

# Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust

9<sup>th</sup> Newsletter, January – March 2016

Herewith our latest news... Enjoy!



## We are four years old and changing our name slightly!

Another year has passed and on the 16th April we turn four years old. What a wonderful four years we have had! We have a long way to go and our dreams and ambitions are big, but when we reflect on where we have come until now, we can feel incredibly proud. In these four years, we have established the first-ever Renosterveld Reserve in the Overberg (with our partners at WWF) and the first-ever Renosterveld Research and Visitor Centre. We have initiated (and nearly completed) our first pilot easements (watch this space!). We have raised enough money (through the Nedbank/WWF Green Trust) to establish a Watercourse Restoration Project at a landscape scale. We have produced a booklet for landowners which outlines priority management guidelines and also acts as a mini field guide to renosterveld. We have pulled in close to 10 post-graduate students to undertake important ecological research in renosterveld. And we have won the hearts and ears of many landowners in the Overberg who are now thinking differently (and more positively) about their renosterveld. We have a long way to go; But we are going there! Over the next four years our aim is primarily to see that these efforts begin to translate into more and more hectares of renosterveld officially set aside and managed for conservation in perpetuity. We look forward to this journey with our friends and followers... thank you again for helping us get this far.



We have realised that our long mouthful of a name occasionally confuses people, so we have decided to change our 'trading name' slightly. From now on, we will be *trading as the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust*. Although this remains a lengthy name, we feel this is more appropriate and will not create any doubt as to what it is that we do.



## Renosterveld booklet produced

Together with our partners at Birdlife SA, the Botanical Society of SA, SAB and WWF's Better Barley Better Beer Project, the Overberg Crane Group and Sijnn Wines, we have produced a very impressive booklet for guiding managers and farmers on veld management and identification of some key species (from plants to insects to mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians). These will be distributed amongst landowners and are available for retail to other individuals who might be interested.





## Update on the Watercourse Restoration Project

The ORCT launched the Watercourse Restoration Project in September 2015, supported by the WWF Nedbank Green Trust. The past few months have involved numerous site visits to the watercourses within the Overberg Wheat-belt to create awareness among landowners about the project as well as develop an understanding on the current status quo of our watercourses and the threats posed to their functioning. This involves camera trap surveys, vegetation surveys, natural resource management intervention identification and water quality testing. Numerous threatened plant and bird species have been recorded in the watercourses and conservation priority mammalian species such as Honey Badger, Leopard and Cape Clawless Otter have been identified through camera trap images. The Breede Gouritz Catchment Management Agency has facilitated the testing of water samples to provide an indication of water quality in these systems. The water quality will be correlated with invertebrate sampling that has also been conducted and this has led to a new level of identification skills required to identify the dragonfly, damselfly and mayfly larvae (to name a few families) recorded during these surveys. The greatest surprise within the past few months has been the unexpected prevalence of fish species within the watercourse systems. Special mention must be made of Cape Kurper records, which indicate new distribution records, as well as specimens belonging to the threatened Redfin genus. The Redfin is



not known to occur within the Overberg Renosterveld watercourses and presently the only records within our area come from the Heuningnes River in the Agulhas Plain. This species is in the process of being described and we look forward to identifying the specific Redfin that was recorded during our surveys.



## Celebrating Ambassadors to the ORCT

We recently created a space for individuals to become Ambassadors for the ORCT and are thrilled to announce the first of these wonderful individuals.

First is **Valiant Swart**, well-loved and popular South African musician, who has a love for the Overberg and its beautiful landscapes and says: '*The Overberg is one of the most beautiful areas in the Cape. So much of it has been sacrificed for farmland, which is understandable. The natural, pristine areas that remain need to be preserved and protected with care and vigour, however. Caring for nature is caring for ourselves and for others.*'



Valiant Swart

**Prof Richard Cowling** is a legend in the field of conservation and research and has also conducted research on renosterveld on the Agulhas plain in the 1980s. Richard says about the ORCT '*Whenever I drive through the beautiful Overberg, I feel comforted knowing you are there.*' Thank you Richard—such an honour!

**Elizabeth Parker** has been on our side from the beginning and through her family Trust, the Mapula Trust, she has supported our work substantially. The Parker family own Elandsberg Private Nature Reserve (near Wellington) which is famous for its lowland fynbos and renosterveld.



Elizabeth Parker

## **FEATURE BLOG BY ZOË POULSEN: Joining forces: A new partnership between the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust and the Overberg Crane Group**

The Blue Crane, also known as the Stanley Crane or Paradise Crane, is South Africa's national bird. It is one of the most beautiful, spectacular and charismatic birds I have ever had privilege to see. Once seen, never to be forgotten. The Blue Crane is blue-grey in colour, about 120cm in height with a wingspan of up to two metres. Blue Cranes breed just once a year, rearing no more than three chicks per clutch of eggs (although in the Overberg broods are usually one or two chicks). They mate for life, and are known for their unusual courtship dance which involves bowing, jumping with wings extended, running in circles and tossing objects into the air.



Blue Cranes are the world's most range-restricted crane and are near-endemic to South Africa. There are small populations of birds in northern Namibia and western Swaziland, with vagrants occasionally visiting Botswana and Lesotho. There have also been a few unconfirmed sightings in Zimbabwe. The total population count for this bird is currently sitting at around 25,000. Sadly the number of Blue Cranes has decreased by half since the 1970s. They are therefore classified as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List. Threats include habitat loss, mortalities from collisions with power lines and poisoning (most commonly accidental through misuse of agrochemicals).

The Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust (OLCT) and the Overberg Crane Group (OCG) have formed a new partnership. The Overberg is home to about 50% of the world population of Blue Cranes, so it is critical that the region is the focus of conservation efforts. The OCG was founded in 1991 with the aim of improving conservation of Blue Cranes, but since then their mandate has expanded to protect other large and threatened birds that occur in the area, including the Western Cape's only population of Cape Vultures, found at Potberg in De Hoop Nature Reserve, as well as Denham's Bustards, Secretarybirds, Korhaans, Black Harriers and other raptors of conservation concern.

Renosterveld vegetation is an important habitat for many of these birds, and acknowledgement of this is one of the main driving forces behind the new partnership. Almost all of this vital habitat is on private land in the Overberg, so therefore extension work with landowners is one of the most important conservation tools. The OCG will be working with the OLCT's Watercourse Restoration Project Manager, Keir Lynch. Important data will be collected through this partnership on bird movements, population dynamics, power line mortalities and breeding success. Extension support through Keir's position will also be used to mitigate human-wildlife conflict through supporting landowners in the region when cases of conflict occur, as well as to raise awareness among landowners about the importance of conserving these species.

As part of this partnership a new website alongside social media presence will be used in order to encourage birdwatchers to participate in conservation monitoring, including reporting sightings of ringed birds and any that are dead or injured. This valuable data will be used to build a better picture of the conservation status of some of the Overberg's most beautiful and charismatic birds.

*The Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust would like to thank the WWF Nedbank Green Trust for supporting this work through the OLCT Watercourse Restoration Project.*



## SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS YEAR's LATE SUMMER / AUTUMN FLOWERS



*Gethyllis villosa*



*Amaryllis belladonna*



*Amaryllis belladonna*



*Brunsvigia orientalis*



*Brunsvigia orientalis*



*Hibiscus pusillus*



### Jeany Poulsen Tribute Fund

Very sadly, our friend, PhD student and blog-writer, Zoë Poulsen, lost her mother, Jeany, in February this year. Jeany was also a friend and follower of the ORCT. Despite this tragedy, Zoë's passion for renosterveld never ceases and she set up a Tribute Fund with the ORCT for Jeany. We are incredibly moved by this gesture and would like to thank Zoë and her father Ian for this initiative during a very difficult time for them. The fund has raised R15 000 to date and will be used for covering the legal costs of our next Conservation Easement—we will keep friends and donors abreast of these developments as they happen.



Zoë & Jeany

Thank you Zoë, for setting this up and for making this a success! We wish you all the best with continuing your PhD. And thank you to all the kind and generous friends of Jeany, Ian and Zoë, who made these donations. You can visit the Tribute Page and read all the messages left for the family at <http://overbergrenosterveld.org.za/jeany-poulsen/>. Contributions can still be made to this fund.

### THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS



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