



Seen around the Reserve...

Adelé Pretorius (BCA Nature Conservator)

Despite the drought affecting large parts of the Western Cape, the BCA has been a hive of activity in the last quarter. In the areas cleared of alien vegetation, plants such as the Blue Salvia (*Salvia cf. Africana-coerulea*) and various Amaryllids, e.g. Candelabra flowers, (*Brunsvigia orientalis*) and March Lilies (*Amaryllis belladonna*) are coming into flower.

Reserve staff were excited to add two animals to the species list, namely African Wild Cat (*Felis sylvestrus lybica*) and Lanner Falcon (*Falco biarmicus*). Species lists for the reserve are available on the BCA website at www.bca.org.za/specialecol.htm

The African Wild Cat is similar in appearance to the domestic cat but with proportionately longer legs. They have a relatively long tail, which is dark-ringed with a black tip. The belly is usually a reddish colour with the back of the ears coloured a rich reddish-brown. Individuals are mostly solitary, except when mating or when the female is tending kittens (2-5 born usually in summer). Unfortunately this species interbreeds readily with domestic cats.

The lanner falcon (*Falco biarmicus*) is resident to southern Africa and is the largest falcon in the region. It is identifiable by the rufous forehead and crown, a thin black moustachial stripe (also described as "tear" markings) and pinkish unmarked under parts.

There have been unusually late sightings (mid-February) of southern right whales in Table Bay this year. These enigmatic creatures usually move into southern African coastal waters from about May to October and spend summer and autumn months in the Antarctic feeding grounds.

In addition to the above, there have been frequent sightings of Common Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), Steenbok (*Raphicerus campestris*), Small Grey Mongoose (*Galerella pulverulenta*), Angulate tortoise (*Chersina angulata*) and Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*) around the reserve.

Computer donation eases pressure on stretched resources

Cliff Dorse (BCA Reserve Manager)



We would like to thank Maximum Dynamics (in particular, Lee Glanville, Head of Marketing and Communication) for their very kind donation of a computer and accessories for the BCA Environmental Education Centre.

From left: Cliff Dorse (BCA Reserve Manager), Louis Raubenheimer (Chairman FoBCA), Eric Major (CEO: Maximum Dynamics) and Henry Jarret (Education Project Manager: Maximum Dynamics) at the BCA EE Centre.

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BCA Vision

To conserve, protect and enhance the unique natural, historical and cultural resources of the area for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations.

To find out more about this unique area, please visit

www.bca.org.za

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On the 16th of February 2005 there was an official hand-over ceremony, where Maximum Dynamics were awarded with an honorary corporate membership to the Friends of BCA for 2005.

Previously, the reserve had one computer that was utilised by all staff members. With the addition of an Environmental Education Officer (Lizanne Engelbrecht) and two Nature Conservation students (Ilke Vermuelen and Penny Murdoch), resources were becoming a little stretched. Now Lizanne will be able to prepare resources and presentations as part of an extension programme whilst daily administration such as report writing, and eventually writing up of their theses by the conservation students, will also be possible.

Du Noon locals enjoy the view from the Hill

Patrick Dowling, WESSA Western Cape

They spend most of their days some ten kilometres east of Blaauwberg Hill, a dusty dot in the distance, but on Friday 11 February, youthful representatives of the Du Noon community joined their peers in the worker team and enjoyed their first breathtaking views from the top of Blaauwberg Hill.

Instead of the hazy blip they are used to, these 15 visitors could now take in the views of Table Mountain and Robben Island that tourists pay thousands for. This long-planned trip was part of the BCA community outreach strategy intended to ensure greater public participation and buy-in.

As part of practical training, all of the preparation for the day was done by the contract worker team themselves, with the help of Lizanne Engelbrecht, the newly-appointed BCA Environmental Education (EE) officer. The event included short PowerPoint presentations, lunch, the tour and gifts in the form of "Genuine BCA Seawater", sustainably harvested off the beach in recycled bottles. The presentations were mostly in Xhosa, but these and the lively question and answer session were translated into English for the more linguistically challenged. There was great interest in the nature and extent of the work being done and the opportunities in future for Du Noon and other communities.

Opportunities for three of the current worker team are developing tangible form as we investigate more specialised entrepreneurial training and work shadowing experiences for them. These will be in BCA-friendly occupations, such as plant nursery management, invasive alien contracting and eco-tourism.



Western Cape Internship Programme benefits the BCA

Lizanne Engelbrecht (BCA Environmental Education Officer)

The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, in conjunction with the City of Cape Town and the Provincial Government of the Western Cape, started an Environmental Management Internship Programme from February this year. The internships, hosted by the City of Cape Town's Environmental Management and Nature Conservation sections, in addition to the Provincial Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, have provided an exciting opportunity to develop capacity and skills in key environmental areas in the Western Cape. They will also enable interns to gain practical hands-on experience in the field of environmental management.

On the 2nd of February, the 15 interns from all over South Africa met at the University of Cape Town (UCT) for a three-day induction course. UCT, which acts as an academic support system, provided the interns with a common understanding regarding the key concepts and principles of sustainable development and institutional arrangements for environmental management in South Africa broadly, and in the Western Cape in particular.

On the last day of the course, the interns had an opportunity to experience nature hands-on when they visited Rondevlei Nature Reserve. Here Dalton Gibbs, Reserve Manager, gave them insight into daily nature

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conservation issues. The course was wrapped up and the day ended with high hopes for the year ahead.

The Blaauwberg Conservation Area Environmental Education (EE) Centre, one of the implementation areas for this programme, only now enjoys the attention that it deserves with a dedicated EE Officer on site. At this stage, promotion and programme development is the core function of the EE Officer, as this is still a developing reserve. The aim is to create a valuable environmental education, training and development resource for all sectors of the community.



The interns – Lizanne Engelbrecht standing second from left.

Two new third year students at the BCA

Introducing Penny Murdoch ...



I graduated with distinction from WITS Technikon Hotel School in 1994, acquiring my National Diploma in Catering Management. In 1995, I travelled solo through Europe, after working in London and Dublin. I came to Cape Town to open a restaurant in 1997, and subsequently worked in and opened other establishments including Melissas Food Shop. In 2000, I bought and re-furnished Yum restaurant in Vredehoek. My restaurant

went on to win the Gourmet Food Festival 'Fleur du Cap' best restaurant award twice in my three and a half years of ownership.

Not able to ignore my dream of a career working with nature, I enrolled in the Nature Conservation diploma course at Cape Technikon in 2003, while still running the restaurant. In order to concentrate solely on my studies I sold the restaurant in October of that year. Today, I am completing my studies by happily working out my experiential training year at the BCA.

My main focus at present is my research assignment, which involves researching the viability of installing an underpass below the R27, to create ecological connectivity between the western dune plains (between Otto du Plessis and the R27/ West Coast Road) and the Hill. Ultimately, this research could be utilised by other reserves in the Western Cape to drastically reduce animal road mortalities and create corridors linking core conservation areas with isolated nodes, helping to maintain and increase biodiversity in the Fynbos Biome.

Introducing Ilke Vermeulen ...



Before I decided to do my experiential training at the Blaauwberg Conservation Area (BCA), I barely knew anything about the area. I am originally from Pretoria, where I completed my first year of studying at Pretoria Technikon. Prior to choosing nature conservation as a career, I worked as a scuba diving

instructor in Mozambique. I moved to Melkbosstrand in January 2004 which, besides the fact that I love the ocean, encouraged me to join the BCA.

The BCA is home to a rare and endangered mammal, *Mystromys albicaudatus*, commonly known as the white-tailed mouse. This cute and furry animal was quick to steal my interest which, in turn, has led me to do my research project on their abundance, habitat preference and distribution within the BCA. While experiencing the enjoyment of becoming a conservationist, the past nine weeks has proved that this year promises to unveil many exciting events. It is therefore with vast interest and anticipation that I am hoping that the BCA will be a successful stepping-stone to my becoming a zoologist!

BCA Festival in May

A festival to promote this unique reserve and its various attributes and opportunities, is being planned for the weekend of 21 and 22 May (and some evenings of the week leading up to it). There will be talks on various aspects of the flora, fauna, history and archaeology, guided walks, displays and many other exciting and fun events for both adults and children. Watch the local press for details...

Friends of BCA news

Louis Raubenheimer, Friends of BCA (FoBCA) chairman

The first hack in the Blaauwberg Conservation Area, which took place on Saturday 12 February, can only be called an unqualified success. In conditions not very conducive to hacking (dry & hot!), thirty one grown-ups (that is, everyone over eleven) and two youngsters (2 and 4 years old) worked for just over ninety minutes and collectively removed 4 100 Port Jacksons (we counted). That averages at 132 per person.

A circular area of approximately one hectare was cleared, leaving a fantastic piece of fynbos to develop unhindered from now on. Particularly appreciated was the attendance of other WESSA Friends Groups. Friends of Rietvlei pitched up, as did Friends of Lions Head and Signal Hill. Friends of Tygerberg Hills were also there with their very experienced hacking group.

Several older people were there to do their bit, and boy, did they do it! Most encouraging was the presence of younger people. Three representatives from the Monte Vista Boy Scouts and little Annette van Zyl (11) all worked away, while the two Marais kids (2 and 4) demonstrated their experience, helping mommy Karen zap those nasty aliens. It gives one hope for the future. Greatly appreciated was the presence and guidance of the BCA Reserve Manager, Cliff Dorse and two students, Ilke and Penny, who sacrificed their Saturday to come and give active leadership. I do not think people realise just what a fantastic job these people are doing.

After the hack everyone went up Blaauwberg Hill for a picnic and to observe the rather breathtaking views from there. Mentioned in passing was the tremendous job done by four-wheel drive enthusiasts, repairing the damage to Blaauwberg Hill caused by rogue four-wheel drivers. Along the way attendees could see our first owl box which has already had its first pair of owls move in (see *BCA Focus* 4/04 for more information on the owl box). Biological control of prickly pear could also be seen (let the cochineal beetle do the hacking!). On top of the hill a very enthusiastic Major Tony Gordon pointed out the Battle of Blaauwberg site and expanded on his ideas of commemorating the Bicentenary next year. World War II buildings, waiting to be renovated, created considerable interest.

We certainly plan to repeat the exercise on a regular basis, having seen firsthand the tremendous success of our first outing.

A very successful FoBCA walk was led by Adelé Pretorius on the new hiking trail about two weeks ago. A few new FoBCA members were even recruited! Some groups had to, unfortunately, be turned away due to the large response, but will be pleased to know that the FoBCA have decided to hold regular "general" walks and a flower-dedicated walk in spring.

HACKS will now be held at 8am on the FIRST Saturday of each month and WALKS at 8am on the THIRD Saturday of each month.

Please contact Louis Raubenheimer on tel (021) 554 2221, cell 082 651 5437 or email Lraubenh@mweb.co.za if you are interested in joining the BCA hacks, and Louis or John Bell on tel (021) 5543649 if you would like to take part in the Blaauwberg Hill walks.

If you would like more information on the BCA or are interested in becoming involved, please contact:

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The Friends of BCA are a voluntary group whose mission it is to contribute to seeing that the BCA is protected and utilised to the benefit of the general public, now and for the future. The group is affiliated to WESSA Western Cape.

You are encouraged to join the Friends of BCA and thereby actively participate in the realisation of the BCA vision.

Please contact Louis Raubenheimer on (021) 554 2221 or 082 651 5437, or email Lraubenh@mweb.co.za

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