

# Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust

7<sup>th</sup> Newsletter, April–September 2015

Compiled by Odette Curtis, with excerpts from blogs written for the OLCT by Zoë Poulsen

*Herewith our latest news... thank you for your continued support!*



## LAUNCH OF A NEW PROJECT: WATERCOURSE RESTORATION

Watercourses (namely rivers, streams and seepages) form a critical component of biodiversity and ecosystem function. Equally important is the riparian buffer zone adjacent to the watercourse itself, which when ecologically intact regulates water quality and acts as an important habitat, forming corridors of natural vegetation for wildlife including pollinators to move through transformed agricultural landscapes. However many of the watercourses in the Rûens wheat belt of the Overberg are threatened and have been significantly degraded by mismanagement.

The OLCT has just received a significant grant from the Nedbank-WWF Green Trust to start a new project focusing on restoration of degraded watercourses within the Overberg Rûens. This initiative shows great promise as watercourses show far greater restoration potential than surrounding Renosterveld vegetation in the area. This will involve a long term experimental research programme to develop capacity and inform best practice on



watercourse restoration in the Overberg alongside extension work to raise awareness of the importance of looking after watercourses on their farms. It will also involve assisting landowners with implementing management interventions.

We would like to welcome our new team member Keir Lynch (photo above), as the OLCT's Project Manager on the Watercourse Restoration Project (which currently spans three years, although we hope to make this project permanent). He brings to the Trust significant experience and expertise, formerly working with CapeNature as their Stewardship Extension Officer. Keir was involved in implementation of CapeNature's Protected Area Expansion Strategy, which included assessments of critical biodiversity areas, extension / outreach work with landowners and proclamation of Nature Reserves. Prior to holding this post he has worked in wildlife management at Sanbona Wildlife and Shamwari Game Reserves.



## DEVELOPMENTS AT OUR RENOSTERVELD CENTRE

Our Renosterveld Centre has been full of life throughout the spring season, as we have had a plethora of postgraduate students and guests making use of it. We are overjoyed by this as it shows that creating this 'home' for Renosterveld was worthwhile.

The upkeep costs of a Reserve and Centre of this nature are not small and we therefore aim to promote the Centre as self-catering accommodation for visitors who wish to stay on the reserve and explore the Renosterveld and surrounding attractions (such as De Hoop, Sijnn Wines, Malgas, Swellendam, etc.). However, the challenge is to balance provision of accommodation for postgrad students, while at the same time keeping up a standard as a 'guesthouse.' A very generous donor has provided funding for us to renovate the other buildings on the Reserve's homestead. We are therefore converting the old barn (livestock feeding shed) into additional accommodation for students and guests, while we will also be painting and cleaning up the large shed to use for group workshops and potentially school groups in future. We are half-way through these renovations and hope to be able to launch the new accommodation in December 2015.



This spring season we have had the following students use the Centre as a base for their field work:

**Zoe Poulsen (PhD):** *Conserving living landscapes: Investigating impacts of livestock grazing and assessing rangeland restoration potential in Overberg Renosterveld*

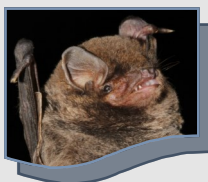
**Jannie Groenewald (PhD):** *Ecology of quartz patches in the Overberg Renosterveld*

**Evan Eifler (PhD):** *Patterns of Diversity and Vulnerability in Globally Endangered Renosterveld*

**Oliver Cowan (PhD):** *Functional ecology of the Critically Endangered Rûens Shale Renosterveld of the Overberg with a view towards future restoration and management interventions*

**Abigail Graham (MSc):** *Small mammal diversity in Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld*

**Luke Gallant (MSc):** *Potential for Renosterveld plants to be used to create indigenous, artificial pasture*



In addition to these student projects, we have also been visited by various projects, interested in collecting seed on our Reserve. This included the **Millennium Seed Bank Project** (collecting seed of threatened species for storage at



Kew Gardens as a long-term insurance policy), a team of **bat biologists** from Stellenbosch University (examining viruses carried by Cape Serotine Bats) and some **entomologists** from SANBI/Stellenbosch (exploring opportunities for future collaborative work on invertebrates).

*Please follow our website for updates on the Centre and DO come and spend a couple of nights in this special place as a way of supporting the work that we do*





## *SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS YEAR'S SPRING (SO FAR!)*

As usual, the Renosterveld has not disappointed us and our walks in the veld have always been rewarded with beautiful flowers and creatures... enjoy!



*Aspalathus rosea*, Endangered



*Gladiolus alatus*



*Gladiolus virescens*



*Babiana purpurea*, Endangered



Levaillant's Cisticola



*Osteospermum scariosum*



Lanner Falcon



*Aristea biflora*, Endangered



Long-tongued Fly



*Moraea comptonii*, Endangered



*Drosanthemum flavum*, Endangered



*Romulea pilosa*, Critically EN

## FEATURE BLOG BY ZOE POULSEN: OREN TAYLOR

We are very grateful to Zoë Poulsen, a PhD student at UCT working with the OLCT, who has been writing excellent blogs for the Trust. She recently interviewed Oren Taylor, one of the OLCT's most prominent supporters. Since many of our readers do not follow us online, we thought we would share some excerpts from this blog (see <http://overbergrenosterveld.org.za/blog/> for the complete story and others).

Businessman and environmentalist Oren Taylor is one of our most loyal supporters. Oren first came to prominence in 2012 soon after the founding of the OLCT through his purchase at auction of the naming rights of *Hesperantha kiaratayloriae*, which he named after his daughter Kiara Taylor. This beautiful pink bulb is only found at one site and extensive efforts to locate additional populations have thus far been unsuccessful. There are thought to be only around 100 mature individuals remaining in the wild and it is thought the majority of the habitat of this species has been lost to ploughing of Renosterveld for agriculture.



*Hesperantha kiaratayloriae*

Oren Taylor grew up on a farm near Vereeniging in Gauteng. In 2000 he moved to the UK, there building a successful career in private equity, software development and business. Oren first met Odette in the UK subsequent to the auction for the naming

rights of the new *Hesperantha*, run by Flora and Fauna International. "When I first met Odette I could feel her passion and all that excitement to do something. That goes a long way". At the auction Oren placed the winning bid, wanting to name the newly-discovered *Hesperantha* sp. after his daughter Kiara: "I wanted to put my daughter's name down in history....whatever happens her name will be there as long as there is a data book around species. Leaving a legacy for my daughter even though she has her whole life ahead of her was something that appealed to me".



This generous purchase was just the beginning of Oren Taylor's support of the Trust's work. Now in addition to ongoing financial support he also donates his time to the Trust, working alongside Odette to build a portfolio of regular corporate donors to build a more sustainable long term income for the OLCT.

When asked about why he supports Renosterveld conservation, Oren says: "I guess it is the uniqueness of it....everybody is trying to save the big iconic species but it is the little things under your feet that people are less interested in. I thought that people aren't looking after this and that we're going to lose it forever. It was a really unique opportunity to get involved and do something that no-one else has done."



But why should we save the Renosterveld? Why is it so important? Oren offers his perspective: "The point is that we haven't even learnt about the things that we are about to lose. I think the world is a poorer place as long as we lose diversity in the world. It's about us and our future. Humankind's future. The Renosterveld of the Overberg and the saving of it is directly linked to the future of humankind and it is through biodiversity, through any scientific gains. Who knows what plant is going to help save somebody? Knowledge is power. We're losing knowledge and the loss is caused by our own hands and so we have to save it with our own hands".

Oren visited Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve in December of last year. He was impressed with what he saw: "I didn't really have any expectations...I think the only thing I would say is that it is just lovely. I think there is potential there and it will expand and grow. It is a lovely place, you know".

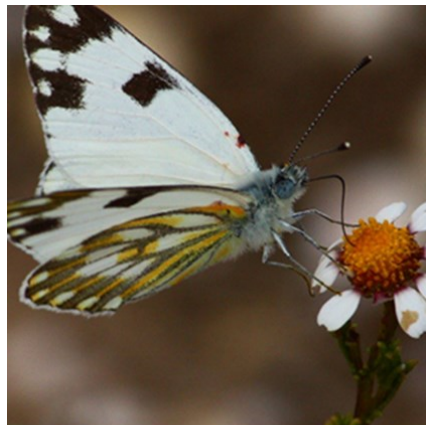
The Trust has grown from small beginnings over the last three years and now we are here to stay. We couldn't have done it without supporters such as Oren Taylor and will continue to need your support to grow and continue our vital work. You can support us in the following ways.....



## WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE OLCT

Please don't forget that we recently launched a series of different options through which you can contribute to the work that we do. Without your continued support, we will not be able to continue our critical work.

Please consider the following options!



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