nestoring Renosteweld







# Letters from leadership

Message from the Chairperson

Billions of dollars worldwide are being allocated to fight the effects of climate change. While climate change and

biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin, there's certainly more to climate change than the loss of biodiversity, and vice versa. And it's the latter that has me most worried.

In the Overberg's renosterveld landscapes, our most immediate threat has been ongoing for nearly 100 years: since the advent of the plough. To the point that today there are only small fragments of renosterveld left, with more hectares lost every year.

Why is this a problem? Because our functioning natural world is the very basis of our existence as humans.

That's why the work that we're doing as the ORCT is vital. I'm so proud of what we've achieved already. Last year we celebrated 10 years of renosterveld conservation. This year our focus has been on renosterveld restoration.

The programmes that we're implementing today are also helping to inform more people on the importance of conserving renosterveld. The Veld School programme, where scholars are shown why our plant world is so special, is particularly important and successful.

I highlight my concern above as an opening to say thank you. My thanks to those farmers who really do care about their incredible natural world, and my thanks to our donors who continue to support our on-the-ground and immediate conservation action. My thanks also to my Board and our Director, Odette Curtis-Scott. Your support and work could not come at a more important time in our history for nature; and the impact couldn't be felt more acutely. It's why our tiny organisation can continue to successfully achieve our goals.

**Dirk van Papendorp** 

### Message from the Director

Last year we celebrated our 10-year anniversary. This year we developed our plans to take the ORCT forward into the next 10 years. We worked hard to strengthen our existing partnerships and create new ones, which we believe will contribute to our sustainability and resilience moving forward.



ahead if we are to save our renosterveld ecosystems from further loss and degradation. Sadly, there remains a strong resistance to appreciating the value of our ecological biodiversity globally and locally. That's despite all the international targets set and agreements signed. The UN Biodiversity Conference COP 15 and the setting of the 30X30 targets (to protect 30% of the planet by 2030) was ambitious. Nevertheless, these targets are necessary and governments need to be held accountable. Let's hope we have more success than in previous years, given the failure to deliver on the Aichi Biodiversity targets and other previous COP targets.

What remains of renosterveld does not come close to 30% of its original range, with an estimated 5% remaining. Therefore, for renosterveld this essentially means that every remnant matters and every watercourse or corridor that can be restored, and thus plays a role in facilitating ecosystem function, is a 'win' for these unique and irreplaceable habitats.

We're now in the midst of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), which also sets some critical goals for restoration of ecosystems globally: in particular to PREVENT, HALT and REVERSE the degradation of ecosystems. It is therefore relevant that for the ORCT, 2022 was a year in which we focused more on restoration than ever before. In fact, most of our projects and activities contribute to the broad definition of restoration (as the UN defines it). While we're working hard, our efforts are unlikely to tip the scales at the global level, but they are crucial for the persistence of our highly range-restricted and threatened biodiversity. I think most people would agree that we would not want to see the Rûens devoid of all natural life.

Our challenges are not small. A desktop analysis of the remnant layers produced in 2003 by the South African National Biodiversity Institute showed that the ±40 000 ha of renosterveld that 'remained' in the Overberg was in fact spread across over 11 000 remnants, 70% of which were less than ONE hectare in size, and only 0.5% (57 remnants) of which were over 100 ha. As we know, we have lost substantially more renosterveld since this analysis 20 years ago, as demonstrated in recent studies. For example, Glenn Moncrieff of SAEON showed that nearly 500 ha were lost between 2016 and 2020, essentially all to unlawful ploughing.

These terrifying figures have not broken our stride: We know the task ahead is immense, but we know we are not alone. Our partners and supporters have stood by us and have recognised the importance of this work. Using the estimates of what is left in our landscape, the ORCT has secured the conservation of nearly 13% of what remains. In the beautiful words of Charlie Mackesy in 'The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse': "We have such a long way to go," sighed the boy. "Yes, but look how far we've come," said the horse. We do indeed have some steep hills to climb still, but we are here to stay and we remain as determined as ever.

**Dr Odette Curtis-Scott** 





# A decade on renosterveld restoration: To prevent, halt and reverse degradation

### By Grant Forbes, ORCT Conservation Manager

Ecosystems, a particular area defined by its biotic and abiotic factors, can be damaged, suffer degradation or even be irreversibly destroyed. As the human footprint expands, as a direct result of our need for survival as well as our insatiable greed, our impact on ecosystems is increasing exponentially. Over the last century, the loss of natural areas has increased at a rapid rate, and this hasn't halted yet. This is the result of a suite of factors, including industrial and housing developments, agriculture, unsustainable use of natural resources and the spread of invasive species. About 40% of the earth's surface has been destroyed or degraded, we have lost about 67% of our wildlife, and 3.2 billion people are impacted as a result of our own actions.

Restoration of ecosystems is needed globally. Historically, restoration focused on the recovery of transformed areas like old agricultural lands or decommissioned mines. These would include activities to help the system regenerate and create suitable conditions for macro and micro-organisms to return and the abiotic process to 'restart'.

Today, however, restoration ecology considers a wider range of activities. The United Nations, as part of their Decade on Restoration (from 2021-2030) highlights our need to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean. In fact, the first rule of restoration is to do no harm – a key principle of our ORCT work. But once that first rule is broken and existing habitat has been impacted, then restoration can be as simple as removing invasive plant species, reintroducing a lost process like fire or grazing, or as complex as landscape engineering to repair, for example, severely eroded areas.

### Long-term recovery

Interventions may catalyse the recovery process but full recovery to its new or preferred state will take years, even decades to centuries. Restoration creates the platform for recolonization but we can never step away – outside factors like climate or other anthropogenic impacts might call for a reassessment of the process in order to adapt or implement additional activities during the restoration period. Therefore, restoration continues as the ecosystem recovers.

Restoration and conservation go hand in hand. Conservation of our natural environment needs to continue as we look at restoring areas to support ecological processes and functioning. This is of particular importance in severely threatened and degraded ecosystems such as the Overberg, where extensive levels of degradation and

Overberg, where extensive levels of degradation and transformation occurred. As humans, we need to take responsibility for the wrongs of the past and give priority to the

preservation of virgin land, and the restoration of degraded ecosystems and transformed areas.

This is crucial for the survival of humanity.

In the Overberg Rûens, the ORCT works in partnership with the custodians of renosterveld to implement crucial management interventions that support restoration. The stewards of renosterveld, the Overberg farmers, are key partners to the vision and mission of the ORCT and the conservation and restoration of Critically Endangered Overberg renosterveld. This includes the management of grazing and fire as landscape drivers, the eradication of invasive species and the restoration of degraded watercourses and other areas to establish corridors which connect remnants, facilitate the movement of wildlife and preserve ecological integrity.









### A decade on restoration:

# Preventing degradation

370 learners reached through our **Veld School** 

### **Keeping our** renosterveld intact via easements

There are 10 golden rules to ecological restoration. However, the first rule is by far the most important: do no harm to the ecosystem. According to the group of ecologists from around the world who compiled the rules for the UN Decade on Restoration, intact habitat is always the priority.

That's why, for the ORCT, our key programme entails us working with landowners to help to keep remaining renosterveld in its virgin state. Our Conservation Easement Programme is an innovative way to secure remaining renosterveld. When farmers sign these easements - in effect a conservation servitude they commit to look after the land in perpetuity. The ORCT, in turn, commits to help them manage these fragments - to benefit all life in the landscape.

### **Connecting pieces of** the puzzle

Already around 4 000 hectares of renosterveld had been committed to conservation through easements at the start of our financial year. But in 2022, we enjoyed another major success when farmer Matthys Streicher added 522 hectares to the easement programme. The Muurkraal Conservation Easement, situated between Swellendam and Bredasdorp was vital for the ORCT for many reasons. It's home to breeding Black Harriers. And it connects more of these conserved fragments together. It also brings the total number of hectares protected to 4 580.

According to Odette Curtis-Scott, Director of the ORCT, "The new easement helps us bring more pieces of the puzzle together, to connect these fragments as conservation corridors."



This is the second easement that the Streicher family has signed with the ORCT. The first easement, called Uitvlucht, was signed in 2020. Matthys Streicher said, "For me it makes sense to make the connection between all our conservation areas." It also proves that the family trust sees the benefits of joining the easement

In exchange for signing, the ORCT supports the landowner to manage the veld well, by providing assistance to remove invasive alien plants, putting up fencing to manage livestock access, and to help with any additional management support that the landowner needs.

#### Using untouched renosterveld to raise awareness

Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve is owned by WWF South Africa and is managed by the ORCT. It forms part of the largest, connected stretch of Overberg renosterveld left on earth - a 500-hectare reserve with incredible biodiversity of all life forms. And it's for this reason that it serves as the home of the Veld School, our environmental education programme for school children. With funding provided by the National Lotteries Commission for the Veld School's inception year, the ORCT is now introducing young children from schools across the Overberg to renosterveld. The aim is to showcase this natural world to children, to show them the importance of keeping these landscapes intact and untouched, and to teach them about the interconnectedness of the web of life.

The reserve is also being used to bring people closer to nature – from students using the Research Centre to undertake their research; or nature lovers enjoying a weekend completely removed from their busy day-to-day lives at the guest accommodation; to course attendees enjoying the quiet amenities offered in The Shed.

From the accommodation and The Shed Learning Centre, it's a short walk into the renosterveld, including the incredible views of the landscape from the lookout point.



#### **Cumulative Renosterveld ha secured through easements**

### The Veld School: **Creating renosterveld** warriors

### By Nande Notyalwa

The Veld School is celebrating one year of empowering young renosterveld warriors throughout the Overberg. In the past year, more than 370 learners from various schools left their daily school programme to visit Haarwegskloof. They have learned and enjoyed lessons about nature essentially found on their doorstep.

The Veld School, led by contracted teacher Gretha Engelbrecht (with 20 years of experience in teaching children about nature) and ORCT intern, Nande Notyalwa, has focussed on marginalised schools that would otherwise not have the resources to come and explore. We aimed to encourage them to become environmentally aware citizens. We have already seen the impact of the Veld School, with learners stating that they had been exposed to more than they could imagine. One learner from De Heide Primary School said, "I have learnt so much about plants and animals and I want to come every year."

This has also been the response from the teachers accompanying the learners to Haarwegskloof. Learners have been given assignments to complete when they're back at school on content taught during their visit. Our young renosterveld warriors have left Haarwegskloof and gone to join the rest of society with an increased awareness and appreciation for our natural world.

### The learners share their experience of the **Veld School:**

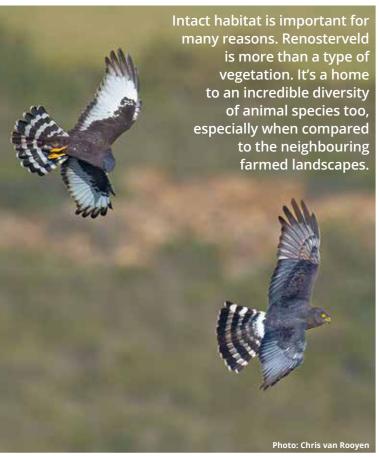
- · Adri from Agulhas School of Skills: "I learnt how to treat wild animals and we learnt about their home."
- Tamzin from Bredasdorp High School: "I really enjoyed the renosterveld. It has been such a wonderful learning experience."
- Anina from Bredasdorp High School: "I learnt about group work and to make right decisions (regarding nature)."
  - Charma from De Heide Primary School: "I enjoyed the day because of the bread and milk we ate. I also love it because the two aunties (teachers) explained a lot about animals and all other things."



## A decade on restoration:

# Preventing degradation









### Pristine habitat as a hub for Black Harriers

One such species is the Black Harrier, a beautiful raptor that has been listed as Endangered due to the decrease in the population in recent times. Experts estimate that there are only around 1 300 mature individuals of this southern African endemic left and more worryingly, that the species is still experiencing an annual decrease of 2.3%. Because of its dependence on fynbos and renosterveld, it has also become a flagship species for the ORCT.

During the past year, we realised that there are many individuals who also care deeply about the future of Black Harriers and the extinction threats they face. After successfully tagging and tracking six Black Harriers over the last two years, the ORCT ran a campaign to raise funds to purchase three additional GPS tags to further our research. But thanks to incredible support from individuals and organisations alike, the ORCT was able to acquire eight tags, which will be used to better understand Black Harrier movements and threats.

### Painting a picture of harrier movements

Three Black Harriers were fitted with tags last year, and six prior to that. While two harriers died two years ago, and one tag is faulty, we are still tracking six birds currently. We hope to fit the remaining eight tags to breeding adults in the 2023 breeding season.

Already the information collected from the satellite tags is yielding results. It has shown that while the birds are entirely dependent on natural remnants of renosterveld for breeding, their foraging range covers a mix of transformed and natural habitats, where they mostly hunt Striped Mice and Common Quail. It has also shown some of the incredible distances undertaken by individuals. For example, Chuana, a male tagged in 2022, made an incredible two-day flight from Paternoster along the West Coast, via Paarl, to the Overberg. He flew 300km in 8.5 hours at between 50 and 60km/hour. He completed the final 220km the next day.

Odette says, "We've already been able to get incredible datasets on the movement of these birds. It helps to form a picture of what landscapes they're using. And also shows us where we must avoid adding additional threats to the species, such as wind turbines." The long-term goal is to use the information collected in the Overberg, as well as on other tagged harriers in key breeding areas, to develop models to predict and identify 'no-go' areas for future windfarm developments. While windfarms are not responsible for the species' historic decline, they may well be the final nail in the coffin: Models suggest that killing just five additional adults per annum will result in the species' extinction within 75 years.

#### **The Black Harrier Task Force**

The ORCT, together with Birdlife South Africa, has taken a lead role in establishing a Black Harrier Task Force. Through this partnership, which also includes the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Birds and Bats Unlimited (Dr Rob Simmons), the University of Cape Town and several individuals, we are working to develop a conservation plan for the species. We're also working to identify potential collaborative habitat conservation and fundraising initiatives.

The ORCT's role in protecting Black Harriers has also been recognised formally by BirdLife SA: They appointed the ORCT as Species Guardians for the Black Harrier, joining Dr Rob Simmons in this honorary position.



## Documenting renosterveld richness

In order to protect renosterveld, you also need to know it. And to know it, you need to spend hours in the field, photographing and documenting its richness.

The ORCT team does this throughout the year. But come springtime, Odette, Grant and Nande spend most of their time discovering what species occur in renosterveld fragments. This year, they combined their annual spring monitoring with the Great Southern Bioblitz competition. This event sees naturalists, scientists and nature lovers document all the species they can find over the course of an extended weekend. Regions across the southern hemisphere compete against each other for the honour of logging the most observations and/or species.

The ORCT undertook outings to some of our easement sites during the four days. By the end of the weekend, the team had logged hundreds of observations of different species. They also helped the Overberg district to log more than 10 000 observations in total, the fifth most of all participating regions in the southern hemisphere.

### An exciting discovery

During the bioblitz, the ORCT also made an exciting discovery: A new population of the Critically Endangered *Polhillia brevicalyx* was found on a site that has not yet been well studied. This new population consists of around 30 plants, and is a rare find for a species threatened by habitat loss.

The ORCT also participated in Birding Big Day, a one-day event organised by BirdLife South Africa. We were joined by the incredible naturalists, Cliff and Suretha Dorse. Some of our sightings on the day included Western Osprey, Black Harrier,

Southern Black Korhaan, Verreaux's Eagle and Agulhas Long-Billed Lark; we ended with a total of 154 species.



# 1383 ha of remnants managed for livestock grazing through fencing

# A decade on restoration: Halting degradation

# Reversing degradation



### Destroyed by ploughing: South Africa's first guilty conviction

Hundreds of hectares of renosterveld are still being lost to illegal ploughing. According to research undertaken by Glenn Moncrieff of the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON), just short of 500 hectares were ploughed in the four years up to 2020.

The ORCT does not habitually involve itself in unlawful ploughing cases, as our objective is to focus on the proactive approach to conservation and not the reactive one (which can compromise relationships with the farming community). But if we're to halt the continuing loss of renosterveld, we need to keep a close eye on any cases and activities pertaining to ploughing, and sometimes, this results in us giving specialist input, or being called as witnesses in court.

South Africa's first conviction for the illegal clearing of Critically Endangered Renosterveld was secured early in 2023. Farmer Mike de Kock was found guilty of one of the three accounts he was accused of – of clearing more than 300 square metres of Eastern Rûens Shale Renosterveld.

### **Beyond reasonable doubt**

According to the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP), the state proved beyond reasonable doubt that Mr de Kock illegally cleared and ploughed an area of 2.5 ha. He was accused of clearing considerably more land on two of his farms, but the exceptionally high requirements of the evidence needed meant that other portions cleared were excluded from the magistrate's decision.

He was sentenced to a fine of R400 000 or three years' imprisonment. While the fine was suspended for a period of five years, on condition that he is not convicted of a similar offence, Mr de Kock was also ordered to pay an additional R100 000 to DEA&DP.

According to the department, "The conviction of such an offence is the first of its kind in the country, which has resulted from a criminal trial and sets a precedent for many other investigations currently underway and will serve as a deterrent for future landowners who choose to disregard the law."

Mr de Kock will be appealing the outcome.









# Blankets, sausages and cuttings: Experimental restoration

Renosterveld faces many threats. It becomes degraded when invasive alien species grow out of control in landscapes, when livestock is permitted to overgraze it, and when fire burns too frequently or not often enough.

Where these renosterveld fragments have suffered from degradation from past activities, the ORCT acts to restore it – especially on our easement sites, as support to farmers who have joined our Conservation Easement Programme.

In the last year, our restoration efforts focused on invasive alien clearing and erosion control. Our contracting team, led by Willie Engel, cleared 595 ha of invasive alien vegetation, including 10 ha of initial clearing in an intensive and challenging setting.

Fencing was erected on three properties to manage livestock grazing. And we're working with one farmer to reintroduce Bontebok, in an area that would historically have provided a home to this species.

### **Stabilising degraded slopes**

Working with Willie and his team, we also kick-started the restoration process for a few sites that had suffered decades of poor land management. We placed soil blankets, old fencing poles and blue gum poles to stabilise slopes. Erosion sausages were fixed to steep banks to slow the waterflow and facilitate the buildup of sediment. This in turn created favourable areas for seed establishment. And we also seeded some sites with a few local species to test whether using this expensive method is in fact viable.

At one conservation easement on the banks of the Ouka River, we experimented with sowing a pioneer seedling mix of grasses and shrubs indigenous to the area. These were placed in hollows and on flat areas covered by soil blankets. Succulent cuttings from the watercourse were also planted out. And in the coming year, more novel restoration methods will be adopted to test in renosterveld.



# Meet the ORCT's restoration Contractor Willie Engel

For the past 26 years, Willie Engel has worked to restore landscapes across the Overberg. As a contractor, he creates employment for a team of seven people – mostly women. Many of his team members were unemployed before joining Willie, coming from Overberg farms where their husbands work as farmworkers.

The 53-year-old small business owner says that working with the ORCT has taught him a lot. "We get to see different places. I enjoy it very much. And we do a variety of work. So while Grant (Forbes, ORCT Conservation Manager) has taught me a lot, I've also been able to teach him some things too along the way."





The goal is to put renosterveld conservation plans in place over the long term. This is the most important strategy for halting an otherwise inevitable loss, and likely extinction not only of the plants, but also all the animals that live in this ecosystem. Gifting a bequest to the ORCT through one's will can help the ORCT to meet our commitment to the long-term integrity of our precious renosterveld.

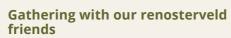
Funds from bequests are used to protect renosterveld through a suite of conservation activities, including:

- Protecting renosterveld hectares in perpetuity through our easement programme
- Restoring degraded renosterveld habitats
- · Educating people, from landowners to school children, on the importance of preserving our natural
- · And undertaking and supporting research to better understand these ecosystems.

Bequests to the ORCT are exempt from estate duty, as we are a registered NPO.

To find out more, contact ORCT Director Odette Curtis-Scott.

Email: odette@overbergrenosterveld.org.za Tel. +27 (0)83 551 3341



The ORCT also hosted a small number of key supporters, as we concluded our 10th birthday celebrations in December 2022. Under a glorious Cape Town sky, we toasted these partners for their incredible support over the past decade. And we shared our future plans to protect renosterveld. This proved a fitting way to conclude 10 years of renosterveld conservation.



### Renosterveld friends we have lost along the way

In the past year, renosterveld lost a true champion when farmer Hansie Swart of Sandkraal farm, Swellendam, passed away. Before many farmers had seriously considered protecting renosterveld, Hansie was already conserving the extensive tracts that occurred on his farm along the Breede River.

Hansie's passing was a blow to conservation in general, and especially to the ORCT.
Odette said, "Hansie was not only passionate about protecting his renosterveld, he also thought deeply about the natural world.
He was extremely smart and open-minded, and would always bring his creativity to any situation. He was able to show us things in a new light, using his intellect and wonderful way with words. I will miss those conversations – and I will miss this wonderful person who enriched my life so much. The world will, without a doubt, be a lot poorer without Hansie in it."



### Financial report ~ as at 28 February 2023

The accompanying summary financial statements, which comprise the summary statement of comprehensive income and statement of financial position for the year ended 28 February 2023, 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.

#### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2023

FIGURES IN RAND	2023	2022
ASSETS	R	R
Non-Current Assets		
Property, plant and equipment	729 167	886 264
Current Assets		
Trade and other receivables	3 624	3 509
Other financial assets	1 893 839	1 330 893
Cash and cash equivalents	433 789	413 794
TOTAL ASSETS	3 060 419	2 634 460
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Capital	1 150 723	1 691 002
Non-Current Liabilities		
Deferred income	1 898 019	911 097
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	11 677	32 361
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	3 060 419	2 634 460

### STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME AND CHANGES IN **EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2023**

2023	2022
5 344 347	5 127 239
5 884 626	4 803 714
(540 279)	323 525
1 691 002	1 367 477
-	-
1 150 723	1 691 002
	5 344 347 5 884 626 (540 279) 1 691 002

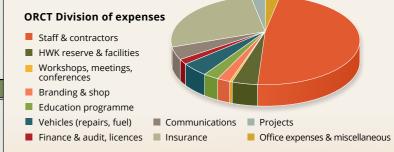
#### **Auditors' Response:**

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 2023 by management and appear consistent.

### Hd Nel

### **BVA Overberg Incorporated Registered Auditors**



#### **ORCT Division of income**





# ORCT Staff and Trustees

It's thanks to our incredible donors and partners that the ORCT can continue to protect renosterveld. Many of our donors and partners have joined us since we were established, and to you we say: thank you for joining us on this 11-year journey.

We are proud to say that we have successfully managed, with clean audits, approximately R25-million over 11 years.

There's still much to do, and we are ready for this challenge to protect renosterveld from an otherwise likely extinction. We take on this massive task knowing that we have friends like you taking hands with us, to help make this world a better place. Thank you!

































NUWEJAARS Wetlands 5MA











NATIONAL LOTTERIES COMMISSION

















Dr Odette Curtis-Scott Director



**Grant Forbes Conservation Manager** 



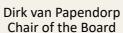
**Sharon King** Office Manager



Nande Notyalwa Intern

### **ORCT Board of Trustees**







Lesley Richardson Vice-Chair



Sean Privett



Prof Muthama Muasya



Christina Stewart





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