Thanks to a huge effort by all parties involved, the newly refurbished Visitor Information Centre was opened just in time for the Christmas holidays. As reported in our November newsletter the project encountered a string of setbacks when structural faults occurred in the building in May last year. We had to wait many months for the City to appoint a contractor to carry out the engineering repairs to the building. Once these were done our own contractor, Dieter Kinsky (ITE Construction), had to work frantically to complete the internal walls and rooms with all services and fittings before the holiday break.

A special word of thanks is due to Alistair Munday, Chairman of the Friends for his leadership and driving energies that helped so much to get the job done. Dieter handed over the keys on 3 December so that Fay Rolando and her team of volunteers could get started on setting up the information desk and the gift shop.

**New interior and shop**
The new internal layout is bright and spacious, whilst retaining the rustic feel under the thatched roof. Once again the Visitor Centre team members are doing duty and have been busy answering hundreds of questions from visitors to the reserve or via the telephone.

Visitors have commented favourably on the new look interior which benefits from an open plan layout with plenty of light and air from the windows that have been uncovered and refurbished.

Meanwhile the shop has been re-stocked with many new and interesting gifts at very reasonable prices, so please come along and look for a bargain.

The Friend’s membership administration office has been moved from the EEC buildings to a new room located in the right hand corner of the Visitor Centre. Our volunteer administrator, Mary Birch, provides this vital service with care and dedication. It will be a great advantage to the volunteers doing duty to have the information and membership services in the same building.

**Volunteer team**
The Friends owe a vote of thanks to the team of volunteers who make sure that the centre is staffed daily from 10:00 to 16:00 by sharing the duties on a monthly roster. Thanks to all for coping in a small cabin for all those months.

The present core team includes: Fay Rolando, who is leader, Penny Clifton-Smith, Rose Haldane, Maureen Arm, Lyn Machin, Yvonne Hutchins, Jane Boswell and Mike Wittenberg. Welcome to Linda Weinand, Friends Life Member, who has recently joined the team, bringing her knowledge of the indigenous flora in the reserve. Many other regulars assist as required, especially the Sunday team.

**What happens next?**
Soon there will be a “lounge area” for visitors to sit comfortably whilst browsing through reference books. Plans are in hand for seasonal plant displays and posters about the reserve. In the future there should be access to our photographic library on computer screens. Members are invited to offer suggestions for displays and events.

We are all looking forward to a great future for the Visitor Centre.

– David Macdonald
Sunset Concerts 2013/14

The fund raising goals of the 2013/14 Sunset Concert series were dealt a serious blow with the cancellation of two concerts, but the series got back in full swing entertaining large crowds. Many hours of good-natured volunteering made the remaining concerts a great success.

– Melanie Horn, Co-ordinator

As World Design Capital 2014 Cape Town is upon us, we have taken inspiration to revamp our online presence. Judith Cross and Githa Skea-Thuesen are taking the Friends into 2014 and beyond, with a vision to conserve paper and unnecessary duplication of efforts, through improved communication and marketing using online media.

Our Facebook Page is our interactive social media supporting our website http://www.helderbergnaturereserve.co.za. You can locate our page by searching for: “Friends of Helderberg Nature Reserve” on Facebook. Please join our other 600+ online followers by clicking LIKE on our Facebook Page www.facebook.com/holderbergnaturereserve.

Once you have joined our Facebook, you will be able to view and post content. You can choose to be a passive or an interactive user. You will get into the “know it all” with latest news, events, etc. You can post new ideas, constructive criticism and calls for assistance. Judith Cross is an absolute whizz at online Q&A, as well as giving feedback from experts. You can also share your own photos and wonderful memories from the reserve with the Friends and connect with old and new friends … and who knows, your photos may become “famous” – we could use selective photos in newsletters and as page covers.

Reminder!

- Friends membership renewal
  • Your membership of the Friends falls due on 1 April. You may renew your membership by calling at the Visitor Centre, completing a membership form and paying the set membership fee – fees remain same as last year.
  • Please bring with you the membership cards and ID numbers of all persons to be listed on your application form (date of birth for children).
  • Membership renewal starts on 27 March, not before.

- Early riser key privilege
  • The expiry date of the present set of keys has been extended to 30 April. The lock on the gate will be changed on 1 May.
  • Application for new keys starts on 29 April.
  • The early riser key privilege is for paid up Friends members only and all key holders agree to a set of terms and conditions.
  • Key holders may nominate family members and/or a walking partner (1 only) to accompany them – the Friends membership and ID numbers for each to be entered on the application form.
  • The key costs R250 – R50 discount to current registered key holders who return their numbered key.

- Friends Annual General Meeting
  10 May at 15:00 at the Education Centre
  • Items on the agenda include the Chairman’s and the Financial reports and the election of office bearers for the upcoming year.
  • Guest speaker will be Andreas Groenewald. Topic: Bats versus Wind Farms.
  • All members are invited to attend.

For further information
Contact the Visitor Centre phone 021 851 4060 open daily from 10:00 to 16:00 or log on to the website: www.helderbergnaturereserve.co.za

Vertical Helderberg – Graydon Norton

Going Green… with Facebook

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New Staff Members at the Helderberg Nature Reserve

We are delighted to welcome the following new staff members on to the Management Team of the Nature Reserve. Both of them bring different strengths to the table and we are sure they will enjoy their stay with us.

Yongama Mbangezeli
People and Conservation Officer

Yongama is based at the Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre and started with us in November 2013. He has been appointed to fulfil the role of Environmental Educator. A partnership agreement between the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the City of Cape Town has made this position possible and Yongama has been appointed as a Groen Sebenza intern until the end of December 2015.

He is no stranger though to working in Protected Areas. He was a Quality Control Officer working at Mountain Zebra National Park after completing his Diploma in Nature Conservation.

Yongama has already been involved in developing new programmes and initiatives and has enthusiastically presented various topics to the schools that have visited the Reserve thus far.

Andrea Schnetler
Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Student

Andrea is our WIL student for the year and will be with us until the end of December 2014. She will be completing this year as part of the requirements needed in order to complete her National Diploma in Nature Conservation.

Andrea has spent many hours volunteering on other Nature Reserves and also holds a Certificate in Advanced Game Ranging and Lodge Management, where she has learnt to combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

She will be working with the staff on all aspects of Reserve Management this year.

I would like to take this opportunity of welcoming them and trust that they will gain the knowledge needed in order to develop their careers. They are both passionate individuals and look forward to a fruitful relationship with both of them.

– Owen Wittridge

Awards for all Eco-Schools in the Helderberg Node

2013 was a very successful year for the 19 schools in the Helderberg Node with all schools receiving their awards for maintaining their eco-projects. These awards are confirmation that the schools are part of the largest International Network of Schools World-wide that practise environmental learning and management.

Eco-Schools projects included:
- food gardens, which supplement the feeding schemes – many learners go to school on empty stomachs;
- fynbos gardens that contribute to the greening of their school grounds and were the motivation behind several satellite gardens that sprung up in the area;
- community outreach programmes, such as knitting squares for blankets, assisting with reading and maths, a swop shop and even baking dog biscuits!

Environment care projects
The schools are also serious about the state of the environment. Many clean-up initiatives have been launched. Aliens have been removed from the Lourens River by Parel Vallei High School. The schools in Macasar have taken ownership of the Moddergat River, that runs through their community, and developed awareness programmes to highlight the dire state of the river.

The eco-schools have done themselves proud and we wish them well with their 2014 endeavours!

– Freya Brett, Node Co-ordinator

The recycle swop shop: A Sir Lowry’s Pass Primary School pupil redeeming her voucher earned by collecting litter in her community for recycling. The ‘shop’ is a joint project initiated by Beaumont Primary School which supplies the items for the ‘shop’, ranging from non perishable food to stationery, toiletries and more.
Bokkies in the Reserve

Since the departure of the bontebok from the reserve, it is possible to think that there are no antelope within its borders. However, nothing could be further from the truth. There are three indigenous species in the reserve, two of which are featured in this issue. A challenge to see if you can spot either in the months ahead! In the next issue we feature the third species, the common duiker.

1. The Vaalribbok/Grey Rhebuck/Pelea capreolus

In October 2009 two Vaalribbok, one male and one female, were released in Helderberg Nature Reserve. This antelope species is endemic to Southern Africa but it is very shy and therefore seldom seen. Fortunately there is eyewitness evidence that the introduced pair have indeed succeeded in having off-spring!

They prefer rocky outcrops, mountain slopes and plateaus with good grass cover. They are predominantly browsers, with forbs and shrubs forming the largest part of their diet.

They are a greyish brown colour with white underparts and a conspicuous white ring around the eyes. The tail is short and bushy with a white tip and white underneath. It is this white flash in the field which is often the only sign that gives them away.

They have graceful slender necks, long narrow ears and the male has very straight spike-like horns. They weigh up to 30kg and have a shoulder height of 700-800mm. The male is extremely aggressive during breeding time, which is from February to April. A single lamb is born after eight months. The mother hides the lamb for six weeks. They are territorial and live in small groupings of a ram, a few ewes and lambs. The ram will defend his territory. They make snorting, groaning and hissing sounds and are active for most of the day but rest when it becomes hot. They are good jumpers and run with a distinct rocking horse gait, with the fore and hind legs kicked out stiffly with each leap.

The Afrikaans/Dutch spelling, reebok, is responsible for the name of the British sportswear manufacturing company, Reebok.

Although the Cape grysbok is predominantly a browser, it will also graze on succulent grass and enter plantations to feed on young shoots and fruit. Remarkably, while this species will drink water when available, it does not require free water but derives all necessary hydration from its food.

Although breeding can take place at any time during the year, most lambs are born between September and December following a gestation period of around seven months. Under good conditions a sexually mature female will give birth to two lambs a year, which are weaned after around 3 months. Along with mating, this is the only other time that Cape grysbok are not solitary.

The Cape Grysbok

This little antelope is relatively common and is present on numerous isolated bits of natural veld, yet it is seldom seen. It is nocturnal and hides in thick bush during the day. These little animals are almost invisible during the day and the best chance to see them is early in the morning or later in the evening and obviously doing a night walk in the reserve.

The Cape grysbok is endemic to the Western Cape and has a rough, reddish sandy coat flecked in white. The large, pointed ears are positioned prominently on the black-tufted crown and the male has short, slightly curved horns. A subtle feature that distinguishes the Cape grysbok from the other small South African antelope is a pair of rudimentary ‘false hooves’ above and behind the hooves of the hind legs.

The Cape grysbok is almost entirely restricted to the dense scrub vegetation that comprises the fynbos biome. It is frequently found in belts of natural vegetation fringing agricultural areas, such as vineyards, and is known to enter into these areas to forage. It relies on an acute sense of smell, hearing and touch to navigate safely and efficiently at night. It is an expert in evading danger. It will hide until the last minute and then flee in an erratic zigzag run.

– Dr Elzette Jordan, ERMD Department

The next issue will feature the third of the small “bokkies” in the reserve – the Common Duiker.
Guided Walks in the Reserve

The current series of interpretative day and night walks in the Reserve have proved to be most popular, particularly the night walks, so much so that they were all fully booked.

Day Walks
Eight people participated in the Protea Walk led by Anderas Groenewald at the end of January. Although there are not many plants in bloom at this time of year, they were able to enjoy the Proteas exima, repens, aurea and mundii amongst others.

On the 23 February the group were given fascinated insights into some of the medicinal properties of our Fynbos plants. “Whew! I never realised that!” “The Fynbos plants have remarkable properties for healing the common cold!” were just some of the comments made. Always so much to learn!

Two more day walks have been planned in the current series. (see below). We then take break during the wet winter months with walks resuming in the spring.

Upcoming day walks
Walks are in the lower area of the reserve and therefore not strenuous. They start from the Oak Café and last approximately 2 hours.

- 30 March: Birds (start 07:30) led by Rose Mills of the Somerset West Bird Club
- 27 April: Fynbos/Protea (start 08:00) led by Andreas Groenewald

The cost for the each walk is R20, R10 for scholars. Booking is essential. Call at the Visitor Centre to get a ticket. Wear comfortable shoes on the day; bring a sun hat and something to drink.

By the Friends is in the process of restoring the existing memorial benches in the reserve. If you or your family would like to make a donation towards the project, please contact Trevor Dunkley, on 083 392 0867 or email lavenderctge@polka.co.za

Night Walks
A perfect evening was enjoyed by 17 folk who joined the first night walk on 1 February. All were delighted with the good views of the Spotted Eagle Owl, various spiders, frogs, two duiker and a magnificent night sky.

It was a lovely evening on the second new moon walk with the weather just right. Unfortunately not much was seen – a toad, some scorpions and a few orb spiders at the ponds! It is clear that life is taking a back seat at the height of summer. However, the glorious night sky made up for the quietness of nature.

-Spotted Eagle Owl

Made it! This wonderful picture by Karin Bester appeared on Face book.

Clearing Invasives

The last few hacks have been carried out in the central garden, targeting mostly pittosporum and pine trees. Our December hack even yielded one or two pines suitable for Christmas trees!

Upcoming hacks 2014:
- 12 April
- 10 May
- 14 June
- 12 July

All hacks start at 08:00.
For more information contact James Silberbauer on 078 306 1660.

Hikes from the Reserve

Guided hikes are arranged on the first Saturday of each month. The following have been arranged during the upcoming months.

Suitable footwear is essential (boots for West Peak and the Green Route). Bring warm, waterproof clothing, water, a hat and snacks. Note that guides may refuse to allow persons to join the hike if footwear and clothing are unsuitable.

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<th>Route</th>
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<td>07:30</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>2B</td>
<td>3+hrs</td>
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<tr>
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<td>08:30</td>
<td>Brown/Red</td>
<td>2.5B</td>
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<td>08:30</td>
<td>West Peak</td>
<td>3C</td>
<td>7+hrs</td>
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Grading: 1 easy 2 moderate 3 strenuous
A no exposure to heights B moderate climbing C moderate exposure to heights

For more information contact Don Reid on 072 270 7972.