



WESSA
People caring for the Earth
NEWSLETTER 30

FRIENDS OF TOKAI FOREST

PO Box 442 Bergvliet 7864



JULY 2004

News of the TOADSTOOL (John Green)

Our chairman, John Green, had an operation to correct an aneurysm to the main artery in his back. The operation was very successful and John is recovering at home. We all wish him a speedy recovery, good health and strength.

New committee member

We welcome Sylvia Brass to the committee of the Friends of Tokai Forest. Sylvia is giving us the benefit of her wealth of experience in organizational and administrative management. Many thanks Sylvia.

Baboon update

As it is winter, the baboons have come down into their lowland foraging area to seek food. The troop has now split into two troops, both with alpha males. The new smaller troop is led by a male with particularly long hair and he has been nicknamed "John Revolta" by the baboon Monitors. John Revolta is the proud father of twins.

A pack of four dogs were attacking the baboons, disrupting their feeding and putting the troop into a state of stress. The dogs came from the forest workers village and the owners were asked to control their dogs. Chris Botes discussed the issue with the village community and it was agreed that the SPCA should put three of the dogs down, as they could not be controlled. Without the constant harassment from the pack of dogs, the troop has settled down and is now much easier to control.

There are four monitors at present and they are doing excellent job. All the monitors are graduates of the Chrysalis Academy and are managed on a day-to-day basis by Des Myhardt of the Academy. Although we are on the urban edge in Tokai, we have had no incidents of attacks on houses this year. The fact that we have the least threatened troops of baboons on the Cape Peninsula in the Tokai area and enjoy a relatively amiable coexistence is a tribute to the competence of the monitors and the techniques employed. Your contributions to Baboon Management are much needed and greatly appreciated.

CEPF project update

The extension of the core conservation site in the lower plantation should take place during late August. Pine trees adjacent to the conservation site will be felled and tree trunks removed using an aerial cable system. The branches that will have been lopped off the trunks will then be broken down even further to ensure rapid decomposition. Compartment A17b will be felled in September to open the biodiversity corridor into the wetlands as per the plans displayed on the notice board in the lower forest.

Once the clearing has taken place we will be in a position to establish paths so we can gain access to the fynbos without impacting the resuscitation process. We also intend to label a number of specimens to assist with our education and understanding of Sand Plain Fynbos.

It appears that the City Council intends to go ahead with its plans to put high-density low cost houses on the Wingfield and Youngsfield military bases. By covering the fields on these old military bases we will lose about 24% of the remaining Sand Plain Fynbos in Greater Cape Town. What we have in the lower plantation is a gem in the crown of the Cape Floral Kingdom and one of the Earth's biological hotspots.

CEPF E-News

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) have an excellent website. The latest newsletter is well worth reading because of its coverage of C.A.P.E. Partners Conference.

The address is www.cepf.net or read it on the notice board.

Wetlands project update

What started as the extension of the core conservation site into the Sweet valley wetlands has now become part of a far larger project. A Working for Wetlands project now plans to remove all invasive alien vegetation from the Soetvlie wetlands and rehabilitate the area with indigenous plants. The boundaries of the project are from the Stone Church at the entrance to The Range to The Blue Route in the East. The project will hopefully start in January 2005.

In the interim the Friends of Tokai Forest will continue to clear the wetlands adjacent to the forest so hasten the creation of the biodiversity corridor.

Forest Audit

The Friends of Tokai Forest participated in an external Environmental Audit of the Tokai Plantation with MTO Forestry in June 2004. The external auditor was Georg von dem Bussche. I think the best way of summarizing the audit is to quote from the note I sent George after the event.

"Dear George

I would like to thank you very much for allowing a representative of The Friends of Tokai Forest to participate in the Environmental Audit of the Tokai and Cecilia plantations. As a retired businessman, who specialised in developing computer systems, mostly to ensure international quality standards of production, I found your approach to the audit very professional, refreshing and educational. After the audit I personally felt that I had attended a "Master Class" in forestry and all who participated were motivated to achieve even better standards. I believe that I am now in a far better position to answer many of the questions raised by our members and the public who enjoy the privilege of having access to the Tokai Plantation.

James Forsyth"

One of the many issues raised during the Audit was the number of huts or wigwams built in the lower forest. These huts are often made by stacking dead branches against tree trunks and as such become serious fire hazards. These "dens" are often the hiding places of undesirables who drink and smoke in them at night. So what starts out as innocent fun can end in disaster. When a forest, on the urban edge, catches fire not only is there a tremendous loss of wildlife but human lives and

houses are also frequently destroyed. Let the kids build huts during the day by all means, but please insure that they are flattened by sunset.

COMPARTMENT A14c OF THE LOWER TOKAI PLANTATION TO BE HARVESTED IN SEPTEMBER 2004

MTO Forestry (Pty) Ltd has announced its intension to harvest the Eastern portion of compartment A14c in the Lower Tokai Plantation in September 2004. The trees in this compartment are 60 years old and overdue for harvesting. Some trees in the compartment have died and are a danger to the public.

The Friends of Tokai Forest participated in an external Environmental Audit of the Tokai Plantation with MTO Forestry (Pty) Ltd. in June 2004. The environmental issues, relating to the harvesting of compartment A14c, that were identified during the audit were:

- The preservation of an active Black Sparrowhawk nest close to gate number Three.
- The protection of the younger compartment of trees (A13a) from the North wind.
- The visual impact of harvesting on a scenic road.

It was decided that a crescent shaped stand of the old trees would be retained to preserve the Black Sparrowhawk nest and protect the younger trees in A13a from the North wind. (Please see diagram on the notice board in the lower forest) The Western edge of the crescent of old trees will run parallel to Orpen road and soften the visual impact of the clear felled area. The portion of compartment A14c on the Western side of Orpen Road will not be harvested until the Eastern side is replanted. MTO Forestry is planning to replant the clear felled area within compartment A14c in 2005.

The harvesting operation was originally planned to take place in August. However, it has been discovered that the Black Sparrowhawk's have three fledglings in the nest and are probably stressed due to the additional feeding needs. It was decided that the Sparrowhawk family would have the best chance of survival if harvesting were delayed to the second half of September.

For the safety of the public, the parking area in the North West corner of compartment A14c will be closed during felling operations. To compensate for the loss of parking, during felling operations, number one gate will be opened and cars will be allowed to park in the plantation precinct during daylight hours. Gate one is the entrance to the forest close to the white entrance pillars to the flower farm and the Lions club house.

Sightings in the forest.

Ann Koeslag has taken some magnificent photographs of the Fish Eagles in the Forest. Copies of her photographs and story behind the photographs are on display on the notice board in the lower plantation. Ann also sent in the following story about animal sighting in the forest:

FOOTPRINTS IN THE DUST

Walking along a road I notice a trail of dog-like footprints in the dust. I know they to belong to a Cape Fox. Continuing on my way, I find them replaced by smaller rounder prints where a Caracal or Lynx has walked. Next there are a set of lonely buck prints. And lastly, different sized elongated hands overlap each other. There is no mystery about these as I can hear a troop of baboons just around the corner. It is morning in the forest and I am very happy to be there.

With raptor cries overhead one would think I was out in some lonely spot, and not 10 minutes drive from my house in a city that is home to several million people.

The Constantiaberg forest isn't a natural habitat for the region, being a pine plantation, but it is home to an interesting selection of wild life. On my bird watching route, one morning, I chanced upon a Cape Fox sniffing the breeze next to the electric fence that separates the forest from the vineyards. He was aware of my presence but decided I was not a threat. After a few moments he unhurriedly went on his way. Pale gold in colour with a large bushy tail he was a handsome sight.

Some weeks later, a group of us were excited to see an adult Caracal with two half-grown youngsters crossing the forest road in the early dawn light. We followed as quickly and as quietly as we dared. They had been attracted by some gory prey remains, the leavings of newly fledged raptors. They were so busy snuffling around that they had no idea we were there.

On another occasion I was taking some visitors from the Eastern Cape up into the forests to show them the sparrowhawks. As we approached the area where I knew we were likely to find the birds, we could hear that a troop of baboons was in residence. I have always found the baboons on the Constantiaberg to be well behaved so, reassuring my companions, we took only a slightly circuitous route to the area we wanted to be in. Sure enough, our quarry was there. As we stood quietly watching the bird, we became aware that the whole troop had slowly filtered down around us. It was awesome to have these large animals going about their business, acknowledging us with only the odd glance to make sure we meant them no harm. There were youngsters chasing each other and wrestling in the dirt. Tiny babies with tails no thicker than string ending in about three hairs tentatively explored their surroundings, while others were suckled by their mothers. I suddenly spied what I took to be a large nest (my primary interest still being sparrowhawks), but it turned out to be a baboon on lookout duty, way up in a tree. To top it all, a large male ended up about 20 metres away, flat on his back, arms and legs spread wide, luxuriating in the attentions of two females as they riffled through his fur. Eventually we had to leave. Quietly making our way back to the road, I noticed that the troop was also on the move, leaving in the opposite direction.

I count myself very fortunate to have such a lovely area in which to pursue my interests.

By Ann Koeslag

Recycling.

A big thank you must go out to all members who have been supporting our Recycling efforts at Pick n Pay, Steenberg Village. The monthly credits for paper recycling is in excess of R60 and that for glass in excess of R160 which does not sound much but since inception we have earned more than R3700. All monies collected go towards baboon management and conservation. We are making an appeal to all members for more papers, especially magazines, as it would appear that we are somewhat lacking in our reading skills. I have been asked to remind you that there is ample secure under roof parking so you can do your shopping and recycling at the same time.

Walks.

At present we do not have anyone heading up walks , hikes, and outings but Jenny Walker one of our members has offered to lead a hike on Sunday 12 September to Berties Balcony. Those interested should meet at 8.30 am at the Kalk Bay side parking area on Ou Kaapse Weg. Members free. Non-members R5.00 plus R5.00 for the car guard if you park inside the boom area.

Alien Clearing.

Alien clearing and work parties have taken a back seat due to the interruptions of holidays and rugby but I will soon be calling for your help again the third Saturday of each month starting from 21 August

Recycling, Walks and Aliens. Bill van der Poll 7128836