

CONSERVATION WISE

Conserving Biodiversity for Future Generations

Milnerton Racecourse Nature Reserve ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011



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 consists of representatives from local interest groups, home owners/residents associations, the City of Cape Town, the Royal Ascot Master Property Association, Gold Circle and conservation / environmental consultants. On-the-ground management and facilities are coordinated by the Environmental Conservation Managers, WET-LAND Solutions, appointed by the EMC.

MRNR Conservation Student

On the 1st February Roxane Moulet joined WET-LAND Solutions as the student for Milnerton Racecourse Nature Reserve. Throughout the year she assisted in the many projects undertaken in the reserve and implemented her theoretical knowledge learnt at Saasveld, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Originally from France she added a bit of humour to any situation and took great interest in one of the charismatic creatures of the reserve, the Cape Dwarf Chameleon. Roxane says of her year that "Loving Mother nature is easy but protecting and conserving what's left, takes another kind of love."

A huge thank you goes to her for all her enthusiasm, drive and fun loving attitude throughout 2011.



School Holiday Programme

MRNR's second successful school holiday program was held on the 8th July in co-ordination with the City of Cape Town's Biodiversity Management Branch. The aim of the program was to highlighting the "Little Five" of the reserve.

Young and old enjoyed a talk and fun activities consisting of a jig saw puzzle and scavenger hunt.



The day ended with a walk through the northern and southern areas of the reserve in search of the "Little Five". The event and biodiversity information was well covered in the local press.



2012 Firebreak Preparation

The Table Bay Nature Reserve team worked an estimated 186 hours, 31 days over 7 months in preparing the firebreak of the northern area in preparation for the 2012 ecological burn. A 5m firebreak was cleared along Sandown Crescent and Stable Yard after which 434 5m rows of Sour Fig were planted. Once these cuttings are established they will act as a fire deterrent, providing increased protection for the residential precincts.





MRNR Fauna

During 2011 ad hoc animals sightings were recorded and the concept of the “Little 5 of MRNR” was born. These 5 charismatic critters are the Cape Dwarf Chameleon, Water Mongoose, Cape Grysbok, Black-headed Heron and the Angular tortoise. The information pamphlet below provides some insights.

MILNERTON
RACECOURSE
NATURE RESERVE

LITTLE 5

INTERESTING
FACTS



Cape Dwarf Chameleon

Bradypodion pumilum

Tongue is one and a half times their body's length and does not possess taste buds.
Change colour according to external factors such as temperature, danger and emotions.
Virtually deaf therefore vibrations enable detection of food and enemies.



Water Mongoose

Atilax paludinosus

Adapted thumb on front paws for extra grip.
Sensitive paw padding to detect prey in the mud.

Can lure birds by lying on its back to display its pink stomach.

Opens fresh water mussels by using its front feet to throw them backwards through its back legs against rocks.

Cape Grysbok

Raphicerus melanotis

Nocturnal and solitary.
Only found at the southern tip of Africa.
Name given by the Dutch settlers, meaning Grey Buck.
Water independent as it attains water from the plants it eats
After weaning (2months old) the ewe drives the lamb away by biting its ears.



Angular Tortoise

Chersina angulata

Females only lay a single egg.
Live for longer than 30 years.
Drink by sucking up water through their nostrils.
Named due to the angular pattern on the shell.
One of South Africa's hardiest tortoises.

Black-Headed Heron

Ardea melanocephala

May perform acrobatic figures when it flies down for landing.
Young Black Herons mature faster than other species of heron and therefore prey upon chicks of other species.
Waits for prey completely motionless.
Scavenge sometimes.



Other interesting sightings during the year included Mole Snake, Citrus Swallow Tail butterfly, Forest Shrew, Brown Water Snake, Rock Kestrel, Black Harrier and Pearl-Breasted Swallow.

Frogging

The first frog survey was undertaken on the night of the 24th August. The two wetlands and dam were surveyed and the frogs were distinguished by their calls. Three amphibian species namely the Clicking Stream Frog, Sand River Frog and the Cape Sand Frog were heard.



Cape Hare

Rietvlei student, Tammy Fallone, undertook part of her research project entitled “The abundance and distribution of Lepus species (*L.capensis* and *L.saxatilis*) in the Table Bay Nature Reserve”. The hare survey was done in the northern and southern area of the MRNR. Two night drives and walks were completed. In total three sightings of Cape Hare were recorded in the southern area, contrasting to the total of only one last year.





CREW

The Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wild Flowers (CREW) lead by Hedi Stummer visited the MRNR on three occasions to identify and survey flora species within the reserve. In total 74 species were identified of which 15 were International Union for Conservation of Nature Red Data Listed.



MRNR Guided Spring Walk

MRNR held their annual spring walk on the 8th October showcasing the reserve's hidden floral gems. A guided walk proved to be an informative morning where the visitors learnt about the plant and animals found in Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. Highlighted during the walk was the reserve's history, current management activities and future management objectives for Milnerton's gem.



Kikuyu Buffer

Kikuyu grass is currently the major alien plant species invading the MRNR. which has a detrimental effect on the biodiversity of the reserve. This species establishes and spreads in the form of a dense mat growing over and suffocating the indigenous vegetation in its path.

As kikuyu originates from housing developments and horse training facilities bordering the reserve it is important to establish good control along boundaries. A 1m buffer zone was therefore created using Sour Fig cuttings planted along the edge of the northern area bordering onto the grass racetrack. Once the sour fig is established it should prevent the invasion of the kikuyu from this area. Focus Ultra, a selective herbicide, is being utilised on the most effected areas of the reserve. The long term management objective is for the complete eradication of kikuyu grass.

Water on the Decrease

Water levels of the two wetlands are monitored on a monthly basis. This year the level reached their lowest since monitoring commenced in 2007. The southern area wetland was 68% lower and the northern area wetland was 10% lower than in 2007. Pictures of wetland 1, below, show the difference in water levels during March 2008 and 2011.



Table Bay Nature Reserve

This year the CCT planned to proclaim 15 unique sites as Nature Reserves to ensure adequate conservation protection for Cape Town's rich biodiversity which is under threat.

The MRNR has been incorporated into the newly formed and soon to be proclaimed Table Bay Nature Reserve (TBNR). The TBNR will therefore be the overarching reserve managed by Koos Retief.

Additional team members

The EMC funded 5 team members who worked at the MRNR for a total of 8 days during spring. The extra hands assisted in the completion of the planting in the firebreak, creation of the kikuyu buffer zone, hand pulling of weeds and alien clearing follow up, as well as path maintenance in the northern area. Without this funding management objective for 2011 would not have been achievable.

MRNR Birding

Helm van Zijl undertook monthly bird surveys as part of MRNR's monthly monitoring. In total 33 new species were sighted in the southern area and 29 in the northern area. Charismatic new species added to the list include European Bee Eater, Black Harrier, Cape Bulbul, Lanner Falcon and Cloud Cisticola.

Vegetation Fixed Point Photography

As part of the Table Bay Nature Reserve vegetation monitoring two fixed point photography stands were erected in the MRNR, one in each area. Monitoring is undertaken on a quarterly basis which serves as a 360° photographic record of the vegetation changes over time.





Urban Influences

MRNR is an urban reserve located between Royal Ascot residential area and the Gold Circle stables. Over the past year the reserve has been influenced by many external factors which could negatively impact the reserve's biodiversity.

These edge effects include ...

- Domestic dogs and cats
- Alien Mallard ducks
- Garden escapees (e.g. Kikuyu)
- Illegal plant harvesting
- Graffiti
- Illegal entry into the southern area

Please help us to manage these impacts by reporting and incidents or wrong doing to the reserve management.

Contact No: 021 550 1096.

Looking Forward

2012 Management Objectives and Events

- Firebreak preparation
- Ecological control burn of the northern area
- Grysbok Drive Count
- Fish & small mammal survey
- Grysbok re-introduction
- Insect survey
- School Holiday Program
- Fun Run (possibly)
- Spring Walk
- Vegetation monitoring
- CREW visit
- Alien clearing
- General maintenance of infrastructure
- Updating of the Management Plan

Aerial Photography

On the 11th March Aerial Photography was taken of the northern and southern area of the reserve as a record of the vegetation changes over time.



“Waste not the smallest thing created, for grains of sand make mountains, and atoms infinity” ~ E. Knight

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children” ~ Native American Proverb

“We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive” ~ Albert Einstein

Redevelopment of Horse Training Facility

During the year the EMC, along with other concerned organisations, provided input into the Basic Environmental Assessment undertaken for the redevelopment of the training area currently owned by Gold Circle. The interface with the nature reserve, protection of the faunal corridor between the northern and southern areas, impact on groundwater flows were some of the issues highlighted.



For more information visit
www.royalascot.co.za

