



Waterberg Nature Conservancy Newsletter

Occasionally issued news of interest to WNC members and others in the Waterberg

Number 11, August 2010

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Newsletter items by John Miller unless otherwise attributed.

Next WNC Meeting

Date: Thursday, 3 September 2010

Venue: Farmers Hall, Vaalwater

Time: 2:30 pm

Guest Speaker: Dr. Philip Calcott

Solar Power - the Solution to our Energy Crisis?

A look at the present and future potential of solar power, and how we can be involved in the coming solar revolution

South Africa has arguably the best endowment of solar power in the world, with high insolation levels well matched to demand centres. So why is it that we are making virtually no use of this amazing resource? Phil will attempt to answer this question, and outline the positive changes that are taking place in the energy sector at the moment. Along the way he will briefly introduce the key concepts of solar power, and explain how we can all utilise this ultimate renewable resource to save ourselves money and also do our bit to avert global climatic disaster.

Also on the agenda:

Richard Wadley: Echoes from the Hills – Fragments of Waterberg History and

Anthony Roberts: History and Focus of the Lapalala Wilderness School

Cash Bar and Light Supper at Very Reasonable Prices

**RSVP to Heidi Carlton by Tuesday 31 August 2010
(contact details at left)**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WILL BE HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, 17 NOVEMBER AT 2:30 PM.**

WNC New Members

I have been negligent in not welcoming new members to the Conservancy, so now I'd like to offer a belated warm welcome to those who have joined us in 2010, and who we look forward to seeing at our meetings:

Francois van der Westhuizen, owner of a plot on Nyathi Game Reserve on the Melkriver Road.

Bushpigs Outdoor Education Centre, represented by managers Chris Ovens, and Kerry and Steve Baytopp, is located off the Alma Road that joins the Vaalwater-Modimolle Road 15 kilometres from Modimolle.

Kim Wilson founded Bush Pigs Outdoor Education Centre in 1987 and managed it until recently. She is a Director of Bush Pigs, and has joined the Conservancy in her personal capacity.

Robin Taylor and Sue Walker who operate their African Odyssey Filmworks from their farm Muisvogelkraal, near Melkriver.

Hermanusdoorns – Located about 40 kilometres from Vaalwater on the R517 towards Thabazimbi, Hermanusdoorns is a 100-shareholder private game farm. John Hill is one of the Directors of the Board and Andre Cochrane is the Farm Manager.

Lindani Game and Lodges – Located in the Melkriver area, Lindani is a private 3,800 hectare game farm providing visitor accommodation. Sam Van Coller was a long-time and very active member of the Conservancy, and in fact served as Chairman for several years. We're very pleased that he has joined us once again.

Swebeswebe Wildlife Estate is a 5,000 hectare private reserve located about 50 kilometres east of Ellisras. Ken has been with Swebeswebe since its inception in 1983. Jaco Swanepoel is the manager.

In 2002, the Conservancy had 24 members. In 2008, there were 40 members. Now we are 61 members, and with your help, we can continue to grow. Think about your neighbours and friends who might be interested. We will provide them with full information, and invite them to join. Let us know.

Waterberg Fire Warning and Assistance Service

by Richard Wadley

The Fire Season is upon us – and once again, the Waterberg Nature Conservancy is offering its members and all other interested and affected parties in the region its free, computerised sms-based fire warning and assistance service. This year, the service is offered in collaboration with the newly-formed Modimolle Fire Protection Association.

All registered cellphone numbers will receive a daily sms fire warning advice (on days when the fire risk is high). You'll be advised of any fire in your area that requires assistance to bring it under control.

In order to request assistance with a fire or to register your cellphone number on the system, contact Richard or Lyn Wadley, on 083 609 1425; or 083 609 1464 respectively.

Remember, when requesting assistance, it is important to describe the location of the fire as accurately as possible in order that people are guided to it.

Writers Wanted

Do you fancy yourself a writer, a journalist, an author – published or unpublished? Conservancy members are encouraged to submit your writings for Newsletter publication. Event announcements, interesting tales, wise advice – long or short – are all welcome.

WNC Community Support

Bursary: We have established a process to support a Matriculant from any Waterberg secondary school who chooses to pursue his or her education at the tertiary level in a field related to nature conservation, environmental protection, or tourism management. As reported in the previous Newsletter, our first recipient was Salome Seaba. For the 2011 academic year, we'll accept applications later in the year and into early 2011.

Charitable Organisation and Conservation Projects: We are now accepting applications from local charitable organisations and conservation projects for WNC support to their causes. Basic information and an application form are available from Heidi Carlton. Members are encouraged to identify worthy projects and invite them to apply.

Eskom Outage 8-11 May 2010

Remember when Eskom power failed about 9:30 on the night of Saturday 8 May 2010? And remember that it wasn't restored until the morning of Tuesday 11 May? Several different stories made the rounds, most in one way or another saying that transformers and cables were stolen. Apparently not. Here are questions I raised with Eskom, and their answers. (I have made minor edits and corrections.)

The power went off at about 21:30 on 8 May. What time did Eskom first become aware the problem?

Eskom's technical personnel were dispatched immediately after the incident was reported and they were on site just before 22:00 on 8 May.

Who was first on the scene, and what steps did they take?

Personnel from the Modimolle Technical Service Centre were on site at around 21:45 closed the breaker once, but it tripped. Eskom technical personnel on site started to sectionalise the line by opening the isolators at pole 143 closed the breaker again but it subsequently tripped again. This indicated that the fault lay between the substation and pole 143. The work was suspended until daylight for the security and safety of employees.

The work resumed on 9 May with additional resources to help with the fault patrol. The first observation was that the breaker indicated that the fault could be about 1km from the substation. The team started to patrol from the substation along the Bela-Bela road. Due to wet weather conditions on that day, it was difficult to work speedily

on the line to resolve the problem. The fault was identified at 05:30 at towers 88 to 90, which were found to be lying on the ground. All the poles had been sawn off. Each tower had double poles at every foot and therefore a total of 4 poles per structure had been sawn off.

How did Eskom mobilise its people to repair the damage? What technical resources? What parts and supplies?

Senior management was informed of the damage to the infrastructure and the process of getting spare parts was initiated. Steel mono-poles were loaded from other Eskom business units and additional technical specialists were dispatched to erect the towers. The recovery team subsequently arrived on site on Sunday afternoon (9 May) and resumed work accordingly.

Did an Eskom team work straight through for the 61 hours of outage? Or, did they stop at night?

The work had to be done in chunks for safety reasons. Furthermore, the fact that resources were pulled from other areas meant that work did not go on throughout this period.

What problems did the crews encounter to make the repairs?

Wet weather conditions and the fact that the area is very rocky made it a little difficult to restore power as speedily as we would have wanted.

Why did it take so long to repair?

Due to the magnitude of the problem it was not going to be resolved within a short period. Furthermore, the challenges explained above affected the turn-around time. Required resources and special technical expertise were pulled from other Eskom business units and long distances had to be travelled.

What is the basis for calling it vandalism, rather than sabotage?

Eskom regards this as vandalism until the investigations can prove otherwise.

Why does Eskom believe those poles were cut, and not others elsewhere? In the Waterberg, or even elsewhere in the country?

The preliminary results indicate that poles were cut, and furthermore Eskom treats each incident as isolated. This means every case will be looked at on its own merits. The investigations will indicate commonalities if any, and proper action will be implemented as required.

Were there similar incidents elsewhere in the country?

Vandalism and other forms of theft were experienced before, but the manner and the extent to which this incident happened is different. Hence we require a special investigation.

Was nothing at all stolen? Cables, transformers, conductors?

Preliminary results indicate that nothing was stolen. Investigations are however in progress to determine other damages.

What have the police done about investigating the incident?

The case is currently with the police, and at this stage nothing has been reported.

Snake Encounters at Home

by Jessica Babich

I have learnt that you must sometimes be careful for what you wish for – especially where wildlife is concerned!

My husband Patrick and I have been filming at Lapalala for a couple of years now and apart from filming and photographing the more common flora and fauna species, we are constantly on the lookout for more special and unusual wildlife and behaviour. Our wish list of these is extensive and encompasses the 'usual suspects' such as leopard, pangolin, armadillo, armadillo, mating wild dogs and so forth – we live in eternal hope.

Sometimes however, nature delivers us wildlife on our doorstep – literally. And it is from these experiences that I again say, be careful of what you wish for...

Other creatures that we are constantly on the lookout for at Lapalala are reptiles, snakes included. Snakes are not usually everybody's cup of tea for obvious reasons. But for us, finding them was on our priority list and proving to be a real challenge. As the months went by, the closest glimpse we ever got of a snake was a swiftly disappearing tail into thick bushes or tracks across a dusty road. Frustrating to say the least!

One day after watching the tail of a twig snake disappear into a thicket, I bemoaned the fact that everybody else was seeing snakes and we were not – we had heard frequent reports of sightings from our colleagues. I then muttered to the universe in general and Patrick in particular that I wished that we could see more snakes. I felt we were destined to never find any that were in close proximity and of good filming quality. Well, I can honestly say that the universe not only complied with and answered my wishes, but gave us a huge return on our vested interest...

Not even a week later, we heard the monkeys giving an alarm call in our beautiful *scotia* tree next to our stoep. We rushed outside to see what all the fuss was about, only to find a *huge* black mamba carefully easing its way up the thick stem and into the higher branches! We flew back inside the house to grab the cameras, which was the cue for the snake to move as far away from us as possible (as do most wildlife when they feel the lens upon them) and it proceeded to move up into the higher branches.

We watched in fascination as it reached the upper canopy, gathered itself into a coiled position and launched its 2 to 3 meter body across a branch-free zone, to land safely in a fig tree across the way, where it continued its stealthy and focused hunt for food. It was truly amazing to see such a large reptile effortlessly negotiate such a distance.

But ask and ye shall receive - that was not the last of our snake action around the house! The following four weeks produced a plethora of snakes.

We were visited first by a non-venomous and very beautiful bush snake who thought that our study would provide it a safe haven. We firmly but gently convinced it otherwise and took it to a far more suitable cluster of bushes just near our garage. It was happy, we were happy. But it did not end there.

We have couches on our stoep where we sit and while away the hours sipping gin and tonics while watching the sun go down. (OK, we don't *really* do that, but that is the dream at any rate.) The following week, we noticed that our cats were showing an inordinate amount of interest in one particular couch, but failed to act on this curiosity until another week had gone by.

By sheer chance one evening, Pat happened to look out of the glass window and saw the tail of a Mozambique spitting cobra vanish under the couch!

Needless to say we leapt into action. Diving masks were donned (to prevent being spat in the eye) as well as thick, heavy boots and long pants (despite it being mid-summer) and we geared ourselves up in a pool of sweat to spend the next hour trying to extricate a very determined cobra from the inner workings of our couch in order to relocate it to a more suitable location well away from the house! Yes, we looked like complete idiots, but it was our first encounter at home with a cobra – little did we know we were about to become dab hands at venomous snake extractions...

A week later, a second cobra decided that it would also like to try and make a home in our study. When I casually opened the door to go outside, I was treated to a very scared snake determined to protect itself.

Upon discovery of our house guest, I did a combination ballet leap / pirouette that the Bolshoi Ballet Company would have been proud of (in addition I am sure that I would have also received bonus points on 'So you Think You Can Dance'!) Once again, but this time minus the mask and heavy boots, we scooped the little guy up, out and away to a more preferable location, once again well away from the house.

Less than a week later, Pat went into our store room just next to the study and noticed that it had been cleaned and organised as a surprise from my Mom – she had lifted all of the stuff off the floor onto shelves, so that snakes would be more easily spotted, you see.

As he turned around to call me, a raised hood and determined stance from yet another cobra stopped his progress out of the storeroom, which resulted in Pat performing a kind of groovy, twisting, Zulu warrior leap away from the snake, accompanied by loud shouts for me to come and help.

We called on our colleague Dr. Anthony Roberts from Lapalala to come and extract our latest visitor. Snake handling tools were required to probe amidst the ultra-thin crack between the door and the step, so that the latest reptilian visitor could be removed and relocated.

If we thought our snake escapades were over, we were sadly mistaken.

Another week or two later, our littlest female cat once again displayed signs of particular interest towards one of the couches on the stoep. This time, we did not ignore her signals and lo and behold, we found one very large and fat puff adder underneath the couch. This time, our cameras were ready and we got some super footage of it lying and hiding from us as it hung out under our furniture. Eventually we had the shots we needed and proceeded to extract it from under the couch.

Now we were much more used to snakes – 1 broom, 2 dustbins and superhero strength from Pat (as he single handedly held up the couch) and deft broom movements from me, and we had the puffie into the bin and whisked it away to a new location, where we released it and got some great additional footage to boot.

But that was not the end of it...a week later we had another visitor, again in the form of a puff adder. This time, it was hunting next to the house where our resident tree squirrels had spotted it, boldly sounding the alarm call to all and sundry. Once again armed with cameras, we proceeded to film as much of its natural behaviour as possible – much easier without a couch in the way – and got some great hunting shots despite a growing audience of vervet monkeys and tree squirrels.

It too was eventually removed to another location away from the house, where we got some super footage of it striking, as well as its amazing camouflage abilities. We were also able to observe just how fast these snakes can move!

Far from being sluggish and ponderous, the puffie eventually got to a point where it had had enough of our lenses pointed at it and, with astonishing speed, whooshed past my foot and into a clump of grass. While we are aware of how fast snakes can move, it was the first time we had seen such a burst of speed from a usually cumbrous snake – not unlike the speed employed when the banks open on a Saturday morning at month end and everyone wants to get in there first.

I can safely say that the reptile populations at Lapalala are flourishing! I am now very careful what I wish for in terms of wildlife action. Mating pangolins or wild dogs on the hunt are ongoing requests that have yet to be answered, whilst other desires such as snake filming opportunities have come upon us in abundance.

Who knows what we will encounter next? At this point, I would like to thank the universe for answering my call. However, perhaps it could consider my wish answered in full at this point with regard to snakes...now if we could just find that leopard giving birth and those mating aardvarks...

WNC Website, Not Yet

Your Executive Committee has often discussed setting up a website for the Conservancy. We think it is important and would be very useful, and we are determined to do it. As none of us are IT fundis, we have had a few stops and starts in our efforts. We'll keep at it, at our plodding pace, unless one of you Conservancy members stands up and offers your own expertise to help us. We have many ideas for content, and in fact much content all ready to go, but we need someone's help with the basic creation and design, and then maintenance. If you can help, please call. Now.

Rhino Poachers Caught in Vaalwater

Some of you might have seen a bit of commotion in front of the Zeederbergs Centre in Vaalwater on Tuesday 27 July. We learn the following from news reports: Four men were arrested for rhino poaching. They were on their way to shoot rhinos at a private game reserve near Lephalale. They were caught at the roadblock that police had set up where the Vaalwater road meets the Lephalale road. Police confiscated a vehicle, an axe, and a hunting rifle. The rifle had been stolen in a housebreaking outside of Pretoria. That's all the news that I've read.

Lantana - An Invasive Plant With Severe Consequences

The Plant Protection Research Institute at the Agriculture Research Council in Pretoria has a very useful website (www.arc.agric.za) and issues very practical newsletters. They've been informing us about Lantana for quite a while – are you listening?? Below, the Institute's Alan Urban tells us just how serious an invader Lantana is as well as how it can be controlled. He can be reached at 012 356 9843 and urbana@arc.agric.za. Also, take a look at the Weeds and Invasive Plants page of the website of AGIS, the Agricultural Geo-Referenced Information System: www.agis.agric.za/wip.

Lantana (*Lantana camara*) must be controlled because it is a Category 1 weed that transforms indigenous vegetation into an impenetrable thicket which diminishes natural pasturage, reduces productivity of stock farming, kills cattle, obstructs access to water sources and plantations, suppresses biodiversity, devalues land, and **control is required by law.**

Summary of Lantana Control Recommendations

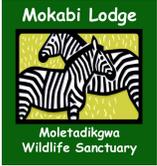
- **Initial Clearing:** Cut the weed down to the ground, using loppers or a pruning saw, to remove nutrient reserves. Paint immediately, five times, with a herbicide, using a squeeze-bottle. Registered herbicides: imazapyr (*Chopper* or *Hatchet*), picloram (*Access* or *Browser*) or fluroxypyr/picloram (*Plenum*). Dilute the herbicide according to instructions on label. Preferably cut and paint when plants are growing actively, but it may also be done during winter using imazapyr, which has longer persistence.
- **Follow-up Treatment:** This is always absolutely essential. Hand-pull or Spot-spray all weed regrowth when it is 0,5-1,0 m tall, using *Access*, *Browser* or *Plenum*. These herbicides are selective against broadleaved plants, but conserve grasses. Avoid spraying non-target broadleaved plants such as indigenous plants and crops.
- **Annual Maintenance:** Scout for weed regrowth every spring/early summer, and treat as immediately above.

- **General:** Do not rely on biocontrol alone for lantana, because the infestation will become denser and more widespread. Do not disturb the soil, because that creates a seedbed for weeds to germinate in. Do not destroy indigenous plants, because they compete with weeds, and provide various, valuable ecosystem services. If there are big bare areas, rehabilitate them using local indigenous grasses, to impede weeds, restore grazing and prevent erosion.
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**Wait, there's more in this Newsletter.
Learn a little about some of our members.**

Scroll on to Member Profiles.

Company	Contact	Contact Numbers	Email	Web Address	Brief Description
Ant's Nest and Ant's Hill Bush homes	Tessa and Ant Baber	014 755 4296 / 014 755 3584 / 083 287 2885	reservations@waterberg.net	www.waterberg.net and www.ridingsouthafrica.com	Ant's Nest and Ant's Hill are private bush homes in the magnificent malaria-free Waterberg. Enjoy fabulous horse riding safaris, guided bush walks or game drives on our privately owned property. Suitable for families, riders, honeymooners or just good friends travelling together
Driehoek Feeds / Voere	Janneman van der Merwe Karel van Vuuren Hanlee van der Walt	014 755 4370 014 755 4211 083 273 2743	Janneman@driehoek.co.za and info@driehoek.co.za	www.driehoekfeeds.co.za and www.equusfeeds.co.za	With over 20 years experience in milling, Driehoek Feeds manufactures a wide range of products. With a committed team of expert nutritionists, Driehoek Feeds has become a leader in the highly specialised Game Feeding industry. Driehoek has also recently launched the new Equus Range of horse feeds which compare to the highest international standards. For Cattle, Game, Poultry and other farm feeds, Driehoek combines research and science with value for money in every bag!
Jobedi Game Reserve 	Sharin	014 755 3993 / 086 612 9937 / 073 280 8670	game@jobedi.co.za	www.jobedi.co.za	Tucked away deep in the Waterberg Mountains is a private retreat. A purposely well kept secret set in a vast landscape of rocky terrain blessed with lush vegetation and scenic vistas of breathtaking beauty which lends itself to an abundance of peace and tranquillity. We offer self catering units and camping and are the only reserve in the area offering self drive game drives.
Kgama Eco-Ranch (Pty) Ltd 	Steven Klagsbrun	012 362 2280 (office) 012 362 5982 (fax) 083 450 7510	steven@kdv.co.za		Conservation – Fauna and Flora – Ecological enhancement. Selected hunting opportunities.
Kololo Game Reserve 	Elize Oosthuizen	014 721 0920 / 014 721 0080 / 014 721 9910	admin@kololo.co.za	www.kololo.co.za	Kololo Game Reserve is situated in the heart of the Waterberg biosphere: A malaria-free area, home to a large variety of game makes Kololo a perfect safari destination. Visit neighbouring reserves and view the Big 5 - lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo, or enjoy a sneak preview over the fence, from the comfort of your chalet at Kololo.
Kwalata Wilderness CC  Where the real Africa begins!	Reinhard Heuser	014 755 4104 / 014 755 4249 / 082 414 5622	reinhard@kwalata.com ; caroline@kwalata.com ; office@kwalata.com ; werner@kwalata.com	www.kwalata.com	Our company's main activity is hunting. Kwalata consists of 13 000ha. Kwalata boasts 4 of the Big 5 and numerous plains game species and birds.

Company	Contact	Contact Numbers	Email	Web Address	Brief Description
<p>Lapalala Wilderness</p> 	<p>Roger Collinson (General Manager) Wild Revolution; Jessica Babich / Patrick Bonior (PR)</p>	<p>(014) 755-4071 (Lapalala Main Office) 084 404-7800 (Wild Revolution)</p>	<p>roger@lapalala.com info@wildrevolution.co.za</p>	<p>www.lapalala.com</p>	<p>A private reserve that is dedicated to conservation, ecotourism, community upliftment and environmental education</p>
<p>Mokabi Lodge, Moletadikgwa Wildlife Sanctuary</p> 	<p>Lyn and Richard Wadley</p>	<p>014 755 3506 083 609 1425 083 609 1464</p>	<p>yeldaw@mweb.co.za</p>	<p>www.mokabilodge.com</p>	<p>A luxury stone and thatch self-catering lodge set in secluded woodland affords guests a comfortable and tranquil experience in the magnificent Waterberg. Numerous clearly marked and annotated walking trails and mountain bike routes on this private game reserve enable visitors to enjoy the diversity of plant, bird and animal life offered by the unique environment of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve</p>
<p>M`solosolo Safari</p>  <p>Relax in the heart of the Waterberg biosphere, private but luxury!!!!!!</p>	<p>Dr. Volker and Marita Neemann</p>	<p>014 755 4106 / 083 450 6535</p>	<p>office@msolosolo.com</p>	<p>www.msolosolo.com</p>	<p>Nestled deep in the Waterberg, you enter a quiet, malaria- and crime-free paradise. Your German hosts have been successfully involved in the hunting and lodging business for over 12 years. Activities include hunting trips with a professional hunter, guided walks to bushman paintings, horse riding, clay target shooting, pistol shooting exercises, bird watching or game drives in an open 4x4 vehicle. We gladly organize elephant back rides, visits to the white lion park or a personal touch with rhinos. Longer trips e.g. to the Kruger National or Pilanesberg Park, sightseeing or tours to God's window or Tzaneen can also be organized.</p>
<p>Nkonka Bush Lodge, Nkonka African Safaris and Idube Safari Lodge</p>	<p>Conway and Becky Volek</p>	<p>082 824 1750, 082 570 8494, 014 755 4170</p>	<p>conway@nkonka.co.za</p>	<p>www.nkonkabushlodge.co.za www.nkonka.co.za</p>	<p>Under the shade of the bushveld, broad leaved trees, the 4 star Nkonka Bush Lodge, provides guests with an escape to enjoy the true beauty of nature surrounding them. Enjoy the small, intimate nature of the camp on a fully or self catered basis. Informative game drives or walks with our experienced guide,</p>



NKONKA
BUSH
LODGE

PURE WATERBERG MAGIC

mountain biking and trips to surrounding attractions can all be enjoyed during your tranquil bushveld getaway. There is also the option of a self catered rustic bush camp, which is exclusive to one party at a time, so you are able to enjoy the beautiful Waterberg in the manner you prefer.