



Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust

12th Newsletter, April 2017

Celebrating 5 years of conserving renosterveld



Our five year birthday!

In this newsletter we celebrate our first five years and our recent achievements. We are thrilled to have come this far and to be able to assure our supporters that all our hard work is finally translating into hectares of renosterveld being conserved ... we have a long road to travel, but we are on the right track and we remain committed!



First Conservation Easement secured!

FINALLY, after several years of working with our partners to perfect this new addition to the 'stewardship tool kit', we have been instrumental in negotiating and securing the first Conservation Easement.

The following text is adopted from Press Release by Heather D'Alton, LoveGreen Communications, for the ORCT:

A new form of conservation protects critically endangered Renosterveld

WWF-South Africa has signed a Conservation Servitude agreement with a Caledon landowner, MG Lötter. The Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT) will manage the easement and provide the management support to Lötter and landowners who sign up in future. Through this innovative form of conservation on private land, part of the largest area of Western Rûens Shale Renosterveld left in the world (370 hectares) will be protected in perpetuity.

Conservation easements or servitudes are a fairly new concept in South Africa, although they have been used internationally. A servitude is attached to the title deed, which is binding on the successor in title. A management plan is attached to the servitude, providing support to landowners and identifying priority management interventions. The ORCT then assists with the implementation of these interventions.

Conservation easements offer landowners an easy and accessible opportunity to conserve their land. The servitude is placed over the entire farm, with areas demarcated for conservation and agriculture. The land does not need to be rezoned, as is the case with many other protected area proclamations.

The signing is the first of hopefully many conservation easements. According to Dr Odette Curtis, founder of the ORCT: "Most farmers want to do the right thing on the natural vegetation on their farm. They know that the Renosterveld patches on their properties are where the wildlife are found – giving life to their properties. But they didn't always know how to commit to protecting these patches. We hope that other farmers will be inspired by this positive commitment that MG has made.

"The ORCT is working with a range of willing and eager landowners across the Overberg. The aim is to start with protecting the largest areas remaining of the four types of Renosterveld in each of the areas that they still occur."

The signing was celebrated on 8 February at Lötter's farm, Klipfontein. The event was attended by landowners, LandCare (Department of Agriculture, Western Cape), the ORCT, WWF-South Africa, and the Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency.



Autumn Flowers and the new Amaryllidaceae Book, Excerpt from Blog by Zoe Poulsen

See: www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za/blog for the whole blog

We have reached that time of year again at the end of summer as the nights draw in and the weather becomes cooler. As the hope of autumn and winter rains sit on the horizon, it is time to look out for our Renosterveld autumn flowers, particularly those in the Amaryllidaceae family. For more information about the Amaryllidaceae family, there is no better place to look than Graham Duncan, Barbara Heppe and Leigh Voigt's stunning new book on the Amaryllidaceae of Southern Africa. This amazing publication has been no less than 45 years in the making and well worth the wait. Barbara Heppe started the gargantuan task of painting botanical illustrations of all members of the Amaryllidaceae family in July 1971 and she painted more than 200 species from this huge and diverse family during her lifetime. After Barbara Heppe passed away in 1999 her daughter Leigh Voigt took up the task of painting botanical illustrations of all the subsequently described species. These stunning illustrations are paired with a beautiful, informative and articulate text written by Graham Duncan, SANBI botanist, horticulturalist and world renowned geophyte expert. This volume covers everything from pollination biology to cultivation in different parts of the world and will make a great contribution to the Southern African flora lover's library.



Out in the Overberg's Renosterveld some stunning members of this incredibly diverse plant family can be seen. First up is the *Amaryllis belladonna*, more commonly known as the March lily or 'Naked Lady'. It is distributed from the Cape Peninsula eastwards to Nature's Valley on the Garden Route and grows in a variety of different habitats, sometimes flowering en masse after fire. The genus *Amaryllis* was first described in Linnaeus's *Species Plantarum* in 1753. *Amaryllis belladonna* is pollinated during the day by carpenter bees and becomes more strongly scented at night where it attracts the moth *Cucullia extricata*.

Now is also the time to spot *Haemanthus sanguineus* or 'April Fool' or 'Brandlelie' as its paint brush like flower heads emerge in the veld. The species epithet '*sanguineus*' means 'blood' in reference to the colour of the flowers.



One of the largest and spectacular members of the Amaryllidaceae family to be seen in the Overberg's Renosterveld at this time of year is members of the genus *Brunsvigia*, known as the Chandelier lily. The most commonly seen is the bright red *Brunsvigia orientalis*.

Equally spectacular and resembling a large purple botanical firework is *Crossyne guttata*. When in leaf they can be easily recognised by their large, flat and bristle margined leaves. They flower from February to April.



One of the botanical gems of Overberg Renosterveld at this time of year is *Boophone disticha*. The name *Boophone* means 'Ox killer' in reference to the toxicity of the leaves to livestock. They are known for their distinctive fan like leaves with wavy margins. This species can be found from the Southern Cape northwards to south Sudan.

The stunning red *Nerine sarniensis* is more commonly known as the Guernsey Lily. The species epithet '*sarniensis*' means 'from Sarnia', the Roman name of the Channel Island of Guernsey. At our Haarwegskloof Reserve following a highly successful control burn last autumn *Nerine humilis* have emerged en masse at the site. This beautiful and delicate looking species flowers from March to June in a variety of habitats from shale flats to rocky sandstone slopes. The different forms of *Nerine humilis* are pollinated by long tongued flies.



So now is a wonderful time to get out into the Overberg's Renosterveld to see some of these beauties in flower. Why not come and visit Haarwegskloof and our gorgeous Renosterveld Reserve to see some of them and learn more about this fascinating and Critically Endangered ecosystem? Please visit www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za/accommodation for Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve bookings and enquiries

Update on the Watercourse Restoration Project

The following is an excerpt from an article that appeared in *BUSINESS DAY*, written by Heather Dugmore:

Restoring the lost jewel of the Western Cape

A portrait of the Western Cape 300 years ago would show rolling expanses of a vegetation type with an extraordinary diversity of bulb species called Renosterveld, being grazed by large numbers of big game, including the extinct bluebuck, quagga, as well as the eland and black rhino, hence its name. The large numbers of game have gone and the Renosterveld is down to 5% of its original expanse, with less than 50 remaining fragments in the Overberg that are over 100ha and even fewer of this size in the Swartberg. An emergency response is required to prevent the extinction of this jewel in the Cape Floristic Region: the smallest and richest plant kingdom on earth.

The emergency response starts with restoring the watercourses that link and feed these fragments, which are the only source of intact biodiversity in the region's farming landscape. This is what the WWF Nedbank Green Trust is funding through a three-year project that started in September 2015, titled '*Watercourse restoration in critically endangered Renosterveld*'.



Erosion control interventions in renosterveld in the Napier area form part of the Watercourse Restoration Project.

Dr Curtis and her team have now identified ecological corridors in the form of streams, rivers and seepage areas that link the disparate patches of Renosterveld between farms in the Overberg Rûens (wheat belt). These watercourses are the lifeblood of this habitat and the health of the entire region, but many of the watercourses are in a badly degraded state. Numerous rivers, streams and wetlands have been invaded by alien invasive vegetation, with advanced soil erosion and water pollution or destruction by ploughing. Restoring these watercourses and assisting landowners in managing them, paves the way for water conservation, ecosystem restoration and better land management in this fragile system,' explains Dr Curtis. 'Partnering with farmers and landowners is the only way in which we can restore the health of the watercourses and this unique habitat from an otherwise inevitable extinction. What is so encouraging is how many farmers are interested and on board, and have come to us for advice and help since the project started in September 2015.'

Update on the Watercourse Restoration Project continued...

Part of the success of this project is the manner in which the project manager on the ground, Keir Lynch, engages with farmers and landowners. Formerly the stewardship extension officer at CapeNature, he has experience and expertise in developing strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with landowners to conserve and expand critical biodiversity areas.

We are currently working with about 50 farmers who are invited to sign a conservation easement or memorandum of understanding with the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust,' says Lynch. 'This is a conservation servitude on their title deed or a written commitment to manage the watercourses and Renosterveld habitat on their land according to the conservation and biodiversity management plan.'

The project team has mapped the Renosterveld fragments they will be targeting, and has started intensive alien vegetation and watercourse restoration in these areas, including:

- Two tributaries on the eastern side of the Breede River - the Dipka and Doring Rivers – between Heidelberg and Swellendam,
- The Ouka River (also known as the Freek Botha River), which is significantly eroded. This is a typical Renosterveld seepage stream that flows into the Riviersonderend River between Riviersonderend and Swellendam. An endemic member of the legume family found only on this watercourse is *Polhillia brevicalyx*;
- The Hansjes River near Napier, which has major erosion dongas, requiring interventions such as silt trapping and gabions;
- Parts of the Sout River that crosses the Overberg and feeds the De Hoop Vlei Ramsar Site near Bredasdorp where, at the headwaters of the Sout River on Kleindam Farm, is one of the only wetlands the team has located so far in Renosterveld, with visiting flamingoes and rare plant species;
- The half-way point of the Sout River on Kykoedie Farm, between Bredasdorp and Riviersonderend, where intervention is required to deal with the erosion of the river banks;



Left to right: Redfin found in the Hansjesrivier, *Polhillia brevicalyx* (Critically Endangered with <100 plants known), Greater Flamingos in renosterveld

'We applaud the farmers who are partnering us in this initiative,' says Dr Curtis. 'Through this initiative many farmers have stopped ploughing up the Renosterveld remnants and watercourses, and there is encouraging commitment to biodiversity conservation to improve the health and supply of water to this region. An exciting recent project find has been the discovery of two indigenous fish species - the Cape Kurper (*Sanelia capensis*) and Burchell's Redfin (*Pseudobarbus burchelli*) in the Hansjes River near the village of Napier. It was previously thought that Redfins do not occur in the Renosterveld system.

'We will continue to sample the river systems throughout the project area to determine the distribution of species across the river systems in the Renosterveld,' says Dr Curtis. 'These are fantastic finds in addition to the incredible plant and animal species already recorded in this area.'

OUR PLEDGE FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Your continued support of our organisation is crucial to the work we do. There are several ways in which you can support us, including:

Stay in our self-catering guesthouse at Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve

To celebrate turning five years old, we are offering a **15% discount** to anyone staying in our Guesthouse from **April to June**. Come and enjoy some of the flowering lilies or see several unique and threatened legumes in bloom. The birding is great, with several endemics present on the reserve!

Visit www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za/accommodation for more info or email Sharon on bookings@overbergrenosterveld.org.za



Support the final 'touches' on our Quartz Patch Botanical Trail by funding the development of a Parabolic Wall



We are currently in the process of developing a small trail which will lead visitors to Haarwegskloof Reserve through our botanical gem: the quartz patch, rich in rare and endemic species, many of which were only described recently. This trail will include plant ID tags of notable species. The trail begins on our most spectacular look-out point and we would like to build a parabolic wall with seating and information boards for visitors to enjoy while sipping on their sundowners or ending the circular quartz patch walk. If you would like to sponsor this wall and have it named in your honour (or a person of your choosing), please contact: Odette on info@overbergrenosterveld.org.za



Consider leaving a [Bequest](#) to us in your will, or starting a [Tribute Fund](#) for someone special.

Consider joining our Golden Circle and donating R50 000 or more annually, thereby contributing towards our long-term sustainability as an organisation (email Odette).

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS

