



# Friends of the Liesbeek River

*Creating an awareness of the river, to rehabilitate, enhance and conserve it and its environs.*

Winter 2014 <http://fol.org.za> Visit the website...there is so much more to see there!



## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

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Welcome to 2014! We are already well into the first quarter of the year and some of us still fondly remember the break we had just a short while ago. While it was lovely to have a break, the issues affecting the river kept up unabated, so the first part of the year is always a big game of 'catch-up' for the Maintenance Project Team. This was especially true this year as the theft of our faithful bakkie meant that we were unable to get to all the reaches of the river equally well towards the end of last year. This, coupled with the late rains we had, have meant rampant growth of invasive plants – even the indigenous plantings require maintenance to help them look neat and tidy.

Thankfully, we are thrilled to report that we have finally secured a replacement vehicle for the team! This long-awaited mobility will mean the world to the Team, especially our Manager, Nick Fordyce, who has been doing the job using his tiny 2-door Ford Ka for 8 months. Thanks, Nick, for your dedication to the cause!

In this vein, we send out a huge 'Thank You' to our very generous funders, especially to Abax for not only renewing their grant to us for another year, but increasing the contribution as well.

We undertake to continue to provide the level of service that satisfies our current funders whilst appealing to other, new potential supporters in future.

An issue that has raised its head in the river far above 'normal background' levels, is homeless people using the river and adjacent green spaces for their shelters. Sadly, our previous Manager, Jason, had very little success in trying to include some of these vagrants in the clearing work or in helping them to understand

These illegal dwellings are almost always massive sources of litter and other contaminants to the water. At the end of each newsletter we list important numbers, please check these and make use of the number for the Displaced People's Unit and the City's Fault Reporting number. Whenever you notice vagrants (or other issues), please report them – do not assume we know already – and help us to stay on top of issues as they occur.

We're looking forward to a great year and hope as many of you as possible are able to enjoy this excellent weather by using the river for your sustainable recreation!

Kind regards

All the best

*Phil McLean*

Chair

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## IMPORTANT AGM NOTICE

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### The Friends of the Liesbeek AGM

**Tuesday 24 June**

**18h00**

**Enviro Centre**

Dalton Gibbs will be speaking on Erica verticillata and the restoration of wetlands.

## PENINSULA PADDLE

*paddling the peninsula for cleaner waterways*

Paddling through Cape Town's waterways, from one side of the Peninsula to the other, brings attention not only to the city's rivers and canals, but also the contrasting social and environmental conditions across the city. Now in its fifth consecutive year, the Peninsula Paddle has become an annual Cape Town event that coincides with World Environment Day (5 June). The paddle is organized each year by civil society activists and receives generous financial support from private companies.

The Peninsula Paddle takes place on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June. Paddlers will be joined by Braam Malherbe, an extreme adventurer and conservationist, who believes that if we each DO ONE THING (DOT) we can make a radical difference to the planet. Other participants include executive managers of the Water Research Commission who will use the event to launch the Urban River Renewal programme and explore how to roll out similar paddle events to other South African cities where the municipalities are struggling to contain the pollution that falls into their urban waterways. To register for the paddle and for more information visit the website or contact Kevin Winter.

Dr Kevin Winter

Friends of the Liesbeek

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[www.peninsulapaddle.wordpress.com](http://www.peninsulapaddle.wordpress.com)



The Friends of the Liesbeek is a WESSA affiliated Friends group.

WESSA has over 50 active Friends Groups throughout South Africa. These are groups of volunteers that band together to conserve, rehabilitate and protect a natural area or space of special interest, and are guided by the mission statement, policies and position statements of WESSA.

For more information on getting involved in or establishing a Friends Group, please contact Nina on 033 330 3931 or e-mail [wessamembers@wessa.co.za](mailto:wessamembers@wessa.co.za)

*Many thanks to our sponsors for their ongoing support.*



## THE RIVER DIARY

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It's been just over seven months since I took on the job as the river manager for Friends of the Liesbeek. What a seven months it has been!

I knew when I took on the job that I would enjoy the outdoors aspect of it. It has long been an ambition of mine to get a job that would enable me to spend at least part of my time outdoors. What I didn't anticipate was the number of very interesting people I would meet along the way. I didn't realise that so many people cared and wanted to make a difference. It's been a rather humbling experience.

We live in a world that seems to be obsessed with the negative. Bad news spreads like wild fire and the good news commonly gets lost in the smoke! This is never truer than in the realm of the environment. Ever since I became interested in the natural world I have read about how we are destroying it. Rhinos are being poached, forests are being chopped down, the icecaps are melting... So it's great to be part of something that flies in the face of that.

All along the Liesbeek I see examples of how we are improving things. Understanding the history of the river and then seeing it in its present state is a huge source of optimism to me. The Liesbeek is probably the oldest river in South Africa in terms of being impacted on by European settlers. As such it has long been the subject of drastic landscape changes and modifications which have had significant detrimental impacts on the river's ecology, hydrology and geomorphology. So when the first committee members came together to create the 'Friends of the Liesbeek', they inherited a river full of issues and problems. The progress (in terms of improving the overall river condition) that has been made since then, and the progress which continues to be made, serve as a huge reminder to us that all is not lost.

So far my time on the river has helped to solidify my belief that we need to change our paradigm when it comes to the way we view nature. Society has seemingly long held the view that nature must be kept separate from humans. Whilst I agree that we need to preserve the remaining wildernesses that we have, I also believe we need to reintegrate nature into urban settings. The Liesbeek provides that opportunity. It acts as a green corridor in an otherwise concrete setting and provides little spots of refuge for the wildlife that ekes out a living on our doorstep.

The proof of this is there to be seen. Unusual sightings along or near the river are becoming altogether less unusual. In Mowbray there is at least one Black Crowned Night-Heron that seems very happy with his/her patch along the river. In Observatory three species of Kingfisher (Giant, Malachite and Pied) all happily coexist. Not far from them the most northern and western population of the endangered Western Leopard Toad continues to thrive (Last year's baby migration was described as the "... biggest in living memory..."). In Newlands a small nocturnal predator, a Small Spotted Genet, has been caught on camera. There has even been very strong evidence to show that Cape Clawless Otters are living along the river. All in all it makes for a very promising situation.

So what have the Liesbeek Maintenance Project team been up to? Well the summer months have left us with our hands full trying to deal with the prolific alien and invasive species that have sprouted up all over the place. All along the river White Poplars are popping up, especially in areas where older trees have died and collapsed and opened space for sunlight to shine through. Our most invasive alien, Purple Loosestrife, has done well in response to the late arrival of last winter's rain and the unusual rainfall events experience in late November and February. In Mowbray and in Newlands we have been busy clearing stands of Indian Shot, Wild Ginger and Lantana (to name just a few) with the view to doing re-landscaping and planting work in Autumn.

All in all it has been a busy few months since I took over. The Liesbeek continues to be both problematic and wonderful. It continues to teach us and frustrate us. Its management continues to serve as an example to other urban rivers. A change of the season is already in full force. I am looking forward to seeing what the Liesbeek will have in stall for us next...

*Nick Fordyce - Liesbeek Maintenance Project Manager*

## WESTERN LEOPARD TOAD

4/3/14

Rapid urbanisation of Cape Town has shrunk the habitable environment of the Western leopard toad, and it is now classified as an Endangered species on the IUCN Red List. Thankfully, there are groups of volunteers dotted across the metropole who get out on the roads at night during the annual breeding season to rescue toads from becoming roadkill. This happens once a year during the Cape's rainy months.

The males make their way to water where they will call out to attract the females. After mating the females deposit strings of eggs in the water. Several weeks later the small toadlets make their way back to their habitats in gardens and vegetated areas. It's during these movements, and when they come out to feed at night, that they are most in danger of being run over.

The photographs show a toad seen in the grounds of the Astronomical Observatory, situated between the Black and Liesbeek Rivers. Public talks and night sky viewing are held there fortnightly on Saturdays; volunteers are on hand to urge the public to drive very slowly and watch out for these handsomely marked, but well camouflaged, toads. Most visitors have never even heard of the Western leopard toad, let alone that it's endangered or how to conserve it. Sharing information about how to care for our environment is ongoing.



## UPPER LIESBEEK RIVER GARDEN



Thank you to all the residents of Bishopscourt Village and Fernwood, Guests and members of Friends Groups who came out in force on Saturday 15th February to celebrate the River Garden's 10th Anniversary. The weather played along beautifully to make it a fitting occasion to look back on all that has been achieved over the past decade. We look forward to many more years of further nurturing this special and magical place that we are so lucky to have on our doorsteps.

*Joan Parker*

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

## Membership and donations

Due in January every year:

- Individual R50
- Family R80
- Corporate R250

We also welcome:

- Donations to the Liesbeek Maintenance Project

Please deposit into our bank account directly. New members must enter contact details: address, e-mail and telephone numbers on the membership form available on our website, and send it to [secretary@fol.org.za](mailto:secretary@fol.org.za) or to our postal address, along with a copy of the deposit slip, including reference details (Initials & surnames). Receipts and newsletters will only be posted on request. Newsletters are sent by email.

Our banking details are:  
Friends of the Liesbeek  
Nedbank, Pinelands  
Branch No: 104709  
Savings Account No:  
2220015645

*Friends of the Liesbeek is a registered Public Benefit Organisation ref no 93000280 Non-profit Organisation ref no 56-033*

### CONTACT PERSONS AND NUMBERS

- **Liesbeek Maintenance Project:** Nick 0722612651 ; [info@fol.org.za](mailto:info@fol.org.za) or [secretary@fol.org.za](mailto:secretary@fol.org.za)
- **Water Pollution:** Brian February (Bishopscourt to N2 Mowbray) 0216841077/0834688243; Johan Marthinus (N2 to Table Bay) 0842995595
- **Displaced Peoples Unit:** 082 5279813 [Wayne.Aldridge@capetown.gov.za](mailto:Wayne.Aldridge@capetown.gov.za)
- **Land Invasion (Squatter control)** 0800225669
- **Graffiti Enforcement Unit:** [lawenforcement@capetown.gov.za](mailto:lawenforcement@capetown.gov.za) or 021 596 1999.
- **Problem Buildings Unit:** 021 596 1999
- **Environmental Standby & Emergency (24/7):** 0834 99 1717
- **Environmental Law Enforcement:** David Morris or Vaughan Thompson 0217130510
- **Centre for Environmental Rights:** 021 4471647
- **CITY CALL CENTRE City Complaints, repairs etc:** [contactUS@capetown.gov.za](mailto:contactUS@capetown.gov.za)  
0860 103089, SMS 31373 (160 characters maximum). Get a reference tracking number.
- **ROADS & STORMWATER** (Potholes, flooded roads and chemical or other spills) Telephone: 0860103089  
Postal address: PO Box X1694, Cape Town, 8000 E-mail: [watertoc@capetown.gov.za](mailto:watertoc@capetown.gov.za)
- **WATER & SANITATION** (Emergencies such as leaks, burst pipes, sewer defects/blockages and complaints e.g. low water pressure and water wastage) Telephone (Account & consumption) queries: 0860 103 089  
Fax: 021 957 4726 E-mail: [watertoc@capetown.gov.za](mailto:watertoc@capetown.gov.za) Website: [www.capetown.gov.za/en/water](http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/water)
- **SOLID WASTE** (Illegal dumping, wheelie bins, cleansing, extra cleaning) Postal address: PO Box 298, Cape Town, 8000 Telephone: 0860 103089 Fax: 0860 103090/021 4004302 E-mail: [wastewise@capetown.gov.za](mailto:wastewise@capetown.gov.za)  
Website: [www.capetown.gov.za/en/solidwaste](http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/solidwaste)
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