



WNHA NEWSLETTER – JULY

2013

Our Mission Statement

“To engage in the conservation, rehabilitation and protection of the natural environment in the Wakkerstroom area”

GENERAL

As things are a bit quiet at the moment, this newsletter is a little later than we had hoped. Somethings are certain however: the soccer season is over , we are experiencing a mild winter, although a cold spell or two are sure to come and the village has been quiet since the Easter and Music Festival weekends, with the exception of the Vrou soek Boer film crew who “took over” for a while . The Vlei Fees was washed out by exceptional April rainfall.

However one of our new projects has commenced - the rebuilding of the boardwalk access to the WOW and Clive Beck hides. The old one is rather dilapidated in parts and was badly damaged in the fire in the vlei last year.

PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT DECLARATION

Work on declaring the Wakkerstroom area as a “Protected Environment”, is proceeding. The WNHA is very much involved in this through strong representation on the Wakkerstroom Protected Environment Management Committee (WPEMC). We unfortunately do not have a target date, due to the nature of committee work and the involvement of the municipality.

There are still people around who believe that Wakkerstroom is to receive World Heritage Status. This is not true; we are not near that status and will never be. This originated from a politician who had his facts mixed up and it was then spread by the media. We have verified this with the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Association.

VLEI NEWS

Work has started on rebuilding the walkway at the vlei. This work has been sponsored by the Telkom Foundation and our grateful thanks go to them.

We are still hoping for funding from Svmor Colliery. We have suggested several projects to them, namely a viewing platform, repainting of the Kruger Bridge, a cattle grid at the gate or a new pathway from the parking to the new viewing platform. We have given them the costings and are waiting for their decision on the amount they are prepared to sponsor.

Maintenance work continues as usual. We have cut the grass around the walkway and underneath Clive Beck Hide. Testament to the rains last summer, there is still plenty of water around the WOW hide and we cannot cut that grass yet but by July that hide is usually on dry ground. At a request from the Wakkerstroom Bird Club, we moved a couple of benches in the Clive Beck Hide to enable birders and photographers to position their tripods between the bench and the outside wall.



FIRE

Unfortunately, the fire teams promised for the Wakkerstroom area have not materialised. The WNHA will follow up to

see where this goes in 2014.

We will be putting fire break legislation up in the window of the “Crow’s Nest”. If this is relevant to you, study it and note that the time for legally burning fire breaks, has nearly passed.



EDUCATION

Things are progressing well in terms of the Grasslands Environmental Education Programme (GEEP), for which Kristi is the manager. BirdLife South Africa launched the Bird of the Year posters and resources during National Bird Week from the 20th-24th May. As many will already know, the Bird of the Year 2013 is the White-winged Flufftail. The resources consisted of 5 lesson plans with accompanying worksheets or activities were sponsored by Eskom. Through interactions with teachers at the annual Mpumalanga Teachers Conference held in Badplaas on the 25th May, these resources will reach approximately 69 000 learners and 4 500 teachers. This excludes the resources that were given to partners and other stakeholders.

Kristi was invited to present the Bird of the Year Programme at the South African Association for Science and Technology Educators 6th National Conference in Nelspruit from the 1st to 5th July. This is the first time BirdLife has been invited to this conference. The teachers were really enthusiastic and over the five slots Kristi presented, each had an average of 40 attendants. This intervention will indirectly reach approximately 39 000 learners and 2 700 teachers across the country.

GEEP has received funding from Harmony Gold to pilot the Avianator Programme in the Free State. This

programme will be commencing towards the end of July with ten schools. Kristi has also been asked to submit a proposal for northern KZN and southern Gauteng for a total of 50 schools for a client of Ogilvyearth. We are awaiting a response from them as well as from Sasol, Secunda for a node of 23 schools. This is quite an exciting time for the Avianator Programme.

The BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre is currently evaluating the structure and service on offer to schools. We are in the process of designing a science based centre which we hope will be funded through the Motsepe Foundation in the coming year/s. Proposals are still to be submitted and the design confirmed.

The Centre was showcased in the July/Aug African Birdlife magazine. This article detailed the Eco-Centre Programme we are involved in and will be reporting on at the beginning of 2014. Remember that we still collect recyclables such as glass, plastic, metal/tins and paper/cardboard. This can be delivered to the centre any week day from 08h30 to 15h30 where your contribution will be recorded appropriately. Please feel free to stop in for more information. (PS - We are still the only centre in Mpumalanga registered on this programme ☺)



“ALIENS” – NOT FROM OUTER SPACE!

Usually these plant species are from South America, Australia and a few from other countries. They are generally large green trees, shrubs or other invasive plants. Unfortunately they enjoy their new habitats enormously and very soon become a massive

problem. This does not only apply to plants but to animals and insects as well hence there are very strict laws in place to try to avoid the introduction of anything which could become a “problem” later on – unfortunately like in the illegal trade of plants, birds and other animals, those determined enough, find a way to smuggle in or out, species that can be sold for large sums of money with scant regard to any future problems they may cause.

Many of our unwanted plant guests were introduced many years ago when no-one thought of or knew that species like Wattle or Poplars could become a nightmare for their heirs. The cost in water consumption and loss of grazing to invasive plants is horrendous and because of the cost to farmers in labour and the necessary herbicides, they mostly cannot even begin to tackle the problem. A couple of farms between Zaaihoek Dam and Volksrust were abandoned by the owners because of this and even the banks who are owed money on these farms, will not take them over!

This is a brief background as to why there is such an aversion by anyone working in or with the environment, to alien vegetation and as it is realised how quickly things get out of hand – often starting from unknowing and innocent planting in gardens. There are lists of plants that **can** and **cannot** be planted. Please contact Glenn Ramke for further information.

Right now there is yet another plant originally from Mexico - *Tithonia tubiformis* – (very like the Mexican sunflower) rapidly moving across our borders from Mozambique and Swaziland and an expert in the field says “it would take ++++++a miracle to eradicate” –

please keep your eyes open and report if you see it - ***and do NOT plant it in your garden!***

Glenn can be contacted on glennr@ewt.org.za / 072 770 4646 / 017 730 0001

MEMBERSHIP

The 2013 subscriptions are due and notices have been sent out. Please remember to pay your subs, so that we can continue to finance our activities. Subs per family are only R 200.00 per year.

Approximately 35 members have not paid their subs this year. If you are not sure of your status, call one of us and check.

SHIRTS AND CAPS



These are now on sale at **Birdsong**. Please support this fundraiser.

CONTACTS AND BANKING DETAILS

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Account number: 6207 4355 134

Branch number : 270543 (if required add two zeros to the end of this number)

Please contact us if you have any suggestions as to new projects or fund raising ideas that we can investigate

We need your input and feedback