



Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust

10th Newsletter, September 2016

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Update on the Watercourse Restoration Project

The Watercourse Restoration Project is fast nearing the end of the first year of implementation. It has been a fascinating journey this far and we have been fortunate to be able to explore spectacular watercourses while meeting incredibly committed and passionate farmers and, of course, spend time getting to know all the critters that call this habitat home. We have neared the end of our planning phase and are now able to begin the implementation of various management intervention projects. We have kicked off with a soil erosion project on the Freek Botha River that will combat sheet erosion along catchments and watercourses as well as more serious gully erosion. As always the project implementation involves plenty of planning, extension work, buying of equipment and the sweat of manual labour. The first project seeks to combat sheet erosion along a catchment with soil saver geotextile 'blankets'. The images below show the extent of erosion and the initial work achieved to date.



The monitoring of water quality has also continued and we are developing a detailed database to be able to gauge the water quality while testing for pH, electrical conductivity, dissolved oxygen, temperature, ammonia, nitrates, nitrites, phosphonates, organo-phosphonates and iron. This is important to not only determine the challenges that aquatic diversity and the surrounding habitat face, but also allows us to determine long term conservation planning initiatives.

As always, the joy of working within the field allows so many opportunities to search for, photograph and enjoy all the amazing diversity that we are privileged to share within the Renosterveld. At this time of year after the winter rains and the onset of spring, the opportunities are endless with a suite of flowers, birds entering breeding plumage, wetlands and watercourses filled to brimming and frogs and dragonflies making the most of early spring. Sometimes its a wonder that we ever get any work done!





FEATURE BLOG BY ZOË POULSEN

In this blog, Zoë describes the small-mammal research being undertaken by Abigail Graham for her MSc at UCT, Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences, supervised by Dr. Pippin Anderson and Professor Jeremy Midgley.



Abigail with a Multimammate Mouse

Abigail is undertaking her Masters research investigating the impact of habitat fragmentation upon diversity of small mammals within Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld patches of different sizes. This is important research given that although there is a detailed and growing body of literature on rodent diversity and ecology within Fynbos there have still only been a few studies undertaken on rodents and their ecology within Renosterveld vegetation. We also know little of the impact of fragmentation of Renosterveld in the Overberg through transformation for agriculture upon small mammal populations.

To undertake research on small mammals, first you have to catch them. And this requires time, patience and a little bribery and corruption. Rodents are caught using Sherman traps, which are baited with a mixture of peanut butter and rolled oats. Slices of apple are also placed in the traps to ensure that any rodents caught do not get dehydrated. The traps are wrapped in arothene sheets to insulate them from the cold and cotton wool is placed in each trap for use as nesting material. Trapping is done overnight and then traps are checked early the following morning and after data collection any caught rodents are released back into the veld. Rodents were trapped within small, medium and large patches of Renosterveld to investigate the effect of patch size upon small mammal diversity.



Abigail's study area

Six different rodent species were trapped during the course of the study. The most commonly caught rodent was the Four Striped Grass Mouse. Next up was the Namaqua Rock Mouse which like the Striped Mouse also occurs throughout the subcontinent and has a tolerance of a broad range of habitats. Four Bush Vlei Rats were also caught as well as eight Southern Multimammate Mice, three Elephant Shrews and three lesser Dwarf Shrews. Preliminary findings show that the majority of rodents were caught in the medium and large patches, suggesting that the smaller patches are less favourable as small mammal habitats.

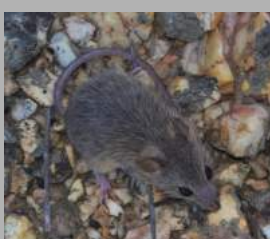
Habitat fragmentation is one of the greatest ecological challenges facing Renosterveld in the Overberg. It is not known fully to what extent this has impacted upon biodiversity in these Critically Endangered habitat remnants.



Lesser Dwarf Shrew



Cape Rock Elephant Shrew



Namaqua Rock Mouse

Preliminary findings from this research also highlights the importance of corridors such as watercourses in the landscape to allow wildlife from insects to rodents to larger mammals to move through the landscape so that patches of veld are not 'islands' marooned in a sea of crop monoculture. It is hoped that this work, once complete, will shed a little more light on how well small mammal populations are surviving in the Eastern

SPEND A UNIQUE WEEKEND AT HAARWEGSKLOOF: 23-25TH SEP 2016

Together with Sijnn Wines, we will be hosting a weekend of Renosterveld exploration and wine-tasting. Pack your hiking shoes and join us for guided walks with the ORCT's Director within two different Renosterveld types found on Haarwegskloof and on the Sijnn Farm (Malgas). Here you will experience the privilege of seeing several rare and threatened plants which are only found within a very small part of the Overberg, while learning more about the ecology of this extremely rich and threatened ecosystem. All this while enjoying delicious food and glorious Sijnn wines. The entire weekend package is R2500 per person and includes all guided walks, meals (including a lunch at De Hoop), wine and accommodation. Please visit www.sijnn.co.za/renosterveld-weekend-23-25-september/ for booking info.

HWK photos by Wessel Wessels



PLEASE SUPPORT THE ORCT

Consider becoming an ORCT member and 'sponsoring a petal'

For only R500 per annum, you can become a member of the ORCT and support the important work that we do while also receiving the following: a hard copy of our annual report, a free visit to the reserve for two people (with a short, guided walk), our quarterly newsletter, sponsoring a petal and a 15% discount on staying at our self-catering accommodation: the Old Dairy.

Choose and click on any of the new 'petals' below to follow the link to becoming an ORCT member...



OR, if you would like to support a specific project, you could contribute towards:



Printing additional English and Afrikaans Renosterveld Booklets as they have been so well-received and are in high-demand!

OR



Designing and constructing trails, signage, information boards and look-out decks for visitors to our Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve.

Please contact Odette if you would like to contribute to either of these projects.

info@overbergrenosterveld.org.za

EARLY SPRING GEMS from our RENOSTERVELD RESERVE

It is a well-known fact that Fynbos ecosystems rely on fire to maintain ecosystem functioning and the diversity of life for which they are so famous. Most of the Renosterveld on our reserve has not burned for more than 20 years, thus it was imperative that we initiate a controlled burning programme. We started implementing this when we burned about 30 ha of the 500 ha reserve on the 30th March this year. The first spring after a burn is usually a spectacular one, with regards to the diversity of flowering bulbs and annuals—and Haarwegskloof Renosterveld has not failed to impress. It is only half-way through spring and we have experienced a most incredible diversity of colour and species—enjoy these images!



Diascia cf. capensis



Watsonia aletroides (NT)



Drosera cistiflora



Lyperia violaceae



Ixia rapunculoides



Moraea fergusoniae



Babiana patula



Babiana patersoniae



Gladiolus brevifolius



Moraea unguiculata



Zaluzianskya divaricata

As always, thank you to our key partners and donors

