



Friends of the Liesbeek River

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

Autumn 2011

<http://fol.org.za>

Visit the website...there is so much more to see there!

Letter from the Committee

Dear Friends,

The first three months of the year have passed already and we have been extremely busy. The annual events of World Wetlands Day and World Water Day were celebrated by some interesting events and we want to thank everyone who participated.

Our AGM is the next important event coming up on Wednesday 11th May, 2011, and we are looking forward to seeing everyone. Our speaker is Neil Armitage, Department of Civil Engineering, University of Cape Town, a well-known expert on stormwater drainage systems. As the littering and pollution of the Liesbeek River largely occurs through the stormwater drainage system, this is a topic of great concern to the Friends. He says "each catchment has a unique litter 'footprint' that is indicative of the state of the catchment at the time of measurement". We have been collecting data on the Liesbeek's litter footprint for a number of years and hope to present these data as well. Neil's wealth of knowledge is extremely practical, essential to implement a successful management plan for the river.

Development on the Liesbeek River is still an ongoing problem and with the help of vigilant members we can keep an eye on activities. We hope that the recent flooding events world-wide will be a wake-up call to those who allow building within the floodlines and in wetlands.

Reports of incidents on the river are disheartening but on the upside, the Liesbeek River is becoming the home to many other (nonhuman) animals such as otter and porcupine as well. We have reports of otter scat in the Newlands area and research may be done on the porcupine, who come to feed on the banks. Our River Warden has taken lovely photos of the many species sighted on the river, such as the one of the owl in the article in this newsletter, and these can be seen on our website.

Warm regards, *The Committee*

WORK ON THE LIESBEEK RIVER: Mapping and clearing of Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*

The Liesbeek Maintenance Team has continued with the mapping and clearing of Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) along the Liesbeek. The team works with SANBI's Early Detection and Rapid Response unit in an attempt to eradicate this newly identified invasive plant species before it moves into other natural systems.

Since December 2010 the locations of all Loosestrife plants have been mapped using a GPS and control measures have been put in place. Due to the nature of the plant a number of clearing techniques have been implemented, and these are monitored to establish the optimum clearing method.

So far all the plants from below Kirstenbosch to the reed beds in Observatory have been cleared and treated. The results look positive but we will only be able to establish the efficacy when the plants begin to grow again in spring.

James Cooper, River Warden

From top to bottom: Flowering Purple Loosestrife, the team mapping the plants, the team take note of where the plants are growing, a treated Purple Loosestrife plant.



Important Notice:

**The Annual General Meeting of the
Friends of the Liesbeek River**

will be held on

Wednesday 11th May 2011

**at 17h30 for 18h00 at the
Envirocentre, Valkenberg Hospital.**

Speaker: Neil Armitage

What does the River team say?

During an informal lunch on the banks of the Liesbeek, the team made some interesting comments. Ntobeko Dyani pointed out that the government is responsible for areas such as the Liesbeek and therefore law enforcement such as the Green Scorpions should help. He asked whether the Friends were addressing the problem of pollution in the river in a pro-active way. He wondered where were all the fishes, frogs and crabs in the river? These important questions the Friends need to ask and answer.



Student Gaobodiwe Mogorosi, River Warden James Cooper, Team Member Mncekeleli Klaas, Supervisor Ntobeko Dyani and Team Member David Nyathela in Roslyn Park on the Liesbeek.

Mncekeleli Klaas suggested that everybody should look after the river as it is important to us all, and that picking up litter every day stopped one from seeing the beauty of the river. Gaobodiwe Mogorosi, who is a UNISA student from Kimberley, was eager to apply the lessons learned from the Liesbeek to his own area. His project on identifying and quantifying the litter found in the Liesbeek will benefit the Project by pinpointing the main sources of pollution. David Nyathela has been working in the project the longest and said that the improvement on the river can be seen even though much needs to be done. James Cooper said that since the team is part of the river landscape so to speak, the community does not always see what has been done and therefore the obvious improvements such as signs and plantings are important. The team all agreed that the river would be much more attractive without the concrete canalization and hope that one day the Liesbeek will run free again.

Francine Becker,

Committee Member

RIPPLES

Information from Liz Wheeler

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:

We welcome the opening of the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) and the establishment of the Environmental Defence Fund (EDF). These two non-profit organisations are based in Sussex Road, Observatory. CER was established by eight environmental non- governmental organisations with the support of over forty smaller ones. Run by a group of dedicated lawyers it will not only protect the environment but us as well. It will be participating in environmental decision making processes and providing support in the reporting of non compliance. The EDF will primarily fund the CER and anyone can donate funds. For more info see www.cer.org.za or phone 021-447-1647.

WESSA FRIENDS' WORKSHOP

The February one was attended by Joan Parker, Liz and Dave Wheeler plus 15 others representing 14 other Friends groups or environmental organisations. Tanya Layne spoke on her work at Cape Flats Nature and the SA National Botanic Institute (SANBI) and Luzann Isaacs told us about her work at Edith Stephens Wetland Park. They titled their talks Growing Together: thinking and practice of urban nature conservators which is the name of the book written by Bridget Pitt and Theresa Boule for the SANBI Cape Flats Nature Partnership. They stressed the need to see people as part of the natural system and how people enjoy nature in different ways. Thereafter several groups gave feed back about their activities and some interesting discussions arose about dealing with water hyacinth and *Typha* etc. The next Friends' Workshop will be hosted by Friends of Rietvlei on Saturday 14 May. This will include visits to the bird hides. Any member wanting to attend is asked to phone Liz on 021-671-4553.

Every little bit counts! *Often one wonders whether helping makes a difference. Well these adorable Shoveller ducklings were saved by Linda Cameron-Dow after their mother had been killed on the highway. She raised them in her garden and even built a pond for them and later released them on the river. They are lovely adults now – thanks for caring Linda!*



OWLS ON THE LIESBEEK

I recently attended an owl box workshop at WESSA and would like to share with you some of the lessons learned. Surprisingly, it's not all about owls ... its more to do with rats ... and poison. The alien Black and Brown Rats spread disease and consume our food, present serious health and financial concerns for humankind. Our reaction is to reach for the rat poison but I implore you to re- think it the next time you hear rats running above the ceiling.

Here's why (Biology 101): People tend to prefer poisons which have an immediate effect and 'solve' the problem with a single dose. However, to be sure that a single feed will kill the pest, the poisons remain lethal to any animal feeding on a dead or dying animal, i.e. the poison moves up the food chain and kills those that eat the pests.

Why does this matter? (Biology 201): All species considered pests (plants or animals) breed very fast and as often as conditions allow. Black rats can breed from 3 months of age and can have up to 7 broods (of between 6 and 12 babies at a time). So if all the offspring survive, a pair of rats can result in 1500 rats within one year! In stark contrast, predators like owls tend to breed much more slowly (Spotted Eagle Owls have a single brood of two to four chicks in a year). This Eagle Owl on the right was photographed on the Liesbeek by James Cooper, our River Warden.



Here's three things you might want to do about Black or Brown rats in your area:

1). Keep tidy. Rodents eat our food, but only if we let them. So pack pet food away in sealed plastic containers and throw away any uneaten food in the evenings (this also goes for bird seed for both wild and captive birds). Make sure your kitchen waste is put into sealed bins or municipal wheelie bins, and compost what you can (in a closed bin).

2). Install an owl box. The biggest limiter to birds of prey in urban settings is the availability of suitable nest sites. You and your neighbour are never BOTH going to have occupied owl boxes, but with two more out there, there is more choice for prospective owls and a higher likelihood that one might get occupied. If your neighbour's box gets an owl, rest assured that they do not adhere to our boundaries – so your rats will be just as much on the menu! Owl box designs can be downloaded from the

web (search Google), from WESSA's site, or from the book 'Owls and Owling' (Tarboton & Erasmus 1998 – Struik Publishers). You can even purchase ready-made units from WESSA directly. We get three owls on the Liesbeek which might take to nest boxes: Spotted Eagle Owl, Barn Owl, and African Wood Owl (the latter are very shy and probably take more insects than vertebrates – so the first two are more relevant here).

3). If you have such a bad problem that you feel you must augment the above solutions with poison, then at least make an informed choice. Bayer make Racumin blocks and paste which are multiple feed poisons. This means that it will take several days of the rats eating the bait to consume enough poison over time to be lethal. This also means that at any one time there is not enough poison in a rat to affect a predator that eats it. If you even

suspect that there might be owls in your area, your only choice should be multiple feed baits. (I only know of Racumin and a product called EcoRat but the latter seems not to be palatable to the rodents). If your local supermarket doesn't stock it – ask a manager to order it for you, but NEVER resort to any of the single-dose poisons or you will be responsible for the slow death of an owl. Any poison should be handled carefully and kept out of reach of pets and children. Drill a hole into the middle of a 200mm section of 50mm PVC pipe and thread a nail or screw through the bait block, or put the bait into a sealed icecream container with a pair of 30mm holes cut into it. Always put poison well out of reach of curious hands and noses (into the roof is best). With multiple feed baits you need to replace the eaten bait every day for about a week.

Enjoy your owling adventures, send us pictures of your attempts to lure these spectacular birds into your neighbourhood – we'll be happy to post them on our website!

Fynbosphil Phil McLean, Committee Member

WATER WEEK WALK TO NEWLANDS SPRING

On Wednesday 23rd March 2011 the Friends of the Liesbeek organized a walk from the Josephine Mill to the Newlands Spring as part of our activities for Water Week. We met at the Josephine Mill for a welcome tot to counter the rainy weather; many thanks to Caveau for sponsoring this.

The group, led by Liz Wheeler, walked via Westerford Bridge over the Liesbeek River, where the water was running murky due to the rain we had earlier that day, underlining the pollution problem due to street run-off water through the storm drains into the Liesbeek River. Along the Liesbeek Path we could look down into the deep river bed carved by the river, indicating the force of the water when the river is at full spate. Large trees struggle to maintain their foothold on the steep banks and often end up in the river. The river is lovely here as the banks are largely kept free of encroaching vegetation by the Liesbeek Maintenance Team and the volunteers from the Brewery and no cement embankments have been built. Near the Sans Souci Bridge the banks are covered by thick layers of glass, dumped by the breweries in the late 1800s and now of historical interest.

Along Main Street we could see and hear (through thick vegetation and obstructed by a wall) the stream from the Newlands Spring. The spring wells up through a crack in the impervious Malmesbury Shale, up through the middle of a depression in a curious mound. The mound may have been caused by a heavy flow, carrying a load of stones and soil. The discharge from the spring is constant, whatever the season, unaffected by drought or rain. The mound is owned by SAB Miller, but since 1994 its slopes are part of the adjacent properties. Water from the spring is piped to the SA Brewery complex on Boundary Road. We collected water from the overflow spout and some commented on the neutral flavor, our palates having been accustomed to the chlorinated water from the tap. The water is reported to have the same pH as rain water (5.7) which is in fact slightly acidic. Trevor Hughes showed us the geocaching point hidden in the spring, and introduced this fascinating hobby to us. You can look at the website at <http://www.geocaching.com/> for more information.

The walk was so informative and a wonderful way to explore! Many thanks to all who came. *Francine Becker, Secretary*



The group listen to Liz Wheeler near the spring.



A young Friend collects water!

If you have email please let us know your address as it certainly is easier to keep you up to date with current news and events. Please contact Francine at 0216715385 or email friendsoftheliesbeek@gmail.com



Water Week is an annual event and you can read more on <http://forloveofwater.co.za/>. This year, the UN's theme is 'Water and Urbanisation'. 5 million city residents are joining the urban population in the developing world each month. 27% of this population do not have piped water at home. 493 million people in cities share their sanitation facilities (in 1990 this number was 259 million). 827.6 million people live in informal settlements, usually lacking adequate drinking water and sanitation facilities. Groundwater is often an invisible water source, subject to pollution through infiltration and contamination, less obvious than surface water such as the Liesbeek River, and yet indispensable in maintaining the life of the river.

The Friends of the Liesbeek would like to thank the SAB, ABAX and Tuffy Brands for their ongoing support of our activities and projects on and around the river.

City of Cape Town Spatial Development Framework:

As part of the ongoing process to develop a new spatial development plan for the City of Cape Town, our chairman Kevin Winter submitted written comments to City pointing out the importance of river corridors for improving ecological services and consequently improving the water quality of the systems, as well as serving as urban drainage reducing flooding. Our involvement in the planning process ensures that the Liesbeek River is not forgotten or designated as a stormwater drain.

Herbicide application course: Well done Team!



Photos from left to right: Ntobeko Dyani, Mncekeleli Klaas, Malibongwe Mzinanda, David Nyathela and Sivuyile Zwide receiving their certificates.

From 9 – 11 February 2011 the Liesbeek Maintenance Project Team attended a herbicide application course facilitated by Invader Plant Specialist cc at the Environment Centre situated in Valkenberg Hospital grounds. The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), who has been working with the Maintenance Project on the control of Purple Loosestrife, kindly covered the costs of the course and provided catering for the three days. During the course the team learnt about different herbicides, their active ingredients, mixing ratios, methods of application, target species, plant transport systems and health and safety regulations while applying herbicide. All team members, who thoroughly enjoyed the course, passed with flying colours. Well done guys! This will provide them an extra skill for future employment and ensure increased safety practices in their work. Huge thanks to Ernita Van Wyk (SANBI) for organising the course and for the continuous support of the Maintenance Project. We look forward to the partnership with SANBI growing in the future.

James Cooper, River Warden

CONTACT PERSONS AND NUMBERS

- **Liesbeek Maintenance Project:** James Cooper 021-700 1843 or 078-031-6749 or liesbeek@live.co.za
- **Water Pollution:** Brian February
(Bishopscourt to N2 Mowbray) 021-684-1077/083-4688-243
Johan Marthinus (N2 to Table Bay) 084-299-5595
- **Displaced Peoples Unit:** Wayne.Aldridge@capetown.gov.za
- **City Complaints, repairs etc:** contactUS@capetown.gov.za 086-010-3089, SMS 31373 160 characters maximum. Get a reference tracking number.
- **Environmental Standby & Emergency (24/7):** 083-499 1717
- **Environmental Law Enforcement:** David Morris or Vaughan Thompson 021-713-0510
- **Centre for Environmental Rights:** 021-447-1647

A BIG THANK YOU goes to Rev Print, Claremont for sponsoring the printing of our newsletters for sixteen years. They started as Kwik Kopy in Mowbray in August 1994 with our fourth newsletter. It's interesting to read that in 1997 they were printing six hundred copies every quarter for us to post out. That was before email! For friendly and excellent service do telephone 021-683-0883.



Students on the Liesbeek!

FOL are very pleased that numerous local and overseas students do research on the river. At the moment three students are busy with projects: Phindile Mangwana is an intern at WESSA doing an educational programme; Chester Chauke has been sponsored by the Observatory Residents and Ratepayer's Association to do research; and Goabodiwe Mogorosi is doing a litter audit. The Liesbeek Maintenance Project also provides an invaluable space for young people to do internships and gain work experience. Any members who are interested in this important aspect of the Friends of the Liesbeek, can contact James at 0780316749 or Francine at 0216715385 or send an email to friendsoftheliesbeek@gmail.com.

DEVELOPMENTS ON THE LIESBEEK

The Friends of the Liesbeek have become increasingly concerned about the number of proposed and approved developments that are taking place on properties abutting or close to the Liesbeek. In recent months we have been given the opportunity to submit comments on some of these proposed developments either through the City of Cape Town's Land Use Planning Ordinance process or as a result of an Environmental Impact Assessment in terms of the National Environmental Management Act. The following are some of the issues that we have covered in our comments:

1. A river must be viewed in its totality i.e. as a riverine system

We find that often proponents of new developments only consider the impacts that might be caused by the planned development in the immediate riverine area that is abutted by the property in question. This is very short-sighted. The river is a continuous system that flows through the entire catchment and impacts must be considered cumulatively not only along the river course but in the entire catchment.

It is usually the lower reaches that are affected by developments upstream resulting in an ever increasing pollution load and the accumulation of biomass that greatly affects the water quality and aesthetics of the river. In the lower reaches of the Liesbeek, the Liesbeek Lake in Observatory has been heavily impacted.



An eyesore under the Newlands stadium parking block

The cost of addressing these problems is currently being carried by the ratepayers of Cape Town through the work that the City of Cape Town, the FoL and its sponsors have to do to maintain the river.

2. Increased hardening of surfaces

Proposed new developments and other human activities in the catchment area of a river can affect the river channel form thereby altering the magnitude and frequency of flooding. Changing the path of a river allows water to flow more rapidly downstream increasing the risk of flooding. Buildings and the creation of hard surfaces within the floodplain as well as in the overall catchment area, removes areas previously available as flood storage. Peak flows during episodes of heavy rainfall become stronger thus increasing the probability of flooding along the river in particular in the river's lower reaches.

Developers aim to achieve maximum return on their investments and thus the proposed development will use the property to its fullest permissible potential. In the layout or design of the development no consideration is given to features that would allow for rain permeation thus creating new areas for flood storage or for groundwater replenishment. The developments are generally wall to wall concrete and hard surfaced. Only the footprint of the building or buildings is used to determine coverage and the surrounding areas that are brick-paved or hardened are not considered.

3. A critically impacted system

It is often stated by the proponents of these new developments, that the Liesbeek is a "critically impacted system" or that the Liesbeek is "already a heavily degraded system". The fact that sections of the river have been canalised is also used as an indication that the river has no active aquatic habitats or functioning ecosystems and hence that there will be no impacts from the proposed new development.



The canalized section of the river near Albion Rd.

There may be parts of the river that are degraded but this is not so for the entire catchment. It is of grave concern to the Friends of the Liesbeek that this river, which has irreplaceable aesthetic, educational, recreational, spiritual and resource value to the inhabitants of Cape Town, is often merely regarded as a sewerage or storm-water system and treated as such.

We like to point out that regular testing (especially in the areas flowing through Bishopscourt, Newlands and Rondebosch) has shown that the Liesbeek is one the cleanest rivers in South Africa! There are many sections of the river that carry viable and healthy functioning ecosystems. Recent sightings of the Cape Clawless Otto and the Cape Porcupine in the vicinity of Esme Road, Newlands further suggest that these shy terrestrial and freshwater creatures are finding the Liesbeek a safe haven. The Liesbeek is also home to various species of birds and there have been regular sightings of Gymnogene, Goshawk and Pied Kingfisher.

A great deal of time and resources have been invested in The Liesbeek Maintenance Project (LMP) which has been operating now for five years. The purpose of this project is to develop robust management activities and partnerships to ensure that the Liesbeek is kept clean of litter, that paths are trimmed, canals are maintained and that invasive alien plant species are controlled. This has resulted in a remarkable change in the quality of the water and in the upkeep of the surrounding riverine environment.

The FoL would like to see the Liesbeek being rehabilitated and one of the long-term goals would be to have sections of

the concrete base of the canal removed to allow for an improved aquatic environment that would allow for the development of a healthy, functioning riverine ecosystem.

4. Buffer Zones

In terms of the City of Cape Town's Floodplain and River Corridor Management Policy, watercourses and their adjacent riparian and associated fauna and flora must be protected or "buffered" from the impacts of adjacent development or activity. These buffers vary in width from 10 m to 40 m depending on the classification of the watercourse. Buffer zones provide:

- continuous corridors and habitat for flora and fauna
- water quality improvement of point or diffuse sources of pollution
- stream bank and erosion protection
- space for appropriate water sensitive urban design elements
- socio-economic benefits in the form of public open space
- opportunities for recreation and environmental education
- enhancement of waterway, visual and property values
- access for maintenance
- adequate space for possible future restoration activities

We have found in some instances that proposed buildings have extended into the 10 metre buffer zone (the requirement for concrete canals) and in other instances no allowance has been made for the required buffer zone.

5. 1:50 and 1:100 year floodplains

The above mentioned policy also requires the developer to determine flood lines. A table is used to indicate the permissible land use, development or activity within the floodplain. The developments we deal with are mostly residential and these are not permissible in the <2, 2 – 20 and 20 – 50 year floodplain zones. In the 50 – 100 year zone, floors must be above the 1:100 year flood level and basements are to be flood proofed to the 1:50 year flood level.

6. Alien vegetation currently on the property

Proponents of new developments especially on vacant land, will often use the existence of alien vegetation to motivate for

an approval to develop. Whilst we acknowledge that a new development may correct the situation, we do not see this as viable reason to approve the particular proposed development. The City of Cape Town can make use of other laws to ensure that the owner of the property removes the invasive vegetation and maintains the property in question.

7. Size and aesthetics of the proposed development

Although this may not directly impact on the Liesbeek we often find that new developments are completely out of character with existing or surrounding properties. Again, this could be the result of developers' greed or of wanting to get the most out of the investment. We then question the need for such a large scale dwelling on the subject property and show how it would be out of keeping with the surrounding dwellings. What would the need be for such a development in the particular neighbourhood.



The development on Roslyn Road

In conclusion, whilst the FoL are not opposed to development nor to the City's densification policy we would like to see development that takes place in a well planned, integrated and holistic manner. There must be associated development and maintenance of existing services and infrastructure. New buildings must be appropriate for the area in question so that they will enhance what already exists in the area. Finally, the planning of new developments must include interventions that promote sustainable urban water usage and drainage management.

Di Mellon, Committee Member



Membership and donations

Annual subscriptions for membership of the Association are now due!

- Individual R30
- Family R50
- Corporate R150
-

We will acknowledge receipt of your donation / subscription.

Please indicate your contact details: address, e-mail and telephone numbers.

Kindly supply your reference (Initials & surnames) details on the deposit slips.

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

Cheques can be mailed
directly to:
Friends of Liesbeek,
PO Box 333
Rondebosch 7701