



2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT



Who we are

Renosterveld: One of the most threatened habitats on Earth.

Renosterveld is highly fragmented with fewer than 50 fragments being over 100 hectares (ha) in size. Almost all Renosterveld remnants occur on privately-owned land, creating an additional challenge for conservation. All these factors, coupled with the large range of endemic and threatened plants and animals inhabiting this bio-hotspot, make this unique 'rhino veld' one of the most threatened habitats on Earth, putting it in urgent need of conservation attention.

The Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT) is a Non-Profit Organisation dedicated to addressing the plight of Renosterveld. Through creating partnerships with landowners in this severely transformed landscape, we aim to save Renosterveld from an otherwise inevitable extinction.



Contents

Letters from leadership	4
Showcasing Renosterveld conservation to the world's top conservation biologists	5
Conservation Easements: "Keeping Renosterveld safe for our children"	6-7
Our Renosterveld Reserve: A place of learning and celebration	8-9
Financial Report 2019/20	10
Donors and partners	11
Contact details and ORCT Staff & Board of Trustees	12



Vision

To secure the long-term conservation and management of remaining Renosterveld through active partnerships, thereby improving the overall quality of farms, sustainable livelihoods and landscapes in the Overberg.

Letters from leadership

Message from the Chairperson

The role of the farmer has seldom been as important as it is now. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a stable food source. In South Africa, the agricultural sector rose to the occasion. As lockdown prevented people from earning a livelihood, farmers helped to ensure our most vulnerable communities weren't left without food.

It's these same farmers who are also custodians of our remaining Renosterveld patches. So many members of our farming community want to help – not only their fellow man, but also their natural environment. Many farmers simply don't know the biodiversity treasure they have on their farms, including in their Renosterveld fragments. These are fragments they must take responsibility for.

These farmers understand conservation farming principles in grain and livestock farming. Once they gain knowledge on the conservation value of their natural veld, they can see the symbiosis between their fields of grain, and the fragile Renosterveld patches in between.

This mindset change only happens when we gain trust among our farming community. This is the only way we can forge relationships that last for generations. Our Conservation Easement Programme does just this. It creates the environment for trust and cooperation. And when other members of the farming community see this, it leads to more interest, and increased involvement (as we can see over the past year).

But involving our farming community is now no longer a nice-to-have. It's essential. The abuse of natural habitats around the world continues unabated. Farmers are at the heart of the solution. That's why our focus on our Conservation Easement Programme remains at the forefront of our work.

There is some good news among these dire warnings and difficult times. I believe the post-Coronavirus citizen will take a different approach to life; this person will understand the importance of living closer to nature, conserving Mother Earth, wasting less – and living with a lighter footprint.

As a Trust, this makes 2020 an important year for us. It's our chance to take hands with this new 'world order'. And to play our crucial role in helping to bring about an improved natural world, a cleaner planet, and a gentler footprint left by humankind.

Dirk van Papendorp

Letter from the Director

What a year it has been, for humans, biodiversity, and our planet generally. Not only have we seen the impacts of a deadly virus (COVID-19) globally, but we have also seen a series of alarming statistics, including those released by the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which demonstrated that about 1 million species (plants and animals) are threatened with extinction.

"Ecosystems, species, wild populations, local varieties and breeds of domesticated plants and animals are shrinking, deteriorating, or vanishing. The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed," says Prof. Joseph Settele (from Germany). "This loss is a direct result of human activity and constitutes a direct threat to human well-being in all regions of the world."

I had the honour of attending the World Biodiversity Forum in Davos, Switzerland, at the end of February 2020 and I heard many fascinating and worrying presentations by several of the authors of the IPBES Assessment, as well as many incredible conservation scientists.

While Renosterveld is in dire straits, so are hundreds of other ecosystems across the world, with several of these providing vital ecosystem services. From the impacts of land transformation for agriculture (the biggest culprit), to extensive land degradation, to over-exploitation of wildlife or plants to broad-scale chemical use having detrimental and poorly-understood impacts on our pollinators (and therefore many important food crops), our planet is being abused from every possible angle. Without urgent changes to policy, coupled with effective ACTION, our ecosystems and the species they support (which includes Homo sapiens!) have very little hope of a sustainable and secure future. More recent research is also linking man's destruction of natural habitats and our exploitation of wildlife to the viral pandemics that we have experienced (and continue to experience) over recent years.

The plight of our Renosterveld is indicative of what is happening to nature at the global scale. It has borne the brunt of most of the impacts mentioned here. Yet while so much has been lost, it nevertheless continues to fascinate, to function (at some level, as our post-grad pollination projects have demonstrated) and to show and teach us new things (evidenced by the new species we continue to find). And our conservation gains are growing: our Conservation Easement Programme is gaining momentum and by the end of the 2019 financial year, we were able to celebrate 1800 hectares of Renosterveld secured for conservation in perpetuity! This is a big win for us!

We need to keep momentum, we need to keep building our conservation footprint: it is the small, practical, tangible successes that give people hope and that demonstrate how powerful a few individuals can be in changing our landscapes for the better. If we can get this right at the local scale, our efforts and successes can surely be extrapolated globally.

Dr Odette Curtis-Scott



DIRK VAN PAPERDORP



DR ODETTE CURTIS-SCOTT



Showcasing:

Renosterveld conservation to the world's top conservation biologists

The Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust was represented at the first World Biodiversity Forum, held in February 2020 in Davos, Switzerland.

ORCT Director, Dr Odette Curtis-Scott was invited to attend the forum as a plenary speaker. She joined some of the most prominent biodiversity researchers and ecologists in the world, taking the stage alongside the likes of Prof Eduardo Brondizio and Prof Sandra Díaz (of the Inter-governmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, or IPBES).

Odette provided an on-the-ground account of Renosterveld conservation to this international audience, showcasing the plight of Renosterveld, and detailing the many challenges and successes in protecting this Critically Endangered habitat.

The World Biodiversity Forum set a formidable goal to delegates: to redefine the agenda for biodiversity, and position it as a focal point over the next decade. This places considerable emphasis on the Sixth Mass Extinction, and the need for biodiversity to be at the forefront of national government priorities.

By the end of the forum, delegates (including Odette), made the following plea to countries: **"We urge national governments and international organisations to act responsibly and without delay towards biodiversity, by including all relevant stakeholders with the ultimate goal to safeguard all life on Earth."**

Renosterveld under siege: Address at the Fynbos Forum

Odette was also invited to attend the annual Fynbos Forum as a keynote speaker, held in Baardskeerdersbos in August 2019. Her talk was entitled, 'Renosterveld under siege: Securing and managing one of the world's most threatened ecosystems.'

This event brings South Africa's researchers and conservation practitioners together from across the Cape Floral Kingdom, to provide insight into the latest research, management and conservation initiatives.

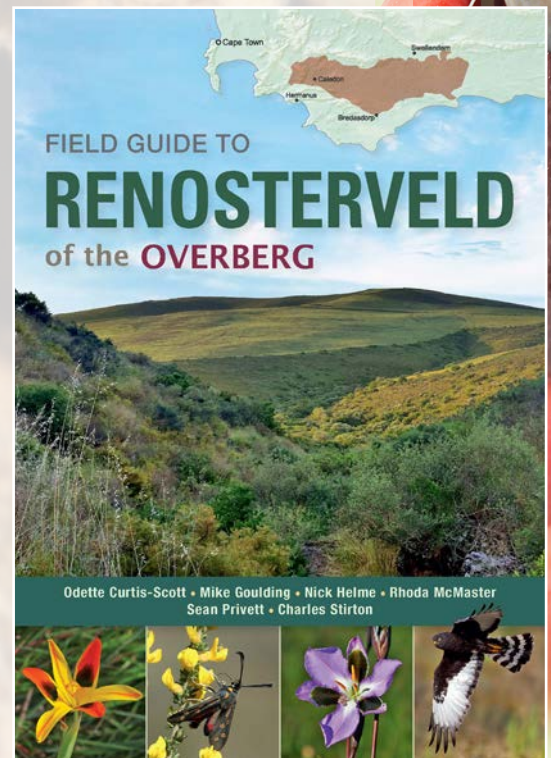
The Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust consists of a small team of passionate and highly qualified people.

Renosterveld field guide ready for release

Following three years of extensive research and writing by an array of botanical experts, the first ever 'Field Guide to Renosterveld of the Overberg' has been completed. It will be published and released by Struik in the next financial year.

The field guide is written by ORCT Director, Dr Odette Curtis-Scott, as well as Mike Goulding, Nick Helme, Rhoda McMaster, Sean Privett and Prof Charles Stirton. It's the most comprehensive field guide written for the area, and encompasses flora (980 species), birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects of Overberg Renosterveld, totalling over 1100 species.

According to Odette, "This guide has taken five years to compile, tapping into the knowledge of some of the Cape Floristic Region's leading experts. This is a proud moment for the ORCT, and for me personally. And we believe it will stir up new excitement and inspire others to protect what remains of our Renosterveld habitats."



Conservation Easements: “Keeping

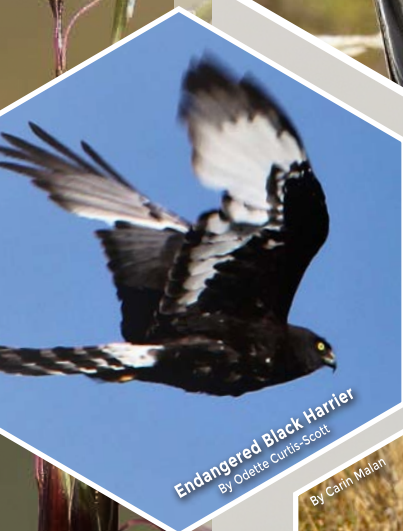
“It’s the right thing to do. Where would the animals go if the Renosterveld weren’t here? You can take it out, but why would you? In the long run, you have to think about nature. Nature was here before us.”

This is why farmer Nico Neethling committed to protecting his Renosterveld in perpetuity, by signing a conservation easement with the ORCT. Nico was one of three landowners who made this commitment in the 2019 financial year, bringing the total for 2019 to 921 hectares of Renosterveld (all of it Critically Endangered) included in the ORCT’s Conservation Easement Programme.

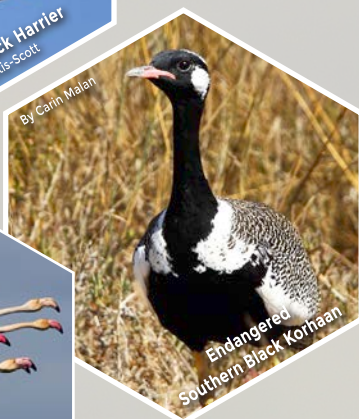
Since the programme’s launch in 2017, the ORCT team has secured 1834 hectares through easements.

The Conservation Easement Programme is being rolled out in the Overberg, as a way for private landowners to protect their natural veld, while still continuing to farm on their agricultural areas. A conservation easement is essentially a servitude registered over a property in favour of a particular entity (in our case, the ORCT). It ‘runs with the land’, which means it’s applicable for both present and future landowners.

It’s also a way for farmers to receive Renosterveld management support. Through wonderful donors, the ORCT can assist farmers with fire management, post-fire monitoring, fencing, erosion control, invasive alien clearing and monitoring the wildlife on their property.



Endangered Black Harrier
By Odette Curtis Scott



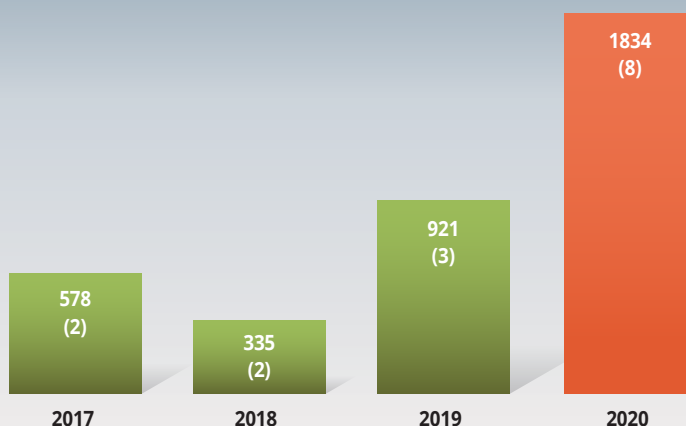
By Carmi Malan

Endangered
Southern Black Korihaan



Greater Flamingoes

Hectares secured through easements



Our ‘authentically-African’ Renosterveld heritage

For Matthias Streicher, protecting Renosterveld runs in his blood. His great-uncle, the late Simon Streicher, spent decades monitoring the Critically Endangered Renosterveld species, *Polhilia brevicealyx*. At least half the global population of this species is found on the Streicher’s farm, Uitvlucht. But at one stage, it was thought that only three plants remained on the farm.

However, surveys by the ORCT and Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers (CREW) have revealed a population of over 100 plants present on this farm. And thanks to the newly-signed conservation easement, the population on Uitvlucht will be protected forever.

For Matthias, protecting Renosterveld means protecting something that is authentically African.

“I want to help conserve the Renosterveld because it is the only true pieces of Rûens veld left to go for a Sunday picnic or veld-braai and at the same time feel part of Africa.”

The signing with the Streicher family is the pinnacle of years of cooperation and partnership with the ORCT, and allows the Trust to provide suitable veld management support to the family going forward.

Odette says, “The Streicher family captures the essence of a farming family that cares deeply about the remaining pockets of Renosterveld. It has been a joy working with them over the years. And we’re so grateful for the way they encourage other farmers to see their Renosterveld as more than ‘uitvalgrond’ (waste land), but as something that is truly part of Africa’s natural world.”

Renosterveld safe for our children"

The Cameron McMaster Renosterveld Reserve

For the first time, the ORCT signed an easement with a municipality. A total of 80 hectares of Critically Endangered lowland Renosterveld and Fynbos belonging to the Cape Agulhas Municipality (CAM) was signed into the easement programme in 2019.

The patches of veld are within the Napier and Klipdale commonages. And in memory of bulb expert, Cameron McMaster, the Napier sites have been named the Cameron McMaster Renosterveld Reserve. Cameron and his wife, drew attention to the conservation value of these sites when they assessed these small patches and found that they were home to a greater diversity of bulbs than the world-famous botanical destination, Nieuwoudtville.

According to CAM Executive Mayor, Paul Swart, the ORCT played a key role in pointing out the conservation significance of these sites. He said, **"We want to thank the ORCT for taking hands with the municipality and showing us these areas that we need to keep safe for our children and grandchildren. We hope this is the beginning of more projects in our area, to keep them safe."**

The difference an easement can make

During the year, the ORCT also looked back on the first conservation easement signed – which served as the blueprint on which all future easements in Renosterveld were based.

MG Lötter was the first farmer to take this pioneering step in 2016. According to MG, he wasn't sure whether the easement would actually benefit his veld. "I asked myself the question: Will I see a difference on my farm or not? And I could definitely see a difference – even within the space of a year." MG has become a true ambassador for the ORCT and the easement programme, demonstrating how partnerships can lead to powerful changes on the ground.

Thank you to our donors

Our easement programme is funded by WWF South Africa, as well as the Ford Wildlife Foundation. Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, the Fynbos Trust and the Mapula Trust also provide ongoing support to the ORCT, including our easement programme.



Easements: It's not just about the flowers

Easements offer an important additional conservation benefit: the opportunity for threatened bird species to benefit from improved habitat management in remaining Renosterveld patches. In a project supported by WWF South Africa, the ORCT is working to monitor and protect five priority bird species found in the Wheat-belt of the Overberg – an Important Bird Area (as identified by BirdLife South Africa).

The Wheat-belt stretches from Botrivier to close to Heidelberg, and includes the towns of Caledon, Riviersonderend, Napier, Bredasdorp and Swellendam (where the easement sites are situated). It's also home to these five priority species: Black Harrier (*Endangered*, with fewer than 2000 individuals remaining today); Southern Black Korhaan (*Vulnerable*, with numbers still declining); Denham's Bustard (*Vulnerable*, and dependent on both natural and farming land); Blue Crane (*Vulnerable*, and dependent on farming lands in the Wheat-belt); and the Secretarybird (also *Vulnerable*, with numbers of this species still declining).

The WWF South Africa support allows the ORCT to grow the number of signed easements, and to provide management support to those farmers who have already signed. Such support includes undertaking (and funding) important interventions such as ecological burns, alien clearing and fencing for livestock management.

This in turn sets the foundation for healthy, well-managed remnants and corridors of natural veld, which provide the ideal landscape that many birds of conservation concern need to survive.



Secretarybird

Our Renosterveld Reserve: A

There is still so much we don't know about Renosterveld. Researchers are asking questions such as:

How are Renosterveld pollinators faring; can Renosterveld fragments survive given the threats; and should Renosterveld be grazed by livestock?

The Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve, which is owned by WWF South Africa and managed by the ORCT, provides the perfect space for researchers to answer these many questions. The reserve is situated in the Rûens area, just north of De Hoop Nature Reserve in the Overberg. It offers the largest, most connected Renosterveld landscape left on earth – and is largely surrounded by agricultural lands (with small pockets of Renosterveld remaining between these commercial farming lands).

By Tabitha Coetzee

During the past year, a number of Honours, Masters and Doctoral students made use of our Renosterveld Research Centre on Haarwegskloof, which served as the base for their studies. They also made some interesting findings – which are likely to inform Renosterveld management actions in the future.

For example, research undertaken by PhD student, Zoë Poulsen, found that grazing by sheep reduced Renosterveld plant species richness, diversity and vegetation cover, when compared to areas protected from grazing. Cattle grazing, however, had no significant influence on species richness and vegetation cover compared to ungrazed sites. These findings are likely due to the different grazing preferences of cattle and sheep. Zoë made several other interesting finds, which will all be revealed when her PhD is completed.

A focus on pollination

Should pollinators become extinct, it's likely that Renosterveld would become the 'living dead'. Already researchers are seeing worrying signs regarding the impact that agricultural chemicals and habitat fragmentation (due to ploughing) are having on pollinators. That's why the Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve supported a number of studies into pollinators during the past year.

Sachin Doarsamy completed his Masters research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal into pollination and taxonomy of the genus *Wurmbea*. Evan Eifler is doing research for his PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison into the genus *Geissorhiza* and trying to better understand drivers of speciation such as pollination using DNA markers.

Oliver Cowan submitted his PhD during the year. He focused on ecosystem function in Overberg Renosterveld, including plant-pollinator networks. And most recently, two German Masters students, Simone Maier and Sina Hauber, a B-Tech student, Jamy Fredericks and a Masters student, Tabitha Coetzee, have examined pollinator networks, presence and absence of pollinator species, and pollination success rates in a sample of selected plant species across different-sized Renosterveld remnants.

Good news for the Agulhas Long-billed Lark

It wasn't only about the plants, however. Oxford University's Celeste de Kock (working with Dr Alan Lee of the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology) published research on the Agulhas Long-billed Lark. After her field study on Haarwegskloof (and other landscapes across the Overberg), she concluded that this Lark (*Certhilauda brevirostris*) will thrive in both natural and productive landscapes, as long as the vegetation is shorter than 30cm. The Agulhas Long-billed Lark is a species that is special to the Overberg: it only occurs close to Africa's southernmost tip, centred around the Agulhas area, and is listed as Near Threatened.

And students from the Nelson Mandela University are making use of Haarwegskloof to better understand how small antelope (such as Duiker and Cape Grysbok) survive in Renosterveld and lowland Fynbos, and are looking at how they use corridors which link natural areas.

Haarwegskloof: A site for celebration

The ORCT hosted a number of farmers during the past year. Farmers who are actively protecting their Renosterveld, as well as those who are interested in getting involved, joined the Trust to explore some of the special quartz patches on the reserve. This included a frank discussion on some of the challenges to conservation, and how to overcome them.

"My research shows that fragments that are highly or partially isolated are just as significant, if not more significant in terms of species composition and number of interactions, than fully connected 'mainland' sites."

~ Tabitha Coetzee

place of learning and celebration

A new learning hub for Haarwegskloof

The ORCT hosted a crowdfunding campaign which was launched at the end of 2019 – in order to raise funds to extend the learning space on the reserve, in particular, to create a learning hub for school children and adult training groups.

The campaign ran until end January – and raised a total of R322 790, thanks to wonderful donors and supporters from across the world.

The aim is to use the Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve as a site for school children and other visitors, to teach them about conservation and ecology. According to Odette, "We need to reach out to children, to create awareness about threatened ecosystems across the globe, and Renosterveld is an example of such an ecosystem. And what we want to show is that despite how severely threatened it is, there is still so much diversity, which we can show at Haarwegskloof."

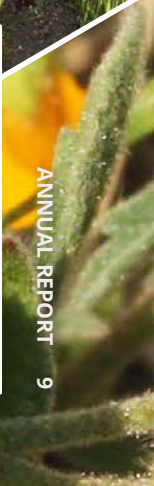
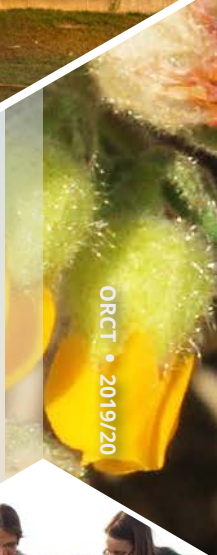
The ORCT will be using the existing old shed (adjacent to the research centre) from which to develop an additional sleeping area to accommodate larger groups, as well as a 'common room' for scholars, undergraduate students, and adult learners to attend presentations, lectures and practical lectures. A kitchen and dining area will accompany this extension in order to cater for visiting groups. During a second phase, a small room on the reserve will be converted into a living space for an intern: a position which the ORCT is currently seeking to fund. Phase 1 will begin in 2020.

Thank you to our donors

We've had donor support from a variety of sources in our awareness-raising work with farmers. We're grateful to the Ford Wildlife Foundation, for sponsoring our Ford bakkies to travel the landscape, and meet the farmers. We're also grateful to Sijnn Wines for providing their delicious wine as gifts to farmers we work with.

Our thanks also to all the donors who gave so generously during our crowdfunding campaign. These are:

AD van Hoogstraten
Amelia Genis
Anonymous
Arthur and Averil Cousins
Cathryn and Judith
Cornelia and Rainer Krug
Garth and Liz Hutton
Gunner, Ranger and Rafa
Herbert Raffaele
Julian and Madeline Reed
Lesley Richardson
Linden Morris
LoveGreen Communications
Mapula Trust
Marianne Soine
Nic Bladen
Odette Curtis-Scott
Robert McKenzie
Stuart Prior
The Sweets
Ute Schmiedel



Financial report ~as at February 2020

The accompanying summary financial statements, which comprise the summary statement of comprehensive income and statement of financial position for the year ended 29 February 2020, were derived from the audited annual financial statements of the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust for the year then ended.

Management's Responsibility for the Summary Annual Financial Statements:

Management is responsible for the preparation of the summary of the audited annual financial statements.

Auditors' Response:

We have been requested to judge whether the summary financial statements are consistent with the audited annual financial statements.

The summary financial statements were derived from the audited annual financial statements of the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust for the year ended 29 February 2020 by management and appear consistent.

HJ Nel

BVA Overberg Incorporated
Registered Auditors

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 29 FEBRUARY 2020

FIGURES IN RAND	2020	2019
ASSETS	R	R
Non-Current Assets		
Property, plant and equipment	323 847	389 242
Current Assets		
Trade and other receivables	3 219	3 057
Other financial assets	643 022	643 745
Cash and cash equivalents	649 194	348 134
TOTAL ASSETS	1 619 282	1 384 178
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Capital	1 008 523	1 370 753
Non-Current Liabilities		
Deferred income	585 352	-
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	25 407	13 425
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	1 619 282	1 384 178

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 FEBRUARY 2020

	2020	2019
Total income	3 029 253	2 140 553
Total expenditure	2 929 947	2 781 290
	99 306	-640 737
Accumulated funds at beginning of the year	1 370 753	2 011 490
Deferred income (Prior year deferred income disclosed separately)	-461 536	-
ACCUMULATED FUNDS TRANSFERRED TO NEXT YEAR	1 008 523	1 370 753

Donors & Partners of the ORCT

To our donors and partners who have supported us and worked with us throughout the year – a heartfelt thank you.



DONORS

- WWF South Africa
- Mapula Trust
- Marianne Soine
- Fynbos Trust
- Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust
- Ford Wildlife Foundation
- Ian & Sandy Liddle

PARTNERS

- SA Wingshooters
- CapeNature
- Birdlife South Africa
- Botanical Society
- Overberg Crane Group
- Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers
- Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association
- Sijnn Wines
- Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative
- University of Cape Town
- Flower Valley Conservation Trust
- Nuwejaars Wetlands Special Management Area
- Cape Peninsula University of Technology
- Nelson Mandela University
- Landbouweekblad

"While Renosterveld is in dire straits, so are hundreds of other ecosystems across the world, with several of these providing vital ecosystem services... The plight of our Renosterveld is indicative of what is happening to nature at the global scale."

~ Dr Odette Curtis-Scott



ORCT Staff

Dr Odette Curtis-Scott

Sharon King

Keir Lynch

Russell Haikney



ORCT Board of Trustees

Dirk van Papendorp

Lesley Richardson

Sean Privett

Prof Muthama Muasya

Christina Stewart

Contact us

Trust Director: Dr Odette Curtis-Scott

Phone: + 27 (0) 83 551 3341

Email: info@overbergrenosterveld.org.za

ORCT Postal Address: P.O. Box 27,
Napier, 7270

