

Friends Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held on 7 May 2011 at which the Chairman and Treasurer presented their reports.

In his report the Chairman paid tribute to Gerald Wright, whose involvement with the Reserve began in 1990, and to Corey van der Laan, past Vice Chairman now living in New Zealand. The Chairman reviewed some of the highlights of the past year and expressed appreciation to all volunteers for their invaluable contribution to the Friends and the reserve.

An important aspect of the Chairman's report was the change at the Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre. Page 3 has further details. On page 2 are highlights from the Financial Report presented by the Treasurer.

Committee

All the members of the outgoing committee made themselves available for re-election and, with no other nominations, they were duly elected:

- Alistair Munday: *Chairman, Volunteers and Sunset Concerts*
- James Silberbauer: *Vice-Chair and Hacks*
- Patrick Neale-May: *Treasurer*
- Muriel Rowcroft: *Secretary*
- Freya Brett: *Environment Education and Eco-Schools*
- David Macdonald: *Strategic Planning*
- Linda Wienand: *Indigenous Nursery*
- Vacant: *PR and Communications*
- Rene Lind: *Information Centre and Walks and Hikes*
- Penny Clifton-Smith: *Elected Member*

We thank each one of them for their willingness to continue to serve.

Business over . . .

those present, had the privilege of listening to well known speaker, Dave Pepler. His entertaining, informative and challenging talk on environmental issues, lived up to all our expectations.

Members then had an opportunity to interact over a cup of tea and enjoy the refreshments generously provided by some of the members.

Exhibition at the MWEEC



in celebration of the
**International
Year of Forests
25 July to 26 August**
Further information
on page 5



Helderberg Friends

Newsletter No 67

July 2011



Owen Wittridge, Reserve Area Manager reports on this and other matters relating to the reserve.

Many of us will not easily forget the recent fire in the reserve. There have been many rumours doing the rounds and I am sure many people have their own opinions. I will not get into all the nitty-gritty. Suffice it to say that a huge fire swept through the reserve on Saturday, 16 April. The first reports of a fire came through just after 09:00 and by 11:00 the fire had spread well into the Reserve. Staff and resources were mobilised and the fire was eventually contained the following day.

Fire damage

Many people have asked me how much damage we sustained. This seems a perfectly simple question. However, it is not as simple to answer. Fynbos needs fire in order to allow species diversity to continue and to stimulate new growth. Some parts of the upper garden area had not burnt for many years and were in desperate need of a good burn, which it received that day.

Other parts of the Reserve that burnt in 2006 and 2007, acted as natural fire breaks. The fire burnt up to these areas and then burnt out naturally – again an indication that fire is an important part of Fynbos ecology. So, from an ecological point of view, the fire was by no means a disaster.

However, one needs to quantify the damage in terms of damage to infra-

structure and this is where we suffered quite a loss. Approximately 100 metres of boardwalk were burnt; we lost about 25 benches and most of the fencing along Hillcrest Road. In addition, the internal fence was damaged.

Repair work

The good news is that most of the boardwalk has been repaired – we still need to repair a section of approximately 10 metres. The job was kindly undertaken by Andrew Forte and the 2nd Somerset West Scouts, as part of Andrew's Springbok Scout badge. We extend a very big thank you to them.

The benches are receiving attention and are being repaired, as is the fence. A contractor has been appointed and the fence repairs are nearing completion. We are, however, not able to replace the internal fence due to budgetary constraints. As a result we have had to reduce the bontebok numbers so as to ensure the well-being of the animals.



Scouts hard at work repairing the boardwalk under the supervision of Robert Le Brun, conservation student.



Beauty after the fire – a burnt flower head of the Wild Almond

Signage

One of the projects we are currently working on is replacing the signage. Most of the signage above the internal fence was burnt out and this has given us an opportunity to re-look at the design of the signs – so watch this space!

Lastly, with regard to the fire, I want to thank everybody for their contributions. No matter how big or small, *all* were really appreciated by me personally and my staff – so a big thank you again.

Helderberg Mountain Challenge

The reserve, in conjunction with the Friends, hosted the second Helderberg Mountain Challenge on the 22 May. This year saw an added route with runners heading up to the Dome, a distance of over 24km – the middle and shorter routes were the same as last year.

We had an excellent turnout with nearly 500 runners participating. It was a fantastic day, despite some “creative” marshalling and two emergency medical issues on the mountain.

I would like to thank all my staff, as well as Alistair Munday and his team of parking officials, for their assistance on the day. I am convinced that part of the success was that the parking was handled in a professional manner.

Reserve Management Plan

This plan has been completed and submitted for approval as part of the City’s reserve proclamation process. “Proclamation process?” I hear some of you ask. “We thought the Reserve had already been proclaimed.” You are correct. The Reserve was proclaimed in 1960 as a local authority nature reserve. We are, however,

currently in the process of proclaiming all the City reserves under the National Environmental Management Act legislation which ensures protection for perpetuity. This means we need to develop management plans and have them approved by the Provincial Minister.

Though a rather long and tedious process, it is really in the interest of the Reserve. I will keep everyone updated.

Finally, I have received many queries asking what the veld is looking like at the moment after such a late season fire. I am pleased to say that there has been a flourish of growth after the rains and the unusual warm weather. We are certainly in for a bumper spring season.

Snippet from the past . . .

Oak trees in the reserve



With the focus on trees this year, did you know that some of the oak trees in reserve picnic area could be as old as 125 years? They were planted by brothers Daniel and Johannes Hendriksz (1883) to serve as a wind-break on their farm *Land-en-Zeezicht* of which the reserve was then a part.

The trees have provided wonderful shade for picnickers over the years. Sadly, a number of the trees have had to be felled in recent years, Aging and disease cause the inside of the trunks to rot, resulting in the trees becoming unstable and therefore a safety hazard.

Thank you . . .

The garden around the parking area near the restaurant is looking wonderful. The logs and pine needles add a touch of natural beauty. Thank you to Juliet Moolman, who quietly and on her own initiative, has been responsible for this – and for beautifying the small garden bed near the gate.



Financial Report Year ended 31 March 2011

Extracts from the Treasurer’s report given at the Annual General Meeting

The net deficit for the year was R41 477. This is much more than our budget and cannot be sustained. We must try and bring our results back to a break-even position.

We managed to contain and reduce our expense base, but unfortunately we have seen a big fall in revenue. We will have to make 2011 a year of improving existing and also finding new revenue streams, if we are to have a break-even position in 2011.

Income and expenditure

Our main revenue sources are:

- membership subscriptions R 142 096 (2010 – R 141 591)
- Sunset Concerts R 143 598 (2010 – R 163 768).

The main expenses of R 316 758 (2010 – R 307 279) were for the Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre (MWEEC) of which R 197 403 (2010 – R 186 768) was for staff costs. This is being addressed with the City of Cape Town, as explained by the Chairman in his report at the AGM (more information on the next page).

The year ahead

Our prime financial objective remains to break even. This year major spending will again be focused on the Environmental Education. The destruction of Reserve infrastructure by the recent fire will probably also lead to major spending requirements. This may require a sustained drive for large donations. Members can, of course, assist with this initiative.

Members, please note

The Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve has complied with the Public Benefit rules of Section 30 of the Income Tax Act and, as such, membership contributions can be treated as an expense for tax purposes.

– Patrick Neale-May, Treasurer



The Oak Café has changed hands and we welcome Elke Deluse and her team. Do pop in and support them. They have exciting specials and make some really tasty meals. Picnic baskets/hikers’ packs are also available. For bookings and other queries please phone them on 021 851 4543 or email: oakcafe1@gmail.com
Open: Tuesdays to Sundays 08:30–17:00



Changes at the MWEEC



One of the main features of the Chairman's report given at the Friends AGM was the planned changes at the MWEEC. This extract from the report explains more.

Many of you may have heard rumours about the Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre (MWEEC) take-over by the City of Cape Town (CoCT). Let me assure you, this is not the case. We, the Friends, on your behalf, entered into negotiations with the CoCT to see if the CoCT would consider coming to the party with respect to the running and funding of the MWEEC.

Reasons for the change

The reasons for this are as follows.

- The cost of running the MWEEC has risen exponentially, currently costing the Friends in excess of R300 000 per annum. There has been no financial support from the CoCT – although we have been helped in many practical ways by Owen and his team and for this we express our heartfelt thanks. Therefore the running of the MWEEC has been solely the Friends' responsibility. These costs are forever rising.
- The current Friends employees, Andreas Groenewald and Elzanne Burger, do not have any form of career path and do not have professional mentors to support their work. In addition, should either one of them decide to resign, there is no backup or replacement in place. With the new proposal, they will fall under the Environmental Education Centre umbrella within the CoCT and will benefit substantially.
- The CoCT runs and supports all the other EE Centres in the nature reserves within the CoCT, so why should the MWEEC at the Helderberg Nature Reserve be excluded from the benefits offered to the other EE Centres?

Negotiations

In September 2010, on your behalf and with the approval from the Friends committee and the Advisory Board, I approached senior management at CoCT with a request that the CoCT and the Friends consider entering into an

agreement whereby, over a set period (two years), the CoCT would take over the running and funding of the MWEEC.

This was agreed to at senior management level within the CoCT and Phase 1 (staff management) was implemented on 1 January 2011. Andreas and Elzanne now report to Owen Wittridge, Reserve Manager, as their line manager.

The final phase (financial and the complete running of the MWEEC) is scheduled for January 2012. The CoCT also acknowledges that the running of all EE Centres is *their* responsibility.

Benefits of the change

These are as follows:

- assured continuation and growth of environmental education services in Helderberg;
- a better financial position for the Friends (positive cash flow);
- career paths and benefits for the MWEEC employees;
- a common educational curriculum for all EE Centres;
- shared resources within the EE Centres.

The Friends will continue to assist the MWEEC whenever required.

Friends' projects to continue

The following Friends' projects will continue as normal after the MWEEC handover:

- special projects to be identified and agreed to;
- sunset concert fund raising;
- information centre and membership;
- indigenous nursery;
- hacks, walks, hikes, flower picking;
- Friends administration and newsletters;
- assisting with Eco-Schools Projects.

It was agreed that the Friends will continue to operate from and have full use of the existing office space owned by the Friends – the wooden building adjacent to the MWEEC. It was further agreed that the ownership and management of the Resource Centre will remain with the Friends. The role played by Freya Brett and the other MWEEC volunteers will carry on as before.

We look forward to the full implementation of this change which, we believe, will be to the benefit of all concerned.

– Alistair Munday, Chairman



Clearing Invasives an on going task

The hack group continues to work below the reservoir. During the past few months the group has cleared a lot of sesbania and some more unusual 'pests' like pampas grass and cotoneaster. A lot of work was done clearing the islands in the small dam. As usual there has been no shortage of enthusiastic volunteers getting stuck in.

Upcoming hacks dates are:

13 August 10 September
8 October 12 November

All hacks start at 08:00.

For more information contact James Silberbauer on 078 306 1660.

Information Centre

The ladies (and one courageous man!) have been kept busy renewing subscriptions as well as registering new members. We welcome our new members and hope you will find the opportunity to become more involved in the Reserve. We do need your help!!

However, the shop sales have been slow despite the fact that there is a good stock of inexpensive gifts.

My thanks go to all the volunteers who give so willingly of their time, sitting all day in a rather chilly centre to give us their assistance.

– Rene Lind, Co-ordinator

Membership update

Membership for the current year is almost 2 200 – some way to go before we reach last year's record figure of 2 979. If you know of anyone who had not yet renewed their membership or would like to become members, please encourage them to do so. Your support will be greatly valued.



Early riser keys

As always, these have been in great demand, with only a few left. So if you are interested in getting a key, please call at the Information Centre asp. A key costs R100.

Please note: Times for membership registration and the issuing of keys are from 10:00 to 15:30 daily (*not later*).



Forest Fun

Holiday Programmes

Programme at the EEC

During the first week of the school holidays, 40+ children enjoyed fun activities in celebration of the *International Year of Forests*. They built dioramas (as above) and created colourful 3-D pictures of forest birds. There were interactive PowerPoint presentations and walks in the reserve to look at the trees. A highlight was the hour long programme by *Drumkidz*. On the final day



parents were invited to see an impromptu play, *The story of the first forest*. Our thanks to all the volunteers who helped to make the week such fun.

Outreach holiday programmes

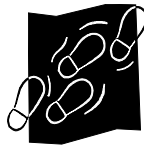
were held during the second and third weeks of the holidays. First it was the turn of 40 children from the *Pérel Project* in the Macassar and Dellrust. They were followed by a group from *Empowered Kids*, Sir Lowry's Pass.

The children learnt more about the earth's forests and were involved in a variety of creative projects, making tree collages, leaf cards, funky animal sock puppets and trees from leaf and bark rubbings. Much fun was had by all.

Elzanne Burger, assisted by the conservation students, led the outreach programme. Transport was arranged by Freya Brett, with funds generously provided by the HEEP (Helderberg Environment Education Project).

An appeal for old calendars

with large, colourful, environment related pictures, such as birds, animals, flowers, trees, especially indigenous. The EEC uses these for exhibitions and awards. Please contact Freya Brett on ☎ 021 852 8831.



Walks and hikes in the reserve

Information walks

On the last Sunday of each month there are information walks starting at 08:00 from the Information Centre. These walks are always worthwhile – even if it means getting a bit wet as we did on the bird walk in May. Despite the unfavourable weather and a shorter walk, we saw a Black Sunbird, a Red Chested Sparrowhawk and a Cape Sugarbird busy with her new nest with Mr Sugarbird keeping a watchful eye on proceedings.

On the upcoming Sunday walks, it will be most interesting to learn what is happening to our Fynbos after the fire.

Dates are as follows:

- **31 July: Fynbos** – Ron du Toit and Helen Pickering
- **28 August: Birds** – Rose Mills
- **25 September: Fynbos** – Helen Pickering
- **30 October: Medicinal Plants** – Andreas Groenewald
- **27 November: Birds** – Rose Mills (NB starting time 07:30)

Hikes from the reserve

Starting in March, we have been organising monthly hikes. The response has been most encouraging, especially from a number of fairly novice hikers for whom the hikes were a totally new and exciting experience. Some had never been on West Point nor along Woodies Walk. Congratulations!

It has been great to see how many bulbs, including fire lilies, and other



On 14 May, after ascending in thick mist, hikers enjoyed their lunch in brilliant sunshine on West Peak. Looking down on the mist with the various peaks peeking through was quite surreal.

plants are already pushing their way through the wet soil after the fire.

The following are the hikes planned for the rest of the year. Times are approximate. Suitable footwear is essential (boots for the Green Route and West Peak). Bring warm, waterproof clothing, water, a hat and snacks.

Date	Start	Route	Grade	Time
13 Aug	08:30	West Peak	3C	6 hrs
10 Sept	08:30	Red	2B	3 hrs
8 Oct	07:30	Green	3B	4 hrs
12 Nov	07:30	West Peak	3C	6 hrs
10 Dec	07:30	Red	2B	3 hrs

Grading: 1 easy 2 moderate 3 strenuous
A no exposure to heights **B** moderate climbing **C** moderate exposure to heights

Note: If the weather is inclement we try to arrange the hike the following Saturday.

Contact person for all walks and hikes
 Rene Lind 084 513 1413 or email: renelind3@gmail.com

Indigenous Nursery

Open: Tuesdays to Fridays
10:00 to 16:00
Saturdays 10:00 to 14:00

During the past dry summer season, like all the local nurseries, we experienced a drop in revenue. We would like to thank all our loyal Friends for their continued support during these recessionary times.

Plants are, of course, costing more but we try to keep our prices competitive and our stocks varied. The leuco-

sperms and leucodendrons particularly are at 'value for money' prices.

There is quite a variety of aloes and succulent-type plants available. While ideal for the water-wise garden, many of these flower in autumn and winter



Aloe ferox

when not much else is flowering. Aloes, in particular, give brilliant splashes of colour. They are also a favourite of sunbirds. So see if there isn't a spot for one or two in your garden!

Issued by: Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve ♦ Registered NPO: 062-777-NPO

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♦ Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre ☎ 021 852-8831 ♦ Website: www.helderbergnaturereserve.co.za

To be cut out and kept in a prominent place as a reminder of upcoming programme and special events.



Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve Programme & Special Events



Exhibition at the MWEEC

in celebration of the
International Year of Forests
25 July to 26 August

Open: Mon – Fri • 08:00 – 16:00

Please Note: School groups will be visiting from 09:00 to 12:00 on most days. You are, however, still welcome to come and see what we are doing.

August 2011

- 13 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
- 13 08:30 **Hike:** West Peak
- 28 08:00 **Walk in the Reserve:** Birds

September 2011

- 10 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
- 10 08:30 **Hike:** Red Route
- 25 08:00 **Walk in the Reserve:** Fynbos

October 2011

- 8 07:30 **Hike:** Green Route
- 8 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
- 30 08:00 **Walk in the Reserve:**
Medicinal Plants

November 2011

- 12 07:30 **Hike:** West Peak
- 12 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
- 27 07:30 **Walk in the Reserve:** Birds

December 2011

- 10 07:30 **Hike:** Red Route

For more information contact the Information Centre ☎ 021 851 4060 or visit our website:
www.helderbergnaturereserve.co.za