



Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust

Trading as Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust

Annual Report 2015-2016



Dedicated to saving Critically Endangered Renosterveld ecosystems from extinction

www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za

NPO # 124-296



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Note: We are now trading as the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT).





OUR VISION

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

OUR OBJECTIVES

- * Secure the largest and most intact remnants of Renosterveld for conservation in perpetuity through a combination of land purchase and Conservation Easements.
- * Link critical fragments through the restoration and formal conservation of corridors (emphasising watercourses).
- * Spread awareness amongst landowners in a way that affects changing attitudes and management.
- * Coordinate and partake in collaborative research on Renosterveld ecology and management.

PATRON

Mr F. W. de Klerk, Former South African President

BOARD

CHAIRPERSON: Dirk van Papendorp

VICE-CHAIRPERSON: Lesley Richardson

Alan Jeftha

Sean Privett

Prof Muthama Muasya

STAFF

DIRECTOR: Dr Odette Curtis

PA to the DIRECTOR: Sharon King

PROJECT MANAGER for WATERCOURSE RESTORATION PROJECT: Keir Lynch

RENOSTERVELD RESERVE MANAGER: Jannie Groenewald

SPECIAL ADVISORS TO THE BOARD

Dr Rob Brett, Fauna & Flora International, UK

Prof Charles Stirton, UCT Associate, UK





Note from our Director, Dr Odette Curtis

"The conservation of resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem it will avail us little to solve all others." Theodore Roosevelt

Achieving conservation impacts of the magnitude required to save an ecosystem as severely threatened as Renosterveld is a mammoth task—but it is one that we remain committed to. If we are to retain the critical ecological processes that contribute towards the health and well-being of our natural and farming landscapes, we need to address the issues facing this environment with a continued sense of urgency and vigour. We hope that hard work and dedication will continue to take us closer to our ultimate goal: To halt the extinction spiral facing one of the most threatened habitats on Earth.

Looking back on four years I believe we can continue to feel incredibly proud of where we are today. In this short time, 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 conservation easements. We have raised enough money to establish a Watercourse Restoration Project at a landscape scale across the wheat-belt. We have produced a high-quality booklet for landowners which outlines priority management guidelines and also acts as a mini field guide to Renosterveld, while we are also in the process of writing a field guide to Overberg Renosterveld which will include over 800 plant species. We have attracted close to 10 post-graduate students who are undertaking important ecological research in Renosterveld and we are working collaboratively on several research projects with University Professors. Most importantly we have won the hearts and ears of many landowners in the Overberg who are now thinking differently about the value of their Renosterveld. We are also very pleased to announce that we have secured funding for our operational costs from 2016 to the end of 2019. I would like to especially thank the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, the Mapula Trust and Oren Taylor for collectively assuring us of this funding. We are so honoured that these organisations and individuals are prepared to demonstrate such confidence in the work we are doing.

While it is always preferable to celebrate successes, we sadly need to acknowledge that Renosterveld remnants are still being degraded and removed on a regular basis: our message regarding the importance of preserving these wildlife refugia is becoming increasingly urgent. Our aim over the next few years is to see that our efforts to engage with farmers translate into an increasing number of Renosterveld hectares being set aside and managed for conservation in perpetuity. We look forward to this journey with our friends and followers... thank you once again for helping us get this far.

Work hard in silence... let your success be your noise.





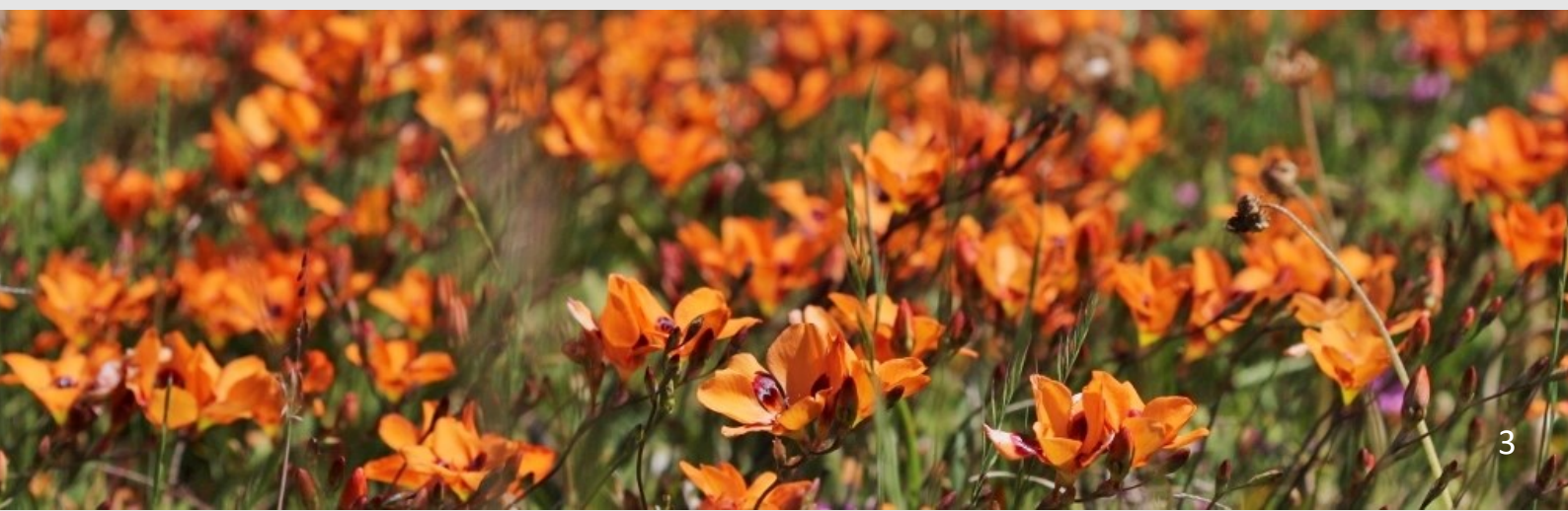
Note from our Chairperson, Dirk van Papendorp

Although conservation has been a buzz word on the National agenda for the past five years, the impact that this trend has had on public opinion has been variable. Globally a lot of effort has been put into practising sustainable conservation, but in South Africa conservation is still highly fragmented across different spheres. Travelling around the countryside one sees that private nature reserves are popping up everywhere, but alongside these big companies continue to open up new mines with little or no regard for water conservation or the pollution of our sensitive river systems. Closer to home we are lucky to still function in a more rural environment. Agriculture, being our main economic driver in the Western Cape, also has a vested interest in conservation, demonstrated through the increasing practise of minimum-till farming aimed at combating the looming impacts of climate change.

We as a Trust are lucky and proud to be working amongst the farmers who own the renosterveld that we are working to preserve. Working with like-minded people makes our task less complicated, but it is still a big responsibility. Delivering our renosterveld conservation message gets easier as farmers get to know our plight and our people. The mini field guide we have produced and distributed amongst farmers should make our work part of every Overberg farm family. A lot of effort has also gone into attending farmers' days, farmers' meetings and giving talks to various conservation authorities to link onto the work they are doing.

We are particularly proud of our fledgling project: the *Watercourse Restoration Project*, which has started out with a bang. I have, since the inception of the Trust, felt that watercourses (which also act as renosterveld corridors) should be a conservation priority for the ORCT, as every farm has a little kloofie or stream which plays a critical role in the health and well-being of our farming landscapes. Farmers know their watercourses well as these often provide an important water source during dry summer months, while also providing important habitat for gamebirds throughout the year. This project aims to highlight the importance of best practise for conserving this natural habitat and will assist us with engaging with many more crucial farmers.

A great thank you to our director and staff for the efforts they have put in over the last two years to secure funding for this as well as the entities and individuals that support our work. Without you it would not have been possible to keep up the good work. Also many thanks to every student who has showed an interest in renosterveld conservation and whose studies are helping us to develop a better understanding of how we need to work in the landscape. A big thank you also to my board that, although from different spheres of life, keeps on believing in what we do and helps to create a united front to further Renosterveld conservation.



2015/16 Highlights



Additional developments on our Renosterveld Reserve

In mid-2015 we received an incredibly generous donation from a philanthropic donor to renovate the old barn on the Haarwegskloof homestead, adjacent to our Renosterveld Centre. This old building (originally built from clay bricks and mud) was an old milking shed (dairy). In late 2015 we completed its transformation into beautiful self-catering accommodation which we are marketing for tourism. It comprises three spacious bedrooms, two bathrooms, a warm and richly-decorated open plan kitchen / lounge area with a large fireplace clad with local stone. For more information visit www.overbergrenosterveld.org.za/accommodation. The ORCT will be marketing this accommodation more aggressively over the next year as it represents an important source of income for the management and maintenance of the Reserve and Centre.

The adjacent Research & Visitor Centre has now been filled with bunk beds and single beds, so that larger groups of students and others wanting to 'rough it' a little more can make use of it. We have to date hosted several student groups, small research workshops and individual post-graduate students as well as a FGASA (Field Guides Association of Southern Africa) course at the Centre.



Production of a Renosterveld booklet for farmers



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 are being distributed amongst landowners and other interested groups.





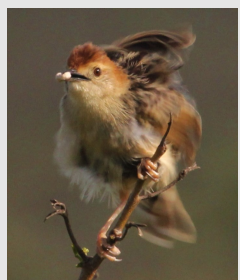
Watercourse Restoration and Conservation Project

Ecological Restoration Background

Restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of veld that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed. Due to the high costs of restoration it is always better to prevent damage before it becomes difficult to repair. The benefits of restoring veld to a natural or pre-degraded condition is that the land will require less management effort when intact than in its transformed condition.

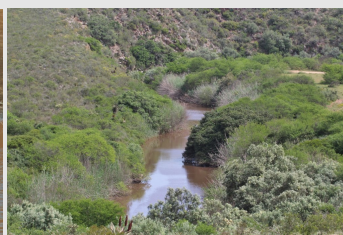
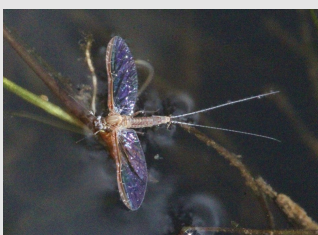
Watercourse Spatial Planning

Spatial Planning for prioritised watercourses has been conducted using GIS software and systematic conservation planning initiatives such as Critical Biodiversity Area Maps and National Freshwater Ecosystem Prioritisation Areas to ensure that conservation targets will be met in the project implementation.



Watercourse Assessment and Setting Management Objectives

Site Assessments have been conducted on various properties to quantify the biodiversity value, water sample quality and the development of management plans. The biodiversity assessments include botanical assessments, faunal assessments of avifaunal, mammalian, amphibian and reptilian populations on site and threatened species are prioritised for future monitoring. Water samples are collected on site and tested in partnership with the Breede Gouritz Catchment Management Agency to provide an indication of the water quality within the systems and is coupled with MiniSASS micro-invertebrate assessments to provide an ecological benchmark for the species diversity within the system.



In depth assessment of management objectives relating to Fire, Alien Vegetation, Soil Erosion as well as Livestock and Wildlife Management Programmes are assessed, mapped and prioritised. This information is then used for the development of management plans for the landowner and budget creation to prioritise management interventions as well as provision of financial assistance to landowners to institute the required restoration activities.

This process has led to a lot of awareness creation in extension and interaction with landowners and farmer associations and will be utilised to ensure that conservation targets may be met through the negotiation of Conservation Easements on the farms.



A new partnership: the Overberg Crane Group

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 OLC'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. (Excerpt from blog by Zoë Poulsen).



Patrons and Ambassadors

The ORCT recently embarked on an effort to attract a Patron, as well as some additional Ambassadors, who could promote our work and give us their 'stamp of approval.' Firstly, we are honoured to have former SA president, Mr FW de Klerk as our Patron, who says: *"I have chosen to be Patron for The Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust because I see a genuine commitment and an extreme passion for this important cause amongst its founders."*

Additionally we have a number of Ambassadors that we would like to acknowledge: Valiant Swart, much-loved South African musician says about the ORCT: *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.'*

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.'*

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

Oren Taylor is one of the longest term supporters of the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust. South African by birth, after moving to the UK in 2000 he built a successful career in private equity, software development and business. He first became known to the Trust after placing the winning bid at an auction run by Fauna and Flora International to name the newly discovered *Hesperantha kiaratayloriae* after his daughter. Oren says: *"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 is about us and our future. Humankind's future."*



Exciting finds in the field



'New' Notobubon species discovered

An unknown species from the Apiaceae family (i.e. the same family as carrot and celery) was confirmed as being 'rediscovered' to science by one of the experts on the group, Dr Anthony Magee. This straggly, bright green shrub is not much to look at but it has the most incredible anise-aroma when the leaves are crushed. In describing this species and examining old type specimens of what was previously (incorrectly) called *Notobubon striatum*, it became clear that this 'new' species was in fact *N. striatum* and that what botanists have been calling *N. striatum* to date is in fact *N. collinum*. The paper describing this 'new' species has been published by Magee, Van-Wyk and Curtis in *Phytotaxa*.



New Lachenalia species discovered

We also had the privilege of discovering yet another new species on our Renosterveld Reserve: a beautiful pink and white bulb belonging to the Hyacinth family. We have 'sold' the naming rights of this pretty little flower to Oren Taylor, the ORCT's longest-standing and most supportive philanthropic donor. Once the expert on this group, Graham Duncan, has published the new name we will announce it.



Large population of Endangered Moraea comptonii located

Almost as exciting as discovering new species is finding large populations of severely threatened species in areas previously unexplored by botanists. We were therefore thrilled when our surveys in some extensive remnants of Western Rûens Shale Renosterveld where we found a large population of well over 1000 plants of the Endangered and strikingly beautiful *Moraea comptonii*. This relatively large *Moraea* is variable in colour and can be either orange and yellow or yellow and green.



Redfins found in Rûens rivers

Part of the Green Trust-funded Watercourse Restoration Project has been to undertake SASS (South African Scoring System) surveys of the watercourses and rivers running through the Rûens crop lands and Renosterveld remnants. The most exciting find has been the discovery of a Redfin Minnow in the Klein Sout River—Redfins are a group of severely threatened freshwater fish. Previously no Redfins had ever been recorded in the Overberg wheatbelt—and there is one relatively new species (still in the process of being recorded) that occurs in the Heuningnes River on the Agulhas Plain. We are therefore looking forward to contributing more information towards this special group of animals.





Developing a Conservation Easement Programme

The primary objective of setting up the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust was to build up a programme similar to the existing Stewardship model whereby landowners were given the option to commit their Renosterveld to conservation in perpetuity. The model upon which we are developing this programme is similar to the American 'Conservation Easement' model whereby a Conservation Servitude is registered against the title deeds of the property. The purpose of developing this alternative to the current Stewardship options is that this agreement could be signed with an NGO (as opposed to a parastatal), while the process could be more time-efficient and cost-effective. However, this mechanism had not been thoroughly tested in South Africa and we therefore had to accept that it would take some time to build our Conservation Easement Programme.

Over the last few years, we have been working closely with WWF-SA to develop a blueprint for registering Conservation Servitudes in favour of NGOs. WWF's legal advisors have now produced a document that will form the basis of our first joint easement with a landowner in the western Overberg who owns an extensive portion of remnant Western Rûens Shale Renosterveld. The landowner will sign the agreement with WWF while the ORCT will become the Management Authority. Once this agreement has been signed, priority interventions identified in the management plan (compiled by the ORCT) will be implemented according to available budget.



The obvious question here is why would a landowner sign such an agreement? What is in it for them? In addition to landowners receiving expert input into the generation of a management plan, these easements come with some monetary incentive which include i) all legal costs required to complete the servitude and attach this to the title deed and ii) some funding towards assistance with priority management interventions (e.g. fencing material, assistance with a controlled burn, clearing, etc.). Thus a Conservation Easement can be a fairly costly endeavour, so priority sites are selected carefully. However, this mechanism is a relatively cost-effective means for securing hectares of land for conservation as it circumvents the need for outright purchase, while the management of the veld remains the landowner's responsibility (although assistance is provided in these cases by the ORCT and partners).

The ORCT has identified some priority areas that we will be targeting for Easements over the following few years. Using some funds from the Watercourse Restoration Project, as well as a growing number of philanthropic donations, we aim to build up our Easement Programme substantially and in so doing ensure that an increasing number of Renosterveld hectares will be secured for conservation in perpetuity.



2015 Financial Report

Report of the Independent Auditors to the Beneficiaries of the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust



We have audited the accompanying financial statements of the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust, which comprise the statement of financial position as at 28 February 2015, and the statement of income and retained earnings, and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and the notes, comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Trustees responsibility for the financial statements

The Trust's trustees are responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standard for Small and Medium-sized Entities, and requirements of the Trust Deed, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatements, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditor's Responsibility

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audit. We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing. Those standards require that we comply with ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Qualification

In common with similar organisations, it is not feasible for the organisation to institute accounting controls over cash donations prior to initial entry of the collections in the accounting records. Accordingly, it was impractical for us to extend our examination beyond the receipts actually recorded

Qualified Opinion

In our opinion, except for the effect of such adjustment, if any, as might have been determined necessary had we been able to satisfy ourselves as to the completeness of cash donations, the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust as at 28 February 2015, and of its financial performance for the year then ended in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards for Small and Medium-sized entities.

| STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| AT 29 FEBRUARY 2016 | 2016 | 2015 |
| ASSETS | | |
| NON-CURRENT ASSETS | | |
| Property, plant & equipment | 171 247.84 | 227 878.27 |
| CURRENT ASSETS | 903 996.29 | 567 226.48 |
| Trade and other receivables | 4 220.74 | - |
| Cash and cash equivalents | 897 275.55 | 564 726.48 |
| Deposits | 2 500 | 2 500 |
| Total assets | 1 075 244.13 | 795 104.75 |
| CAPITAL AND LIABILITIES | | |
| CAPITAL | | |
| Retained income | 1 061 357.45 | 787 564.09 |
| CURRENT LIABILITIES | | |
| Trade and other payables | 13 886.68 | 7 558.66 |
| Total capital and liabilities | R1 075 244.13 | R795 104.75 |

Boshoff-Visser Bredasdorp Inc.





Partners and Sponsors

In addition to our donors and partners listed below, we would also like to thank Oren Taylor for his continued and generous support of the ORCT, as well as several additional donors who wish to remain anonymous.

We also acknowledge the following partners and collaborators: University of Cape Town, BirdLife Overberg, Stanford Bird Club, Department of Agriculture and the Walker Bay Bird Fair.

