



Friends of the Liesbeek River

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

Winter 2011

<http://fol.org.za>

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Letter from the Committee

Dear Friends,

A big thank you to all who attended the AGM on 11th May. The talk by Neil Armitage on SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) was entertaining and informative and it is encouraging to see how simple and effective methods of reducing stormwater runoff can be implemented by individuals and cities. Thank you Neil! For more information on this topic read the "More on SUDS" article on the website.

The official business of the evening was dealt with efficiently by our outgoing chairman, Kevin Winter. He thanked Liz Wheeler for her dedication and hard work on the committee and wished her all the best in her "retirement" but noted that it was unlikely that Liz would stay away from "her" river. Liz will continue to be in touch and fill us in on the environmental news in Cape Town.

Grant Irlam, our Treasurer, presented a summary of the year's finances and pointed out the healthy state of the FOL finances resulting from the generous donations. We thank our donors for their support. The money is being well-spent as was outlined by James Cooper, our River Warden. The ongoing student mentoring program was showcased by student Chester Chauke who presented his work on Purple Loosestrife on the Liesbeek.

The election of the committee was simple as most of us were willing and able to commit ourselves to a new term of office, with the welcome addition of Louis de Villiers. The newest committee members will be introduced in this newsletter, giving a short biography and their vision for the future.

The evening was rounded off by a generous array of snacks donated by The Wild Fig, Courtyard Hotel and Player's Café at the River Club. Thank you for your loyal support.

This newsletter includes a piece on alien plants, which will be continued as a regular feature. Contributions and suggestions are always welcome. (Please send them to secretary@fol.org.za).

Warm regards, *The Committee*

Planting on the Liesbeek

Winter provides the Liesbeek Maintenance Project (LMP) with the perfect opportunity to plant indigenous plant species on the banks of the Liesbeek, with regular rains ensuring the survival of the majority of the plants. For the past year the Maintenance Team has been working with the Pinelands 1st Scouts, South African Breweries (SAB Miller) staff and members from the Friends of the Liesbeek on rehabilitating the banks of the Liesbeek behind Newlands Swimming Pool. This has involved removal of invasive alien vegetation, namely wild ginger, Kikuyu and *Canna indica*, stabilisation of the banks and planting indigenous species. July 2010 saw the Pinelands 1st Scouts begin with the first section of rehabilitation. They spent a day removing Kikuyu grass, ginger and *Canna* from the site and stabilised the banks using poplar branches the LMP team had removed the week before. The LMP team planted the area with 270 plants, which were purchased from the Cape Flats Nursery.



After the successful establishment and survival of 70% of the plants that were planted, the rehabilitation site has been extended. This has been achieved thanks to SAB's corporate investment programme, which dedicates days for SAB staff to get involved with projects happening in their local community; budget for plants being provided by City Parks; the tireless work of the LMP team and members of Friends of the Liesbeek. This year SAB staff joined the team on two occasions for their corporate investment programme. During this programme the rehabilitation site was extended, with wild ginger and *Canna* being removed by physically digging out the roots, and the banks being stabilised using poplar branches removed elsewhere. Following the survival success over the past year, the same plant species have been ordered to be planted in the newly cleared area. These plants will be ready for collection in June 2011. Anybody wishing to join for planting activities, or who would like to donate any plants for rehabilitation purposes must please phone the Liesbeek Maintenance Project Manager, James Cooper on 078 031 6749.

Building on St.Alban's Close?

The upper reaches of the Liesbeek are particularly lovely to walk along but also the most difficult to manage as most is private property. Where the alien plants have overgrown the river, it is even difficult to see the water, and we hope that residents will do their part in keeping the river flowing.

A recent notice in the paper also alerts us to new development on St Alban's Close and we hope this does not mean even more of the wetland will be lost. Again, residents need to be aware of these potentially harmful developments along the Liesbeek and report any contraventions (see our list of contact numbers at the end of the newsletter).



New Members

We welcome the following new friends as members and wish them a long and happy association with us : Boneni Beki, Nicholas Laird, Belinda Muti and Andrew Smith.

RIPPLES

Information from Liz Wheeler

Enviro Kids

The Friends of the Liesbeek feature in the latest edition (vol.32 no.1) of this wonderful WESSA publication for young people. To subscribe to this four times award winning publication visit the WESSA website www.wessa.org.za or phone the editor Roberta Griffiths on 021-671-8344. It is the gift that makes a difference. No primary school should be without copies.

Integrated Water Resource Management Action Plan

This is being driven by Province and Aurecon South Africa (Pty) Ltd have been appointed to develop it. During Phase 1 a Status Quo Report is being drafted to form the baseline for the action plan. Amongst others water quality, water supply and demand and land-use impacts will be specifically addressed. Public Participation meetings have been held in each of the four Water Management Areas whereby the public were invited to become informed of the objectives, assist with access to any relevant information, identify problem areas and provide input into the development of the Plan during Phase 2. For more information contact

Graham.English@af.aurecongroup.com

Friends Workshop at Rietvlei

This was another stimulating time spent with Friends out at the excellently maintained Environment Centre run by Friends of Rietvlei. They have been involved with the updating of the Diep River Management Plan, the establishing of the Table Bay Nature Reserve and the issues of the Potsdam Sewerage Works and the Vissershok Hazardous Waste Site to name just a few issues. Feedback from the other Friends groups led to some topical and thought-provoking discussions. Out on the Vlei we were treated to a spectacular ballet of flamingoes disturbed by three mongoose catching a seagull! All this while new Integrated Rapid Transport System MyCiTi buses glided past on their inaugural trips.

Meet the committee!

Our newest committee members introduce themselves:

Louis de Villiers : I was born in Johannesburg and grew up on the Highveld where I began to develop an interest in the vegetation of the area. When I relocated to Cape Town in 1987 I enjoyed hiking on Table Mountain and the surrounding mountains and discovering an entirely new vegetation type. During the battle opposing the proposed Kassie Wiehahn development of Oudekraal I started becoming more involved in organised conservation and eventually became chair of the Peninsula Mountain Forum which had grown out of this broad opposition to the development. From this I moved on to become a member of the Regional Committee of WESSA: Western Cape, eventually taking on the role of chair of this committee, in which capacity I served for about ten years. With my background as a lawyer, I have been interested and involved in EIA processes, particularly looking at the EIA regulations until I became too disillusioned with how these were being continually watered down since the original version adopted in 1997. I have been interested primarily over the recent past in issues of water demand management and energy and am a vocal opponent of nuclear power generation. Living and working in and around Observatory and Rosebank, I have had a long interest in the Liesbeek River. I envisage a Liesbeek River which is ecologically healthy, clean and natural from source to sea, also being available as a recreational amenity to its surrounding communities.

Phil MacLean: (aka Fynbosphil): I'm an Eco-tour guide and Sustainable Living Consultant. I lead hiking and school tours around Cape Town (especially up the mountain and along our river) as well as birding and wine route tours. My consulting work involves helping people to 'Live Greener' through the choices they make at home. I'm a proud father of two and if you want to see me, look out for the family with the twin pram on the Liesbeek Trail (most often near the Newlands Pool trying to bird-watch using the lesser-known tactic of wailing infants to lure birds out of hiding!). In my spare time I wait, didn't I just say I was a father? ... What spare time?! My aim on the committee is to try my best to look after the ecology of the Liesbeek River for today and for when my kids grow up!

Francine Becker: I am a doctoral student at Stellenbosch University, starting a research project on socio-ecological systems. I am a natural scientist who has meandered through gender studies and theology to my present research focus. I have four sons, all grown up now, and lived in Germany and Thailand before settling in lovely Cape Town. I am passionate about the environment and the vulnerable in society, believing that the two cannot be separated. I have a vision of the Liesbeek forming a biodiversity corridor from the mountain to the sea, where people can see the lovely plants and animals of this unique part of the world, and in doing so, discover and replenish their spiritual connection to nature. I want FOL to be a serious role player in City planning and policy, positively influencing decisions regarding the environment. I would also like to see a greater public participation in maintaining and conserving the river, as well as taking ownership of the communal space in enjoying the opportunities to rest and play there.

The committee is still looking for members to join in any capacity, so please volunteer!



Outgoing committee member Liz Wheeler will be sorely missed!

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.

ATTACK OF THE alien!

The single biggest threat to our world-famous, unique fynbos, is habitat destruction. Expanding urbanisation and developments take their toll, but invasive alien vegetation is responsible for the huge losses and expensive, on-going remedial measures (just ask anyone from Working for Water!).

Firstly let's make some distinctions and clear up some misconceptions: Most gardens have alien plants. That is: plants that naturally grow outside of South Africa (or the Cape if you're a real stickler). Not all alien plants are invasive (or even a problem). In fact many (think of roses or fruit trees) are attacked by insects and other local predators and pathogens. However, some alien plants have no natural enemies **AND** are able to reproduce and spread; these are plants that can become a problem.

Under present legislation, weeds fall into categories which dictate the urgency with which they need to be dealt with (I'll get into that more in future articles). Many of you will be aware of the problem plants which occur on the mountain and in other natural areas, but I wonder how many of you know that the City is taking some exciting, proactive measures to combat new alien invaders?

The program is called **EDRR (Early Detection and Rapid Response)**, and they welcome information from anyone. The idea is to highlight a few of the plants that are becoming problem weeds in Cape Town. If you spot any of these plants, please give the co-ordinator (Taryn Rossenrode) the information as to where you found it etc, and they will endeavour to locate and remove the plant in question. ALL of these plants are found on the Liesbeek! In each newsletter, I'll highlight one of these newly emerging problem plants, explaining how to identify it and what you can plant instead if you find one in your own garden.

The First Candidate is called the '**Tree of Heaven**' or *Ailanthus altissima*. Most will be relatively small (less than 5m), but there are a few older trees around. It seems that something has changed in the last few years that has suddenly allowed this tree to start producing viable seed. It colonises disturbed areas and can suppress other plant growth by releasing chemicals into the soil. It has compound leaves where the leaflets are opposite, or just off opposite. The centre rib of the leaf is often brick-red (especially in new leaves). The wood gives off a strong, unpleasant smell when cut and it produces thousands of winged ('helicopter') seeds. Tree of Heaven originates from China, but is now widespread and considered invasive in many parts of the world. A very aggressive root system means that it can crack walls and block/damage underground piping like sewers and water mains.

If you find one in your garden, remove it by digging it out and rather plant our local 'Butterspoon Tree' (*Cunonia capensis* also known as 'Rooiels'). Its leaves are very similar in shape but it's not as vigorous a grower so its roots will not cause problems. In addition, it will attract birds and bees to your garden when it flowers (off-white 'bottlebrush'-type flowers)!

Keep the Alien Invaders out!

Phil MacLean



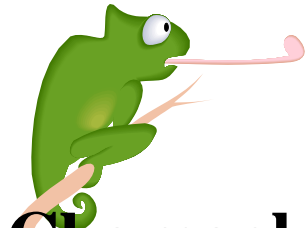
Tree of Heaven
Ailanthus altissima

If you see this tree contact EDRR :
E-mail: EDRR@capetown.gov.za
Ms Taryn Rossenrode or
Louise Stafford
Tel: +27 (0)21 712 1944 /1434
Fax: +27 (0)21 712 927

2011 Peninsula Paddle

This took place on 5 June - World Environment Day. Once again paddlers navigated from False Bay to Table Bay along the rivers and canals of the Cape Flats. It was hard work but fun with the aim of drawing attention to the need to transform our waterways into healthy, living assets for the communities through which they flow. Find out more by visiting
<http://peninsulapaddle.wordpress.com>





Chamaeleon

The word 'chameleon' (also spelled 'chamaeleon') derives from an ancient Greek name meaning 'Ground Lion'! This is certainly testament to its hunting prowess and also its ferocious nature – try picking one up, and this small animal defends itself beyond its size by puffing up, hissing furiously as well as gaping and biting! Don't worry – it has no teeth!

There is only one type of chameleon in the Cape, appropriately called the Cape Dwarf Chameleon. The biggest adult Cape Dwarf Chameleons grow to around 15cm with the tail adding another 5cm if it is unravelled. All chameleons have prehensile tails; which is a fancy way of saying they use their tails as a fifth limb to help with grip while climbing around bushes. Of course, the two features for which these animals are famous are their telescopic tongues which they dart out to catch insect prey, and their ability to change colour. It was long thought that the reason for the colour change trick was to help with camouflage – to protect from being eaten, and to help sneak up on dinner. But, more recently, it has been shown that the most important use of colour change is communication with other chameleons. If you're ever fortunate and/or patient enough, you might see a female being approached by a male ... a male she's not interested in ... then you will see her change to a dark, blotchy pattern, open her mouth and sway back and forth on the stem she's holding. Her advancing suitor will be normal green but with a blue streak across his flank (apparently sometimes the ladies like that!).

The Cape Dwarf Chameleon is interesting amongst chameleons firstly because it is not strongly territorial and many individuals of both sexes can be found on the same bush (especially if it is flowering and attracting insects!). Secondly, and very unusually for any reptile, they are ovoviviparous. That's another fancy word to explain how, like other reptiles, they have eggs, but in the case of our local hero, the eggs mature and hatch **INSIDE** the female who then appears to give 'birth' to live young!

Ask anyone who has been in Cape Town for a few years and they'll tell you how one doesn't see as many chameleons as one used to. This is a sad fact. These sensitive reptiles have porous skins and absorb pesticides directly off plant leaves (they also eat 'pest' insects which have been poisoned) and in this way succumb to the toxins in these chemicals. Cats too are something that the chameleons have no defences against, and these relatives of lions very often prey on the tiny 'Ground Lion'. People are also directly

to blame they try to keep these cute, but wild animals as pets (and not allowed by law anyway). The Cape Dwarf Chameleon is a very unsuitable pet as it requires tremendous skill to look after. They **REQUIRE** direct sunlight for their metabolism and can only drink by licking small droplets off leaves (they will not drink from a dish or any other similar offerings in a terrarium). Also (hopefully) most of us do not have enough insects in our homes to feed them on!

But there are ways to enjoy these miracles of nature AND leave them outside in the wild. The first step is to plant a variety of indigenous flowering plants in your garden, in pots and even on your curb. Flowers are purpose-built to attract pollinators, a great many of which will be insects. If you can secure more insect visitors to your garden than your neighbours', yours will be more attractive to chameleons! If you go this route, the obvious second step is: Try (please!) **NOT TO SPRAY PESTICIDES** – let your little helpers do the work for you. Indigenous plants can get eaten by a variety of bugs, but this is a **GOOD** thing! This is an extra source of insects for 'your' chameleons (and local plants have adapted to this kind of predation and will more than likely survive such insect attacks).

So enjoy your chameleons, but leave them in their natural habitat and protect them by limiting access to them by your pets and by not using pesticides. Have fun and enjoy your backyard nature reserve!

Phil McLean

Feeding stations for chameleons

Important! Don't put the feeding station in an exposed location, or you risk attracting the chameleons out into the open, making them vulnerable to predators (cats, dogs and birds).

- A container – anything from a used yoghurt/feta tub to a bucket
- Place a stout twig in it. This will help any enthusiastic hunters to climb back out should they blunder into the container.
- Cut or pierce a few holes in the bottom of the container to allow rain or irrigation water to drain.
- Next, add vegetable and/or fruit scraps from your kitchen (not meat as this will stink when it rots).
- Leave this container under a small bush in the garden (even better is one where you've seen chameleons before). You'll find that after a very short time, insects like fruit flies will be buzzing around the tub and any passing chameleons will stop by for a snack.
- Check on the container from time to time to remove very old scraps (to your compost, of course) and add new peelings.

OR

- Take a small container, even glass jars with a tin lid will do. Try to get one with a red, black or yellow lid.
- Pierce several small holes in the lid using a nail. This station will attract flies, so the holes must not be large enough for a fly to pass through.
- Take 'Red Top' fly bait-station refill (supermarket or garden centre) and mix $\frac{1}{4}$ bag with 1l of hot water, and fill the container $\frac{3}{4}$ full.
- Replace the lid and place under a bush, preferably where it will get some sun. It should be a magnet for flies that will crawl around the lid looking for a way in through the holes. This leaves them vulnerable to the speedy tongues of lurking chameleons.

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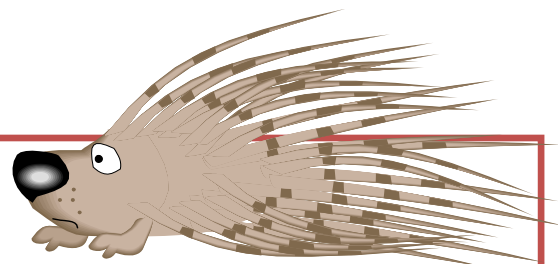
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Porcupines - Prickly and Pernicious

That's how PhD candidate Christy Bragg describes these creatures which we are privileged to have on the Liesbeek. She will be talking about her fascinating research on them on Thursday 21 July at WESSA in The Barn 31 The Sanctuary, Kirstenhof at 6.00 for 6.30pm. Please RSVP to Sandy on 021-701-1397 or email admin@wessa.co.za before Tuesday 19th July.

CONTACT PERSONS AND NUMBERS

- **Liesbeek Maintenance Project:** James Cooper 021-700 1843 / 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
- **City Call Centre ROADS AND STORMWATER**
(Potholes, flooded roads and chemical or other spills) Telephone: 0860 103 054 Postal address: PO Box X1694, Cape Town, 8000 E-mail: 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 Website: 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 103 089 Fax: 0860 103 090/021 400 4302 E-mail: wastewise@capetown.gov.za Website: www.capetown.gov.za/en/solidwaste