

Dear parents, the Eco-Ranger group has been running for just over a year now and we feel that there should be a formal way to communicate to you the activities and programs your children have been involved in.



Amber and Tinity proudly showing their fynbos poster.

Fynbos diversity

This is an ongoing topic, as there is such a rich diversity of fynbos to get to know. At the first meeting we had on this topic, Andreas gave us an overview on what fynbos is. The children each made a lovely poster to display at their school or wherever they thought it could inform other people.

We had one meeting where we learnt about the medicinal plants in our fynbos. Each child made a potpourri bag to take home, to use as a natural insect repellent.

We also did a plant count in our fynbos. An area was allocated for each group and they had to count and try to identify all different plants in their area. It was amazing how many plants were found in just a 2mx2m area! In coming terms we want to zoom in to look more closely at our different fynbos groups: proteas, ericas and restios.



Look at that lovely flower!

Eco-Rangers

Helderberg Nature Reserve under the auspices of the Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre



Eco-Rangers enjoying a rest at Disa Gorge

Why join the Eco-Rangers?

We started the Eco-Ranger Club because we enjoy being in nature, learning about and protecting our natural heritage. Nature is so exciting and full of wonders, that we want to share it with children and adults that have the same appreciation.

Research shows that children need connections with the natural world as an integral part of their healthy growth and development – physically, mentally and socially. Disconnection from nature is leading to increased problems such as childhood obesity, dislike and even fear of the outdoors and even an increase in behavioural issues. To preserve our natural heritage and to lead a healthy life, we need people caring, knowing and enjoying nature. In answer to this, the Eco-Rangers facilitate the opportunity for children and their parents to connect with nature.

Exhibitions

We have been involved in two exhibitions. At one the children made a display at the Somerset West Library. They were very proud of their nature articles, art work and lovely flower arrangement.

For the biodiversity exhibition at the Environmental Centre, we helped making lots of butterflies and moths to hang up on the walls.



Tobias and Nikola at the Somerset West Library exhibition.

Spoor casting

To teach the children to always be on the lookout for signs of animals, we decided to do some spoor casting with them. On Wedderwill there are Eland, Zebra, Wildebeest, Bontebok, Springbok, otters, genet etc. After some good rain, when the soil was soft, we spent an afternoon on Wedderwill Game Farm, looking for tracks, making casts with plaster of paris and identifying the animals that made the tracks. Andreas promised a chocolate to anyone who finds an otter spoor, but unfortunately nobody was so lucky!



Eco-Rangers waiting for their spoor casts to dry

Cape Point: Rock pool rambling

We have outings to make members aware of special places in our area. The abundance and variety of rock pool life at Cape Point was astounding. The children enjoyed scouting around and finding many beautiful creatures!

We also walked up the light tower at the point. The high cliffs falling down into the sea, where breathtaking!



The Kriedemann brothers at the rock pools



Paper pulp on sieve

Hand made paper

This was a long awaited topic. Keenly everyone arrived and wanted to see what was involved. We had invited Anita, an art teacher, to teach us how to make hand made paper. Beforehand we had collected Tortoise and Zebra dung, which we then added to give texture to the paper. The dung, together with the paper pulp and some other items to give texture, were put in the water and using a sieve, a wet layer formed on the sieve. After drying, the sheets could be taken off and the proud children could each take 2 sheets home.

Save our Rhinos

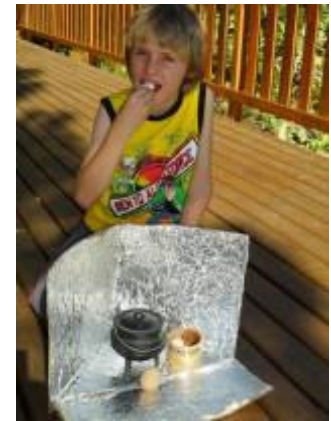
Andreas told us all about our threatened Rhinos. The two African varieties are the black and white Rhinos. The Asian varieties are found in India, Java and Sumatra. The Asian varieties are critically endangered while our African varieties are endangered. Poaching has increased considerably in the last years, particularly last year here in Africa. In the east rhino horns are sold at very high prices where they are used as medicine or decorative material. It is vital that we stand up against this illegal trade and save our Rhinos! The children made lovely clay Rhino models of existing or prehistoric Rhinos.



Rhino clay models

Sustainable living

What does it mean to live sustainable? In Nature nothing is wasted. Everything is recycled or reused. We people have so much rubbish that cannot be reused or recycled, filling up land fills and polluting our environment. How can we pollute less? What can we do to make sure the basic needs for life: air, water and food, will be preserved for the future generations? Two projects we did with the children were to build a solar cooker, to demonstrate how much clean energy is available from the sun. The other project was to make a worm farm for the Education Centre and each child made their own mini worm farm. Last year we also had an outing to Rondevlei, which is a lovely wetland fed by wastewater treatment plants.



Tobias was very proud of his cooked rice and yummy marshmallows!

Know our Insects

We started a series of getting to know our insects. Now in summer they are so abundant, yet few people take much notice of them. The first group we focused on was the dragonflies and damselflies. Andreas told us some fascinating facts on these beautiful, dazzling creatures. We made identification cards of the most common ones that occur here. This term we want to focus on our butterflies and moths.



Nikola catching insects

Astronomy

There is so much to learn and see when looking at our night skies. We have been focusing on our moon and the stars. For the moon we 'made' craters, using a container with flour and dropping marbles in it. The children then made a moon landscape from clay.

Andreas told us about the size of our planet in regards to our other planets, the sun, other stars and then the red giants and blue giants. It was amazing to see how big some stars actually are!

We've had a night star gazing evening where the children could look at the planets and stars through a telescope. We plan in future to have regular night sky evenings, where we expand our knowledge of the night sky.



Craters on moon surface

Frogs & Toads

This topic took place when it was real frog weather: wet and rainy! Andreas showed us lovely pictures of colourful frogs, huge frogs, small frogs and endangered frogs and toads.

To help a toad find a home, each child painted a ceramic pot, which they could take home and place in their garden and hopefully a toad would move in!



William and Oliver painting toad houses

Owls & building owl boxes

We were lucky to have Richard Morris to assist us on this project. He sells owl boxes commercially and supplied us with pre cut wood to make these owl boxes. We had 4 adults and one high school student who assisted the young ones during this wood work session. Hammering away, we had to make sure that the panels were hammered on correctly. If someone made a mistake, it was no problem, as Andreas came with his pliers, pulled out the incorrect nails, and the hammering could start again.

After all the nails were hammered in, the boxes were taken outside where they were stained. It was a messy, but rewarding project!



Owl boxes in the making

Tree planting and River rehabilitation

In order to get to know our indigenous trees, we have been collecting seeds and planted them in trays. We have potted young yellow wood trees, which were then used in a river rehabilitation project on Wedderwill. The Wedderwill Game farm has been cleared of alien vegetation. There are very few indigenous trees left, so we hope the new trees will help to restore the natural vegetation that once grew there.

In future we plan to plant and plant many more trees and rehabilitate other areas.

Archeological Tour

We had a very special tour to Water-val Oord, Matsikamma, where we were joined by Dr Jeanette Deacon, Archeologist specializing in rock art, to go to this area and record rock paintings and look for new ones.

To all who attended this was an unforgettable experience. It was hard and hot work to find the shelters, but we were rewarded with masses of paintings: hand prints, paintings of people, some with weapons, some with bags, some with digging sticks, eland, small antelope, a huge white elephant and many more. We helped Dr. Deacon record all these and she told us by whom, how, where, why, when these were painted.

We plan to have more of these special interest tours in future.



Dr. Deacon showing details of rock painting to Nikola and Tobias.



Kayla, Annie-Joy and Jamie potting yellow wood trees

The story of the Hex River Camp

Fully packed for two days, we arrived at the Fairy Glen Estate on Friday afternoon.

On our way up we were greeted by the lovely smell of buchu. The proteas were gorgeous. We saw a poisonous grass snake, which had most probably been disturbed by us. The children couldn't resist collecting the lovely stones. Beautiful coloured and layered sandstone, quartz veined stones, crystals, rusted brittle stones etc.

After about 4 hours of walking, we could at last see the stone hut, surrounded by high mountains and deep gorges.

As it became dark, the night sky became visible. It was amazing to see how clearly the Milky Way was visible. A telescope would have been fantastic!

It was wonderful waking up on Saturday morning with mountains all around us. We packed our snacks and water to go and explore the area. We followed a footpath in the direction of Fonteintjiesberg. On the way we explored the rock outcrops. At one outcrop found jawbones and fur of dassie and young antelope. It must have been the dining area of Verreaux Eagle.

Andreas saw a layer in the mountains that looked like the Ceres formation. It was a dark brown layer, high up in the mountains. Unfortunately it was too far away to go there. If this is so, there are chances of finding fossils in this layer. We definitely would like to come back to look at this layer.

Later the afternoon we explored the river. We found a lovely cave further down, with the most wonderful view over the mountains and a waterfall flowing over it.

Braaing their marshmallows and feeding the fire with dried proteas, kept the children busy until night time.

The next morning we packed everything and started our walk back down. With sadness we looked back to the stone hut which had been our home for two wonderful nights.



Walking in the majestic Hex river mountains.

While having a snack at 'Lemoendraai', suddenly a huge black shape appeared, as if from nowhere. We looked and saw two Verreaux Eagles gliding past us. Awestruck we watched these majestic creatures, elegantly gliding past!

A little further on, we noticed a cave not too far away. We left our rucksacks and scrambled up. The cave wasn't very big. As Jeff and Tobias squeezed in, they saw that the sides were covered with quartz crystals. What a sight! Andreas told us that this cave must have been under very high pressure for those crystals to be formed. We found a few loose rocks with crystals which the children could take home.

Then it was time to go back to the cars. Not only had this been an unforgettable adventure, but also a life enriching experience! We will definitely be back!



Braaing marshmallows at Thomas hut

Hikes

As hiking is the ideal way of experiencing all of the topics that are dealt with on the Friday meetings, we always include one Friday afternoon hike per term. We normally walk to the gorge, as this is a lovely cool spot with water, which the children always enjoy.

We encourage the children to join us on day walks. We have done a walk to the top of the Helderberg Mountain where we slept under the stars. We walked up Kasteelpoort, Table mountain, where we looked specifically at the geology. We've done the historic wagon trail over Sir Lowry's Pass where we could see the old wagon tracks cut into the stone.

We do longer hikes as well: We've had a camp at the Johnson hut, Vergelegen. Here we enjoyed the lovely river and walks to the mountains. We did a 3 day hike in Hex River Mountain.

These camps are highly recommended, as you really get to unspoiled, seldom visited places in a secure group and an enthusiastic field guide!

Program for the 3rd Term 2011

15 April

Weather: Wind

22—25 April

Hex River Camp

29 April

Sustainable Seafood

6 May

Fynbos : Know our Proteas

Saturday 7 May

Walk : New Koggelberg Hiking Route

13 May

Deserts

20 May

Astronomy : Our Sun

27 May

Walk in Reserve

3 June

Geology: Rock classification

Sunday 5 June

Walk : Elephants Eye

10 June

Raptors: Past & Present

17 June

Bees