

CONSERVATION WISE

Conserving Biodiversity for Future Generations

MILNERTON RACECOURSE NATURE RESERVE ANNUAL REVIEW

January - December 2010



What is the Milnerton Racecourse Nature Reserve (MRNR)

The MRNR is the area that was, and still is to some degree the centre of the Gold Circle horse track within Milnerton. The area is approximately 19ha in size and is separated into a northern and southern area.

The MRNR is recognised as being of exceptionally high conservation value due to the number of Red Data (endangered) plant species and its high biodiversity. It is one of the City's core botanical areas and has been included in the Biodiversity Network.

The City owned land is managed by the Royal Ascot Environmental Management Committee (EMC). This committee is constituted by representatives from local interest groups, home owners/residents associations, the City of Cape Town, the Royal Ascot Master Property Owners Association, Gold Circle and conservation / environmental consultants. On-the-ground management and facilities are coordinated by the Environmental Conservation Managers, Planning in Balance, appointed by the EMC.

Ecological Burn at MRNR

On the 9th March the 2nd controlled burn was undertaken at the MRNR. 4.2ha was burnt in the southern most portion. The fire was cooler than the 2008 burn, aided by the North Westerly winds on the day. The burn commenced at 12h30 due to weather constraints and continued for approximately 40mins. The burn went off without a hitch and was a resounding success.



Fire is required to remove old plant material and stimulate new growth. This ensures that the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos is kept healthy and productive.

This renewed growth results in more available, choices, food sources for fauna within the MRNR keeping it healthy by reducing pressure on limited resources. Controlled burns also reduce available fuel loads lowering the risk of an uncontrolled fire becoming unmanageable and damaging property.



Burns are a vital driving force in the fynbos biome, which has adapted to fire and relying on it to remain healthy. Many of these species require fire stimulation of seeds and cones to allow for seed dispersal and germination. So over time without fire several species may be lost from the area.



New Site Conservation Officer for MRNR

On the 4th January 2010, Simone Greveling was appointed by the EMC as the Site Conservation Officer for Milnerton Racecourse Nature Reserve. She says that the MRNR is one of those special sites within the Cape Peninsula, unknown to most but bursting with opportunity. It's a little piece of nature tucked away for young and old to enjoy. The diversity at this site is amazing and she states that every time she visits the site there is always something new to discover.



Simone believes that, "Conservation is the way of the future and anyone can make a difference, you just got to get out there and let your voice be heard".



Alien Invasion

The invasion of alien and exotic plants is one of the main biodiversity challenges of any Reserve. These species utilise vast amounts of water, have larger seed banks, establish readily, adapt and spread quickly and therefore out compete the indigenous vegetation. In most cases if clearing is not done these species will dominate.

This year regular clearing of Port Jackson (*Acacia saligna*) and Rooikraans (*Acacia cyclops*) within MRNR have proven to be very successful in controlling the spread of these category one aliens. However, other non-indigenous species persists within the Reserve including Kikuyu, Vicia, Paspalum grass and other emergent species have also invaded. With constant monitoring and follow ups over time these detrimental species can be controlled and hopefully eradicated.

Night Drive

On the 24th November the first night drive was undertaken within the southern area of MRNR, the aim being to determine if Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis*) were still present within the reserve. During the drive one Cape Hare was spotted within the burn area as well as approximately 8 Grysbok. It was discovered that the wetland within the southern area is a roosting ground for Yellow Billed Duck (*Anas undulate*) and Cape Teal (*Anas capensis*). More surveys like these will be undertaken in the future to determine the population of Cape Hare and if management intervention is required.

No Domestic Animals within the MRNR

Domestic animals have an impact on natural areas and as MRNR is small, closed and isolated the impact by domestic animals is magnified. Impacts are:

- ✘ Disturbance of nesting areas and breeding patterns of birds and small mammals;
- ✘ Increasing mortality rates;
- ✘ Smaller animals can be chased from the conservation areas into road ways and gardens;
- ✘ Domestic animals displace existing natural predators, that may lead to over-predation of small animals in the conservation area;
- ✘ Increased stress on animals occurring in natural areas can lead to greater susceptibility to pathogens and parasites present in such areas that otherwise would be of little consequence;
- ✘ Increased possibility of introducing new pathogens and parasites into Reserves;
- ✘ Migrant bird species that would normally utilize the area can be discouraged.

Please remember that as per the framework of the MRNR Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) and the Environmental Management System (EMS) cats and dogs may not enter the MRNR.



Birding at MRNR

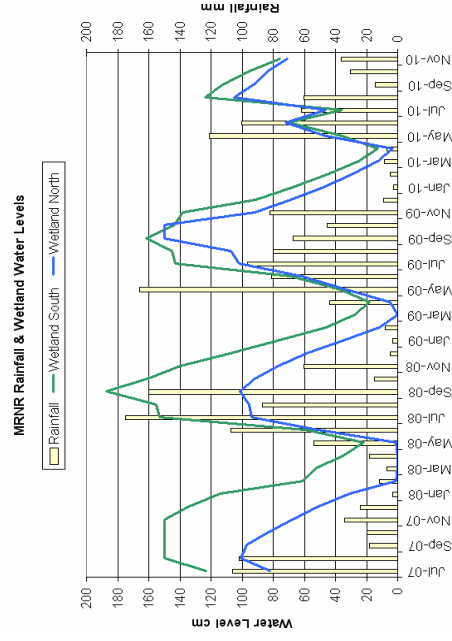
Take an hour out of your day to enjoy a slow walk through the northern area of the MRNR. If you are patient you will easily identify 20-30 of the ±70 species depending upon the season. Summer is the best time to observe the migrant species. On the water you can observe Red-Knobbed Coot, Common Moorhen, Little Grebe and usually Yellow-Billed Duck. Depending upon the level of the water you could add Cape Wagtail, Blacksmith Lapwing and the beautiful Three-Banded plover.

A surprising number of birds fly overhead, e.g. White-rumped, Little, Alpine and Black Swift, Rock and Brown Throated Martin and in summer Greater Striped, Barn, Whitethroated and Pearl Breasted Swallows. Rock Kestrels are seen regularly as well as Yellow Billed Kite, Black Sparrowhawk and Peregrine Falcon. Surprising birds are Grey Winged Francolin and Orange Throated Longclaw.

MRNR has a variety of habitats from wetlands to shrublands and grasslands and therefore provides a niche for a variety of different bird species.

Wetlands

Due to climate change hot areas of the world are getting hotter, and cold cooler. This means less rainfall and therefore less water. The data below is compiled from MRNR rainfall and wetland level monitoring for the past four years. Climate change is happening, decrease your Carbon Foot Print.



Proclamation as a Nature Reserve

The draft of the Integrated Management Plan for the Milnerton Racecourse Nature Reserve was compiled and submitted to Senior Management of the City of Cape Town Biodiversity Management department in December 2010. The public will be given the opportunity to give comment in February of 2011. After the approval the Conservation Area will be able to gain its Nature Reserve status.