WATERBERG NATURE CONSERVANCY

Minutes of General Meeting

Date 1st March 2012 * Venue: Rivier Oord, Vaalwater

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1. Welcome

The host and chairman, John Miller, welcomed all the members of the Conservancy noting some new faces from Hermanusdoorn and the special guest speakers.

2. Confirmation of Previous Minutes (AGM, 17 November 2011)

The minutes were accepted as a true reflection of proceedings.
There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

3. Guest Speakers: Arnaud le Roux, Endangered Wildlife Trust

Operation Oxpecker: The Oxpecker's Disappearance and Reappearance in the Waterberg.

Arnaud thanked the WNC and the Chairman for the opportunity to address the members on this important subject.
The EWT has been around for approximately 40 years and over the years old issues become relevant again like the rhino poaching and the oxpeckers.
The EWT currently are busy with ± 15 different programs with ± 200 project. In his group they try to mitigate conflict between wildlife and humans and for today's talk will focus on oxpeckers.

Promoting the use of environmentally compatible ectoparasiticides to support conservation of oxpeckers and other affected biodiversity.

Operation Oxpecker is aimed at preserving the existing populations of Yellow-billed Oxpecker and Red-billed Oxpeckers on privately owned and state owned land in South Africa and also at expanding these populations into other areas where oxpeckers used to occur before the introduction of oxpecker incompatible ectoparasiticides.

The Swahili name for the red-billed oxpecker, Buphagus erythrorhynchus, is "Askari wa kifaru" and means the rhino's guard. We tested the wildly held, but untested, belief that oxpeckers warn rhinoceros of approaching predators. Sixty-one unconcealed approaches by a person to seven marked adult female black rhinoceros, Diceros bicornis, were monitored. We recorded detection and detection distances that could be related to the presence-absence and number of oxpeckers resident on the rhinoceros and corresponded to their alarm calling. When oxpeckers were absent black rhinos were able to detect the person on 23% (7/31) of occasions at a detection distance of ± 27.74m ± 4 SE. However, oxpecker presence increased the rhino's detection rate to 97% (29/30) and improved detection distance by more than two fold (± 66.07m ± 6 SE).The 29 detections were an immediate response to an oxpecker alarm call. There was also a significant positive relationship between number of oxpecker on a rhino's back and detection distance. We confirm that red-billed oxpeckers really do act as an anti-predator warning to black rhinoceros. We discuss these results in the context of the wider mutualistic-parasitic oxpecker-rhino relationship.

How to attract oxpeckers?

- Terminate dips that may harm oxpeckers.
- Request all neighbours to follow (± 40 000 ha).
- Only dip farm animals when really essential.
- Try and stop dipping game species.
- Fit nest boxes to trees (± 2.5 – 4 m high) and do not disturb new birds.

Illegal use of pesticides
Homemade pour-on dips = imprisonment!
Homemade "Brews" are NEVER accurate!
No or wrong additives!
Never use any crop protection chemicals!
Over & under dosing, build up tick resistance!
Contaminate meat and milk!
Detrimental for birdlife and dung beetles!

The EWT try to educate the public, emerging farmers and commercial areas through promotional material as well as using local people to help with research.

Mark Howard, the manager at the Mokopane Wildlife Centre, is doing research on the oxpeckers and you will be able to view oxpeckers bread in captivity – by accident.
It is not practical to farm / breed with oxpeckers and also very expensive.

Monitoring of oxpecker populations in southern Africa
The project can only be successful with the help from the public by passing on valuable information gathered from i.e. game drives, bird watching.

4. Dr Michelle Thorn
Human-carnivore conflict in the Waterberg – up-date

The project aim is to assess the cost and effectiveness of non-lethal anti-predation methods in game and domestic livestock farms.

Project outline:
- Waterberg study area
- 3-year duration
    - Year 1 – baseline data – this information has now been collected
    - Year 2 & 3 – non lethal trials
- 30 -50 farms
- 4-6 weeks field work
- Additional wild dog monitoring

New activities for this year:
- Focus on large carnivores
    - Citizen science – to recruit landowners to help with research – this will start in May 2012
    - Photo contest

To take part, simply put your trail camera out at the beginning of May and send us a copy of your photos. Your carnivore photos will automatically be entered into our Waterberg Carnivore Photo Contest (www.ewt.org.za/photocontest.aspx) but if possible, we would like all photos, not just the ones with carnivores in them.

5. Kelly Abram
Report on Pompom Weed Day

On Monday 30 January, collaboration between the Waterberg Nature Conservancy and the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve organised a pilot event for Pompom Weed eradication and awareness. Welgevonden supplied a team with vehicles and herbicide and the Waterberg Biosphere organised a team from Timothy House (at Waterberg Welfare Society). The idea was to spread the message about Pompom Weed and tackle the issue of the plant invading the town of

Vaalwater and the surrounds. There have been teams from both South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and Working for Water (WFW) in and around the area battling with Pompom Weed over the last couple of months. It is apparent, however, that unless local people and land owners get behind this invasive plant issue we will be seeing the kind of takeover of our grasslands that has been experienced in KwaZulu Natal. Unless we can stop this plant now we will be fighting a losing battle and we will see our grasslands and wetlands destroyed.

There were about 21 people involved in Pompom Weed Day, actively cutting and spraying the weed. After carrying out a quick survey of the town and surrounding roads and recording GPS coordinates of Pompom Weed, the teams concentrated on two areas of dense Pompom Weed on private land in Vaalwater. These were the areas around the silos and the land behind the silos. Because they were on private land, SANBI and WFW teams had not been able to spray. We deemed these priority areas, which if uncontrolled will produce a source of seeds that will spread further into the surrounding areas. Thanks to Abrie Zaayman for permission to enter his land so that we could work on Pompom Weed.

Pompom Weed was removed by one team cutting off the flower and seed heads and the second team following with spray packs with herbicide that weaken and kill the plant after so many cycles of spraying. To control and eradicate Pompom Weed requires a long term commitment due to the herbicide being only effective with long term use. The WNC and WBR will continue their efforts to both assist in the control and eradication as well as the important communication and awareness of this dangerous plant in the future. With this pilot day, we are better equipped to organise a much bigger event in the next flowering season and get many more people involved. Our thanks go also to the Welgevonden team for assisting with spraying and herbicides and also to the Timothy House volunteers.

If you come across Pompom Weed on your property, here is how it should be removed and controlled:

For small areas of plants you can cut the plant down. The best method is to cut off any flower or seed heads and burn them. You can then cut down the rest of the plant down to the ground. It is not advisable to pull out the plant as the disturbance and breaking of the root stimulates the plant to grow more. During the growing season you can repeatedly cut the plant down. This will use food reserves in the roots and stress the plant eventually killing it.

For large areas you will need a herbicide treatment.

Assistance either in the form of the herbicide and/or teams is available from Working for Water. Contact Norman Malemela on 079 153 1608 or email normanledikwa2@gmail.com for more information.

What not to do – please do not ignore Pompom Weed. It must be eradicated now. If left alone it will spread aggressively and take over our grasslands.

Any new sightings of Pompom Weed can be reported to Kelly Abram Waterberg Biosphere Reserve – email info@waterbergbiosphere.org and also to Lesley Henderson Henderson@sanbi.org (Include date, GPS or approximate locality, habitat and abundance).

6. Richard Wadley
The Historical Distribution of Tsetse Fly in the Waterberg District

Richard gave a brief historical background on the origin of the tsetse fly.
There are 22 species of flies identified in Sub-Saharan Africa; only 4 in South Africa of 1 can be found in the Limpopo Province.
The name Tsetse fly means: 'fly that causes death of cattle'.

Why is the Tsetse fly important?
They are carriers of single-celled animal parasites that cause fatal diseases in domestic animals (nagana) and humans (sleeping sickness).

Sleeping sickness have caused the deaths in ± 10 million people in the last century and still kills over 50 000 people every year – mainly in central Africa.
Nagana is more widespread through east and southern Africa and until the mid 1990's also in South Africa. It is responsible for the deaths of over 3 million domestic animals per year – it also effects rural ploughing and transport and restricts areas for agricultural settlement.

Factors affecting fly distribution:
- Climate
    - Thrive in temperatures between 15 and 35º C and occur at altitudes up to 1800m (amsl) at equator, but rarely above 1200m in SA
    - Prefer rainfall bigger than 750mm per year – unless in thick vegetation along river banks and watercourses.
- Topography
    - Seem to prefer stands of dense bush on low rocky outcrops.
- Preferred hosts
    - Buffalo
    - Spiral horned antelope – kudu, bushbuck
    - Wild suids – warthog, bush pig
    - Elephant and rhino

Will the tsetse fly return to Limpopo?
Recent trends and developments make this possible:
- Conversion of former farm land in the lowveld to game farms.
- Increase fire control encourages generation of bush at the expense of grassland.
- Game farms lead to increased density of game animals, including that of the tsetse fly's preferred host – the buffalo.
- The development of large trans-frontier parks brings the risk that corridors are created along which infected tsetse fly and their host can migrate into areas that have free of the disease.
- Southern African government departments no longer have the capacity or knowledge to monitor the spread of the tsetse or to manage control programmes.
- At Kruger National Park, these issues are taken seriously and there is a program in place to monitor the southward migration of the fly.

7. Any Other Business

JM thanked all the speakers for their presentations.

The meeting was adjourned and everyone was invited to stay for refreshments, chats and snacks.

Signed: ……**Chairman**

Date: ……..