



## Newsletter JUNE 2018

**OUR VISION** | To be a highly effective and well-supported champion of the environment.

**OUR MISSION** | To implement high impact environmental and conservation projects which promote public participation in caring for the Earth.

**Dear Friends of the Environment,**

the WESSA Eden Committee have been busy in recent weeks with an outing to de Rust, supporting the call to clear up the Kariba Weed on the Kat River and participating in the Touw River Conservancy's "Conversations in Conservation", so herewith a brief report back on these events.....



### Report on De Rust Eco-Champion Road Tour

As per usual, we had the finest folk participating in this excursion! Thank you all for your support. Your R50 donations amounted to R1 400 towards a new printer for the Garden Route Botanical Gardens Environmental Education.

Our hosts, Joel Immerman and Pieter Smit were just phenomenal! It was a bit like visiting two favourite family members. Joel, whose home is entirely off the grid with all sorts of innovative ways to harvest energy, water and a home-grown permaculture food garden left us gobsmacked.

Pieter shared the history, planning and stages of building of his state of the art bale house. He also employs a variety of energy saving devices and a waterless loo to boot! It is remarkable how he and Dianna provided all of us with comfortable seating while listening to his talk and admiring the beautiful wood finishes inside their home.

Most remarkable of all is the utter generosity of both our hosts in sharing their environmental savvy life-styles with us. I think we left them exhausted after being peppered with a myriad of questions from the enthusiastic participants!!

More folk should be exposed to these model life-styles with the smallest carbon footprint in the region. So watch this space for a follow-up Road trip to them next year.

*Compiled by Annemarie Gebhardt*



### Report on Conversations in Conservation

The second annual Conversations in Conservation event was held on 26 May 2018, the day after Africa Day. Hosted by the Touw River Conservancy, at the Fairy Knowe Hotel in Wilderness, this free event focuses on bringing people together to discuss local conservation and environmental issues, and projects.

After the talks - which included interesting (and important) presentations about fire risk management by landowners, invasive plant species, regrowth in areas that burned in July 2017, the Greenpop Eden reforestation festival, and human-wildlife interaction in the area - we all had the opportunity to have



one-on-one discussions, visiting the different 'conversations market' stalls.

Two talks that stood out for me was:

1. Pam Booth's presentation about the green scorpions and the challenges and facets of her work at Eden municipality, and compliance with legislature concerning alien species on private land.
2. Chloë Geurbois from Nelson Mandela University shared some of their findings from researching the baboon troops that roam the campus, Wilderness Heights, and parts of George that borders wild areas.



Monica at the Landmark Foundation stall

The stalls included our WESSA stall, Landmark Foundation, the Garden Route Botanical Garden, The Green Campus Forum, and CapeNature.

During the 'Soapbox' opportunity I gave a short introduction to what people can find at the WESSA stall: information and examples of eco-bricks, our Layman's Guide to local invasive plant species, a whale tail sculpture created mostly from ocean pollution from Brenton-on-sea's beach, and people could chat to me about the work of the African Climate Reality Project.



People were invited to add a little message card (a wish or thought about the ocean or pollution) to the whale tail sculpture. The sculpture also made an appearance in Woodmill lane in Knysna on World Environment Day as part of an initiative by Bio-Wise. Thank you to Lindie Calitz for her work and effort in getting the bulky tail there and back, and for the photos below!

Compiled by Janet Bezuidenhout



## WESSA proudly presents

### Self-drive guided Geology of the Klein Karoo Road Trip

**Back by public demand !!!**

Join our geologists Peter, Paul, & Colin on geological expedition from Oudtshoorn, over the Swartberg via Prince Albert, through Meiringpoort ending at de Rust in the late afternoon.

The geological features will be explained at various points along the route. Ideal for the motorist who does not like to walk much! Participants will receive detailed route directions and information.



Thursday 9 August



08H00 - sunset



R100

Do not miss this opportunity of learning more about our fascinating area.

Bookings now open and absolutely essential !

E-mail:

[wessageorge@isat.co.za](mailto:wessageorge@isat.co.za)







## WEEDS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Concerned residents have reported prolific weed growth on the Garden Route dam. The alarm was sounded last year already, when canoeist Howard Ogilvy expressed his dismay with the rapid growth of the weed. He said the plants can be seen at all the inlets into the dam.

Paul Godwin, another outdoor lover, said this week, "I don't know what plant is it but surely something needs to be done by the municipality?"

According to Director of Community Services Walter Hendricks, the municipality's department of Parks and Recreation is aware of the vegetation growing on the dam. He said, "(The department) controls it biologically or with an approved aquatic herbicide three times a year. The current growth will be treated within the month".

### Recurrence of Kariba weed

Municipal communications officer Athane Scholtz confirmed that it is Kariba weed (*Salvinia molesta*), the same weed that endangered the dam in 2016. At the time, Alida de Beer reported that Dean Chandler and local environmental activist Ken Gie had already sounded the alarm bells when *Salvinia* was first noticed along the edges of the dam three years before, in April 2013.

see full article: [www.georgeherald.com/News/Article/General/weeds-in-the-spotlight-201804251201](http://www.georgeherald.com/News/Article/General/weeds-in-the-spotlight-201804251201)



## KARIBA WEED: 'SEWAGE LEAKS MUST BE HALTED'

The idea for tackling the arduous task of clearing the weed from the Kat river was mooted at an impromptu meeting held on the Kat river banks in the suburb of Eden on Monday night, 7 May.

However, the George Municipality's Parks Department and the National Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) are the bodies responsible for preventing the weed (*Salvinia molesta*) from completely taking over our waterways and dam.

### Urgency

The DEA's biodiversity officer of production, Reley Bell, who was involved in combating the Kariba problem on the Garden Route dam in 2013, 2014 and 2016, stated on Friday 11 May, "The most important aspect to remember regarding Kariba weed is that it flourishes in dirty water and sewage wastewater that enters the dam from various points.

On the system this is our biggest challenge, which needs to be addressed firstly and most urgently. An integrated control approach is the way forward; George Municipality indicated they will spray the big infestation and from the DEA side we will search for suitable Kariba weed sites to populate with weevil insects."

### Residents raise the alarm

Canoeists and hikers raised the alarm about the latest infestation, saying the weed has trebled in volume since it was spotted in November last year.

A thick carpet is now visible at all inlets into the dam, including the Kat river. Currently, the weed lines the shores of the Garden Route Dam and was seen floating near the dam wall.

The green flower-like weed which floats on top of the water thrives in nutrient-rich water. Concerned ratepayers speculate as to whether the intermittent sewage spills into local rivers are stimulating the growth of the plant. For more than two years, there have been sewage spills from the ageing and porous sewerage lines in Fernridge and Denneoord, polluting the Kat / Mitchell river, which flows into the Garden Route Dam.

Full article : [www.georgeherald.com/News/Article/General/kariba-weed-sewage-leaks-must-be-halted-201805230209](http://www.georgeherald.com/News/Article/General/kariba-weed-sewage-leaks-must-be-halted-201805230209)

These concerns led to a group of concerned citizens and students from NMU's Green Campus Forum convening one Saturday morning with canoes, tools, buckets and abundant energies to make a gesture and remove some of the Kariba weeds



## "RECYCLING SERVICE PROVIDER CONTRACT ENDS

George Municipality regrets to inform the public that the contract of the current recycling service provider will end on 31st May 2018. George Municipality remains committed to the recycling process which is one of the most effective ways to save natural resources and lowers waste products sent to landfill sites.

A tender process will be undertaken to appoint a new service provider. This is a temporary situation and George Municipality wishes to maintain the momentum of those residents who continue to put out blue bags and the municipal refuse trucks will be used to collect these blue bags on the same day as the black bags are collected in your area. The recycling of items will take place at the Municipal Transfer Station.

The municipality is not able to provide any blue bags as of 1 June 2018. The public who wish to

continue recycling are asked to purchase their own blue bags or alternatively clear plastic bags so that the content can be clearly identified as recycled items. George Municipality would like to apologize for any inconvenience this creates and advises that the tender process will commence in July 2018 and updates will be given on progress. Any queries can be directed to the Director: Community Services 044 802 2900"

### ALTERNATIVES

Take your Blue Bags to Interwaste – they are still operating from 10 Extension Rd, Pacaltsdorp Ind Area, George, 044 878 0688

or take your Blue Bags to the northern entrance (near the railway crossing on Caledon Street) of the Botanical Garden. This is a source of much-needed funds for the Garden."



Press Release: Issued George Municipality, 30 May 2018  
Immediate Release



## Heading: Steer clear of dying trees in George area

The George Municipality is warning people to steer clear of trees that appear to be dying as hundreds of trees in the municipal area are starting to succumb to, mainly, borer beetle infestation.

The municipality reported last month (3 April 2018) that trees in George were showing signs of infestation with the Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB) beetle and associated fungus, and had

called upon expert advice from University of Pretoria Professor Wilhelm de Beer. It also asked the public to report trees they suspected of being infected.

George Municipal Manager Trevor Botha said the municipality was dismayed to hear the PSHB beetle and its associated fungus had not only decimated entire species in other parts of the world, but there was also little proven success in controlling it. "We are awaiting results of DNA sequence testing to confirm the local infestation is in fact the same beetle and fungus that have killed thousands of trees elsewhere, but Professor De Beer's initial observations and the many trees that have started dying off, certainly point in that direction.

"There are hundreds of trees across the municipal area that show advanced symptoms and, for the moment, there seems to be no certain cure. We continue to work with Professor De Beer and the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) at the University of Pretoria to find a solution, but must in the meantime address what we can.

"We ask the public to be especially careful near trees during and directly after adverse weather and wind, and ask that they help spread the message. We have identified Meade Street in the CBD the greatest immediate threat, where the fungus had accelerated the dying off of several trees that had reached maturity.

"Please take a good look at a tree before you walk, park, stand or picnic under it and avoid trees with signs of dying, such as broken branches. In George the most likely to be infected are box elder, maple and oak trees, which line many of the city's streets – but these are not the only species that can be affected and we suggest people take heed as a general rule. Please note indigenous species can also be infected."

Mr Botha said many of the trees in George were reaching maturity and had already been scheduled to be systematically replaced as

they started dying off. However, the aggressive nature of the borer beetle combined with the effect of urban development (such as paving) and the mature age of the trees have resulted in trees dying faster than could have been anticipated – or planned or budgeted for.

"The municipality has been trimming dead branches from trees constantly, but will need to get in outside contractors to adequately address the problem. Cutting and trimming large trees is a specialist, dangerous and expensive task for which the municipality must find additional funding. While we are investigating all sources of funding, we appeal to the public to take care and tell others to do so also. For now, we are concentrating on trimming branches on the major routes in town. Should it become necessary, the municipality will consider temporarily closing sections of roads and sidewalks," said Botha.

## Disposal

The municipality had initially investigated a separate, specialised disposal site for infected trees, branches and plant material – where it could be burnt or solarised. However, the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning was not in favour of another disposal or burn site in the city. Since the impact and spread of the disease is currently faster than any proven control measure (hence out of control), it is also considered more prudent to focus efforts on safeguarding trees.

All infected stumps, branches and plant material must be taken to the municipal garden waste site on the Airport Road (R102) for disposal. Infected cut materials should preferably be moved off the premises to the waste site within 24 hours from being cut.

Tree felling companies, garden services and wood cutters are advised to dispose of plant material only at the garden waste site. Infected wood should NOT be turned into firewood for selling or chipped for mulching as the fungus remains active in this way.

## Private property owners

It is recommended that owners regularly inspect trees on their properties for signs of disease and trim dead branches as they notice them. It is very important that nobody sit, play or linger under such trees and children should be warned to not climb in or play under such trees under any circumstances. It is highly recommended that dying trees be felled, removed and the plant materials burned. Do not leave the tree stump untreated and do not replant in the exact same spot where the infected tree was, as evidence exists that beetles may bore down when a tree is cut and fungus may still be active in the soil.

"We have had to come to terms with the fact that, as with other cities that have been invaded by this beetle and fungus, our urban landscape is going to change. We will lose many of our large trees, which will sadly change some of the character of our city. But we are determined to plant new trees wherever we can, repopulating our city with indigenous species that have so far proven resistant to the beetle. We thank the public in advance for their help and support," said Botha.

Persons, businesses and organisations wanting to meaningfully assist can contact [parks@george.gov.za](mailto:parks@george.gov.za)

## BACKGROUND

The George Municipality started investigating possible local infestation of the Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB) beetle and its associated fungus following a scientific report in the Southern African Institute of Forestry (SAIF) newsletter in March 2018. Since then hundreds of trees in the George municipal area have been identified to be infected by the disease.

Professor Wilhelm de Beer of the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) at the University of Pretoria provided the following information:

The PSHB and its fungus was first discovered in South Africa during a routine survey for tree pests at the KwaZulu-Natal Botanical Gardens in August 2017, and is suspected to have come into the country via packaging in harbours. Native to Southeast Asia, it is a 2mm long ambrosia type beetle (which means it feeds on ambrosia produced by fungus) and is also known as *Euwallacea fornicatus* (Stompkopkewer in Afrikaans).

The beetle bores through the bark into the sapwood of trees and inoculates the fungus into living wood. The fungus grows in the beetle's tunnels and serves as food for its larvae. In susceptible trees the fungus can spread through the sapwood causing disease and even death.

The situation is worsened by the fact that the beetle and fungus is not host specific but seems to be affecting a wide range of indigenous and exotic trees, including box elder, Chinese and Japanese maple, oak, plane trees, Kapok trees, paper bark acacia, wild plum, dwarf corral and common corral. Overseas surveys have also indicated susceptibility of important crop trees such as avocado, macadamia, pecan, peach, orange and grapevine.

Symptoms most seen on trees in George so far are small elevated blue-black lesions on the bark resembling shotgun wounds or cigarette burns. Other symptoms

include patches of white powdered wood on the bark surrounding entrance holes of beetle tunnels and blotches of oozing resin on the bark.

As there is still relatively little known about the control of the PSHB beetle and its fungus, and because of its aggressive and non-selective targeting of species, it is recommended that infected host plants and trees be felled and the plant material burnt or solarised to limit spreading.

Herbicides are being tested elsewhere, but at huge cost and has had limited success so far because the fungus has been killing trees faster than the herbicide can take effect. Some attempts at biological control have been made overseas but with little success.

## OTHER INITIATIVES

WESSA member Janet Botes is organising a group art exhibition to be held at the Knysna Art Gallery 10-30 November. The exhibition is focused on IUCN red-listed species on the Cape coast, Garden Route and Karoo, and ends on REMEMBRANCE DAY FOR LOST SPECIES.

Janet is seeking partnerships for this exhibition, in the form of relevant endangered species experts to offer talks during the exhibition, as well as other collaborations before and after the exhibition. The plan is for the project to become an ongoing and longlasting initiative, with an annual exhibition, educational activities, and fundraising for projects that aid the conservation of our endangered species. To attain these goals, collaboration and partnerships are key. Please contact Janet at [art@janetbotes.co.za](mailto:art@janetbotes.co.za) or 072 331 5057 to get involved.

### VERGE



**Artists:** Annie le Roux | Chris Lochner  
Gwendolyn Meyer | Ingrid Coerlin  
Ingrid Nuss | Jane Pitchford | Janet Botes  
Jurgens Walt | Lee Molenaar

**Current partners:** Knysna Basin Project,  
Knysna Art Society, SAN-ecosystems, The  
Project Room





**African Climate  
Reality Project**

**CLIMATEREALITY.CO.ZA**



@ClimateRealityAfrica



@AfricaCRP

The African Climate Reality Project is the African branch of the Climate Reality Project since 2014.

### Objectives:

- creating a network and communications hub for trained Climate Reality Leaders, NGOs, governments, scientists and others in Africa to collect and share information and resources.
- Develop wide-ranging communications assets, workshops, events and social channels to tell the story of climate change in Africa.
- Gather information on African Climate Change, extreme weather events, community and individual stories and solutions.

[www.climatereality.co.za](http://www.climatereality.co.za)



Every June/July, the Greenpop Festival of Action brings people together from around the globe to learn, connect, give back and get active. For the past 6 years, this event has taken place in Livingstone, Zambia and for the first time in 2018, the Festival of Action is being hosted in the Eden District, South Africa.

Over three weeks we will plant trees, rehabilitate ecosystems, clear alien vegetation build using eco-methods, set up recycling systems, paint eco murals, attend sustainability workshops, celebrate with live music and more. It's an adventure for active citizens who want to change their world.

Apply for the full programme here <http://bit.ly/GPEden18Apply>

### Volunteer at one of the Open Days

For the first time in 2018 - we are opening up the programme and offering Open Days, where you are welcome to join us during our activations - free of charge and without needing to camp out or stay for the full week-long programme.

Get involved in mass tree planting and alien clearing in your local community!

Apply as a local volunteer: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfmbQ8VpE6q0iFAb1WjCeaVjP93sO4OntnA9NNnE1e4TABJ\\_w/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfmbQ8VpE6q0iFAb1WjCeaVjP93sO4OntnA9NNnE1e4TABJ_w/viewform)

Remember that we're always open and available for more hands on deck. We are stronger and more impactful when we work together. If you're keen to join the committee, don't hesitate to let us know.



*Regards, Christine Ridge-Schnauffer*  
*Honorary Secretary WESSA EDEN*

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