

CONSERVATION WISE

Conserving Biodiversity for Future Generations

Table Bay Nature Reserve: Milnerton Racecourse Section ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2013

What is the Table Bay Nature Reserve: Milnerton Racecourse Section

It is the area that was, and still is to some degree the centre of the Kenilworth Racing horse track in Milnerton. The area is approximately 19ha in size and is separated into a northern and southern area. It is recognised as being of exceptionally high conservation value due to the number of Red Data (endangered) plant species and its high biodiversity. This site 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, conservation NGO's, residents associations, City of Cape Town, Royal Ascot Master Property Association and Kenilworth Racing. On-the-ground management has been coordinated for the last 7 years by WET-LAND Solutions as the EMC appointed Environmental Conservation Managers.

New site manager for Milnerton Racecourse

Landi Louw, will be managing the Reserve as of January 2014. She studied Nature Conservation through the University of South Africa (UNISA). During her studies she worked for a number of organisations, including the Cheetah Conservation Fund (Namibia), Stellenbosch University (Namaqualand) as well as the Burgherspost Nature Reserve (Darling). With a Level 2 Nature Site Guide qualification, Landi is registered as a South African tourist guide. In January she started her year of experiential learning with the City of Cape Town at the Table Bay Nature Reserve and obtained her National Diploma in Nature Conservation. Landi plans to continue her studies next year to obtain her B-tech degree in Nature Conservation. She aspires to uphold a consistent high standard of work that has been maintained at Milnerton Racecourse and is looking forward to getting involved with the local community and interest groups of the surrounding area. Landi believes that she can ascribe her success so far to five main things: Positivity, Motivation, Dedication, Balance and Consistency. Her motto in life?

"Keep it simple."

Horsey History

The Milnerton Racecourse has been the pride of Milnerton for generations and has hosted some of South Africa's biggest racing events. Previously the land formed part of the Rietvlei farm until it was bought by the Milnerton Estate Company Limited in 1897. In 1904 a sub-committee was set up to discuss the project and in that December the Janbiesjies Kraal section of the farm was earmarked for the Racecourse. Building of the Racecourse began in 1905. Due to the economic depression work was halted in 1907 for a period. The Racecourse was completed on the 28th May 1908 once construction recommenced. The racing licence was granted to the Milnerton Turf Club by Jockey Club of Johannesburg later that same year. In its prime the Racecourse attracted approximately 25 000 visitors from far and wide to races. Many utilising the train reach the illustrious events.



Source: History of Milnerton, 1980

In the 1990's the Racecourse was sold and became the Milnerton Training Centre, later the known as Gold Circle Stables, now Kenilworth Racing. After 12 years the R12.6 million grand stand was demolished to make way for a housing project, Royal Ascot. The development of Royal Ascot began in 2000 isolating two natural areas from the greater Rietvlei Wetland Nature Reserve. The southern area is in the centre of the training horse track and the northern area is situated to the north of the Sandown Crescent complex. These two areas were proclaimed the Milnerton Racecourse Conservation Area in 2003, which has now been incorporated into the greater Table Bay Nature Reserve.



Source: History of Milnerton, 1980





Boardwalk Upgrade Anticipated

The EMC submitted a number of proposals in respect of the call for projects through the Ward Allocation process. The project that received preliminary approval was the placing of boardwalks through seasonally inundated areas in the Northern Conservation Area to allow visitor access during winter. Implementation is expected in the 2014-15 financial year

Are we killing the Environment or Ourselves?

Rodenticides kill rodents, insecticides kill insects, herbicides kill weeds, disinfectants kill bacteria and fungi. All these “pest control” agents are called Biocides and are used to kill living things but what or who are we actually killing? Many ingredients in these products cause human allergies, initiate cancer, promote genetic mutations or cause birth defects. Every time we use Biocides the toxic ingredients build up in the human body. Insecticides are probably the most commonly used poisons in our homes and are the most toxic. Insecticides can cause damage to the nervous system, liver and are a cancer risk. So what can be done? Do ants, snails and mice really need to die or can they be removed by hand? To use these substances responsibly read the small print and follow instructions carefully. Keep pesticides contained. Cover rat or snail bait to prevent other animals getting to it, and remove the dead animal immediately. Look for alternative products online www.gaiaresearch.co.za. In case of human poisoning contact the *National Poison Line* on 021 689 5227. For animal poisoning contact *Care for Wild* on 082 825 8735.

Edge Effects to the Reserve

Landi Louw’s research aimed to identify negative edge effects that threaten the biodiversity of the Table Bay Nature Reserve. The objective being to identify high risk areas that can be prioritised during future planning. Management objectives can then be adapted accordingly so that negative edge effects or threats can be controlled, reduced or eliminated. The study was complicated by the fact that the TBNR comprises of many fragmented pieces of land, increasing the number of “edges” that had to be assessed. It’s location within an urban environment also increased the severity of the negative aspects of the edge effects as natural buffers to the reserve rarely exist. Interestingly, of the 10 fragments of TBNR assessed, the Milnerton Racecourse (north and south) fragments’ impacts were the lowest.

Eight Legged Wonder



The Ord-web Spider (*Argiope australis*) is an attractive and common spider found in Fynbos. Another name for this species is the Black and Yellow Garden Spider deriving its name from the colourful striped patterns on its body and its most common habitat, your garden. Do not fear, these spiders are harmless to humans. The females are larger and display the bright yellow and black patterned abdomen. Males are attracted by the females scent and while the females are eating he takes his opportunity to mate and then flees before the female can consume him. They build wheel-like webs which are continually repaired. Constructing a zig-zagged patterned web from the centre stabilises the structure to capture prey.

Fantastic Flora

Come and enjoy a 20min walk through the northern area, third circle Grand National Boulevard, Royal Ascot and see what you can find.



Watsonia meriana



Wachendorfia paniculata



Phyllobolus canaliculatus



Leucadendron leavisanus



Pelargonium myrrhifolium



Oxalis pescaprae



Geranium incanum



Diasphysma crassifolium



Hermannia procumbens





Gold Circle Staff Walk & Talk

One of the Reserve's management goals is to increase the awareness of the neighbours who border onto the Reserve. Regular environmental inductions were undertaken with the staff of the horse training facility during the year



Sessions explained the Reserve's importance, its history and incorporated the Do's and Don'ts of the Reserve. Enthusiastic groups were then given the opportunity to access the southern area, a first for most. This allowed for their many questions to be answered. During the December walk a Mole Snake was sighted, one of the Little Five of the Reserve.

School Holiday Programme

The Reserve held its 3rd successful winter school holiday programme on the 25th & 26th June at the Rietvlei Environmental Education centre.

Children aged 6 - 12 enjoyed 2 fun filled mornings learning about food webs and the importance of plants and animals in the environment. Outdoor activities allowed the children to identify plants and animals, their functions and the effects on a food web if a species is removed or becomes extinct. Other activities included races, nature bingo, scavenger hunts and bio-billionaire which encouraged group work and tested their knowledge gained through the programme.



Seniors Guided Walk

On the 12th & 13th March the Milnerton and the Claremont groups of the Cape Jewish Seniors Association were taken on a guided walk through the southern area of the Reserve to experience the gem of Milnerton. The main focus of the walk was the flora. The groups identified both flowering and non- flowering species using an identifying chart. The highlight of both walks was the sighting of a Cape Dwarf Chameleon. The sighting of this sensitive reptile species not often seen in the wild, highlighted just how important the Fynbos habitat of the Reserve is for the preservation of both its fauna and flora species.



Spring Walk

On the 6th October, the 3rd annual spring walk was undertaken. Members of the public were given the opportunity to walk through the southern area of the reserve normally closed to the public due to the sensitivity of the vegetation and high concentrations of red data species.



The guided walk informed the visitors about the history of the Reserve, the flora, why Fynbos needs fire, the animals and the wetlands of the Reserve. Visitors were given the opportunity to identify a vast array of spring flowering species, due in part to the high winter rainfall.

Treasure hunting in Milnerton

Come and find the Geocaching site in the Reserve. This high tech treasure hunting allows anyone to use a GPS to hide and seek locations across the world. Your treasure is visiting these amazing areas experiencing a new and exciting adventure. For more information visit www.geocaching.com .

For more information visit

www.royalascot.co.za

to find out when our events will be held





Attack of the Aliens

After the 2012 ecological burn in the northern area not only were dormant indigenous seedlings rejuvenated, but alien acacia species as well. Port Jackson is a Category 1 alien plant in terms of the Conservation of Agriculture Resource Act (CARA) and must be controlled. Many alien plant and animal species are detrimental to ecosystems as they overwhelm indigenous flora and fauna by crowding them out, competing for resources, or by predation. For this reason one of the main objectives for 2013 was to eradicate all sprouting Port Jackson seedlings. It took 12 days between January and May to handpull, cut and herbicide them all. It will take many years of followup to eliminate these invaders completely as they have large seed banks. Fortunately, monitoring shows that the density of alien plants in the Reserve has decreased since clearing began.



In Search of Mottles

The newly appointed reserve manager, Landi Louw, conducted a study during June 2013 as part of her Work Integrated Learning, entitled "The delineation and vegetation description of a wetland in Milnerton Racecourse". The purpose of the study was to determine the type of wetlands (temporary or seasonal) that exist in the Southern Area of the reserve. The location and approximate boundaries of the wetland zones were determined by recording and comparing data on known wetland indicators such as vegetation, presence of an impermeable layer, hydrological characteristics, soil colour as well as redoxymorphic features (mottling).

According to the Department of Water Affairs (DWA), (2008), a combination of redoxymorphic features verified by the presence of wetland vegetation can be used to determine the boundaries of wetlands. However, according to Job (2009), there are certain sites in the Western Cape, especially those with sandy soils, that do not exhibit distinct soil wetness indicators such as gleying or mottling as described in the wetland delineation manual. These sites are referred to as "special sites" due to their unique conditions.

Due to the presence of sandy soils and the lack of variation and abundance of redoxymorphic features in the study area at Milnerton, a combination of the indicator plant communities, verified by the presence of redoxymorphic features was used to determine the boundaries of the respective wetland zones, with indicator plant communities serving as a primary indicator.

Grysbok Success

During 2010 one female and one male Cape Grysbok were captured at Milnerton Racecourse and introduced into Intaka Island, Century City. The aim was to start a population of Cape Grysbok at Intaka and what a success story it has been with the birth of the first lamb in February. Milnerton Racecourse removed these animals in order to reintroduce new Grysbok in order to prevent longterm damage to the population through genetic bottle necks. A permit has now been granted by Cape Nature for the reintroduction of one male and one female Cape Grysbok into Milnerton Racecourse in 2014. It is estimated that a population of 5 Cape Grysbok exist at the Reserve. Once the population reaches the maximum carrying capacity of 12 individuals, additional translocations will be undertaken to ensure that the Grysbok population remain healthy.



Rainfall and Wetlands

This year's winter rainfall data has been most interesting. The highest rainfall figures have been recorded since monitoring began in 2007. In August an all time record of 232mm was recorded, 101mm of it falling within 3 days. This was 57% more rain than August 2012 and 62% more rain than the average rainfall for August from 2007 to 2012. The result of the increased rain led to the formation of many ephemeral wetlands throughout the Reserve, and the merging of the dam and wetland in the southern area.

