

# The Aliens in Retreat

June 2010

A chronicle of Helderberg Hackery

Under the auspices of the Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve

## A day for tortoises

It was a hack punctuated by tortoise sightings. In between the moments of nature-study plenty of hacking was done by Mike Carr, Annegret Gruner, John McNaught-Davis, Lewis Silberbauer, Justin Williams, Nicholas Williams, Katherine Williams, Alex Williams, Alex Dixon, James Owens, Thomas Owens, Don Reid, Jason Greig, Harlan Greig, Stephen Brown and James Silberbauer.



*As we were making our way back along the dam wall after the hack we spotted this old tortoise. The lack of pattern on the shell and almost charcoaled appearance in places had us wondering if it had survived a close shave with a fire, but the dull colour is more likely due to old age. There were signs of an old wound near the front of the shell.*

*We came across this half-hidden juvenile leopard tortoise at the start of the hack. We marked the spot and made sure we did not disturb it again. The tortoise was about the size of the palm of an adult's hand.*



*This leopard tortoise was well-hidden in the bush. Quite a large specimen, it was almost half the height of a nearby anthill.*





*Katherine Williams tackles a prickly thistle. This is a Scottish Thistle. This plant has several nasty thorns all around each leaf. They are so sharp and strong they are even able to penetrate the tough gloves we wear.*



*There was a fair amount of bundu-bashing during this hack — about to ford a stream, from top to bottom: Steve Brown, Alex Dixon, Alex Williams and Justin Williams.*

**W**e were back to the area below the waterworks after three months of working in the central garden. Here we found quite a few escaped garden plants and a large mix of alien plants. There were pines, longleaf wattle, port jackson, bugweed, thistle and sesbania. At one point we saw that a fish eagle was observing our efforts, as did a herd of bontebok from the side of the dam wall.

*Harlan Greig wields a slasher — rather aptly dubbed "The thing that goes back and forth and then goes Ka-chinngggg!" by Katherine Williams.*



## Next Hack

The next hack will be held on Saturday 10 July 2010. Starting at 8:00am.

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