



CITY OF CAPE TOWN  
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ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT & SPATIAL PLANNING  
ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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# CONSERVATION WISE

*Conserving Biodiversity for Future Generations*

## QUARTERLY REPORT OF THE MILNERTON RACECOURSE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2015



Photos left to right: *Lampranthus amoenus*, *Pelargonium triste*, *Moraea gawleri* (Photo: Hester Pentz). Photo below: *Crocothemis erythraea*



Funded by the **Royal Ascot Master Property Owners' Association** (RAMPOA) in partnership with the City of Cape Town and the Cape Town Environmental Education Trust (CTEET).



## Fixed-point photography

**Fixed-point photographic monitoring of water bodies** is done every month at Milnerton Racecourse. Fixed camera stands around each water body are used.

A set of four photographs is taken for each of the three water bodies every month.

Fixed point photographs are useful in monitoring features such as aquatic vegetation, algal activity, water levels and vegetation encroachment.

Photographs from different months and years can be compared with each other.

The photographs to the right indicate the difference between a wet year, 2012, and a dry year, 2015.

**Top right: Wetland 1 in September 2012.**  
**Bottom right: Wetland 1 in September 2015.**



## A raptor's paradise

**A number of birds of prey** were recorded at Milnerton Racecourse during 2015, including a Yellow-billed kite, an African harrier-hawk, a Lanner falcon and a Rock kestrel.

The juvenile African harrier-hawk was seen by the Site Manager in the Southern Area on 11 August 2015. This was a new species on the list.

Harvey Downes, a Tygerbird Bird Club member, also assists by doing monthly bird counts.

Birds such as falcons, hawks and kestrels keep prey populations balanced. As such they are vital components in the ecosystem and food chain.

Some falcons feed on pests such as crickets, while others keep potentially damage-causing birds, such as Helmeted guinea-fowl and pigeons in check.

**Top right: A Lanner falcon (photograph by Harvey Downes)**  
**Bottom right: A Rock kestrel.**



## Cape grysbok on the run and dogs on the loose

**Several reports were received that Cape grysbok were walking outside the nature reserve boundary** during July 2015. All the fences were checked and there appears to be no place for the antelope to escape. It however seems possible that free-ranging grysbok from unfenced areas in Rietvlei or the Milnerton Lagoon may have been able to wander into Royal Ascot in search for food.

During dry years such as 2015, irrigated landscaped areas may be attractive foraging areas for grysbok. Grysbok are selective browsers that prefer fleshy plants and green shrubs.

Some of the antelope may have remained in the landscaped areas since the start of the development, such as a particular grysbok that has been seen living adjacent to Arena North for nearly two years. If this is the case, then landscaped areas could be a viable habitat for such solitary antelope.

Cape Grysbok is indigenous to Cape Town. As Capetonians we should be aware of urban wildlife and take pride in the presence of these creatures in some of the most unlikely places. Not all animals can always be placed into a fenced nature reserve and expected to stay there.

We should drive vigilantly and never allow our dogs to run free where they could hurt children or wildlife. Royal Ascot is not a designated "free running zone" for dogs, therefore any person walking a dog without a leash is liable to a fine of R500. Please report dogs off leashes to Crime Watch or Big Bay Law Enforcement immediately.

Some interesting urban wildlife projects in Cape Town include the urban caracal project at [www.urbanacaracal.org](http://www.urbanacaracal.org) as well as [www.wildneighbours.co.za](http://www.wildneighbours.co.za).

## Terrapins, tortoises and turtles

**Marsh terrapins** are often seen at Milnerton Racecourse. They belong to the order Chelonia which also includes tortoises and turtles.

Terrapins however only occur in freshwater, whilst tortoises occur on land and turtles in marine habitats. Terrapins can be distinguished from tortoises by their flat shells and sideways-retracting heads.

Marsh terrapins (*Pelomedusa subrufa*) are one of three species of terrapins that occur in South Africa. They breed in freshwater pools, marshes or wetlands.

They sadly have gained popularity in the pet trade, while alien terrapins such as the exotic red-eared terrapin have escaped into the wild. They outcompete indigenous terrapins and introduce parasites and diseases.



Above: A juvenile marsh terrapin from one of the temporary pools.

## Frogging in the rain

A **frog survey** was conducted in the Northern and Southern Areas of Milnerton Racecourse on the evening of 25 August 2015.

Frog surveys are generally done by walking through the study area and listening for the calls of frogs. Calls can either be identified in the field or they can be recorded and identified with the help of an audio field guide.

Each call or group of calls are given a value according to the number of individual calls that can be discerned by the listener.

Two CPUT and four UNISA students assisted the Site Manager with the survey.

Clicking stream frogs and Cape sand frogs were heard.

Far right: A clicking stream frog.

Right: A Cape sand frog (Photograph by Atherton de Villiers).



Photo above: Frog surveyers, listening intently.



## Rare and endangered plants

A **new plant species**, *Gladiolus undulata*, was added to the plant species list of Milnerton Racecourse. It was found in the Southern Area by Biodiversity Coordinator, Cliff Dorse, on 20 August 2015.

The total plant list of Milnerton Racecourse is now 261 records in the 19.2 hectares of critically endangered Cape Flats sand fynbos.

**Red list (rare and endangered) plant monitoring** was undertaken during August and September of 2015. 33 Red list plant species have been recorded at Milnerton Racecourse to date. Many of these plants are declining elsewhere, which makes their conservation all the more important. Monitoring is one of the ways to ensure their survival.

Below are photographs of some of the red list plant species at Milnerton Racecourse.

Left to right: *Lampranthus amoenus* (Endangered); *Spiloxene canaliculata* (Endangered); *Cliffortia ericifolia* (Endangered); *Lachenalia reflexa* (Vulnerable); and *Lachenalia contaminata* (Near threatened).



## Boardwalk repairs

The **wooden boardwalk** at the entrance of the Northern Area of Milnerton Racecourse was built in 2010 in order to offer visitors access to the pathway through winter when the seasonal wetland fills up with water. Ten of the planks had to be replaced due to weathering.

The Environmental Management Committee of Royal Ascot offered to pay for the purchasing of new planks.

**Right: A portion of the repaired boardwalk in the Northern Area, with new planks visible.**



## School holiday programme

The **“Chameleon Commotion” school holiday programme** was held on 14 July. 24 children, aged eight to 12 years, attended the event. Four volunteers from UNISA, Northlink College and CPUT assisted the Site Manager.

The programme started with a short presentation on chameleons and their fascinating traits. Then a demonstration showed the children how long their own tongues would have been if they were chameleons.

The use of chromatophore cells to change the colour of chameleon skin was also explained. Thereafter, games such as “Feed your chameleon”, “Sort the beans” and a chameleon treasure hunt were played. At the end each participant had the chance to make their own chameleon mask.

**Some photographs of the day can be seen below:**



## Spring walks in 2015

**Guided spring walks** were held at Milnerton Racecourse on 16, 17, 19 and 20 September. The Site Manager hosted 42 people. Each walk started in the Northern Area with a short introduction. Thereafter the visitors were taken to the Southern Area which is normally closed to the public. Two UNISA students and one CPUT student assisted as guides for the walks. See some photographs of the spring walks below.

