



OVERBERG LOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST

Annual Report 2014-2015



Saving Critically Endangered Renosterveld from extinction

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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

- i) Secure the largest and most intact remnants of renosterveld for conservation in perpetuity through a combination of land purchase and Conservation Easements.
- ii) Link critical fragments through the restoration and formal conservation of corridors (emphasising watercourses).
- iii) Spread awareness amongst landowners in a way that affects changing attitudes and management.
- iv) Coordinate and partake in collaborative research on Renosterveld ecology and management.

BOARD

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

DIRECTOR

Dr Odette Curtis

RESERVE MANAGER

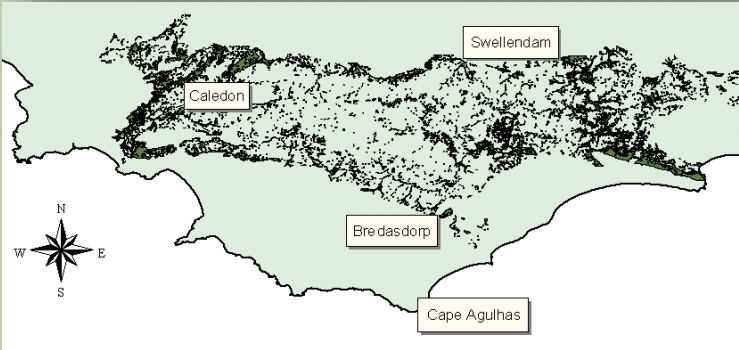
Jannie Groenewald

PA to the DIRECTOR

Sharon King

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



Maps denoting the historical and current-day extent of renosterveld in the Overberg.





NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR, Dr Odette Curtis

It has been said that *if your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough*. This year's reflection is all about dreams - and particularly, dreams that came true. In April 2015, we turned three years old. We have travelled a challenging road, but we are making big and beautiful things happen. We are excited and proud to share these achievements with our supporters.

The highlights of our 2014/2015 year have most certainly been the securing of the Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve and the establishment of our Renosterveld Research and Visitor Centre on this reserve. In mid-2008, I took a dream to WWF-SA. The dream involved buying up a few critical pieces of Renosterveld in the part of the Overberg where the largest and most intact Renosterveld remnants are found. The longer-term dream is that these remnants will ultimately form one large Renosterveld Reserve and that this will be linked to the coastal De Hoop Nature Reserve.

In late 2013, after years of negotiations, WWF closed the first deal for the first 500 ha of land on the farm Haarwegskloof – in the heart of the Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld, just north of De Hoop. Thanks to our excellent working relationship with WWF-SA, in 2014 this property was entrusted into our care as the Management Authority of this soon-to-be-proclaimed Nature Reserve. This was a big step forward for both organisations: for the OLCCT it meant an entire suite of new responsibilities and opportunities, while this was the first time that WWF had handed one of its properties to a small and relatively new NGO.

But our dreams were only just starting to take shape: We had seen the importance of creating a 'hub' in the Overberg for Renosterveld research and conservation – a place where post-graduate students could come and study this severely misunderstood vegetation type; a place where the wonders of Renosterveld could be shared with farmers, farm workers and visitors of all ages as well as a place for the OLCCT to make its mark in the landscape. Renosterveld needed a home. And Haarwegskloof was the obvious place. Our incredibly successful fundraiser meant that we were able to renovate and furnish the old homestead on the Reserve. We launched the first-ever Renosterveld Research and Visitor Centre on 6th September 2014. The overwhelming support for the work we do was reaffirmed at this launch, with about 100 people attending from both the commercial-farming community and the private and parastatal conservation fraternities.

Since the establishment of this facility, we have managed to entice about eight new students (ranging from Honours to PhDs) to join our collaborative Renosterveld Research group and they are examining several key components of Renosterveld ecology from fire and grazing impacts to ecology of rare quartz patches as well as small mammals and insects. We are very excited to be growing this team, as it will also mean that we will grow our relationship with landowners through our students, who also serve as ambassadors to the OLCCT. Our pilot Easements are also under way and we aim to have a fully-fledged Conservation Easement Programme by 2016.

The Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust has gone from strength to strength during our infant years. And we are here to stay. For the sake of our precious lowlands and all the incredible biodiversity which these systems support, we will continue to dream fearlessly and passionately and to make these dreams come true. Thank you, our treasured supporters and partners, for all that you have done to support us along this journey. We hope that you will continue to hold our Renosterveld close to your hearts.

Odette Curtis

View at Haarwegskloof





NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON, Dirk van Papendorp

Since the inception of the OLC, I have said that for us to bring momentum to Renosterveld conservation sufficient research should firstly be carried out in the various Renosterveld types within the Overberg region. To add momentum to this, awareness within the tourism industry should also be increased in order to sensitise more and more conservation-minded people to what we are trying to achieve as well as to help create a springboard that launches Renosterveld into an orbit where it can stand its ground in the broader conservation community. For us at the OLC this is happening rapidly and we are truly proud of what we have achieved in such a short time.

The moment that meaningful research is carried out on such an endangered ecosystem it creates a backbone for all other conservation authorities and bodies to support and sustain prolonged conservation efforts. In a way, it can be said that research gives meaning to dreams, thoughts and ideas.

With this research as a foundation we as a Trust have a credible story to tell. We also have the necessary knowledge to go out to the farming community and tell them in no uncertain terms the what, why and how of the little pieces of Renosterveld that are left on their farms. As I am writing this and while we are visiting more and more farms to spread the good news and get farmers to understand the treasures they have we are still seeing patches of renosterveld being ploughed up and lost forever. It is sad to see this still happening. It again proves that our conservation message hasn't reached all corners of the community we work in. We want to urge all the relevant authorities and conservation agencies to come on board and help us spread news of the importance of full conservation of this endangered habitat. We as a Trust do not have any law enforcement role in the broader landscape and it would be inappropriate for us to take on such a role. We can only inform, sensitise and help create awareness and we will keep up this work although we might have a shortage of manpower and the funds to go full force at this stage.

To quote Dr. Archie Carr: *"For most of the wild things on Earth, the future just depends upon the conscience of mankind"*

I want to take the opportunity to thank every person and organisation that supported us through the year: We are extremely grateful for this and we hope that you will continue to support the work we do, as we cannot do it without you. As you can see from this report, we have great plans lined up for the year to come and will definitely need all the support we can foster. The work we are doing in the landscape is gaining momentum. We pride ourselves in becoming the main custodians for Renosterveld in the Overberg and we will keep increasing our sphere of influence. We value your support in keeping this dream alive and growing!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'D. Papendorp', with a stylized flourish at the end.



2014/15 Highlights

Establishment of the first-ever Renosterveld Reserve and Research & Visitor Centre



In late 2013, WWF-SA secured the first piece of Renosterveld in the Overberg for conservation in perpetuity when the farm Haarwegskloof was purchased. Due to the role that the OLCT played in identifying this property as a priority, we were handed official custodianship of this special place through the signing of a Management Agreement with WWF-SA. The property is now entirely our responsibility, and this includes all management and running costs.

It was our dream to give renosterveld a 'home' in the Overberg and this seemed like the perfect place to do so. The old (>100 years old) homestead on the property was dilapidated, but we saw in this a perfect opportunity. We started a crowd-funding appeal through www.Indiegogo.co.za and set out to raise R250 000 in 40 days. Thanks to the generosity of several NGO and philanthropic pledges, we reached our target and went beyond it, raising R420 000 in total. Renovations started in June and we launched the first ever Renosterveld Research and Visitor Centre on the 6th September 2014.



The launch was a spectacular event, with 100 attendees, catering done by the fantastic team from the Red Windmill in Napier and wine tasting supplied by our partners at Sijnn Wines from Malgas. Each guest received a goodie bag full of various gifts donated by partners (Botanical Society of SA, WWF-SA, Cape Leopard Trust, OLCT, Nouvelle Mushrooms, Agulhas Honeybush Tea and the Red Windmill). We were honoured to have the President of the Botanical Society of South Africa, Prof. George Bredenkamp and his wife, Dr. Christine Bredenkamp, as well as Zaitoon Rabaney (Executive Director of the BotSoc) attending the event and making some very moving and supportive speeches.

The Centre currently has three bedrooms, a kitchen, two bathrooms and a large workroom / dining area with herbarium shelves (herbaria are in the early stages of development) and bookshelves (with a wonderful, growing collection of donated books). Plans are afoot to develop the old barn into additional accommodation for students.



More on the Renosterveld Reserve and Research & Visitor Centre

Manager appointed

After the Centre was launched, we raised a few extra funds to employ a manager for the Reserve and Centre on a short-term contract. Jannie Groenewald is now the Manager and he brings with him vast knowledge and extreme passion for renosterveld conservation. Jannie grew up in the renosterveld around Buffeljagsrivier (near Swellendam) and recently acquired his MSc on the Ecology of Rûens Silcrete Renosterveld.

Since he has been on the Reserve, he has helped us build our biodiversity inventory and with his entomology skills has added significantly to our previous knowledge on the invertebrates that occur in the area. He has also impressed many visitors and donors with his knowledge of the fauna and flora, as well as his enthusiasm for everything wild.

Jannie has recently registered for a PhD with UCT under the supervision of Prof Muthama Muasya and Dr Odette Curtis, where he will examine the ecology of quartz patches and their unique plant communities.

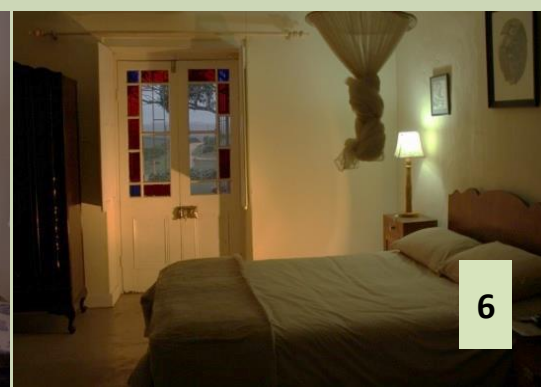


Above: Donors (including Oren Taylor who purchased the naming rights of our newly-discovered *Hesperantha* in 2012 (first photo, far right)), visitors, bioblitz team and volunteers on the reserve.



Centre opened for guests

We invested in a few extras in order to add a few finishing touches and the Centre is now also available as a self-catering guesthouse, while collaborating students are able to make use of the centre for a minimum rate. We hope to build this up as a business with time, so that we are able to at least cover the running costs of the centre through this income. Please visit our website for more details on rates and availability, or email bookings@overbergrenosterveld.org.za



Research and students

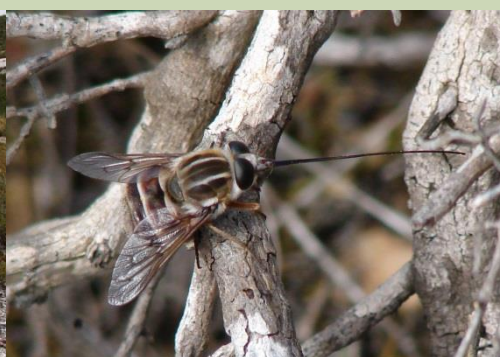
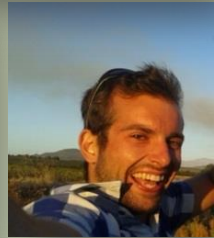
We are gathering momentum in the field of collaborative research, with at least seven students coming to do research on Overberg Renosterveld in the spring of 2015.

In a collaborative effort with a group of scientists, Prof Muthama Muasya and Dr Samson Chimphango of UCT successfully raised funding through the National Research Foundation (NRF) to undertake a series of research projects from Honours to PhD level on two focal themes. The first theme is the ***ecology and evolution of quartz patches in the Eastern Rûens***. This initiative is overseen by Prof. Muasya, Dr Chimphango, Dr Odette Curtis and Dr Ute Schmiedel and the students that have been working on the project so far are our own Jannie Groenewald (PhD) and Tara Cathcart (Honours).

The second theme focuses on ***grazing issues***: i) how livestock grazing impacts Renosterveld and ii) whether there are any species in Renosterveld that could be cultivated as an alternative to current pasture plants (i.e. lucern). Under this theme, we have Zoë Poulsen doing her PhD on the ***impacts of livestock grazing*** and Luke Gallant doing his MSc on the ***chemical composition*** of a suite of Renosterveld plants, while Saadiq Soeker (MSc) is looking at the potential production and plant growth of ***potential pasture species*** indigenous to the Overberg Renosterveld.

Additionally, we have Abigail Graham doing her MSc under the supervision of Dr Pippin Anderson at UCT on ***small mammal*** assemblages in Eastern Rûens Renosterveld.

And, Evan Eifler, the American volunteer who worked with us in 2014, is planning to return to the Overberg to undertake field research towards his PhD on ***evolutionary processes*** within Renosterveld which he is doing back home in the USA. Exciting times lie ahead for Renosterveld research in the Overberg and we look forward to welcoming more collaborators and students into this initiative.



A new board member is welcomed: Prof Muthama Muasya

It is with the greatest of pleasure that we welcomed Prof Muthama Muasya to the OLC Board in late 2014. Muthama holds a BSc in Botany & Zoology (Moi University, 1992), an M.Phil. in Plant Taxonomy (Moi University, 1993) and a PhD in Systematics (University of Reading, 1998). He has extensive postdoctoral experience in England (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), USA (Rutgers University) and Belgium (KU Leuven), as well as research experience at the National Museums of Kenya. Since 2006, he has held an academic position at UCT, with research focus on the cosmopolitan plant family Cyperaceae, as well as other aspects of the Cape and African Flora.

Muthama is an NRF-rated researcher, has published over 100 scientific outputs (journal papers, conference proceedings, book chapters), successfully supervised postgraduate students and regularly examines theses, and has served in national and international committees and panels. He is also currently a member of the Fernkloof Nature Reserve Advisory Board. He has a wide range of experience, networks and good standing within the biodiversity research and conservation fraternity. Muthama will be especially important in guiding the OLC on our collaborative research programme, as we grow and expand research initiatives in the Overberg lowlands.



OLCT is awarded a 4X4 FORD pick-up by the Ford Wildlife Foundation

When Ford and Mazda split, there were concerns as to who would carry the Wildlife Fund. Luckily, Ford stepped in and set up the Ford Wildlife Foundation. We were one of only 15 projects country-wide to be privileged to receive a vehicle through this initiative: a Ford Ranger 2.2 double cab 4X4! We are thrilled to continue our relationship with B&M Ford in Bredasdorp, who give only the best, friendliest, most efficient and helpful service ever! Thank you Danie, Venessa, Theresa, Angela, Martin, Graham, Hadley and the rest of the team at B & M Ford for going the extra mile for us always!



Our Director receives two conservation awards

Odette was awarded two conservation awards this year as an acknowledgement by the fynbos conservation fraternity for the work that the OLC is doing. The first award was the Flora Conservation Award, presented by the South African National Botanical Society (BotSoc) at the launch of the OLC's Renosterveld Centre. The second was a CAPE Fynbos Conservation Award, for Odette's *passion, dedication and innovative approach towards the conservation of critically endangered biodiversity*. This award is made annually by SANBI to three individuals; the purpose being to recognise an individual's outstanding contribution or achievement amongst their peers in the broad biodiversity conservation community and working towards the goal of conserving the biodiversity of the Cape Floristic Region, utilising it sustainably and managing it effectively, while at the same time delivering significant benefits to the people of the region in a way that is embraced by local communities, endorsed by government and recognised internationally. In 2014 this award was also received by Matthew Norval (Wilderness Foundation) and Eugene Marinus (Nieuwoudtville Botanical Gardens).



Above: Medals, Catherine Browne (BotSoc), Odette & Zaitoon Rabaney (BotSoc Executive Director (photo: Sharon Brink), CAPE Awards, and Prof George Breedenkamp (BotSoc President) making a speech at the Centre's launch (Photos: Louise de Waal)

Exciting ecological finds: camera traps, surveys and bioblitz-ing

The spring of 2014 was full of beautiful surprises and we were treated to sightings of several rare and threatened species. Most notably, we saw *Moraea atropunctata* (*Critically Endangered*) for the first time – this species is so rare that it is only known from one single location in the Caledon district. Then, we also found a few of her cousins, *Moraea comptonii* (*Critically Endangered*), flowering in the same district. We found large populations of the *Endangered Babiana purpurea*, but no additional populations of newly-discovered *Hesperantha kiaratayloriae*, meaning that as far as we know, this species is still restricted to only one site (and therefore also listed as *Critically Endangered*).



Above, left to right: *Babiana purpurea*, *Moraea comptonii*, *Moraea atropunctata*

Haarwegskloof Biodiversity Inventory

With significant inputs from our Reserve Manager, Jannie Groenewald, we made significant inroads towards compiling a biodiversity inventory for Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve. However, we had mostly focused on the plants, birds and larger mammals, while we knew very little about the smaller, more elusive species that occur on the reserve. We invited some of our colleagues from the Cape and arranged for a ‘bioblitz’ of the reserve: essentially a few days of focused surveys to identify the other critters that live on the reserve. Jannie and I were joined by Cliff and Suretha Dorse (City of Cape Town), Keir and Alouise Lynch (CapeNature and Dyer Island Conservation Trust) and Barry and Rozelle Rose (Fisheries biologist, photographer). Over three days, we set out live traps to catch (and release) small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. These traps revealed some exciting surprises, of which the Namaqua Rock Mouse, Cape Rock Elephant Shrew and Rain Frog were highlights.

Not only did these cameras reveal previously unfamiliar critters but our camera traps showed us that we have two of the rarest and most elusive mammals that occur in the Overberg on this Reserve: Aardvark and Aardwolf! The presence of these two termite-specialists is a most encouraging find – and is likely to be indicative of a relatively healthy and intact system.

To top this all, we found three breeding pairs of Black Harrier (a rare, endemic raptor with an estimated population size of 2000 birds) – a species typically associated with the ‘healthiest’ and most intact renosterveld remnants.



Above, left to right: some unusual wildlife on Haarwegskloof: Robertson Dwarf Chameleon, Cape Rock Elephant Shrew, *Breviceps* Rain Frog, Black Harrier pair passing food, *Parabuthus* Scorpion.

Below, left to right: caught on camera traps at Haarwegskloof: Aardwolf, Aardvark, Denham's Bustard, Small-Spotted Genet



OLCT FINANCIAL REPORT FEBRUARY 2015

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

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust, which comprise the statement of financial position as at 28 February 2015, 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

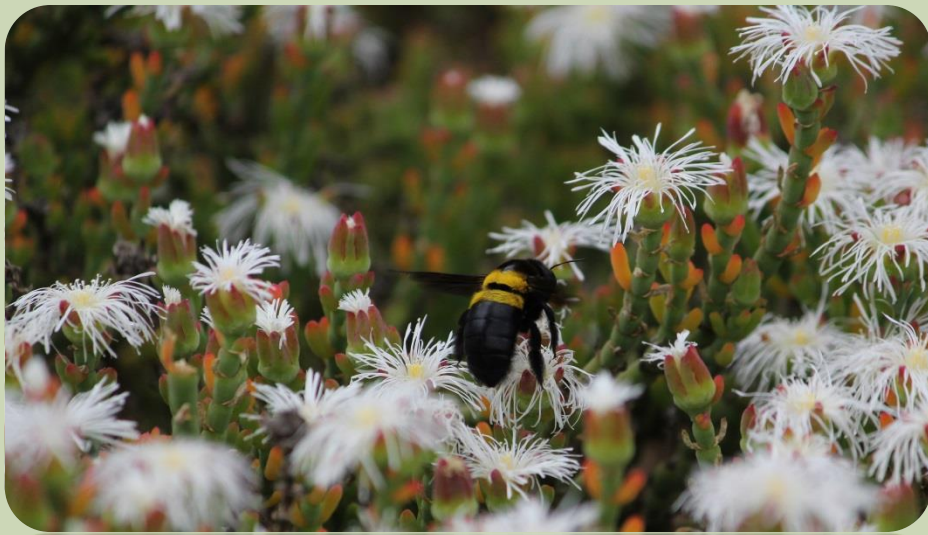
Qualified Opinion

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 2015, 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 2015		
	2015	2014
ASSETS		
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant & equipment	227 78.27	10 497.37
CURRENT ASSETS	567 226,48	360 928,42
Cash and cash equivalents	564 726,48	360 928,42
Deposits	2500	-
Total assets	795 104,75	371 425. 79
CAPITAL AND LIABILITIES		
CAPITAL		
Retained income	787 546,09	335 737,81
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	7558,66	35 687,98
Total capital and liabilities	795 104,75	371 425,79

Boshoff-Visser Bredasdorp Inc.





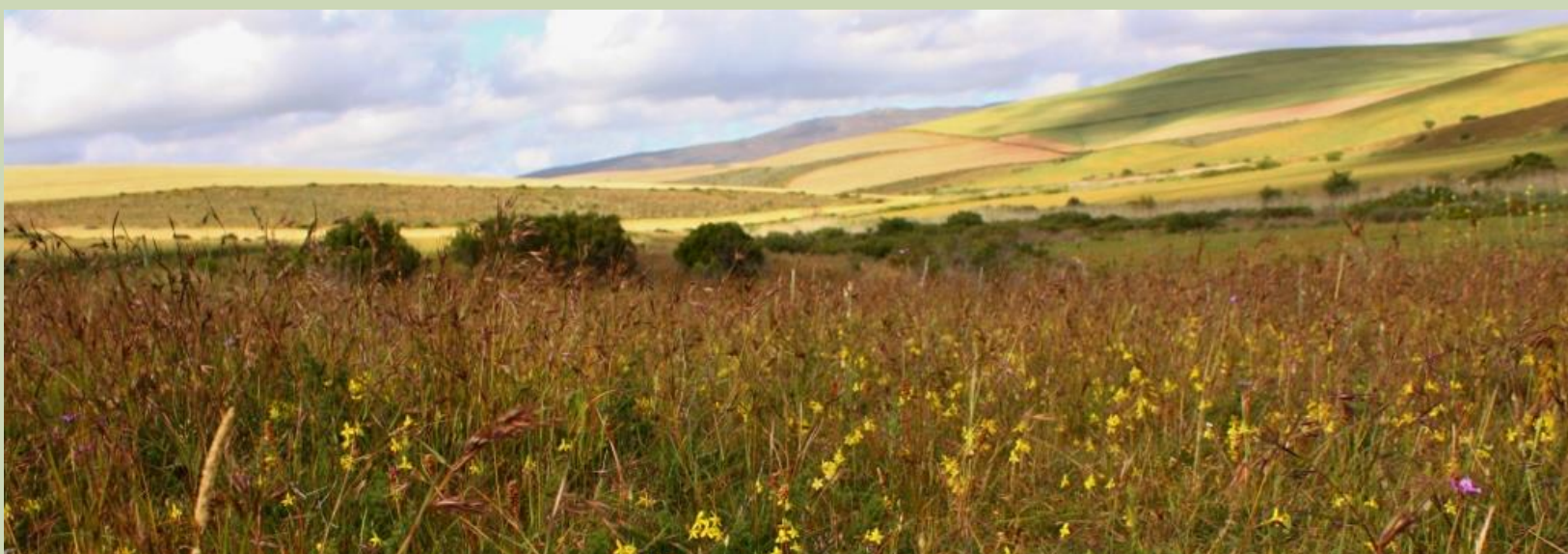
PARTNERS & SPONSORS

Ford 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
 CREW
 Stanford Bird club
 Oren Taylor
 Flower Valley Conservation Trust
 Botanical Society of South Africa
 Botanical Society, Southern Overberg
 BirdLife Overberg
 Department of Agriculture
 Walker Bay Bird Fair

Thank you!



SIJNN



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