



OVERBERG LOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST

Newsletter 6, April 2015

Herewith, the latest newsletter of the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust (OLCT)
(Jan 2015 -Jan2015, compiled by Odette Curtis)
Please remember you can also follow us via our Website, Blog and Facebook pages.

Autumn Angels

A treasured friend of the OLCT refers to the flowers of the Renosterveld as my 'little angels'. I think the term fits these little gems so beautifully. Here are some of the angels we have enjoyed this autumn...



Above left to right: *Crossyne guttata*, *Amaryllis belladonna*, *Nerine humilis* (long-tuned version at Haarwegskloof)

Happy Birthday to us! We are three years old! 😊

On the 16th April 2012, we were officially registered as a Trust, making us three-years-old this month. The journey has not been an easy one – but it has been full of rewards and we are very proud of how far we have come in a relatively short space of time... We have raised funding to keep ourselves afloat; we received a Ford Ranger from the Ford Wildlife Foundation; and we discovered new species and sold the naming rights of one of them. We have forged new relationships with farmers in the landscape, while strengthening our existing relationships with those we already knew. We are close to completing a booklet for landowners which will contain management guidelines and an ID Guide to key plants and animals in the Overberg Renosterveld. We initiated a pilot Conservation Easement (watch this space for an update!); we have acquired our 'own' Reserve (owned by WWF-SA) and we built the first-ever Renosterveld Research and Visitor Centre, giving Renosterveld the home it so desperately needed.

None of this would have been possible without the support of our donors. We have received incredible philanthropic support and it is because of this, along with that received from the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, that we have made it this far. But our work has only just started. Our precious Renosterveld continues on the downward spiral and we need to do a lot more to stop this otherwise inevitable extinction. We need to secure longer-term funding so that we can have more people on the ground, creating awareness amongst landowners and ultimately assisting them with improved management and long-term commitments to conservation.



Boophane disticha

Haemanthus sanguineus blooming on the edge of a watercourse.
Close-up by Cameron McMaster



Renosterveld Research & Student Update

The research work of our PhD student, Zoë Poulsen is progressing well. Zoë is based in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Cape Town and is supervised by Dr Samson Chimphango, Prof Muthama Muasya, Prof Timm Hoffman and Dr Pippin Anderson. Her project title is: 'Conserving living landscapes: Investigating impacts of livestock grazing and assessing rangeland restoration potential in Overberg renosterveld'. Since the project started she has built collaboration to facilitate research with 21 farmers across the Overberg region from Caledon to the Heidelberg District. Data collection is well under way and we look forward to a productive autumn field season. Zoë will also be writing some Blogs for us over the coming months, so please keep a look-out for these on our website.

We would like to extend a special thank-you to all the farmers involved in the project for access to their veld, warm welcome and support in running the project. We would particularly like to thank CD Du Toit and the rest of the group farming at Quarrie Farm for their immensely generous donation of previously-used fencing material to the project. We would also like to thank Hansie Swart at Sandkraal and Nelis Swart of Posstal, both of whom have generously donated labour towards erecting fenced plots for this research project in their veld. We couldn't do it without you and your generous support!

In addition to Zoë's PhD, we have Luka Gallant undertaking his MSc investigating the potential for indigenous plants in Renosterveld to be used as artificial pastures; we have Jannie Groenewald starting his PhD on the ecology of quartz patches in Renosterveld; and we have at least five additional students looking at a suite of different aspects of Renosterveld ecology, from soils and plant communities on quartz patches, to small mammals to invertebrates, to restoration opportunities in remnants and watercourses. We will report more on the student projects in the next newsletter.



Above, left to right: Jannie helping Zoë with her research plots (photo: Zoë Poulsen), Muthama in the quartz fields of the Knersvlakte.

Ecological burn at Rooivlei Stewardship site

Due to the collaborative efforts driven by CapeNature and the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association, a long-awaited management burn was undertaken at a CapeNature Stewardship site in April this year. The Renosterveld here was over 20 years old, so we are looking forward to seeing what gems are revealed with the regrowth over the coming months. Renosterveld plant diversity declines with increasing time-since-burn and recent research suggests that a burning frequency of 7-10 years is probably acceptable in higher-rainfall regions of the Overberg. Rooivlei sits between Bredasdorp and Swellendam, in the same vegetation type as our Renosterveld Reserve at Haarwegskloof. This vegetation is known as Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld and we believe that because of its dry, karoo-like nature, it should burn with a much lower frequency (probably 15 years) than, for example, the grassier Renosterveld of the Napier and Caledon regions. Thus, burning it at an age of >20 years is deemed appropriate. We will be monitoring the recovery of this veld closely.



Renosterveld Research & Visitor Centre: Now open for visitors and overnight stays



Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve represents the largest protected piece of lowland renosterveld on Earth. It is owned by WWF-SA and managed by the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust. In 2014, we established the first-ever Renosterveld Research and Visitor Centre on the Reserve, and it is now open for bookings as a self-catering guesthouse.

The Reserve has over 350 plant species, over 80 birds, 20 mammals and several amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates recorded to date. Come and spend a night or three on our beautiful reserve and contribute to the important work we are doing here. The Reserve is also close to De Hoop Nature Reserve and you can also take a trip down to visit our partners at Sijnn Wines on the Breede River at Malgas, where they are also conserving Renosterveld.

Rates:

R250 per person per night, *minimum* 2 people for 2 nights OR 4 people for 1 night.
Children under 10 years old R150 pppn, under 3 years old free.

Available rooms:

Room 1: 1 double bed

Room 2: 3 single beds

Room 3: 1 double & 1 single bed
(Sleeps maximum of 8 comfortably)



Please see www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za or contact bookings@overbergrenosterveld.org.za for bookings and further info.

A guided tour of the reserve is available on request for an extra R100 per person, but must be pre-booked to confirm availability of guide.





The rare, long-tubed form of *Nerine humilis* at Haarwegskloof

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CONTACT US

www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za; info@overbergrenosterveld.org.za. Tel. +27 83 551 3341

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