



OVERBERG LOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST

Newsletter 1, August 2013

We are proud to share with you the first newsletter of the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust (OLCT). Herewith, our highlights from our first 18th months of operation. Please remember you can also follow us via our website, blog and Facebook pages.

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 2X2 bakkie. This is a significant asset for a newly-established NGO. A huge thank you to Mazda Wildlife Fund!

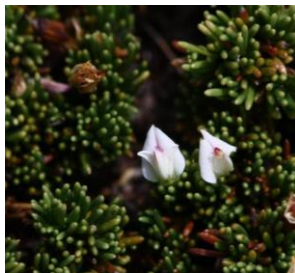


mazda Wildlife Fund
The Driving Force Behind Conservation

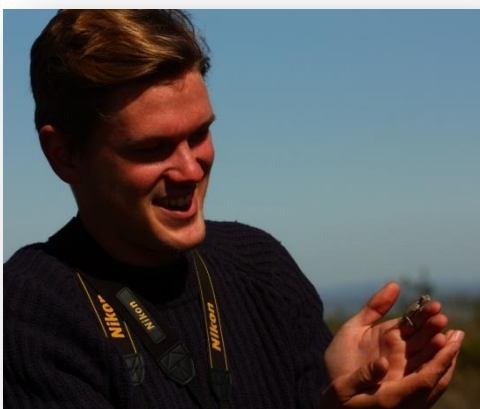
Five new species discovered and published

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 and 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 student, Evan Eifler

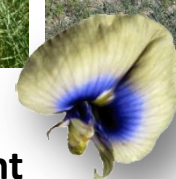


Evan Eifler (Madison, Wisconsin, USA) was first introduced to renosterveld as an exchange student when he attended a lecture and field trip led by Odette Curtis, with his third-year Ecology classmates. Ever since then, he has been working hard to come back to South Africa and get involved with the work 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 the OLCT in August 2013 and will be documenting and photographing important plants, insects, mammals, reptiles and birds, in order to create an inventory of the species found in renosterveld fragments in the Overberg.



OLCT Launch: Suurbraak

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 presentations or speeches were made by Nicholas van Myburgh (Mayor of Swellendam), Minister van Rensburg (Dept. Agriculture), Francis Steyn (LandCare's Programme Manager), Ismail Ebrahim (CREW), Cornie Swart (President, Agri-Western Cape), Dirk van Papendorp (OLCT Chair), Alan Jeftha (OLCT Vice-Chair and partner in SGF), Minister van Rensburg and Odette Curtis (OLCT Director). 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.



Director of the OLCT received her PhD on renosterveld management

Summary of key findings from thesis titled "Management of Critically Endangered renosterveld fragments in the Overberg, Western Cape, South Africa"

South Coast Renosterveld was more-than-likely always a grassy-shrubland – i.e. it was never a pure *Themeda* 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, 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 fynbos. 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.





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, 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.) – the first record of butterfly pollination for the genus *Hesperantha*.



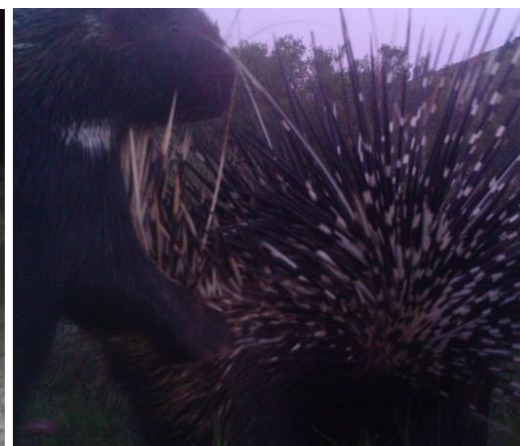
Website, Blog and Facebook pages launched

Our website and social media pages were launched in 2012 and we are thrilled with the result. Please visit our website on www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za and follow us via our blog and Facebook pages. We would love to grow our 'likes' and develop our Facebook page to be more interactive. And remember, you can 'like' us on Facebook even if you are not a member.



Camera trap project initiated

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 remnant as refugia.





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Botanical Society of South Africa
Botanical Society, Southern Overberg
Department of Agriculture
Brian Wall Memorial Fund

Thank you!



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