ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

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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.

ORCT Staff & Trustees

Dr Odette Curtis-Scott, Director

Odette holds a PhD (2013) in Botany and an MSc Zoology (2005), both from the University of Cape Town (UCT), preceded by a B-Tech in Nature Conservation from Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). She managed the Black Harrier and Black Sparrowhawk Projects at UCT (including a stint at the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania, USA), before working for CapeNature, promoting their Stewardship Programme. At this time, she initiated Renosterveld research, which led to her establishing the ORCT in 2012. She also serves on the board of the Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency, and has been a committee member of the Fynbos Forum. She is passionate about the natural world and about sharing the wonders of Renosterveld with landowners to inspire change within this threatened ecosystem.

Grant Forbes, Extension Officer

Grant spent much of his early conservation years working in the Cape Floral Kingdom. He completed a B-Tech: Nature Conservation from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in 2009. Grant honed his skills working for the Overstrand Municipality, Flower Valley Conservation Trust and as Reserve Manager at Fernkloof Nature Reserve in Hermanus. In 2012, he joined CapeNature as a Nature Conservator. In order to grow further, he travelled to Jordan in the Middle East, for an aquaponics project which sought to develop alternative farming methods for desert areas. In 2020, Grant chose to return to South Africa, to join the ORCT as Extension Officer.

Sharon King, Office Manager

Sharon has worked as an Executive PA for many years in both the legal field and corporate world. She also ran her own cake-making/decorating business from home for a number of years, based in the town of Napier, in the Overberg. She is passionate about animals and is involved in animal rescue, in particular Greyhound rescue, adopting many Greyhounds that have been seriously injured during illegal practices. Sharon plays a critical role in the management of the ORCT's human resources, finance and administration.

Russell Haikney, Project Manager

Russell is Project Manager for the ORCT at Haarwegskloof, where he attends to the upkeep and maintenance of the buildings and reserve. He has a BSc in Animal Science, Nutrition and Breeding and farmed and managed dairy, sheep and beef cattle in areas such as the Eastern Cape and Ovamboland. He was also Ranch Manager for big ranches in Swaziland and Komatipoort from where he was transferred to Bredasdorp to manage sheep enterprises for twenty years. He went on to manage an organic farm enterprise outside Swellendam, before coming to work for the ORCT in 2019.

Keir Lynch

Our thanks to Keir Lynch, who left the employ of the ORCT during the past financial year. Keir was a wonderful asset to the team, serving as our Ecological Coordinator. We wish him all the best with his new venture.

ORCT Board of Trustees:

Dirk van Papendorp, Chair of the Board

Dirk holds a BSc (1986) and Honours (1989) degree in Agriculture. He is a successful commercial farmer in the Heidelberg region in the Overberg, and owns two adjacent farms: Voorstekop and Uitvlugt. Voorstekop was awarded the National Veld Trust Award, thanks to his care of the farm. He has registered the Renosterveld and Lowland Fynbos habitats on his farm as a Nature Reserve with CapeNature.

Lesley Richardson, Vice-Chair

Lesley has a BSc in Dietetics (1975, University of KZN), an Honours in Community Health (1984, UCT) and an MSc in Epidemiology (1990, University of Stellenbosch). She first worked in the field of community health and nutrition for 15 years. In 1992 she moved into the conservation sector, working for WWF South Africa. She joined Flower Valley Conservation Trust as Executive Director in 2003, and finally retired from the Trust in 2020. She currently serves as Coordinator for the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative.

Sean Privett

Sean (MSc Botany, UCT) is a botanist, Director of the Grootbos Foundation, founder and Chair of the Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy and a Trustee of the Flower Valley Conservation Trust. Sean runs the Green Futures Horticulture and Life Skills College, as well as Growing the Future sustainable agriculture projects at Grootbos Nature Reserve. He has written the definitive guide to the flora of the Walker Bay region, and is co-author on the 'Field Guide to Renosterveld of the Overberg'.

Prof Muthama Muasya

Prof Muthama Muasya holds a BSc in Botany & Zoology (Moi University, 1992), an MPhil in Plant Taxonomy (Moi University, 1993) and a PhD in Systematics (University of Reading, 1998). He has extensive postdoctoral experience in England (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), USA (Rutgers University) and Belgium (KU Leuven) as well as research experience at the National Museums of Kenya. Since 2006 he has held an academic position at UCT, and has published over 100 scientific outputs.

Christina Stewart

Christina was born and bred in the Overberg and has lived here most of her life. She and her husband, Billy, farm on a fourth generation family grain and sheep farm where she grew up. Here she learned to know and love various Renosterveld plants and animals. Christina graduated with a BA degree in Social Sciences from the University of Stellenbosch in 2001 and worked in a corporate environment, before giving birth to her twins. She is also the Director of their farming enterprise.

Letters from leadership

Message from the Chairperson

It has been an unusual year – accompanied by good and bad. In some ways, the environment had a moment to rest, with a drop in pollution. In other ways, many people turned increasingly to nature to provide them a livelihood – often illegally so.

Sadly, this is also the case in Renosterveld. This will go down as the year in which the impacts of illegal ploughing were truly highlighted. This shows that our work is far from done, and that we need to continue educating farmers on the value Renosterveld plays.

As a result of Covid-19, our team may not have been able to meet as frequently with farmers as in the past. However, they were able to do more fieldwork without being disturbed by administration and meetings. And there was no better time to get into the field – thanks to one of the most superb spring Renosterveld displays in years, which the ORCT could document and capture.

The Board also had to find new and innovative ways of operating in a Covid world, and instead of counting against us, we've managed to develop systems that save time and costs.

Coming up in the next year, we'll focus on the core business of the Trust. That includes, whenever it is safe and possible to do so, working with farmers to bring them into our conservation easement programme. Also, we continue to work on securing enough funds to support our long-term goals – a struggle even when global funds and resources aren't depleted by Covid-related projects. We are proud of Odette, our Director, and her team who constantly try and find new ways to procure more funds.

We also look forward to another wonderful year in the veld – thanks to good rains in May. It's likely to truly bring these landscapes to life. And surely there is no better opportunity to convince farmers of the need to protect this beautiful habitat.

Dirk van Papendorp

Message from the Director

The year 2020 is one that most of us are likely to remember for the rest of our lives. Parts of it were like a futuristic science-fiction movie – something that we could not have imagined, even in our wildest nightmares. The ORCT, however, is privileged to report that we came out essentially unscathed. We acknowledge how incredibly fortunate we are to be able to say this. Despite lockdown restrictions in the earlier part of the year, we were able to resume our responsibilities for the remainder of the year and continued to make notable strides towards conserving our precious Renosterveld.

A highlight for us was welcoming Grant Forbes as our new Extension Officer. Grant has brought passion, dedication and an incredible work ethic with him and we are thrilled to have him on our team. Because we were able to persist with our Easement Programme, we had another bumper year and signed an additional 1800 ha of Renosterveld into conservation in perpetuity! We also had an incredible spring and enjoyed a severe overdose of botanical beauty, thanks to the fantastic, much-needed winter rains, which broke the back of the five-year drought that had brought much suffering to farmers and the veld.

Thus, for Renosterveld and its custodians, 2020 was a very memorable year – for all the 'right' reasons. Well, almost all of them. It was also the year in which a very harrowing study took place: A study by Glenn Moncrieff (published in early 2021) revealed that at least 500ha of Renosterveld has been unlawfully ploughed in just three years. The study highlights the fact that despite the popular belief that the small amount of Renosterveld remaining has no arable-land value and is therefore 'safe' from ploughing is simply untrue. We continue to lose virgin Renosterveld at alarming rates and urgent action is required to stop this from happening any further.

Dr Odette Curtis-Scott

Message from the Extension Officer

The well-known American biologist EO Wilson said that life's diversity is dependent on a network of natural resources and relationships between species. Systems that are thriving boast diversity, show higher productivity and are flexible to change. If these systems are impacted by altering the network of resources and the inter-species relationships, the diversity is reduced and they become vulnerable to change, especially to the impacts of humans. Organisms that depend on these systems being intact face the threat of extinction.

This is unfortunately true of the Overberg, as we live with the pressure of having to produce food and sustain livelihoods. This has resulted in a notable rate of loss here. South Africa can't afford this loss of biodiversity. Neither can the Overberg. We've probably already gone beyond the point of no return in some areas.

Still, I believe there is hope. This past year I have seen the full spectrum; from deteriorated veld and little fragments that are so isolated to well-connected fragments of veld that boasts life and diversity, a glimmer of what once was stretched out from Botriver to Heidelberg and beyond. I've experienced the Overberg spring in Renosterveld at its best.

And I've met wonderful farmers who manage their veld well, and who try to find the balance between conservation and production. Many of these farmers are now managing their Renosterveld with ecological objectives in mind, trying to curb the loss that we face in the Overberg.

Grant Forbes

The launch

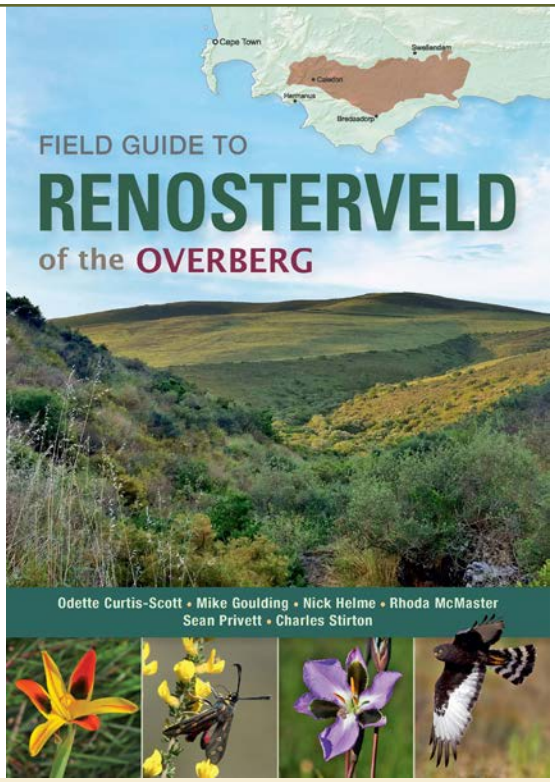
First Overberg Renosterveld field guide

The first ever Overberg Renosterveld field guide was published and released last year. The 'Field Guide to Renosterveld of the Overberg' took five years of extensive research to complete. It's written by ORCT Director, Odette Curtis-Scott, Mike Goulding, Nick Helme, Rhoda McMaster, Sean Privett and Prof Charles Stirton.

The guide showcases one of the world's most threatened habitats, which has also been greatly understudied. The book includes 980 Renosterveld plants and 140 animals that live in this habitat – from mammals and birds, to insects and reptiles.

It was published by Struik and was officially launched at several events last year. During a Zoom event, organised by Struik and the Botanical Society of South Africa, Odette spoke about her goal for the book. "It's my dream that this book brings Renosterveld to life – both to those who simply want to spend time enjoying and exploring this rich ecosystem, and to those who hold its future in their hands, especially the farmers of the Overberg," she said.

The book was funded by the Mapula Trust and is endorsed by the Botanical Society of South Africa.



What this guide means for the farmers

It was also introduced to farmers during four farmers' days held in the Overberg in 2020. Farmers who have signed conservation easements with the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust were awarded copies donated by the Botanical Society of South Africa at these mini book launches.

Odette says knowledge and information can change negative attitudes towards Renosterveld, which is the richest bulb habitat on Earth. "We see the difference it can make to people when they learn more about Renosterveld – which is perceived as the 'ugly' sister of Fynbos and has been neglected and misunderstood for too long. But I've seen attitudes change with so many farmers we work with, as they spend time enjoying and exploring Renosterveld."

According to farmer Matthys Streicher, who signed an easement with the ORCT, "There's still so much that I would like to learn, and that I would like my children to learn about Renosterveld. So this is a great guide; it's like a bird book that you can use and take with you to the veld in order to learn more about the veld."

David Trafford, owner of Sijnn Wines, who also signed an easement, said, "For most people including novices like myself, Renosterveld is just grey bush with beautiful plants in between if you look carefully. But it's nice to have some source of information to look up things and understand better this incredible veld type."

The guide gives the history of Renosterveld, the human-induced impacts and the current-day context. Odette says, "We hope to share not only the plight of Renosterveld, but also the many wonders and secrets it holds through this book. It may have taken five years to write this book, but it's many lifetimes of expertise and experience of Renosterveld that went into bringing this book to life."

Renosterveld easements: For the

Another 1820 hectares of Renosterveld were included in the conservation estate in the financial year, to be protected in perpetuity. Six farmers (or farming families) in the Overberg signed conservation easements with the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust during the year. That brings the total hectares signed into conservation easements to around 3500 hectares.

These conservation champion farmers are:

Neethling Dippenaar (Diptka Renosterveld Reserve)

The Diptka Renosterveld Reserve includes 328 hectares of Critically Endangered Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld and Rûens Silcrete Renosterveld. The Renosterveld patch could connect up with other protected Renosterveld reserves, creating a 'corridor' for plants and animals to move. It's home to a number of threatened Renosterveld species, such as *Freesia leichtlinii* and *Liparia striata*. It's also a paradise for birders, recording more than 130 bird species such as Verreaux's Eagle, Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk and Black Harrier.

Hennie Eksteen (Melke Houte Bosch & Napkysmond Renosterveld Reserves)

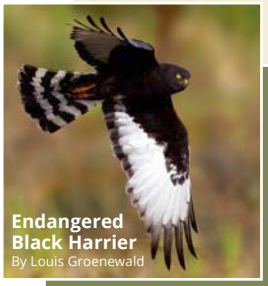
Hennie actually only realised the value of his Renosterveld when he sought permission to convert some patches of previously ploughed lands into arable land again. During the process of obtaining permission, and while engaging with the ORCT throughout the process, he started to appreciate the diversity of his Renosterveld. "The assessment took two years. And during that time, I got to see the nature and the animals in my Renosterveld, and it just became more important and prettier to me," Hennie says.

As a result, Hennie signed two easements, to include 876 hectares of Critically Endangered Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld under this protection. Hennie adds, "I saw that the ORCT wanted to enter into a relationship with farmers. That was the attitude with which Odette and Keir approached us; to work in partnership."

Sijnn Wines (Sijnn Wines Renosterveld Conservation Area)

For more than a decade, Sijnn Wines owner, David Trafford worked with the ORCT to protect the patch of Renosterveld on the wine farm. He says, "We saw this beautiful piece of Renosterveld when we bought the farm in 2003. When we came to build the winery itself, we wanted to build on previously ploughed land. But there was some Renosterveld on the land too. And that's how I got involved with the ORCT."

This led to the signing of the easement to protect 30 hectares of Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld and Rûens Silcrete Renosterveld in perpetuity. Sijnn has also created a walking trail through their Renosterveld patch. David says, "We also get some assistance and direction in how to manage the land, so we can do a better job of looking after this conservation area for the betterment of the environment and future generations."


Endangered Black Harrier
By Louis Groenewald

Protecting Renosterveld to protect Black Harriers

It's a joy to witness a Black Harrier swooping over Renosterveld landscapes in the Overberg. Black Harriers rely on Renosterveld and other Fynbos habitats for foraging and breeding. But as land transformation for agriculture and development increases, so our Black Harrier numbers have dwindled – to the extent that there are fewer than 1000 mature individuals left today. Their Red Data status has escalated from Vulnerable to Endangered – how long will it be before they reach Critically Endangered status?

The ORCT protects Renosterveld to protect all the life which is dependent on this habitat for survival. The Black Harrier is therefore an important flagship species for us. For this reason, the construction of the new Excelsior Wind Farm was of grave concern, as windfarms elsewhere in the country had already caused several Black Harrier deaths (through collisions). What's more, a harrier breeding site had been recorded near the Excelsior site.

Our team focused on monitoring this site more closely over the last two years and have discovered that this site in fact holds the highest density of breeding harriers in the Overberg. The ORCT has been engaging with BTE Renewables since the windfarm was approved and despite our initial concerns, we have fostered a positive and close-working relationship with the company. BTE Renewables has committed to the employment of 10 bird monitors, on a daily basis, seven days a week, to monitor all aerial bird movement for the lifespan of the windfarm (20 years). Observers, led by the competent and passionate Clarissa Mars, radio-in any species of concern to the control room to call for 'shutdown on demand'. Any turbines that are within the flying bird's path are shut down immediately. This method has worked so well that not a single species of conservation concern has been killed by the turbines to date, a huge achievement for BTE Renewables and its team.

In order to assess how vulnerable the nearby breeding harriers are to the windfarm, we partnered with the Overberg Crane Group and Dr Rob Simmons (UCT Research Affiliate) to buy two satellite tags and fit them to breeding males. Two males were trapped and tagged by Odette, Grant and Rob in November 2020. Funds secured from the Tygerberg Bird Club will allow us to buy another three tags which we will fit to breeding birds in 2021.

So far, the satellite tags show that the two males spent most of their time foraging in and around the wind turbines. This remains a worry, and the ORCT continues to monitor their movements and work with BTE Renewables to find ways to protect them. We continually discuss new technologies and mitigation measures that can be considered for keeping our raptors safe in future.

flowers AND the birds

The Streicher family (Uitvlucht Renosterveld Reserve)

The Streicher family's connection to Renosterveld started decades ago. The late Simon Streicher noticed a population of *Polhilia brevicalyx* on his farm and brought it to the attention of the scientists. He started monitoring the population – and saw it dwindle from 15 plants, to just three over a period of 15 years.

That's when the ORCT became involved. Together we went in search of more *Polhillia brevicalyx* populations on and around the Uitvlucht farm. We found around 100 plants altogether, with at least half the population on the Streicher's farm. While Simon Streicher passed away before the family officially signed up, today 270 hectares of Renosterveld and watercourses are protected by the conservation easement.

Thys Swart (Koloniesplaas and Kleindam Renosterveld Reserve)

Through the Koloniesplaas conservation easement, 88 hectares of Renosterveld are now protected, most of this consisting of Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld. This Renosterveld patch is also an important bird haven, providing a home to Southern Black Korhaan, Karoo Korhaan and Denham's Bustard.

Kleindam is co-owned by Rossouw and Thys Swart. In this easement, 143 hectares are protected forever, consisting of Vulnerable Cape Lowlands Freshwater Ecosystems, Endangered Central Rûens Shale Renosterveld and Endangered Western Central Rûens Shale Renosterveld. It houses incredible diversity from small mammals, birds, reptiles and plants and is one of the most unique remnants of wetland Renosterveld remaining.

Denham's Bustard
By Bernard DUPONT

Rossouw Swart (Koesani and Kleindam Renosterveld Reserve)

The Koesani Easement conserves 85 hectares of Critically Endangered Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld, and Rûens Silcrete Renosterveld. It includes important watercourses and quartz patches – which also provide a sanctuary for endemic birds.

Our thanks to WWF South Africa and the Ford Wildlife Foundation for their support to sign these conservation easements, and the ongoing support from the Mapula Trust and the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust.

The spring of 2020: One to

Take an extremely rainy winter (following a five-year drought in the Overberg) and combine it with the perfect spring weather, and the result is a Renosterveld spring season that hasn't been seen for decades.

The spring of 2020 produced a floral show more prolific than could ever have been imagined.

The ORCT realised that given the magnitude of the spring show, in order to undertake our spring ecological surveys, we needed help. We were fortunate to get support from botanist Petra Broddle, who stayed at our Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve, and who helped us survey all our Renosterveld Reserves (those farmers who have signed conservation easements) over a particularly long spring season.

According to Petra, some of the best sites were those where controlled burns had taken place in recent years. She says, "We visited a number of interesting burn sites across the Overberg and at one counted 10 different species of Hermannia. These tiny yellow or red flowers resemble miniature roses."

Spider Lilies, Orchids and special succulents

A highlight for both Petra and our Extension Officer, Grant Forbes, was the Spider Orchid *(Bartholina burmanniana)*, as well as many of the other Spider Lily species, such as *Wurmbea marginata* and *Wurmbea punctata*.

The *Gibbaeums* also lit up the landscape with their pink flowers, after poor displays over the past five years. Grant says, "The flowering *Gibbaeums* really stole the show. They are extremely range-restricted, and can only be found on quartz patches. In fact, the pink mat of flowering *Gibbaeums* completely hid the rest of the plants – such was the show they put on for us."

The spring also enriched our ORCT knowledge and understanding of many of our conservation easement sites. Working with those farmers who have signed easements, this new knowledge allows us to implement even more targeted management interventions. Grant says, "We found Renosterveld species at many of these sites that we didn't know occur here. We've come to understand more of these systems even better than before."

And our very own Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve dished up a spring season to be remembered. Now we watch those sites that have burnt with interest, to see how these patches will continue to recover, and to see how the diversity develops over the coming years.

Fascinating finds during our bioblitzes

Every year, the ORCT field staff aim to undertake bioblitzes on a number of our easement sites. Our partners-in-crime on these exciting field days are Cliff and Suretha Dorse – an incredible husband-wife couple of naturalists, who both work for the City of Cape Town's conservation departments. We are privileged to spend a couple of weekends a year scouring Renosterveld habitats with them, while benefitting from their in-depth knowledge and expertise on spotting and identifying the incredible critters which live in these remnants.

A bioblitz involves a group of naturalists or biologists from different fields (in other words, with different expertise or interests) surveying an area to identify and photograph or record as much as they possibly can (from plants to fungi, to invertebrates and large mammals). This contributes to the biodiversity inventory for each property. However, because we keep our blitzes small and because we spend much of our spring 'botanising' and birding, we focus mostly on amphibians, reptiles and small mammals for our bioblitzes.

This year, we focused on two sites in the Central Rûens: Kleindam, a wetland site at the headwaters of the Sout River near Rietpoel, and Keykas, a stretch of veld along the Sout River near Klipdale. We spent five incredible days in the field with Cliff and Suretha and are so grateful for their knowledge. We were also joined for part of the blitzes by Grant and Brent Reed, brothers from Botswana who run Letaka Safaris. Their knowledge of all things living is on a par with the Dorses. What an enriching experience, to share our special places with incredible naturalists.

remember for Renosterveld

Some of our favourite sightings:

Southern Caco *(Cacosternum australis)*

This is a recently-described addition to the genus, comprising small, elongated frogs.

Bark Scorpion *(Uroplectes lineatus)*

This species can be found under rocks or under loose bark. Their sting can be painful, but is not deadly under normal circumstances.

Cross-marked Whip Snake *(Psammophis crucifer)*

A shy snake that's only mildly venomous, and harmless to humans. It feeds on lizards and skinks, but may also take rodents, birds and even other snakes.

Spotted Harlequin Snake *(Homoroselaps lacteus)*

This docile, colourful snake spends most of its life underground, in deserted termite mounds or under rocks. It hunts Legless Skinks and Worm Snakes, and is only mildly venomous.

Delalande's Beaked Blind Snake *(Rhinotyphlops lalandei)*

Long-tailed Seps *(Tetradactylus tetradactylus)*

Black Thread Snake *(Leptotyphlops nigricans)*

Common Slug-eater *(Duberria lutrix)*

Large Reddish-Grey Musk Shrew *(Crocidura cyanea)*

Baboon Spiders and other spiders

Renosterveld boasts a wealth of beautiful spiders. Baboon Spiders represent the 'Tarantulas of Africa'. They are generally rare and live in silk-lined burrows under rocks. They eat scorpions and even mice and geckos. But they are docile spiders who require serious provoking before biting (they are not venomous).

Baboon Spider *(Harpactira cafreriana)*

Orange Lungless Spider *(Caponia sp.)*

Velvet Spider *(Eresidae sp.)*

Solitary flies and bees

A number of solitary flies and bees pollinate Renosterveld plants, such as Hover Flies, Bee Flies and many species of solitary bee.

Latest Renosterveld Research: The outcomes

While Covid-restrictions and strict lockdowns at the universities put many of our collaborating post-graduate student projects on hold, two students were able to complete their studies (remotely) and contribute substantially to the field of taxonomy (the naming and classifying of organisms).

Taxonomy is an important field, as without knowing which species occur where and how they are related, we cannot determine the conservation status of the individual species. It is also an ever-changing science: as genetic sequencing advances, so the studies reveal more about how organisms are related.

Revising the genus *Thesium*

Daniel Zhigila revised the genus *Thesium* – an overlooked group of plants belonging to the family *Santalaceae* or 'Sandlewoods' – for his PhD study. Through a combination of examining herbarium specimens, as well as undertaking his own extensive fieldwork to collect additional specimens, Daniel (working with Prof Anthony Verboom and Prof Muthama Muasya) was able to describe and name seven species new to science (four of which are found in Overberg Renosterveld) and revise the classification of the genus.

Thesium quatzicolum (male plant)

Thesium nigroperianthum

Thesium spinosum

Daniel was born and raised in Nigeria and worked as a Graduate Assistant with the Botany Department at Gombe State University in Nigeria, before enrolling for his PhD at the University of Cape Town. Since completing his PhD and publishing three scientific papers from his work, he has been offered a one-year post-doc post at UCT. We look forward to welcoming Daniel back to the Overberg in 2021!

Polhillia curtisiae

Describing and revising *Polhillia* species

Brian du Preez, a passionate botanist from Cape Town specialising in legumes, undertook his master's degree on the taxonomy of *Polhillia* – a small genus of legumes (Fabaceae family), now comprising 12 species – all of which are threatened. These striking pea-plants tend to be small to medium-sized shrubs with a soft, grey or silvery appearance and typical yellow pea flowers. They are all range-restricted and Red-listed.

Since half the *Polhillia* species occur in the Eastern Rûens of the Overberg, the ORCT played a significant role in assisting with collections and field sites for Brian's study. Not only were 'new' species described in this work (in which he collaborated with supervisors Leanne Dreyer, Charles Stirton and Muthama Muasya) but some of the 'known' species were also revised. After graduating from his MSc, he immediately registered for a PhD and is now revising the genus *Indigofera* – another legume (mostly with pink, reddish or purple flowers) with a high species diversity.

A new *Drosanthemum* for the Overberg

Drosanthemum are perhaps some of the most well-known of South Africa's vygies. A new paper by Klak *et al.* describes several new taxa in the genus *Drosanthemum*, including a new species found in Overberg Renosterveld. This species was in fact discovered almost simultaneously by ORCT Director, Odette Curtis-Scott in the Overberg and Peter Bruyns in Riversdale (co-authors on the paper).

The species has now been named *Drosanthemum overbergense*. It's rare – currently only known from three sites, and it has been recommended that it be listed as Critically Endangered on the Red List of South African Plants.

Illegal ploughing drives Renosterveld closer to extinction

Agriculture has historically been one of the greatest threats to Renosterveld. But new research shows that still today, agricultural activities in the Overberg are continuing to drive this habitat closer to extinction.

Recent research by Glenn Moncrieff of SAEON (South African Environmental Observation Network), published in the journal *Remote Sensing*, found that between 2016 and 2020, a total of 478.6 hectares of Renosterveld was lost to illegal ploughing. This loss equals a total of 0.72% of surviving Overberg Renosterveld. Given that only around five percent of Renosterveld remains from its original extent, this illegal destruction represents a significant loss of biodiversity.

Glenn's research made use of remote sensing. This allowed him to see where vegetation losses occurred, and more or less when. About half of the losses could be dated to within two weeks of them taking place. And 87% could be dated to within two months. Most of these losses took place during the Overberg's ploughing seasons, just before planting and harvesting of cereal crops.

The value of Renosterveld patches

Given that so little Renosterveld remains today, the areas that are illegally ploughed are themselves generally not large, and are often fragmented. Still, research shows us that even fragmented patches of Renosterveld are home to significant biodiversity – which includes the wildlife that rely on these natural areas.

Ploughing of virgin Renosterveld is illegal. And land that has not been cultivated for 10 years or more is viewed as 'virgin land,' thus it is also unlawful to remove old lands without a permit. Obtaining a permit to plough old lands (over 10 years) is possible, subject to an ecological assessment.

The new technology and very clever algorithms have meant that satellite imagery can be monitored and analysed on a daily basis, if required. This makes it all the more difficult to hide unlawful activities from conservation authorities.

The ORCT's stance on the ploughing of Renosterveld

According to Odette Curtis-Scott, "We work with many gems in the farming community who care deeply for their Renosterveld. We're proud to call them partners, as we work together to protect this habitat for our future generations. There are also many more farmers who we are yet to meet who also care greatly. This gives us so much hope."

However, there are some who continue to exploit every possible corner of their land. Despite the ORCT's continuous drive to engage with landowners, we have not managed to alter the hardened hearts of those who feel it is their right to do whatever they please with their land. Nor has our small team managed to 'reach' all landowners to show them the beauty of their Renosterveld. This undermines our conservation gains and positive achievements, and frustrates those landowners who have committed to conserving their veld.

Over the last four years, while we were in the process of signing up over 3500 ha of Renosterveld into easements, the equivalent of a sixth of this was lost to illegal ploughing. Odette says, "This not only emphasises the urgency of our work and the need for us to increase our capacity, but also the need for a radical, fresh approach by government departments who need to strengthen their resolve on this issue. If we are to stop this extinction spiral, we will need urgent change."

Financial report ~ as at February 2021

The accompanying summary financial statements, which comprise the summary statement of comprehensive income and statement of financial position for the year ended 28 February 2021, 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 28 February 2021 by management and appear consistent.

HS Nel

BVA Overberg Incorporated
Registered Auditors

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2021

FIGURES IN RAND	2021	2020
ASSETS	R	R
Non-Current Assets		
Property, plant and equipment	312 639	323 847
Current Assets		
Trade and other receivables	3 370	3 219
Other financial assets	1 416 323	643 022
Cash and cash equivalents	592 451	649 194
TOTAL ASSETS	**2 324 783**	**1 619 282**
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Capital	1 367 477	1 008 523
Non-Current Liabilities		
Deferred income	930 017	585 352
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	27 289	25 407
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	**2 324 783**	**1 619 282**

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2021

	2021	2020
Total income	4 312 808	3 029 253
Total expenditure	3 953 854	2 929 947
	358 954	99 306
Accumulated funds at beginning of the year	1 008 523	1 370 753
Deferred income (Prior year deferred income disclosed separately)	-	-461 536
ACCUMULATED FUNDS TRANSFERRED TO NEXT YEAR	**1 367 477**	**1 008 523**

"We continue to lose virgin Renosterveld at alarming rates and urgent action is required to stop this from happening any further. We need all partners to play a role."

~ Dr Odette Curtis-Scott

Donors & Partners

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

DONORS

BTE Renewables
Ford Wildlife Foundation
Fynbos Trust
Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust
Ian & Sandy Liddle
Mapula Trust
Marianne Soine
National Lotteries Commisison
WWF South Africa

PARTNERS

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

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