



CITY OF CAPE TOWN  
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TRANSPORT FOR CAPE TOWN  
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

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# CONSERVATION WISE

*Conserving Biodiversity for Future Generations*

## QUARTERLY REPORT OF THE MILNERTON RACECOURSE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

APRIL – JUNE 2018



Above: The Restoration Area following the ecological burn (Photo: Thomas Meisinger)



Above: City of Cape Town staff conduct an ecological burn (Photos: Charl van der Merwe)

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).



## Rejuvenation by fire!

**A prescribed ecological burn was conducted on 12 April.** The Restoration Area was burnt as part of the ongoing Restoration Project which is aimed at rehabilitating approximately three hectares of degraded land within the racetrack that was previously been owned by Kenilworth Racing.

This land was originally zoned for housing development, but due to the track realignment it was donated to the City to be incorporated into the Milnerton Racecourse Section of the Table Bay Nature Reserve. This land is being transferred to City of Cape Town and the Environmental Management Department is managing it.

In order to rehabilitate the land, an ecological burn was prescribed in order to stimulate the germination of any indigenous fynbos plant seeds lying dormant in the soil-stored seed bank.

Much preparation has already taken place on the site, including earthworks to remove foreign materials, and replanting of search-and-rescued plants from the area which will be taken up by the new tracks.

The prescribed ecological burn marked the next phase of intensive rehabilitation which included the planting of over 1,700 propagated plants as well as sowing of seeds collected from the natural vegetation in the Reserve.

Given that the burn was scheduled to take place at the peak of the water crisis, utmost care was taken to ensure that **no potable water would be used** during the burning activity.

This was a condition of the burning permit. All fire-fighting vehicles were filled using rainwater sourced from Rietvlei. Firefighters were equipped with wind-blowers and fire beaters to control the blaze and water was only held in reserve as a last resort.

The City of Cape Town's Biodiversity Management staff were joined by Fire & Rescue Services staff as well as a Working on Fire team. In total, there were approximately 50 firefighters present at the burn. The activity was led by the Biodiversity Area Manager for Milnerton, Koos Retief and by the Site Manager.

The veld was ignited at 10:30 in the south-western corner of the demarcated burn block. After a change in the wind direction the ignition of the vegetation was switched to the opposite side of the burn block. Officials were able to contain the boundary of the fire and burn along the edges. Once the edges were burned out, the fire was allowed to spread throughout the entire block.

Any unburnt patches were later set alight to ensure that the entire area burnt out. By 12:30 the fire had mostly died down and staff suppressed smouldering areas by hand to prevent any fire hazards.

In total 1.9 hectares were burnt in the Restoration Area. The burn was successfully conducted **without the use of any water**. The smoke drifted predominantly to the east of the Reserve and as such residents dealt with minimal nuisance.

The following day, work began in earnest in the Restoration Area with collected seeds being sown into and between various research plots in the burnt area.

The burn was a fantastic success. The Site Manager would like to thank the residents for their cooperation throughout the day, and the City officials, students and volunteers for their assistance on the ground.

More pictures of the burn can be seen overleaf.



Above: Officials prepare for the fire (top and middle; photos: C v/d Merwe); Koos Retief ignites the blaze



Above: An official suppresses the flames with a wind-blower (left); fire beaters prevent the fire spreading outside the burn area (right)



Above: The fire line is monitored (left); houses were relatively unaffected by the smoke (centre); the fire rages (right; Photo: C v d Merwe)



Above: Intense heat stimulates germination (left; Photo: C v/d Merwe); the fire begins to subside (Right; T Meisinger).

Left & below: Officials monitor the fire (left photo: C v/d Merwe)



## The Reserve gets a makeover!

**This quarter saw many upgrades to infrastructure in the Nature Reserve.** Infrastructure requires maintenance as it ages and eventually needs replacement.

The boardwalk in the Northern Area provides critical access to the footpath during the winter months when the wetlands are inundated with water. The boardwalk was historically maintained when damage occurred, but a critical support beam gave way at the beginning of the year.

A subsequent inspection revealed that its structural integrity had become compromised and as such, a decision was made to replace the entire installation.

The Environmental Management Committee (EMC), together with the City of Cape Town, purchased the timber and hardware required to complete the installation.

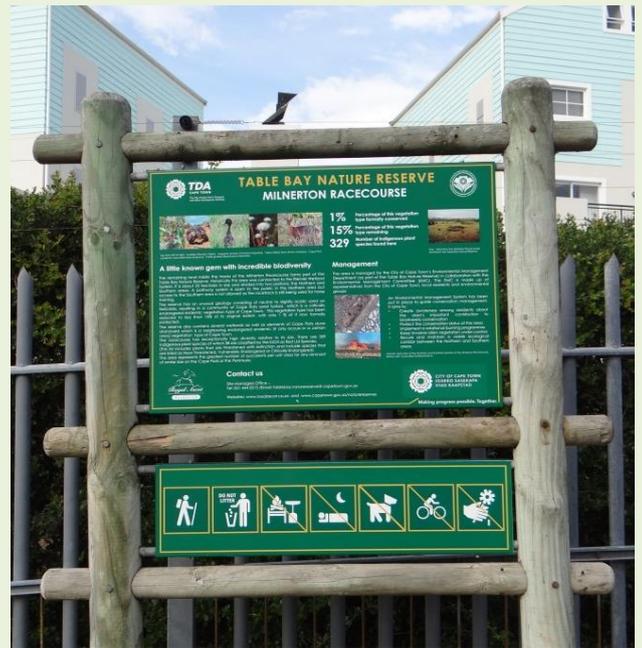
The work was done by the Site Manager, Reserve staff and students. The new boardwalk was completed in May, just in time for the winter rains.

The existing signage also had become faded and required replacement, together with an update of the information.

The EMC funded the printing of new signage contained the updated information and various new images. The new signs were installed at the entrance to the Northern Area and along Grand National Boulevard in June.

Following the ecological burn, new fencing was required for the Restoration Area, to exclude herbivores such as the Cape grysbok which feed on new growth. Master's degree student Landi Louw was able to fund the majority of the new fence with a research grant and the EMC provided the balance.

These new upgrades give the Reserve a fresh feel and would not have been possible without cooperation of the various stakeholders who look after the Nature Reserve.



Above: The new boardwalk in the Northern Area (top); New information board at the Northern entrance (bottom).



Above: New Reserve signage indicating restricted activities at the Northern entrance (left); Reserve staff and EPWP workers install the new exclusion fence (right)

## Creatures of the night

A **nocturnal survey** was conducted by Reserve staff, volunteers and residents in the Northern and Southern Areas of Milnerton Racecourse on 23 May 2018. The purpose was to record fauna sightings after dark. Six members of the public joined the event which began at sunset. Highlights of the night included a Cape sand frog, 23 Cape dwarf chameleons and two King crickets – to name a few!



Above: participants scan the veld for nocturnal animals (left); a King cricket (centre); and a Cape sand frog (right)

## Spring Walks – book your place!

The **Milnerton Racecourse Annual Spring walks** this year will be held on 22 and 23 September.

Secure your spot now to experience a guided walk through this unique and critically endangered habitat.

A total of 329 indigenous plant species have been recorded in the Reserve, of which 38 are classified by the IUCN as Red List species.

During the walk, visitors will be exposed to the Southern Area of the reserve, which is usually closed off to the public.

Please make bookings in advance by contacting the Site Manager at [Kyran.Wright@capetown.gov.za](mailto:Kyran.Wright@capetown.gov.za).



Above: A group from a previous Spring Walk and a few of the spectacular flowers sighted (left to right), *Romulea hirsuta*, *Baeometra uniflora* and *Ferraria crispa*.

## Rules Reminder!

**There has been a recent spate of incidents** of residents failing to adhere to the rules of the Reserve. Notable cases have included numerous domestic cats being sighted within the Reserve, dog-walking and the feeding of birds. These activities are strictly prohibited and for a good reason.

Management staff will be taking action against any perpetrators and residents are implored to obey the rules at all times. In particular, domestic cats may not be allowed to wander in the Reserve. A cat-trapping project will be implemented in the coming months and any cats caught in the Reserve will be taken to the SPCA. The owners will have to pay a fee for the animal to be released. More communication in this regard will follow.