



OVERBERG LOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST
Annual Report 2013-2014



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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.

OUR BOARD

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

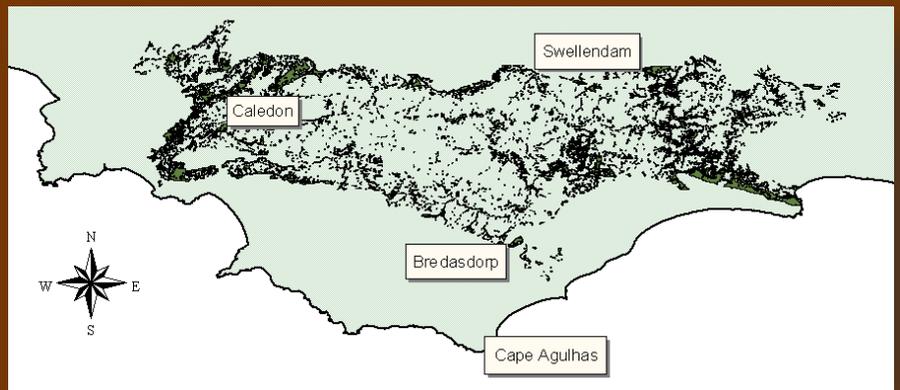
OUR DIRECTOR

Dr Odette Curtis

SPECIAL ADVISORS TO THE BOARD

Dr. Rob Brett, Fauna & Flora International, UK
David Houghton, National Wildlife Refuge Association, USA
Prof. Charles Stirton, UCT Associate, UK

Map below denotes the renosterveld remaining in the Overberg.





NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR, Dr Odette Curtis

The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it. Henry David Thoreau



The Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust has come through another year, and what a year it has been! We continue to grow from strength to strength and are very excited about where we are going. I would like to start by thanking my Board and particularly my Chairperson, Dirk van Papendorp, for incredible support, beyond what is generally the 'norm.' You have been my rocks and I look forward to many more years with you!

In the last financial year, we initiated our first Conservation Easement at Kykoedie farm; we undertook a substantial amount of field work over spring 2013 and discovered several previously unknown populations of rare and threatened species. We are slowly gaining a better idea of the status of the small mammals in renosterveld refuges and our concern for these species is growing immensely. We had our first volunteer, Evan Eifler, join us for almost a year and he produced some beautiful reports for landowners, with information and photographs pertaining directly to their specific farms, which were very well-received. We have produced a renosterveld video, which demonstrates the plight of renosterveld, while showcasing some of the wonderful landowners, who have joined our crusade. We acquired the management of a new Nature Reserve purchased by WWF, in the form of Haarwegskloof farm, where we are currently setting up the first-ever Renosterveld Visitor and Research Centre. We were awarded a substantial grant from the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, as well as a generous donation by Oren Taylor in the UK to help us cover our budget for 2014. We have initiated an exciting project through a collaboration between the WWF/SAB Better Barley Better Beer initiative and a group of concerned landowners in the Botrivier area, where the largest, contiguous stretch of Western Rûens Shale Renosterveld remains. We have established a Research Group and are currently completing a Research Strategy that will guide future research within the OLC and hopefully inspire some more students and ecologists to come and explore this poorly-understood system.

The support we received for our fundraiser for the Renosterveld Centre in mid-2014 has been overwhelmingly moving and has served as an important reminder of the faith that people have in this organization and the work we do. Thank you to everyone who has demonstrated this faith - we hope you will continue on this journey with us, while inspiring others to do the same.

Dr Odette Curtis
Director

If there is one defining characteristic of conservation, it is urgency.
Caroline Fraser, Rewilding the World



NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON, Dirk van Papendorp

Looking back at the past year made me realize that nothing is impossible! In our 2013 annual report we expressed our sincere wishes of having our own piece of Renosterveld to secure for future generations. All our efforts finally materialized and at this stage we are frantically working to upgrade the building complex at Haarwegskloof in time for its launch. What we believed in and worked hard for, culminated in another first for Renosterveld conservation: our very own research centre.

Other milestones were also reached, of which I will name but a few:

- Evan Eifler, a volunteer from the USA, spent almost a year assisting us in the field. Although Evan acquired most of his funding through a kick-starter campaign, the OLCCT was responsible for making the Overberg his home away-from-home. Through a joint venture with the Overberg Crane Group, who supplied him with the use of their vehicle, Evan helped Odette with site assessments and documented important bird sightings in the region. We are especially proud of individual farm reports that were produced by Evan as a result of this work; a valuable tool to use in future to create awareness amongst our farm owners of the biodiversity present on their own farms as well as guidelines on how to protect it.
- The undertaking of a pilot conservation easement on Kykoedie Farm is another first for us. We look forward to growing these type of agreements with farmers throughout the Overberg's Rûens area, as more funding becomes available. Out of my own experience, I know that farmers learn better from other farmers.
- The production of our first promotional movie was also money well-spent, with up to 727 views to date. Through this, an awareness regarding the plight of renosterveld is also created on the internet and other social media platforms. We will grow this platform as a means of educating people all over the world, as well as highlighting the desperate need for funding of specific research and focused conservation action on this issue.
- Several field guides and promotional materials are in the pipeline and will reach farmers and the research and conservation community in the next year; all creating a broader awareness for Renosterveld conservation.
- Although still in its infant stages, the ground-work carried out by our director for the Langeberg Biodiversity Initiative has created the backbone of something big for the larger Swellendam/Suurbraak community. The emphasis of this broader landscape initiative will be to form partnerships between previously disadvantaged communities, private landowners, SANParks, and farmers with the main goal to preserve a unique landscape.

I would like to thank my Board and our director, Odette Curtis, for all the hard work that went into securing the Trust's future over the last year. The saying goes that "perseverance pays" and this is so true for our dedicated team. Even stronger bonds were forged with the conservation community in the past year and I think the Trust is definitely being recognized as the leading authority on Renosterveld conservation. I would also like to thank all our donors for their generous contributions towards making this possible. Keep up the good work, we won't disappoint you!

Dirk van Papendorp,
Chairperson of the Board



OUR FOCAL PROJECTS: WORK IN PROGRESS (1)

CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAMME

This programme focuses on building and cementing partnerships with farmers, who own critical remnants of renosterveld. The aim of this long-term project is to raise enough funding to be able to cover legal fees for declaration costs and associated habitat management for landowners willing to commit to formal long-term conservation.

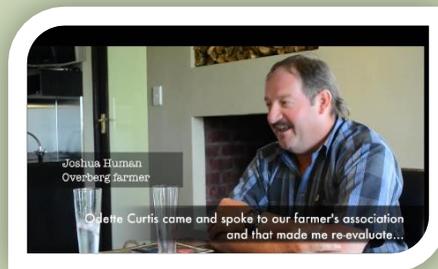
Progress: We are currently undertaking our first pilot Conservation Easement on a 60 ha portion of Kykoedie Farm owned by Joshua Human (who is also featured in our promotional movie). Joshua is setting an example for other Overberg farmers by committing this beautiful piece of veld (which is home to the Endangered *Gladiolus vandermerwei*) to conservation in perpetuity through a conservation servitude, which will be attached to his title deed. Fauna & Flora International have kindly agreed to cover the legal costs (R25 000) of this Easement. We are constantly working towards raising enough funding to carry this absolute priority project out on a landscape scale.



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.

Progress: i) *Promotional video:* we were able to produce our first promotional video, which tells the story of why renosterveld so desperately needs our help. This is a moving story, which includes interviews with some key landowners, beautifully filmed by Vanessa Stephens of Hydrangea Films. You can view this video on our website and was produced due to donations (R23 000) from Eagle Eyes Education Initiative (Royd & Lindsay Frith), the Stanford Bird Club and the National Wildlife Refuge Association (through David Houghton, USA).



ii) *Renosterveld booklet:* this booklet is in the early stages of development and will be a collaborative project with BirdLife, the Overberg Crane Group, SAB Miller, and the Botanical Society of South Africa. The booklet will contain management guidelines, conservation options, and a field guide to important plants, birds, mammals and other taxa. The booklets will be distributed amongst landowners.

OUR FOCAL PROJECTS: WORK IN PROGRESS (2)



LANGEBERG BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE (SUURBRAAK COMMUNITY & SURROUNDS)

This landscape initiative initially focuses on the farms from the Grootvadersbosch Conservancy, through the Suurbraak commonage, to Rietvallei. We are collaborating with a suite of partners to secure conservation land in this area, with benefits for private landowners, local communities and the environment. This will be achieved through various initiatives from alien clearing, to the creation of hiking and cycling trails, and the development of ecotourism in the area, which will enable job creation and the creation of small, local businesses.

Progress: The OLCT spear-headed an initial meeting between all the relevant partners in March 2013 and from this, the Langeberg Biodiversity Initiative was created. This is essentially a collaborative project between state and private entities.

Aileen Anderson, from the Grootvadersbosch Conservancy, has raised R600 000 from the Table Mountain Fund. This will enable Aileen to focus on this project full-time, while the OLCT will provide expert input on environmental management and will continue to explore further avenues for funding, formalizing conservation and developing sustainable tourism businesses with a view to uplifting the local communities in this unique part of the region.



LAND PURCHASE PROGRAMME

Through a collaborative programme with WWF-SA, we have identified suitable sites for outright purchase, as a means of securing the largest, most contiguous remnants of renosterveld. We are assisting our partners with local landscape knowledge, negotiations for purchase and management post-purchase, while we also continue our efforts to attract additional funding to purchase further properties.

Progress: After a substantial amount of groundwork, negotiating, blood, sweat and tears, we finally secured a flagship piece of renosterveld for conservation, through our partnership with WWF-SA. The renosterveld on Haarwegskloof farm is now owned by WWF and the OLCT is the Management Authority. This piece of land will be declared a Nature Reserve and we look forward to developing activities on and around the reserve, including expanding the conserved area, setting up a research station, and possibly, in the long-term, linking tourism activities with De Hoop Nature Reserve (which is just south of Haarwegskloof).



OUR FOCAL PROJECTS: WORK IN PROGRESS (3)



COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

The OLCT is committed to growing the field of renosterveld research, through collaborating with all interested research institutes, locally and internationally. Through this, we aim to build up a Research Strategy for renosterveld in the Overberg, which can be used to attract students and collaborative researchers, as well as to raise funding to address priority research questions.

Progress: We have started the process of a collaborative research team and have had two workshops to brainstorm relevant questions and project ideas. We are now in the process of developing a Research Strategy document. Thus far, we have identified the following research themes:

Paleo-ecology & evolutionary drivers: e.g. using paleo-ecology techniques to assess historic changes in vegetation structure and composition; assessing evolution of renosterveld vegetation types, with an emphasis on the quartz patches of the eastern Overberg.

Biodiversity (endemism and richness): e.g. diversity of invertebrates, plants, birds, mammals and other taxa at different scales, within different veld management practices, etc.; use of top predators (e.g. Black Harriers) as indicators of biodiversity in renosterveld fragments; habitat use by important species (including 'problem animals' and top predators).

Management & landscape ecology: e.g. impacts of fire and grazing management on renosterveld; investigating evidence for the existence of extinction debts; implications for conservation planning and management of fragmented systems at the landscape level.

Restoration & ecosystem services: e.g. investigating restoration potential of old lands (for adding grazing value to farms and creating corridors between fragments); restoration of degraded virgin land; restoration of watercourses (for gamebird habitat, water management and the establishment of corridors).



DEVELOPMENT OF A RENOSTERVELD VISITOR & RESEARCH CENTRE

Certainly, one of our greatest achievements for us to date has been to raise the funding (through a crowd-funding campaign) for the first ever Renosterveld Visitor & Research Centre. This campaign was initially started in order to raise money for only the renovations for the building on Haarwegskloof (purchased by WWF, managed by us), with a view to making it a Centre. Our goal was to raise R250 000 in 40 days. We not only met our target, but we also went beyond it and have now raised R400 000! This means that we can complete the addition to the building, in the form of a workroom, which will also include a herbarium and a small library. We will furnish the building and also start to investigate how we can use the venue to generate some income for the running of the Reserve and Centre.



A HUGE thank you to the following individuals and organizations for their generous contributions to this Centre:

A. Genis, M Cardwell, Prof C. Stirton, J. Cohen, Dr S. Shearer, R. Masson, V. Hallett, D. & C. Malan, Q. Hurt, P. Krcmar, K. Succow, J. Poulson, M. Lea, B. Arroyo, F. Waller, P. & L. Curtis, A. Foster, M. Gastil-Bhul, R. & S. Eifler, S. du Plooy, D. Victor, S. Alane, P. & T. Rebelo, M. & J. Reed, M. Sautereau, C. Sweet, C. & R. McMaster, H. & L. Hawkins, M. Lotter, C. Sweet, L. Stuart, S. Foyle, Mapula Trust, Melozhori Game Reserve, BirdLife Overberg, Western Cape Birding Forum, Rob Simmons's Black Harrier fund, West Coast Bird Club, West Coast Birding Forum, Giuseppe & Rita Raimondo Charitable Trust, FFI, Botanical Society of South Africa, Botanical Society (Southern Overberg branch) and several individuals who choose to remain anonymous.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS YEAR (1)

POLHILLIA BREVICALYX AND WIBORGIELLA BOWIEANA SURVEY

In October 2013, we got together with a group of CREW volunteers (and their leader, Ismail Ibrahim) and the farm manager, Matthias Streicher, and walked the Freek Botha river course in search of more *Polhillia brevicalyx* and *Wiborgiella bowieana* populations. The reason for this species-specific survey is the critical status of these two plants (the former only known from two sites on a single farm (about 20 individuals) and the latter only known from two populations (<50 individuals)). The survey was a huge success, and we found over 50 individuals of each species! We intend to make this an annual survey and to grow our efforts in understanding the real status of these severely threatened species. Please do let us know if you would like to join us on the 2014 survey!



Photographed above (left to right: CREW volunteers (led by Ismail Ibrahim) and Evan Eifler photographing *Polhillia*, *Polhillia* in flower, Flora Cameron (CREW volunteer) with healthy *Polhillia* plants and *Wiborgiella bowieana* in flower.

ANIMALS IN RENOSTERVELD: CAMERA TRAPS

Medium-sized mammals (foxes, cats, etc.) are becoming rarer in the Overberg's wheat-belt (mostly due to habitat loss) and we believe this is cause for concern. In order to kick-start some interest amongst both the scientists and the farmers, we are using a handful of camera traps in informal surveys to see what we pick up in these remnants. We know that patches of natural veld are critical refugia for birds (particularly gamebirds) and mammals, but to what extent some of the rarer species are able to adapt to such levels of habitat transformation is largely unknown. We would like to make this camera project into a fully-fledged project with time, as these data are incredibly valuable for understanding how these ecosystems continue to function.

Photographed on our camera traps below are (from left to right): Purple Heron, Porcupines, Small-spotted Genet, Common Duiker, Caracal and Honey Badger.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS YEAR (2)



FINDING NEW POPULATIONS OF RARE AND THREATENED PLANTS

Our extensive surveys resulted in the discovery of several previously-unknown populations of special plants, including (photographs from left to right, below): *Gladiolus vandermerwei* (Endangered), *Moraea debilis* (Endangered), *Lotononis villosa* (Vulnerable), *Leucadendron coriaceum* (Endangered), *Moraea tricolor* (Endangered) and several others.



NEW LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE IN WESTERN RÛENS SHALE RENOSTERVELD, BOTRIVIER

Together with landowners in the vicinity of De Vlei farm, near Botrivier, and the SAB/WWF Better Barley Better Beer initiative, we have undertaken a new landscape initiative which should ultimately secure hundreds of hectares of Western Rûens Shale Renosterveld within the largest remaining area of this vegetation type left on earth. Thanks to one particular champion in this landscape, MG Lotter, who farms on De Vlei and Klipfontein, we will hopefully see this project bearing fruit very soon.



CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE OLCT'S MISSION BY AN AMERICAN VOLUNTEER

After raising funds through a crowdfunding initiative and National Geographic, Evan Eifler (23) spent the last year working with the OLCT. Here is a summary by Evan of this time spent here with us:



'With great help from Odette, over the past year of field work I have visited around 30 farms amounting to around 45 site visits (some sites visited more than once). From these visits I have taken 1,000's of photos that I have since reduced to more than 400 **iSpot** observations - at least 5 of which represent the only public image of that species. Forty-five of these observations are of rare or threatened species. This information will be passed onto CREW to help them with national red-listing. Twelve site visits have been turned into personalized farm reports for landowners. In return for the use of the **Overberg Crane Group's** (OCG) vehicle, I have also been doing some work for the OCG by assisting on the Cape Vulture count, submitting crane collision reports, and recording opportunistic bird observations of rare birds in the Overberg.'

Thank you, Evan!



OLCT FINANCIAL REPORT FEBRUARY 2014

Report of the Independent Auditors to the Beneficiaries of the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust, which comprise of the statement of financial position as at 28 February 2014, and the statement of income and retained earnings, and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and the notes, comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Trustees responsibility for the financial statements

The Trust's trustees are responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standard for Small and Medium-sized Entities, and requirements of the Trust Deed, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatements, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditor's Responsibility

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audit. We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing. Those standards require that we comply with ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Qualification

In common with similar organisations, it is not feasible for the organisation to institute accounting controls over cash donations prior to initial entry of the collections in the accounting records. Accordingly, it was impractical for us to extend our examination beyond the receipts actually recorded

Qualified Opinion

In our opinion, except for the effect of such adjustment, if any, as might have been determined necessary had we been able to satisfy ourselves as to the completeness of cash donations, the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust as at 28 February 2014, and of its financial performance for the year then ended in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards for Small and Medium-sized entities.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION		
AT 28 FEBRUARY 2014		
	2014	2013
ASSETS		
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant & equipment	10 497.37	-
CURRENT ASSETS	360 928.42	431 571.00
Trade and other receivables	-	3 248.00
Cash and cash equivalents	360 928.42	428 323.00
Total assets	R 371 425.79	R 431 571.00
CAPITAL AND LIABILITIES		
CAPITAL		
Retained income	335 737.81	418 202.00
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	35 687.98	13 369.00
Total capital and liabilities	R 371 425.79	R 431 571.00



Boshoff-Visser Bredasdorp Inc.





PARTNERS & SPONSORS

Mazda Wildlife Fund
 Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust
 Fauna & Flora International, UK
 WWF-SA
 BirdLife South Africa
 Overberg Crane Group
 CapeNature
 National Wildlife Refuge Association, USA
 SANParks Buffer Zone Project
 University of Cape Town
 University of Stellenbosch
 Melozhori Game Reserve
 CREW
 Stanford Bird club
 Flower Valley Conservation Trust
 Botanical Society of South Africa
 Botanical Society, Southern Overberg
 Department of Agriculture
 iSpot

Thank you!



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