



OVERBERG LOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST
Annual Report 2012 - 2013





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OUR VISION

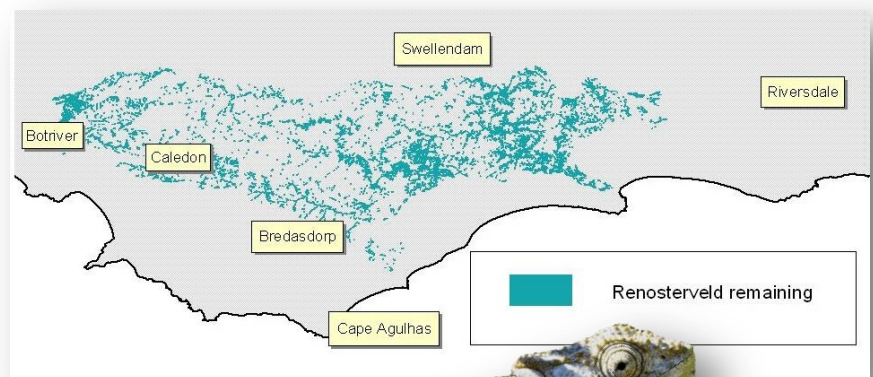
To secure the long-term conservation and management of remaining lowland vegetation through active partnerships thereby improving the overall quality of farms, sustainable livelihoods, and landscapes in the Overberg.



OUR OBJECTIVES

- Source funding for incentives to landowners for improved habitat management, in a way that will benefit both farming and conservation objectives: e.g. assist with fencing, burning, alien clearing, etc.
- Source funding for supporting the legal process involved with voluntary title-deed restrictions.
- Bring local communities into lowland conservation, through awareness, involvement and, where possible, job creation.
- Establish and/or continue long-term renosterveld research projects.
- Form strong, positive relationships with key partners.

Map below denotes the renosterveld remaining in the Overberg.



OUR BOARD

Dirk van Papendorp (Chairperson)
Alan Jeftha (Vice-Chair)
Lesley Richardson
Sean Privett

SPECIAL ADVISORS TO THE BOARD

Dr. Rob Brett
David Houghton
Prof. Charles Stirton





OUR LAUNCH: 10th September 2012

The Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust was launched on the 10th September 2012 at the Suurbraak Community Hall. The event was sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, and the venue was selected based on the fact that the OLCCT was founded by the Suurbraak Grain Farmers Co-operative (SGF), a Black-Economic Empowerment farming company that promotes conservation on farming landscapes, through Conservation Farming principles.

In his presentation, Francis Steyn, LandCare's Programme Manager at the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, remarked that "the Suurbraak partnership between agriculture and conservation is what we strive for in sustainable development; it is the ultimate rural development initiative. It is led by innovative people looking for solutions, and brave people willing to take on hard tasks that daunt others."

It was an honour to have Minister van Rensburg attend the launch: he said, "The Co-operative [SGF] fits into the national objectives, promoting sustainable natural resource management and rural development. With the Trust and the Co-operative working together, the three legs of the triple bottom line can be achieved."

Our Chairperson, Dirk van Papendorp, who is also a commercial farmer, said that the OLCCT could help farming and conservation "tie the knot". He said, "The aim is to find the balance between commercial benefits and conservation on the farm. One can farm sustainably without the loss of income."

Presentations were also made by Nicholas Myburgh (Mayor of Swellendam), Alan Jeftha (OLCT Vice-Chair and partner in SGF), Ismail Ebrahim (CREW), Cornie Swart (President, Agri-Western Cape) and Odette Curtis (OLCT Director). Lunch was followed by a field trip to the Suurbraak commonage, where several botanical experts were able to share their knowledge about the spectacular flower display

The launch was well-attended, with more than 100 people present and the message regarding the critical collaboration between agriculture and conservation was clear by the support from both communities.





NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR, Dr Odette Curtis

*A society is defined not only by what it creates, but by
what it refuses to destroy (John Sawhill)*



The task of setting up and running a new NGO has been a daunting, difficult, overwhelming, rewarding and exhilarating experience! Starting the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust was the culmination of several years of research and stewardship work in renosterveld remnants of the Overberg and the realization that if we do not address the critical state of renosterveld urgently, we will lose it forever.

When one is caught up in the challenging tasks of fund-raising and administration, one's accomplishments often feel over-shadowed. However, looking back on the first year of the OLCT, I feel proud of what we, as a new NGO, have achieved in a relatively short space of time. We successfully raised enough funding, through the auctioning of the naming rights of a newly-discovered Iris, to cover our running expenses for the year 2013. We were awarded a Mazda Wildlife Fund vehicle. We published new and exciting research. And we continued to build our relationships with our most important partners: the landowners.

Conservation off-reserves is the key to the preservation of landscape-level ecological processes and the maintenance of biodiversity; this is most critical in severely transformed habitats such as renosterveld. Historically, conservation on private land was largely opportunistic and reserves were often established merely by default (e.g. mountainous areas not suitable for agriculture were declared nature reserves). A critical turning point in the global approach to conservation was due to the realization that conservation needs to be strategic if we are to make a tangible difference to the ecological integrity of the environment we live in. Without this essential mind-shift, the most severely transformed habitats would continue on the path towards inevitable extinction. With this in mind, conservation planners in the Cape Floristic Region have generated world-class conservation plans, providing all the required tools for achieving conservation in our threatened lowlands. However, resources allocated for implementing these plans have been scarce, meaning that despite our heightened awareness about conservation prioritization, over the last ten years, we have lost more of these habitats than we have managed to secure for long-term conservation. Nevertheless, these remnants continue to provide us with botanical surprises and many of the gems that occurred throughout this landscape continue to survive in these islands. Whilst we continue to find new plant species, we are also increasing our understanding of the critical refugia that these remnants provide for a suite of important animals. It is these exceptional levels of unique biodiversity that drives the OLCT to keep fighting for this *Critically Endangered* global hotspot. I hope that if you are reading this, you will be walking this journey with us.

Odette Curtis

Odette Curtis





NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON, Dirk van Papendorp

The Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust can look back at a year of hard work in securing the future of renosterveld conservation in the Southern Cape area: a giant leap was taken to further conservation initiatives in the broader landscape.

The OLCT was formed in 2012 with only six individuals under the leadership of Odette Curtis. At the inaugural meeting the vision was expressed by all attending that although our backgrounds are diverse, we see the need for conserving what is left of this delicate ecosystem, with only limited patches left throughout the grain-producing areas of the Southern and Western Cape. We had farming, law, botanical and zoological expertise around the table that day and out of it emerged a structure to give body to what has been identified as a priority in conservation circles for quite some time already.

The Suurbraak Grain Farmers project was approached to be the founder of the Trust as they expressed a keen interest to implement conservation of their renosterveld on a broader scale. This gesture also highlighted the link that exist between grain farming, growing the wellbeing of communities and conservation of the natural habitat.

Our first year in office saw the following milestones:

- FFI donated R 130 000 as start-up capital for the OLCT.
- R360 000 was raised through the auctioning of the naming rights of a newly-discovered Iris.
- Through the active involvement of the OLCT director, we succeeded in contributing to successfully opposing a proposed wind farm in threatened habitat at Brakkefontein farm, near Stormsvlei.
- A successful launch for the OLCT was held in Suurbraak.
- The director was approached by several farmers' groups and societies to present the OLCT's work.
- The OLCT established formal working agreements with other conservation bodies including BirdLife South Africa, Flower Valley Conservation Trust, WWF and the Overberg Crane Group.
- The OLCT was awarded a Mazda vehicle by the Mazda Wildlife Fund.
- The Trust launched it's official website and social media pages (blog and Facebook) for which the visitor count is growing steadily.

What we are still striving for is to create a 'home base' for renosterveld conservation and research, with the necessary infrastructure to support students and visiting scientists, as well as potential donors and eco-tourists with an interest in renosterveld.

In summary, I think the OLCT has achieved a lot in such a short time. Strong bonds have been forged and the OLCT is now seen in conservation circles as a force to be reckoned with. There are several new initiatives planned and the future for renosterveld conservation doesn't look so bleak anymore!

I want to take the opportunity to thank my board, all donors, as well as institutions for their willingness to support and put in hard work for this great cause.

Dirk van Papendorp



OUR FOCAL PROJECTS

CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAMME

This programme will focus on building and cementing partnerships with farmers who own critical areas of renosterveld. Financial assistance with management will be provided to those landowners willing to commit to formal long-term conservation.



SUURBRAAK COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PROJECT

Through a landscape initiative which first focuses on the farms from Grootvadersbosch Conservancy, through the Suurbraak commonage, to Rietvallei, we will collaborate in a partnership project with benefits for private landowners, local communities (with a focus on Suurbraak) and the environment by providing assistance with management, enabling job creation and capacity building and sustainable land use respectively.

LAND PURCHASE PROGRAMME

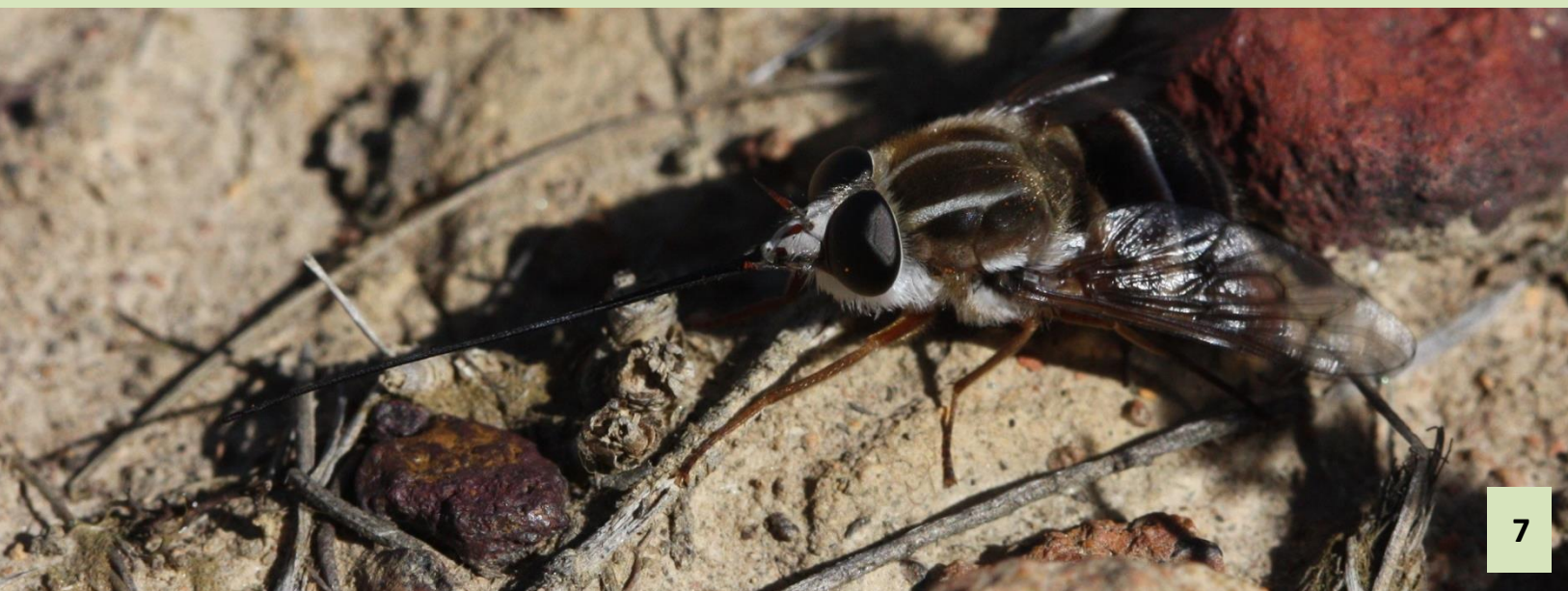
Through a collaborative programme with WWF-SA, FFI-UK and other entities, we will assist with identifying suitable sites for outright purchase, assist with fundraising and contribute to negotiations with landowners, as a means of securing the largest, most contiguous remnants for maintaining ecological functioning at the landscape level.

SUPPORT TO EXISTING STEWARDSHIP SITES

We will provide support, through collaboration with CapeNature, to existing Stewardship sites that fall into our area of operation.

EXTENSION & AWARENESS IN FARMING COMMUNITIES

Keeping in mind that *one cannot love what one does not know or understand*, our most important work is based on the veld surveys we do and the feedback and discussions we have with farmers and communities regarding our findings and their implications for sustainable veld management. Developing positive relationships with landowners, and making people proud to be the custodians of our natural heritage, in is the only way we will ensure the long-term preservation of these critical systems.



HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR FIRST YEAR

Species-naming auction raised R350 000 for the OLCT!



With help from Fauna and Flora International, UK, we successfully auctioned the naming rights to a new species of *Hesperantha*, discovered by our Director, Odette Curtis in 2011.

The winner of the bid, UK-based Oren Taylor, bought the flower's name for his daughter, thus it has been named *Hesperantha kiaratayloriae*.

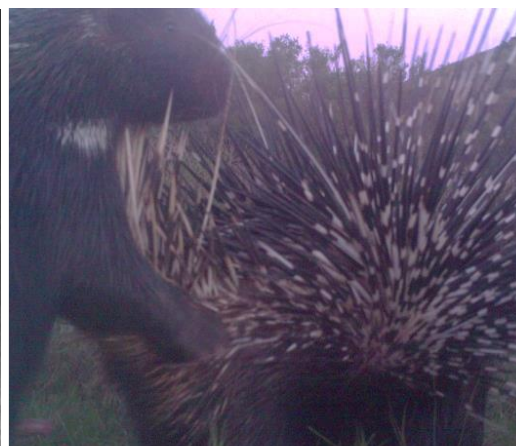
The funds raised from this auction have sustained the running costs of the OLCT for 2013.

This little Iris grows on quartz patches in the Eastern Rûens of the Overberg. Thus far, we have only found a single population of this rare plant and therefore propose that it be given the Red Data status of *Critically Endangered*. It is pollinated by a butterfly (*Tsitana* sp.) – and this is the first record of butterfly pollination for the genus *Hesperantha*.



Camera trap project

Thanks to philanthropic donations, we were able to purchase five camera traps for monitoring animal activity in renosterveld fragments in order to assess which animals are using these important remnants as refugia.



Five new species discovered and published

During the course of 2012, Prof. Charles Stirton, Dr. Muthama Muasya and Odette Curtis found and described five new plant species in the Overberg's renosterveld. Four of these are legumes (from the pea family) and one is a miniature sedge. This was published in a paper in early 2013 which is available on the OLCT's website.

The new species are shown below (from left to right): *Polhillia curtisiae*, *Aspalathus quartzicola*, *Ficinia overbergensis*, *Otholobium curtisiae* & *Aspalathus microlithica*.



Funds raised for project with American volunteer, Evan Eifler



Evan Eifler (Madison, Wisconsin, USA) was first introduced to renosterveld as an exchange student when he attended a lecture and field trip on renosterveld led by Odette, with his third-year Ecology classmates. Ever since then, he has been working hard to come back to South Africa and get involved with the work of the OLCT. Through his Kickstarter campaign, Evan Eifler was able to raise more than \$13 000 to be able to take part in a project under the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust for a year. Evan starts his field work with Odette in August 2013 and will be documenting and photographing important plants, insects, mammals and birds, in order to create an inventory of the species found in renosterveld fragments in the Overberg.

OLCT awarded a vehicle from the Mazda Wildlife Fund

One of the big highlights of our year was being awarded a Mazda Wildlife Fund vehicle. The Trust has been given a loan vehicle in the form of a BT50 double cab 4X2 bakkie. This is a significant asset for a newly-established NGO. A huge thank you to Mazda Wildlife Fund!



mazda Wildlife Fund
The Driving Force Behind Conservation



Odette Curtis, Director of the OLCT, received her PhD on renosterveld management



THESIS SUMMARY & KEY FINDINGS

Lowland renosterveld is a relatively fertile, shale-derived vegetation type found within the Fynbos Biome of South Africa, a biome which is recognized as one of the world's smallest, yet richest plant kingdoms. A widely accepted, although not proven, hypothesis states that current-day renosterveld is derived from a pristine C_4 grassland and that the dominance of small-leaved asteraceous shrubs such as *Renosterbos* is due to more than 300 years of mismanagement in the form of overgrazing. The debate over what renosterveld actually is, combined with a dearth of knowledge as to its ecological functioning, has meant that management recommendations are largely based on a combination of guess-work and inferences from studies in adjacent and similar fynbos and Karoo habitats. Additionally, renosterveld has been severely transformed for agricultural development, rendering it a *Critically Endangered* vegetation type, with 4-10 % of the original extent remaining.



South Coast Renosterveld was more-than-likely always a grassy-shrubland, and although data suggest slightly higher C_4 inputs historically, renosterveld was never a pure C_4 grassland. Alpha diversity was on a par, if not higher, than that of any other studied fynbos habitats and is comparable, if not richer, than its other Mediterranean-climate shrubland counterparts. Similarly, species turnover across habitat and landscape gradients was high, suggesting that multiple renosterveld reserves will be crucial for the long-term preservation of this habitat and associated ecological processes.

Renosterveld in the Overberg responds positively to fire, through a significant increase in flowering and germination in post-burn vegetation, while older renosterveld is less productive. However, I also demonstrate that regular short burning intervals are not advisable for this relatively dry shrubland, which is better suited to fire frequencies similar to, or lower than, those in comparable fynbos habitats. Grazing impacts did not manifest on plant diversity or cover, but did affect size and productivity of species favored by livestock, suggesting potential for long-term negative impacts with continuous grazing. This study suggests that managing for the grass component alone will not have overall benefits for the biodiversity and ecosystem functioning of this severely threatened vegetation type.

The future of renosterveld in the Overberg depends on the establishment of a network of reserves which includes the full repertoire of management regimes, micro-habitats and aspects, in order to incorporate diversity at all levels. This alone, however, will not be sufficient: a strategy which ensures landowner buy-in, through tangible incentives, will be crucial for the long-term persistence of renosterveld as a functioning ecological entity at the landscape level.



OLCT FINANCIAL REPORT FEBRUARY 2013

Report of the independent auditors on the summary annual financial statements to the Trustees of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust (registration number IT851/2012) for the year ended 28 February 2013.

The accompanying summary annual financial statements, which comprise the summary statements of comprehensive income, and statement of financial position for the year then ended, are derived from the audited annual financial statements of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust for the year ended 28 February 2013. We expressed an unmodified audit opinion on those annual financial statements in our report.

The summary annual financial statements do not contain all the disclosures required by the International Financial Reporting Standards. Reading the summary annual financial statements, therefore, is not a substitute for reading the audited annual financial statements of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust.

Management's responsibility for the Summary Annual Financial Statements

The management is responsible for the preparation of a summary of the audited annual financial statements on the basis described in Note 1.

Auditor's responsibility

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on the summary annual financial statements based on our procedures, which were conducted in accordance with International Standard on Auditing (ISA) 810, "Engagements to Report on Summary Financial Statements".

Opinion

In our opinion, the summary annual financial statements derived from the audited annual financial statements of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust for the year ended 28 February 2013 are consistent in all material respects, with those annual financial statements, on the basis described in Note 1.

Note 1

The financial statements of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust are prepared in accordance with the requirements of the International Financial Reporting Standards.

The accompanying summary annual financial statements, which comprise the summary statement of the financial position as at 28 February 2013, and the summary statement of comprehensive income for the year then ended, are derived from the audited annual financial statements of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust for the year ended 28 February 2013.

Statement of Financial Position as at 28 February 2013

Figures in Rand Note(s)	2013/2012
Assets	
Current Assets	
Trade and other receivables	23,248 -
Cash and cash equivalents	428,323 -
	431,571 -
Total Assets	431,571 -
Equity and Liabilities	
Equity	
Retained income	418,204 -
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Trade and other payables	13,369 -
Total Equity and Liabilities	431,573 -



Boshoff Visser Bredasdorp Incorporated



PARTNERS & SPONSORS

Mazda Wildlife Fund
Fauna & Flora International, UK
WWF-SA
BirdLife South Africa
Overberg Crane Group
CapeNature
SANParks Buffer Zone Project
University of Cape Town
Melozhori Game Reserve
CREW
Flower Valley Conservation Trust
Botanical Society of South Africa
Botanical Society, Southern Overberg
Department of Agriculture
Brian Wall Memorial Fund

Thank you!



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