



Annual General Meeting
9 May at 14:30

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve will be held at 14:30 on Saturday, 9 May, at the Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre.

Agenda will include:

- Chairman's Report
- Financial Statement
- EEC Report
- Election of Friends' Committee Members for 2009/2010

(Please note: Nomination Forms are available at the Information Centre)

Please make a special effort to attend. Tea and coffee will be served after the meeting. Members are asked to kindly bring a plate of eats.

It's time to renew your membership

Membership for the current year expires on 31 March. In the letter from the Treasurer on the back page you will find details regarding the new subscription fees for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Paid-up members may renew their membership at the Information Centre from **1 March 2009** and will be issued with their new membership cards. To avoid a last minute rush, we encourage you to make use of this opportunity to register before your membership expires.

From the Treasurer

Our Treasurer, Patrick Neale-May, is urgently needing someone to assist with cash management and financial administration. If you can help, please contact Patrick on cell 072 904 2903 or via e-mail at patrick.neale-may@telkomsa.net

Helderberg Friends

Newsletter No 60

March 2009



by Owen Wittridge, Reserve Manager

I am sure I don't need to remind everyone about the terrific fires the Helderberg basin has experienced this past month. My staff and I have been assisting Fire and Rescue personnel, as well as private landowners, in an attempt to control and contain the fires which have burnt through Lourensford, Vergelegen, Fleur du Cap, Wedderwil, Knorhoek and onto the property of the Old Tolhuis. We have been lucky in that the Reserve has been spared.

We have worked through many a night and have been out on the fire line for most of the past month. We have assisted in cutting fire belts, saving houses and vineyards and helped out as best we can.

I want to thank all of the Friends who brought in donations of food and water during this time. Your generous support kept us going when temperatures soared and the fire was picked up by the strong winds. Thanks to you all.

Many of you would have heard stories of arson and the like. I cannot confirm any of these, but can confirm that we struggled to contain the fire which kept flaring up due to high temperatures and the strong winds.

With Global Warming on the rise many people are predicting that we will

continue to experience hot and windy weather during the late summer.

Listed below are some practical steps that all residents can take, not only to prevent veld fires, but also to protect their properties from any fire risk.

Prevent a fire in your home

- Keep matches and lighters out of the reach of children.
- Avoid overloading electrical circuits.
- Service your electrical components regularly and replace faulty ones.
- Switch off all electrical appliances at the wall at night or when leaving your home.
- When cooking, do not leave the pot on the stove unattended.
- Cut candles in half to prevent them toppling over. Use a candle holder.
- Smoking in bed is dangerous.

(See page 5 for more tips, especially if you live near open veld or on the urban fringe.)

To report fires

I want to appeal to everybody to be vigilant and report all fires to the listed numbers below.

- Report all **fires** by dialling **107** from a landline or **021 480 7700** from a cell phone.
- Report any **persons starting fires** to Law Enforcement on **021 596 1999**.



A Bumper Concert Season

A record number of people attended the 2008/2009 Sunset Concert programme and I am sure everyone enjoyed listening to the fine music in the beautiful ambience of the Reserve. A big thank you to our audiences for their loyal and enthusiastic support.

The programme

The series started off with the Police Band. This was a first for them at the Helderberg Nature Reserve. Barleycorn Folk Music followed a fortnight later. Then came Rob Anderson from Shanty, a concert which was very popular.

A highlight of the series was Shiraz, attracting a record breaking crowd of about 1 400 people. They excelled with some fantastic music, bringing the crowd to their feet during most of the evening – and they gave us a full two

hours of great music. Thank you Shiraz.

Jesse Jordan was a winner with a completely different crowd – great music and a super evening. Next was the Hanepoot Big Band led by Jannie van Tonder. Again, for those of you who like jazz, one not to be missed.

The last concert, featuring the Army and the Caledonian Pipe Bands, had to be rescheduled due to the fire in the Helderberg and took place on 15 March.

Thank you to the team

Concerts don't just happen. My thanks to all the volunteers who helped to make this year's series a success. Without you, we would not have made it.

The proceeds of the concerts go towards the sterling work done by the Environmental Education Centre.

– Alistair Munday, Concert Convener



Friends to receive EEC Newsletter

The Mike Woods Environment Education Centre (EEC) publishes a newsletter twice annually. It is circulated to 120 schools in the Helderberg Basin and surrounds, and features EEC news, as well as information about upcoming events and programmes.

As the EEC is a project of the Friends, it has been decided to send the newsletter to members of the Friends as well. Members will receive it either by post – included with the Friends Newsletter – or via e-mail.

Indigenous Nursery

Open: Tuesdays to Saturdays
10:00 to 16:00

Autumn is the time to plant...

- Proteas, Pincushions and Leucodendrons – there will be a good selection for sale.
- We are also clearing some plants at special prices to make room for new stock. Do visit our bargain corner.
- How about planting a tree?



Reference books needed

Is there a generous member who would like to donate a copy of either of these books? Contact ☎ 021 851 9192.

- *Guide to Aloes of SA (2004)* by B van Wyk & G Smith.
- *The Southern African Plectranthus* by Ernst van Jaarsveld.

Needed...

- Does anyone have a **trailer in good condition** that they no longer need? It would be put to good use by both the Nursery and the Education Centre.
- Also needed is a **wheelbarrow**. The last load of sand fell right through the one they have!

Please contact the Nursery ☎ 021 851 9192 if you can help.

EEC achieves Eco-Centre status



The International Eco-Schools/Centre Flag soon to fly at the EEC

The good news came early in January – the EEC had been awarded Eco-Centre status! All the hard work over the past 12 years had paid off.

A detailed application process had to be followed. In addition, a portfolio of the Centre's programmes and activities had to be compiled. This proved to be a time consuming and demanding task. However, the finished product was most impressive and will be on display at the Annual General Meeting.

We congratulate all those involved on this wonderful achievement.

The international flag will be presented to the Centre at a special award ceremony during the Eco-Schools Mini-Conference from 2 to 3 April.

A flag raising ceremony is yet to be arranged. Watch this space!

Tribute to Bert Louw

Bert Louw died suddenly on 5 January 2009. He and his wife, Vera, were founder members of our indigenous nursery. Together they helped to set it up and sourced much of the initial stock and continued to do the buying, adding to the ever increasing selection of plants. We send our loving condolences to Vera.

Participants: EEC Programmes

Comparative Stats 2006–2008

	2006	2007	2008
Learners:			
Advantaged	3 418	3 882	3 207
Disadvantaged	2 438	1 686	2 168
Adults	228	564	621
Tertiary Students	104	105	50
Total	6 188	6 231	6 046

The above statistics give an indication of the number of participants in the EEC programmes over the past three years. It is encouraging to note how many learners came from disadvantaged schools. In most cases their transport to the Reserve was provided by the H.E.E.P. Bus Project. During 2008 the project sponsored 43 buses, bringing hundreds of learners, who could otherwise not have been able to come. The continued support of these sponsors is deeply appreciated.

There was a small decline in the overall number of learners participating in the Centre's programmes. One reason could be the current financial climate; another the fact that there are now many more centres and facilities offering environmental education, such as the Oceanarium, Rietvlei/Blaauwberg and Rondevlei Nature Reserves.

During the past two years, Andreas Groenewald, our Educational Officer, has run a number of courses for U3A members. These have been extremely well received as is reflected in the adult numbers above. Other adult groups include Gordon's Bay Rotary Club, Probus and the Stellenbosch Garden Club.

Tertiary students also come to the Reserve as part of their practicals.



H.E.E.P. Bus Project

The Helderberg Environmental Education Project, H.E.E.P., was initiated some years ago to assist in providing transport for those schools which cannot afford to get to the Reserve.

Supported by a number of NGOs and individuals, it provides a most worthwhile service. Anyone wishing to contribute to this fund, should speak to Freya Brett at the EEC. ☎ 021 852 8831 (office hours).

Information Centre Volunteer Get-together



Some the volunteers who are involved at the Information Centre, together with Alec Dampies (back row) who works at the gate.

All the volunteers who assist at the Information Centre were invited to a special function on 16 February in recognition of the important role they play at the Reserve. They are indeed its 'front window'.

Input by Reserve Manager

Owen Wittridge, Reserve Manager, gave a presentation on the functioning of the Reserve and reviewed important information such as what is and what is not allowed in the Reserve and contact numbers in the case of an emergency. He also discussed the projects currently underway. These include:

- **Pine Plantation removal.** This is going ahead. The pines are growing on the rarest vegetation type in South Africa – the Lourensford Alluvium Fynbos – and are a huge fire hazard.
- **Footpaths** are receiving some much needed attention. Some of the paths in the Garden have been closed off to avoid duplication.
- **Invasive vegetation removal** – contracts are out at the moment to clear the Reserve of all invasive plants.
- **Bontebok** continue to receive treatment during summer in order to supplement their dietary requirements.
- **Road maintenance** – the potholes have received some attention and attempts are being made to source funding for further repairs.
- **New Office Complex** – the Conservation Office will be re-located to behind the Main Gate once the pines are down. Management is also looking at re-locating the Sugarbird Campsite.

A word of appreciation

Owen's talk began with 'thank you' and ended in exactly the same way. "Without you," he told the volunteers, "there would be no Information Centre. Your willingness to be there in all weathers, whether there are callers or not, is greatly appreciated. Thank you."

Refreshments

After the presentation, volunteers were able to relax over a glass of wine and enjoy some delicious snacks.

Reminder! The Guinea Gift Shop at the Information Centre has a wide range of items for sale. Do pay them a visit.

Children's Holiday Club 29 June – 3 July 2008

Each morning from 09:00 to 12:00 during the first week of the winter school holidays, the EEC will have a series of exciting and creative activities for children aged 5 to 12 years – a wonderful opportunity for them to explore some of the wonders of nature in a relaxed, fun-filled atmosphere.

The cost per child per day is R40. As numbers are limited to 40 children per day, booking is essential. **Booking opens on 1 June (not before).** Contact the EEC ☎ 021 852 8831.



As part of the Education Centre's outreach commitment, from 6 to 10 July a special holiday programme for children from disadvantaged communities is being planned. Transport will be arranged through the H.E.E.P. Bus Project.

From the
Treasurer

Friends' Membership

1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010

Members of the Friends pay an annual subscription which allows them 'free' entry into the Helderberg Nature Reserve for the subscription period 1 April to 31 March of the following year.

The subscriptions received are used primarily

- to fund activities and programmes of the Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre,
- to contribute to conservancy activities within the Helderberg Biosphere.

Friends' projects

Close to 6 000 learners (many from disadvantaged backgrounds) participated in our education programmes and over 18 000 people visited our Information Centre. The Nursery continues to expand and focuses on encouraging the planting of indigenous plants.

Another major activity that is supported by member subscriptions is the monthly alien vegetation hacks where the number of volunteers has increased steadily to over 15 at last count.

We believe in keeping in touch with our members and newsletters are circulated regularly (by e-mail preferably).

Your involvement is important

On the other side of the coin, we actively encourage members to play a direct role in Friends' activities. We always need more volunteers so contact us if you are willing and able to assist.

South Africa has a number of Friends groups, of which *Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve* is currently one of the largest.

Subscriptions for the new membership year

These are as follows for the year 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010. We look forward to your continued support.

Membership Category	2009/10 Subscription	Conditions
A. Ordinary Member	R 85	1 Numbered Card in the name of the Member. Non-transferable.
B. Senior Citizen (60 + years)	R 55	1 Numbered Card in the name of the Member. Non-transferable.
C. Family	R 170	2 Adults plus children 18 years and under. Numbered card in each family member's name.* Non-transferable.
D. Patron	R 275	2 Ordinary Membership Cards in the name of the Patron. Cards transferable.

* **Children under 4 years:** Entry is included on the responsible card holder's membership.

Alien Vegetation Beware!



Although this cleared patch looks completely barren, it will not be so for long. The bed of seeds lying dormant in the soil will soon produce a wide variety of indigenous plants.

Both the January and February hack groups continued to wade their way through the alien vegetation in the Reserve and the efforts of the sustained hacks are becoming clearly visible.

Both hacks were supported by the Betty's Bay Hack group. They brought along a number of its tree poppers, which were particularly effective.

Upcoming hack dates:

- 11 April at 08:00
- 9 May at 08:00
- 13 June at 08:00
- 11 July at 08:00

Please note that from April we revert to the winter time and start at 08:00.

To join in, phone James Silberbauer on 078 306 1660.



Discover Nature on Foot

The informative walks in the Reserve for the next few months are as follows:

- **29 March** at 07:30: **Birds** – Rose Mills (*Please note starting time*)
- **26 April: Proteas** – Corey van der Laan
- **31 May: Medicinal Plants** – Andreas Groenewald
- **28 June: Fynbos** – Corey van der Laan and Andreas Groenewald

Walks start from the Information Centre at 08:00 (unless otherwise stated) and last ±2 hours. While the walks are free, those without a valid Friends' card will need to pay the normal entry charge.

For more information contact the Information Centre or visit our website.

Issued by: Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve ♦ Registered NPO: 062-777-NPO

♦ Postal Address: P O Box 2075, Somerset West 7129 ♦ E-mail: helderbergfriends@telkomsa.net

♦ Information Centre ☎ 021 851 4060 ♦ Indigenous Nursery ☎ 021 851 9192

♦ Mike Woods Environmental Education Centre ☎ 021 852-8831 ♦ Website: www.helderbergnaturereserve.co.za

♦ Editor: Melanie Silberbauer ♦ Design and Layout: Mary Birch ♦ Afrikaans Translation: André Badenhorst

To be cut out and kept in a prominent place as a reminder of upcoming programme and special events.

Protect your home from fire...

especially for those who live near open veld or on the urban fringe.

- Maintain adequate fire breaks around your properties.
- Form a safety zone around your house, using gravel or lawn that is kept short. Keep your home and garden free of debris such as dead leaves, twigs or litter.
- Clean debris from roof surfaces and gutters.
- Avoid having trees and bushes next to the house, or creepers on the walls.
- Remove dead branches from trees and bushes.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in your house and/or have your garden hose rolled up ready for use in the event of a fire.
- Consider installing screens, shutters or heavy fire-resistant curtains.
- Store any firewood, gas, petrol or paint away from living areas.
- Provide enough distance between dwellings for emergency access. Where possible, have more than one exit from your dwelling.
- Have an escape plan and make sure that the whole family knows the plan.
- Ensure that fire hydrants remain unobstructed, especially by parked cars.
- Ensure easy access and turning space for emergency vehicles.
- **Please** do not throw burning cigarette butts out of car windows.

Emergency Numbers

- Report all **fires** – dial **107** from a land-line, **021 480 7700** from a cell phone.
- Report any **persons starting fires** to Law Enforcement on **021 596 1999**.



Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve Programme & Special Events March 2009 – July 2009

March 2009

- 14 07:30 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
15 17:30 **Sunset Concert**
Army & Caledonian Pipe Bands
29 07:30 **Walk in the Reserve:**
Birds (note early starting time)

April 2009

- 11 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
26 08:00 **Walk in the Reserve:**
Proteas

May 2009

- 4 – 28 **Bird Exhibition** at the EEC –
part of the EEC programme
9 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
9 14:30 **ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING** at the Mike Woods
Environmental Education Centre
31 08:00 **Walk in the Reserve:**
Medicinal Plants

June 2009

- 13 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**
28 08:00 **Walk in the Reserve:**
Fynbos

July 2009

- 11 08:00 **Alien Vegetation Hack**

For more information contact the Information Centre ☎ 021 851 4060 or visit our website: www.helderbergnaturereserve.co.za