification Guide to Southern Africa* features all 69 (in fact, now 70) families of spider that occur in this region.

In May 2010, a new family [of arachnids] was described, bringing the SA families to 70. A fresh layout, full-colour photographs throughout – many of them new – and diagrams of diagnostic features make this a quick and easy guide for use in the field.

The spiders are grouped into web-living, ground-living and plant-living species to aid identification. Each family is described in terms of the spiders' lifestyle, habitat, size, behaviour and venom potential, and the best collecting methods are given in each case. For those species whose venom is potentially harmful to man, the effects and recommended treatment of bites are discussed. This handy format book will appeal to anybody wishing to gain insight into the daily lives of spiders.

The late **Dr Martin R Filmer** enjoyed a life-long interest in wildlife, and for a number of years served on the committee of the Witwatersrand Bird Club.

Discovering an interest in spiders, Dr Filmer pursued his interest academically, and decided to write on the topic to make the study of these intriguing animals more easily accessible to the general public. Despite devoting most of his time to the study of spiders, **Norman Larsen** still describes himself as a naturalist, with his knowledge ranging from tiny arthropoda to large mammals. Norman is also a skilled photographer, and is an Associate Arachnologist at the Iziko South African Museum. ♦



The Agenda: Past and Present – by Alison M Downie

We report back on the AGM, and discuss current and future fundraising initiatives.

Due to the Soccer World Cup, the FoV's annual general meeting was postponed to July, when those members who had gone away to escape the vuvuzelas and crowds had returned. The meeting was held, as per usual, at the Vrolijkheid hall, and the speed record was broken once again as Piet van Zyl reported on the finances, after which chairperson Alison Downie gave a brief summary of the activities over the past year. As members are aware, our main focus over the last two or three years has been the wheelchair-friendly boardwalk and bird hide project, and Bruce Milne and Gerhard Botha were recognised for their passion, hard work and commitment to this endeavour. The Friends will forever be grateful for the enthusiasm and selflessness which they gave to this task; it just shows what can be done if we all pull together towards a common and worthy goal.

Our guest speaker for the AGM, Wicus Leeuwner, gave a moving presentation: a photographic journey featuring different landscapes, the birth of a Blue Crane chick, and the wild horses of Namibia. With the ladies dabbing their eyes and the gents gruffly nodding to one another, proceedings relocated to the 'Jakkalsgat' pub. A roaring fire set the mood while members enjoyed Frances Doering and Ann van der Riet's now-famous butternut soup. The turnout was so immense that committee members were literally 'scraping the bottom of the barrel' in order to provide enough for everyone who attended. We hope that this support signals the positive intention of our members as a whole and that the projects over the last year have been well received. It gave the committee a great deal of encouragement, together with our membership which has increased steadily over the last year. As always, we can only do so much by ourselves; together we can achieve a whole lot more. The committee members all agreed to stand again and in addition two more members have joined us, namely San-Mari Burger of Robertson and Ian Cameron-Clarke of McGregor. Members agreed that family membership should be increased to R60; the fee remains R50 for singles.

On Saturday, 25 September, the Country Kitchen at McGregor's Donkey Sanctuary hosted an afternoon market during which the Friends manned a stall and sold items of clothing and homemade goodies prepared by members. Thank you very much to those who offered to make something – you know who you are and your cheerful generosity was most appreciated. Our stand reached rush-hour proportions at one stage, with lemon meringue tart, peanut biscuits and banana bread flying off the table. Because everything was donated we felt it only right to sell the items at reasonable prices and this paid off: we raised over R300 and also sold several caps, beanies, stickers and golf shirts.

Thank you to Denise Brownrigg and San-Mari Burger, who helped man the stand, and to McGregor resident Colleen Hall-Reace, who was our self-appointed quality control officer. We will more than likely hold another similar event and trust that members will be willing to contribute again to this type of fundraiser.



As part of our fundraising efforts, we have introduced Friends of Vrolijkheid caps, beanies and golf shirts (seen here). There is a very small mark-up on these items and much effort went into sourcing the products and services we felt were part and parcel of this project. We furthermore have reintroduced the 'bumper sticker' system and encourage all members to purchase a R5 licence disc which indicates FoV membership. All items are available from Alison Downie or at FoV events.

Our final event of the year will be our year-end brunch which will take place at the Vrolijkheid picnic site on Saturday, 4 December. Tickets remain R50 per head and are available from all committee members. Please ensure you book your place on or before Monday, 29 November. We look forward to seeing you all there before we take a breather during the festive season and warm summer months.



We will inform members of events taking place early in 2011 before we pick up officially in April, so look out for these notices.

Our first project for 2011 is to complete the Braille trail, started in 2009, which will involve placing plaques in Braille and English, placed at intervals along the Heron Trail. There are several other projects under discussion and we, of course, welcome any suggestions or ideas from members.

The Friends group is in the process of being officially recognised as a volunteer group of CapeNature. This will require us to formally adopt a constitution and for those who are interested, it will enable members to attend CN training courses and become HNCOs (honorary nature conservation officers). We will keep members informed regarding this issue.

As the year draws to a close, a number of people ought to be thanked: first and foremost, all our members who have supported our various initiatives and events this year, of course Bruce and Gerhard for their sterling work, sponsors and supporters Green Gables Pub & Restaurant, Travel Experience, Robertson Verhuring, Rooiberg Winery, Browrigg's B&B and Tanagra Wine Estate.

Thank you to members Dave Giraudeau and Brian Brice for kindly collecting shirts and caps in Cape Town.

Bridget Rose made a significant donation to the Friends recently; these and other sums – both large and small – all add up to what is now a healthy bank balance as we near the end of the year and consider what projects we ought to be tackling in 2011.

At this point I'd also like to extend a vote of sincere thanks to the committee: we now have a great team of seven passionate people, divided between McGregor and Robertson, and all the hard work this year has been most appreciated. It is a pleasure and a privilege to work with all of you. ♦



Green Gables Country Inn



Your hosts Tiger & Jill

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Fun with the Friends – by Frances Doering

Cogmanskloof Hike, Montagu: 16 July

Andre Doering, kindly playing the part of taxi driver, was met with a few sleepy-heads as he went around the village collecting the group of hikers who had chosen a beautiful day for exploring the mountains of Montagu. Before long the blood was pumping and we were all wide awake, enjoying the scenery and the thought of all those at work on such a glorious morning.

The hike started easily enough, meandering through a kloof before a monster uphill climb (*climb* being the operative word). The route forms part of the annual M3 mountain race, and one of the group spent the better part of the hike removing blue plastic markers from bushes.

Before long we had crested the mountain and continued along the contour path at a more leisurely pace, with Bloupunt in the distance. An inquisitive klipspringer (pictured above right) stopped us in our tracks, even taking several steps towards us for a closer look. After another short pull we stopped at a view point for a spot of tea. Superb views stretched all around and we could even see Towerkop faintly outlined in the distance.

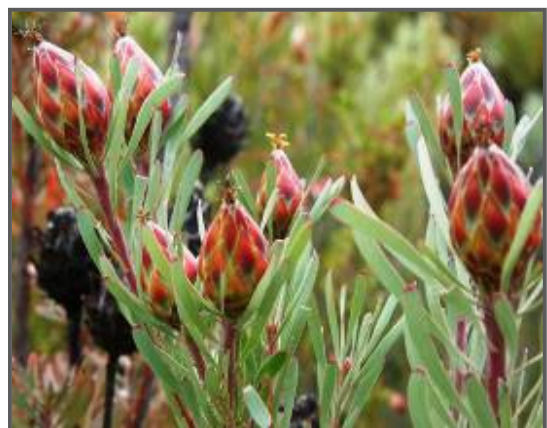
Thus refreshed, we began the descent, walking through stands of various fynbos-type shrubs and marvelling at the magnificent rock formations as a result of ‘honeycomb weathering’, cut into the hills over eons of time. As we approached the area above the Montagu tunnel we were treated to an aerial display of Vereaux’s Eagle, the pair rising on thermals and then descending again, calling to one another as they disappeared gradually from view.

Towards the end of the hike two members of the party were waylaid by the proximity of a popular local restaurant and took the opportunity to order coffee and tea while the others returned with the vehicles. It was agreed that we should return to the area for another hike and to sample the famous savoury pancakes and scrumptious crumpets made by ‘Die Padstal’.

Witteberg Private Nature Reserve: 1–3 September

Spring was marked by a memorable visit to members Tom Lewis and Frik Linde’s beautiful nature reserve, located near Matjiesfontein. The party elected to stay at the campsite, and the FoV had the reserve all to ourselves, accommodated in tents and in a delightful historic cottage, complete with communal braai area, shady trees and gas geysers for hot showers. The reserve is pet-friendly and one can also choose from one of several beautifully furnished apartments with all facilities one might wish to have.

Frik made us very welcome and furnished us with maps and information regarding suitable walks for the duration of our stay. During our visit we enjoyed a number of walks in the reserve, taking in some of the cultural sites as well as enjoying the natural scenery. Some parts of the reserve feature Proteaceae vegetation (pictured above right) and we came across species such as *Protea humiflora* and *P. lorifolia* as well as *Leucadendron* spp. We were taken on a tour of the reserve and given insights into the various families who had lived on the property, one of whom was Frik’s great-grandmother who had attended the farm school as a young girl. The small school building is still in existence and owners Frik and Tom intend to convert it into a museum, having already amassed many items to be displayed there. We were also shown the reserve’s extensive solar power system which supplies all the



energy for refrigeration, computers, television and lighting for the main homestead and the apartments on the property. On our last morning we climbed to a cave to look at some dated rock art and stone tools before saying our goodbyes and following the scenic roads back to Montagu.

Affordable, scenic and an easy two-hour drive from the Breede River, Witteberg will definitely be added to our list of favourite places to which we intend to make a return visit. ♦

Did You Know – by Dr Ernst Baard

Did you know that ...

- Snakes cannot and do not deliberately mesmerise or hypnotise their prey like some people believe? In fact, many small animals cornered by a snake, realising there's no escape, remain very still to give the appearance of being 'paralysed' with fear
- Snakes cannot and do not 'milk' cows as many farmers believe. Firstly, and physiologically, it is impossible because a snake's mouth is in no way suitable to suck, and secondly, it would be impossible for a snake with a mouthful of sharp, often recurving teeth, to hold on to a cow's teat without discomfort to the cow (can you imagine a large Cape cobra taking a drink from Daisy's teats!?)
- Man cannot become immune to snakebite, unless the person subjects him/herself to a steadily-increasing dose of snake venom, similar to the method adopted with horses in the preparation of anti-venom. However, immediately such venom administration is stopped, immunity is quickly lost again
- Some people, especially snake-handlers, may become very sensitive to snake venom, especially when working with spitting cobras kept in cages
- The majority of venomous snakes are more or less immune to their own venom, but not necessarily to that of a different species
- Snake venom can be swallowed with no ill effect, provided you don't have a mouth, stomach or intestinal ulcer or other abrasions. Because snake venom is effectively a protein, it will pass through the alimentary canal like other food
- A snake cannot inflict a venomous sting with its tail or its tongue. Like other reptiles, its tongue is used to sample the air for smells
- The breath of a snake is not venomous and this myth probably originates from tales of dragons that breathe fire
- Snakes do not have eyelids and therefore cannot close their eyes
- Snakes do not only die after sunset. Many believe that snakes, after being killed, only die after sunset, but while there may be some twitching and writhing after it has been struck, these movements are all involuntary
- The infamous so-called 'Dassie-adder', reputed to have the head of a dassie and a tail like an adder, is in fact a rock leguaan
- The so-called 'Vusimanzi', regarded in KwaZulu-Natal as deadly venomous, is indeed the harmless brown watersnake. ♦

Gambol in Gonarezhou – by Ann van der Riet

Earlier this year we were invited on a trip to Zimbabwe to escape the Soccer World Cup madness. Leaving in two Land Cruisers loaded with tents, solar-powered refrigeration, water tanks, supplies and fuel, our route took us through Martin's Drift into Botswana, where we made camp that first night at Shashe Dam, just south of Francistown. Because the vehicles have a range of 1,400 km, our intention was to keep to the countryside wherever possible and to visit towns only when absolutely necessary.

Crossing into Zimbabwe via Nata and Pandamatenga, we drove through a hunting conservancy near the Hwange National Park, spending several glorious days at Msuma Fishing Camp, an island at the western edge of Lake Kariba. Watched closely by hippo, and with crocodile and innumerable birds, the sunset cruises and fishing were a sheer delight. From here we travelled to Matusadona National Park, farther along the lake, where we observed fresh lion and crocodile spoor in the camp. It was heartening to note that at a nearby conservancy every effort is being made to save the remaining wildlife from poachers.



In the Mutare Vumba area we spent a wonderful day at a place known as 'Seldom Seen', with guide Bulawezi, undoubtedly the most talented bird spotter we have ever encountered. He knew every bird in the book (and its call), as well as being able to locate and identify those tiny endemics which normally one has no hope of sighting.

Friends of ours still farm at Humani Ranch on the Save River; they endure despite occasional invasions by 'war vets'. We arrived to find a young buffalo calf being cared for in the garden and were highly amused by Boris, the tame vulture who enjoyed pulling the windscreen wipers to pieces. Then there was Jimmy, an orphaned black rhino, which, despite being almost fully grown, still imagines himself to be a house pet. After being told firmly to remain in the garden, he simply came in through a window. He visits regularly but is quite content in the wild.

From there it was on to the paradise of Gonarezhou National Park, our main destination, which we had to ourselves. After one night in the park we camped 'wild' along the Runde River and Chiloja Cliffs. Wildlife is returning to the area, thanks to an American who has bought a huge area surrounding Gonarezhou. He is restocking game and also financing anti-poaching units, which is having a gradual but positive influence.

Most gravel roads in the parks are dreadful and in some places disappear altogether. River crossings are washed away and some elementary road-building was necessary. Because Lake Kariba was at its highest level for many years, we often had to drive through knee-high water, coming out at the other end covered in mud and Kariba weed. On one occasion one of the vehicles had to be winched out! Appropriate vehicles are without a doubt essential for undertaking a trip of this nature.

We encountered a number of police road blocks but Dion, our son, chatted animatedly to them about the Soccer World Cup until they quite forgot to charge us the usual \$1 and waved us on. At no time did we feel unsafe and were always met with friendly smiles. The towns are crowded but the countryside is sparsely populated, with desperately under-productive farms.

It was indeed an unforgettable and very special family trip, and already we are discussing a return visit. ♦



In the Beginning – interview with Johan van Zyl

In a recent issue, the early days of The Rooikat was briefly mentioned. This sparked comments from some of our members who were there at the time and were part of initiating the Friends group. Forty-five issues and nearly a decade later, Johan van Zyl, the first chairperson and Rooikat editor, relates how the Friends first began.

RK (Rooikat): Johan, I understand that when the Friends first began, it seemed as if Vrolijkheid was in financial difficulty or may have to be privatized. Is this the case?

JVZ (Johan van Zyl): At the start of the new millennium, the future of the Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve was shaky, to say the least. The provincial government was on a cost-saving mission, going so far as to call in the media for proposals for the privatization of certain parts of the reserve. In practical terms, this would have meant restricted access to the people of the Breede River Valley. There was another factor: I was quite taken aback to discover that many residents of the nearby towns had never set foot in the reserve!

RK: How did you go about setting up the group? Did the group have specific goals when it was first established?

JVZ: After consultation with Piet van Zyl of CapeNature (as the body came to be called a few years later), a meeting of interested people was held in May of 2001. And what a great start! More than 50 nature lovers showed up. Our objectives were to increase awareness of Vrolijkheid, to have at least one outing or event per quarter and to promote the conservation of a precious resource on our doorstep. As well as increasing the utilisation of the reserve, we tackled projects such as refurbishing the signs, renovating the tables at the picnic site and building a ramp for wheelchairs.

RK: Did you select a committee once it was decided to establish the group that would be known as the Friends of Vrolijkheid?

JVZ: Yes, we did. The first committee consisted of Marge Campbell, Tony Rogerson, Carole Murby, Piet van Zyl and me, with Brian and Ann Snaddon joining soon after. A short time later the numbers were strengthened by Gilly Schütte, Dave Harding, John Jackson, Alan Grier and Bruce Milne.

RK: In the early days, what activities did you offer to members?

JVZ: A car sticker was printed, a newsletter sent out and the hugely popular programme of events (fantastic brunches, great speakers, and hikes) and outings (to the Kleinberg dam, Die Galg, Nuy valley, Jonaskop and other off-limits places) was launched ... and all these activities are still going from strength to strength!

RK: You began the newsletter, which has passed through the hands of several editors.

JVZ: The newsletter has always been vital for communication with our members. After I handled the first fifteen issues, Brian and Ann Snaddon subsequently took over the articles, editing them with compassion and skill. Everyone will remember Ann's lovely line drawings and their engrossing tales of incidents in the reserve (of animal, not human origin!). The next editor was Dave Harding who introduced the name 'The Rooikat' and many new features.

At that stage the newsletter was photocopied and delivered by hand by committee members. The newsletter was later sent by e-mail, an essential cost-saving decision but many people still fondly remember the pleasure of receiving their own hand-delivered copy! [The newsletter is still delivered to a number of members although we are encouraging readers to receive it via email, for obvious reasons]. Long may it survive and long live Friends of Vrolijkheid!

RK: You keep a busy schedule these days looking after the needs of the Donkey Sanctuary. Do you miss the FoV?

JVZ: I can quite honestly say that this was one of the most pleasant committees I have ever served on. (Perhaps one reason was our decision to have no constitution and a revolving chairmanship!) ♦

Do you have any stories of the early days of the Friends? We'd love to hear from you. Please write to us at PO Box 436, McGregor or email Alison at alisonmdownie@yahoo.com.



The adorable image of a baby otter taking a nap on its mother's tummy as she swims across a bay

March 2010: Photographer Steven Kazlowski, 40, snapped the otters drifting across Saw Mill Bay, in Prince William Sound, off the south coast of Alaska. The sound has more than 3,000 miles of shoreline and is home to around 70,000 sea otters. Steven, from Seattle, said he had to wait for almost eight hours before he got the snaps of the otters. 'I had watched this area for several days and I found a rock which I thought would make a great place to watch the otters from. I had been hiding there for about eight hours one day when I saw the otter with its baby drift by.'



Photographs: Steven J Kazlowski / Solent



Addo-Avontuur – deur Anneen Steyn-Durant

Gedurende die September skoolvakansie dié jaar, het ek en my familie (23 van ons!) heerlik by Addo Nasionale Park gekampeer. Die jongste lid van ons geselskap was my seun, Paolo (7) en die oudste in ons geledere was my pa Piet (84).

Aanvanklik was ons bekommerd dat die tent-staanplekke dalk ietwat knap sou wees, maar die twee staanplekke aan die einde van die tent-cul-de-sac is so ruim dat ons sewe tente daar kon opslaan en nog kuierplek gehad het. Ons kon toe die 'orige' staanplekke gebruik vir parkeerplek vir die voertuie. Dit is 'n goedingerigte kampterrein en ons het 'n uitsig op die een watergat vanaf die tentstaanplekke gehad van waar ons van tyd tot tyd olifante en koedoes kon sien waterdrink.

Die eerste nag (so teen 04.00) het ons leeu hoor brul en dit het geklink of hulle glad nie te ver van die kamp af was nie. Ongelukkig het ons hulle in die ses dae wat ons daar was, glad nie gewaar nie, net weer 'n keer gehoor.

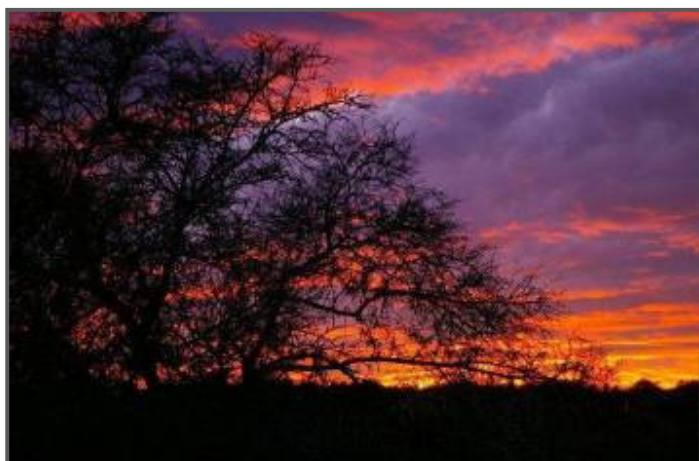
Mense noem dit nie verniet die Olifant Park nie – daar is baie olifante: grotes, kleintjies, oues, jonges. Ons eerste 'intieme' ontmoeting met 'n olifant, was 'n alleenloper bul, reusagtig moet ek bysê, wat reg tot by ons voertuig van voor af ons tegemoet gekom het. Dit was net ons voertuig – ek en my twee kinders binne-in – en Mnr Olifant. Ek sal jok as ek sê ons was nie benoud nie. Die spekbome staan dig tot teenaan die pad, so al uitsig was ons reuse besoeker. Of ons was seker sy besoekers!

Daarna het ons tot baie naby aan twee of drie troppe gekom. Ek het veral die kalfies geniet – baie klein en baie kostelik.

Ander wild wat ons gesien het was koedoe (baie dikwels), hartebees, eland, buffel, jakkal, volstruis, vlakvark, ystervark, bloukransvoël, sebra, bleshoender, kolgans, tarental en skilpad.

Ons het ook naby die Park by die Addo leeu- en krokodilpark gaan kuier. Die hoogtepunt was dat my dogter met twee twee-maande-oue leeuwelpies kon speel. Hulle is pragtig – so groot soos 'n huiskat, skat ek. Boonop was dit 'n baie billike prys vir die kuiertjie by die welpies.

By die Addo Nasionale Park is daar ook heelwat aktiwiteite vir die kinders – swembad, ervaringsentrum, speelpark en staproetes. Die klimraam is in die vorm van 'n olifant met groot houtore wat regtig kan flap. Die klimraam is vier meter hoog – so hoog soos 'n groot olifantbul. Ek het saam met Paolo daar opgeklim en vier meter is indrukwekkend hoog van daar af! Dit was 'n besonderse kampeer-uitstappie en ek sal almal aanbeveel om by Addo Nasionale Park te gaan kuier – onthou jou verkyker en kamera. ♦



In Memoriam – by Ann van der Riet

On 27 August 2010, representatives of the Friends of Vrolijkheid attended the memorial service of longstanding member Fred Burger in the Moeder Kerk in Robertson. Family and friends from near and far (some from Holland and England) attended the service to remember a very special person.

Fred was attacked in his house but tragically died a few days later.

He was the kindest and most considerate person and was always prepared to help anyone who came to his door. Unfortunately this had led to three previous incidents in the past few years.

He was 80 years old but still very much young at heart. Hospice, the Robertson Literary Society and many other organisations benefitted for many years from Fred's help and dedication to do whatever was asked of him. He will be sorely missed in the Robertson and broader community. ♦



Escorted Tours 2010

Exotic places, small group tours – great experience

Music and Christmas Markets: Prague, Vienna and Salzburg

5 – 16 December 2010

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Global Synopsis – by Alison M Downie

June 2010, Kruger National Park – The Highveld Honorary Rangers donate four bat houses to Berg-en-Dal, replacing old ones which were in a state of disrepair and being used by squirrels and bees. Almost immediately they became occupied by yellow house bats and free tailed bats that live in the area.

September 2010, Cape Town – CapeNature announces that it will be extending the range for selected species. Animals such as blesbok and bontebok will have extended ranges, while kudu, black wildebeest, gemsbok and giraffe will be allowed to be translocated throughout the province. Anton Bredell, MEC for local government, environmental affairs and development planning, confirmed that, 'CapeNature's translocation policy will continue to uphold conservation and ecological principles in line with international agreements, and national and provincial legislation'.

July 2010, New York – A new 'green' packing material is developed by the founders of company Ecovative Design. The material is made from mushroom roots and inedible agricultural waste, and will be marketed as 'EcoCradle'. The production process uses one eighth the energy and one tenth the carbon dioxide normally required for foam packing material.

November 2009, Bird Island, Lambert's Bay – Seventy millimetres of rain falls on the island, resulting in the destruction of many Cape Gannet nests. The parents lay eggs once more but eventually have to abandon their chicks as they take to the skies on their annual migration. Ninety chicks are rescued and reared by SANCCOB, and released back into the wild. The species is listed as vulnerable due to their limited breeding range, on just six islands.

September 2010, Stellenbosch – WWF-SA launches its worldwide 'rhino month', a campaign to garner support and increase awareness of Africa's rhinos, who are currently under serious threat. Donations are to go towards anti-poaching equipment for the rangers who are on the frontline of the war. Fuelled by demand in Asia, rhino poaching has increased dramatically over the past 18 months. At present 20 rhinos are being killed each month, with approximately 600 having been poached in Africa in the last four years. For more information or to make a real difference, visit www.panda.org.

April 2010, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – Scientists report that 123 new species have been found in Borneo since the launch of the 'Heart of Borneo' project that began in 2007. Discoveries include a slug that shoots love darts, a 56 cm-long stick insect, a flame-coloured snake and a flying frog. WWF has called on governments to ensure the protection of the 220 square kilometre area. In total, 67 plants, 29 invertebrates, 17 fish, five frogs, three snakes, two lizards and an entirely new species of bird were discovered, said the report.

March 2010, OR Tambo International Airport – Foreigner Xuan Hoang is arrested after being found in possession of 16 kg of rhino horn (a total of seven horns equivalent to a street value of R2 m). Three months later at the Kempton Park Magistrate's Court the Vietnamese citizen is sentenced to 10 years in prison, with no option of a fine.

June 2010, Beijing – Wildlife officials confirm that China will in the near future lift the ban on the trade of tiger bones and body parts. The country has only about 30 wild tigers, with the balance (5,000) kept on commercial breeding farms. Groups seeking to profit from the government's captive-bred tigers appear too strong to keep the ban in place indefinitely.

August 2010, Walt Disney Park, Florida – Eight sea turtles begin their rehabilitation after being rescued during now-infamous Gulf oil spill. Two are green sea turtles and the other six the highly threatened Kemp's Ridley sea turtles. The temporary facility is able to house up to 35 turtles but the intention is to return them to the wild once they are fit again, a process which could take several months. One hundred and eighty-four gallons of oil later, the blown-out oil well appears to be sealed.

October 2010, Maldives – Despite its recent status upgrade to a Marine Protected Area, tourism activities in Hanifaru Bay are reportedly putting strain on the local manta ray population. The boost in tourism has seen a massive increase in the number of boats and people in the water, causing a significant disturbance in the feeding behaviour of the sea creatures. The Maldives Manta Ray Project warns that without proper management a massive decline in numbers is likely.

June 2010, Cape Town – CapeNature's in-house publication reports on the status of leopards at a number of provincial reserves, where leopards have been caught on cameras placed in strategic locations. In May 2010, a 35 kg male leopard was captured and collared at Gamkaberg Nature Reserve while four individuals have been identified at Limietberg. The work of the Cape Leopard Trust (featured previously in *The Rooikat*) includes a number of research projects in the Cape as well as several others across the country. ♦

Sources: *Wild* magazine (www.wildcard.co.za), *News24* (www.news24.com), *The Cutting Edge* (www.popularmechanics.co.za), *This and That* (CapeNature), *Environment* magazine, *Associated Press* (www.news.yahoo.com/), *Disney Parks Blog* (disneyarks.disney.go.com/blog), *Environmental News Network* (www.enn.com)

Weather Statistics for October

Rainfall				Temperatures	
Year to date	159 mm	Min	0 mm (1998)	Min temp	4,0 °C
2009	279 mm	Max	63 mm (2004)	Max temp	36,0 °C
2008	417 mm	Oct total	22 mm		
2007	315 mm			Average min temp	10,5 °C
2006	335 mm			Average max temp	26,1 °C

Five Hundred Years Ago in England – a contribution from Dave Harding

Many years ago in Scotland, a new game was invented. It was ruled 'Gentlemen Only ... Ladies Forbidden' ... And thus the word **GOLF** entered into the English language.

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Readers' Competition

Answer the question and win a dinner for two at Green Gables Pub & Restaurant in McGregor!

What is the name of the creature in the photograph? Email your answer to alisonmdownie@yahoo.com or send a postcard to PO Box 436, McGregor 6708. The winner will be drawn on 15 December 2010 and informed in writing or by telephone. The competition is open to FoV members only.

Congratulations to John Hargreaves, who correctly identified the animal in the previous issue as a Cape genet, also known as the large spotted genet. He wins a dinner for two, courtesy of Green Gables. ♦

Otter-ly Unforgettable – by Alison M Downie

A chance encounter with a friend in Cape Town ended with the enquiry, ‘You wouldn’t by any chance be keen on doing the Otter Trail in August?’ This is a question that no sane nature lover says no to, and two months later saw Alison lacing up her boots in Storms River at the start of what was to be an unforgettable adventure.

Some say the Otter Trail is a hard up-and-down non-stop slog; some say the river crossings are dangerous. Others say the days are long; while yet more maintain the paths are narrow and tricky. What they really mean is: it’s a hike you’ll never forget.

The level of difficulty, eliminating all those but the earnest of hikers, is all part of the attraction, together with the simple accommodation and the pull of being out in the great outdoors alone in one of South Africa’s most beautiful natural environments. The five-day 42,5 km trail alternates between rugged shoreline and dense indigenous forest, hugging the coast between Storms River and Nature’s Valley, passing through some of the most picturesque landscapes you’ll ever find. The two-year waiting list speaks for itself and the route is popular with both South Africans and visitors to our shores.



After leaving vehicles at the end point at De Vasselot in Nature’s Valley, groups typically spend the night prior to the start at Storms River, as we did, before beginning the trail the following day. After a short video clip and the inevitable indemnities, the first and shortest day is a mild walk to a spectacular waterfall, where most opt to stay for lunch and a dip. From here day trippers are left behind and henceforth it is just your small band of merry men and the intoxicating prospect of five days of nothing but you and the wilds.

Despite being the most popular hike on the Cape coast, the trail is by no means a beaten track. The path is maintained to ensure erosion is prevented – from man and from nature – and while hikers are assisted in the most difficult places in the form of stairs or bridges, any and all infrastructure has been built with nature as the priority (see photograph, left).

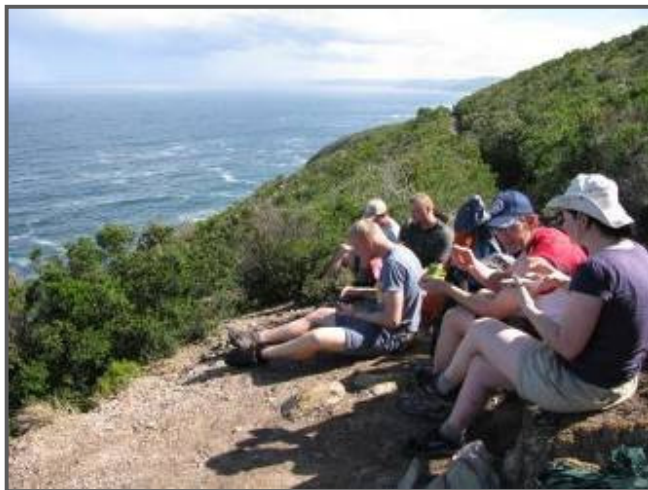
At the end of each day two wooden cabins nestled in a sheltered cove greet weary hikers. Only twelve persons are allowed on the trail at any one time; therefore doing the Otter as one group makes the trip all the more enjoyable. A communal braai area, supplied with braai wood *nogal*, provides the perfect setting for jovial evenings around the camp fire.

Sewerage systems take the form of toilets fronted with perspex glass and usually overlooking the sea. There are also showers at some of the huts, with cold water (as the water appears to come directly from the North Pole, it is strongly recommended that this only be attempted in summertime).

The simple joy of the hike is leaving one’s cares behind entirely, for all that matters for five days is making your way to the top of the next hill or around the next bent to see another ocean view; taking note of where your mates are; and at what point you’ll be having the next break. This is the uncomplicated rhythm of the Otter, in a setting so exquisite only those who’ve done the hike can relate to the ecstasy of each blissful hour.

Although most hikers prefer summertime, the added advantage of tackling the Otter in the cooler months is that one can take along vacuum-packed meals to braai every night, making food preparation a breeze.

Most of our group agreed that the second day, though not the longest, is the most strenuous, partly due to the terrain and partly because of the load one is carrying at this stage.



There are several river crossings, of which the Bloukrans River is the most notorious. The vast sand bank has been washed away during the last few years, resulting in a crossing that is tricky even at low tide. For us, ‘Bloukrans day’ was the most beautiful and something each of us will long remember.



The day in question started with a 03.15 wake-up, for we needed to make low tide at 09.15. Heading out just after 04.00, we spent the five hours walking next the coast, almost hypnotised by the full moon lighting our way and reflecting across the sea to Plettenberg Bay.

The early start resulted in our one and only otter sighting: a furry head popped out of the river as we stood at its edge, discussing the best route across. Even at low tide, parts of the crossing were chest-high – somewhat of a challenge when one has a heavy floating pack in tow. Once through the minefield of submerged and menacing mussel-covered rocks, there was much exuberance as the ‘deep-water friends’ prepared tea and snacks to warm up after the icy swim.

	Then (1980s)	Now
Paths	Single track	Single track with steps as well as ladders and viewing platforms
Huts	Basic huts, no lighting, no beds	Log cabins, no lighting, bunks with thin mattresses
Communal area	None	Lapa, with wood supplied
Toilets	Long drop or spade	Flush toilets, with panoramic views
Otter sightings	Sometimes plentiful, sometimes rare; spoor usually observed	Rare
Other animal sightings	Small antelope such as steenbok and duiker	Common at the huts, eg bush buck, Cape genet
Escape routes	None	Escape route on each day
Waiting period	12 months	Two years (though sometimes one can find a gap in the month of July)
Cost	R125–R150	R755 plus conservation fees
Group size	Maximum of 8	Maximum of 12



‘Bloukrans day’ is, apart from being the most adventurous, also the longest day, at 13,8 km. Due to the early start, we arrived at the Andre huts early and were able to enjoy the afternoon to the full, enjoying the scenery and copious cups of soup and tea.

The experience of being out alone in nature cannot be understated. Without the cares and conveniences of civilisation, all pretence falls away, presenting the opportunity to refresh and renew the spirit and soul: a chance to breathe deeply and be fully content knowing the valleys and coves are here for us to return to, to drink our fill from nature’s bountiful hand. And such is the case with the Otter Trail: once you have tasted the sweet rewards, it is the hiking trail above all hiking trails to which all nature lovers will wish to return to again and again. ♦

Climb the mountains and get their good tidings.

Nature's peace will flow into you

as sunshine flows into trees.

The winds will blow their own freshness into you ...

while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.

– John Muir



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Next issue: March/April 2011