



# STEENBOK NEWS

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



At the recent AGM all the Trustees with the exception of Brian Steele, who resigned after a long period of service, were re-appointed. Ester Townsend will be joining MANCOM which otherwise continues with the same committee members and with Roger Voysey as Reserve Manager. To achieve greater efficiency the Operations Committee has been disbanded and it is intended that a small Planning sub-committee, to meet twice a year, be appointed by MANCOM.

It was reported that the financial position was sound. Details of the current Action Plan, including the installation of additional pipes to facilitate restoration of further salt marsh, were provided. A copy of this is included in this Newsletter on Page 4.

On completion of the formal business two guest speakers covered topics of special interest. Mr Peet Joubert, well known in Knysna as the previous manager of SANParks in the Garden Route, reminisced on some of his experiences in Knysna, and his hopes for the environmental development of the greater Knysna area.

Dr Richard Barnes, a Fellow of St Catharine's College Cambridge, presented a Power Point presentation covering his research activities in the sea grass beds in the Knysna Estuary.



This highlighted the vital and

unique importance of sea grass to the sustainability of marine life. His Power Point slides can be viewed at;

<http://www.steenboknaturereserve.org.za/features/RichardBarnesPowerPresentationAGMMarch2014.pdf>

## RESTORATION OF SALT MARSH



It will be recalled that we have been investigating ways of restoring a significant area of salt marsh west of the boardwalks and considering a recommendation from hydrologist Piet Huizenga to install 4 pipes to allow tidal flow from the estuary that would achieve the restoration. Following his initial report it was decided to commission VPM Survey to undertake a more detailed survey to produce a contour map (in 100mm intervals) of the area.



This was done and the results submitted to Mr Huizinga. Following further examination he has confirmed that his original recommendation stands and that the development of similar saltmarsh habitat is expected as at the area east of the boardwalk leading to the seawall.

The restoration project has also been given the green light by Professor Janine Adams who together with three of her students, spent nearly three hours with us visiting the Reserve. Janine is Professor of Botany at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and is an estuarine botanist with expertise in environmental flow requirements, estuary ecology and salt marsh.



Based on the recommendations of Mr Huizinga engineer Gerrit Nieuwoudt, a local and well known professional engineer, has been commissioned to prepare an engineering proposal and cost estimate.

These together with Piet Huizinga's recommendations and VPM Survey drawings will be submitted to our MANCOM at its meeting at the end of this month.

**DOG AWARENESS PROGRAM**



As evidenced by many over-flowing litter boxes it is clear that the dog awareness program conducted earlier in the year has resulted in greater compliance. This is encouraging but there is still room for improvement.

We were thus thrilled to receive a call from one of our members offering to sponsor a new litter box at the East entrance which seems to be one of the worst trouble spots. We will also be installing more litter boxes and bag dispensers at other busy points.

**SPOTTED EAGLE OWLS**

Towards the beginning of the year, once the Spotted eagle owl chicks had moved on, the parent couple roosted in the two trees outside the Bowling Club-house.

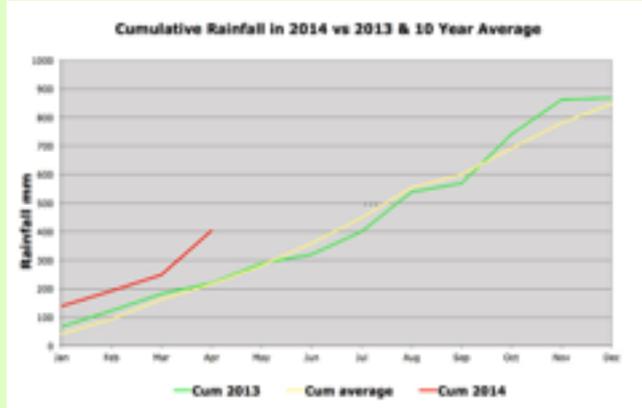


Then one day there was only one; nobody knows what happened to the other but it is surmised that it died from rat poison.

**RAINFALL**

The rainfall charts for the first four months of this year show a dramatic doubling of rainfall as compared to last year, as well as to the ten year average.

This coupled with exceptionally high temperatures in the first quarter has resulted in exceptional high vegetation growth.





The remaining owl continued as a frequent visitor to these trees until a month ago when it disappeared. However to our delight it was recently spotted again in a group of milkwood trees between the tennis courts and Kingfisher Creek. On a nearby branch half a young dead rabbit was clear to see! It will be recalled that the owls failed last year to use the owl box for the second year in succession and it seems widely accepted that the owls were chased away by Egyptian geese.

One of our projects for this year is to seek expert guidance on how to restore the owls to their rightful home. We have thus been talking to Dennis Robson of Radical Raptors and he has encouraged us to focus on creating and protecting the owl habitat in the Reserve. He advises that there are three main components to achieving an ideal owl habitat:

- Educating all concerned to refrain from using rat poison
- Adequate number of owl boxes
- Adequate number of high hunting perches in strategic hunting places away from heavy traffic.

Subject to approval of MANCOM we plan initially to locate new owl boxes and hunting perches on tall poles at the west end of the Park. Given the “owl habitat” that exists in the Reserve, especially with the planned enhancements, this should ensure that there is “room” for both the Egyptian Geese and the Owls.

With this background we have not considered actions to chase away the Egyptian geese. In any event geese, like owls, are territorial and if a pair is chased away the space will merely be filled by another pair.

We understand that by implementing this three point plan there is a good chance of our remaining Spotted eagle owl finding a mate in the next few months in time for the breeding season.

We record our appreciation to Dennis for his time and advice. It was Dennis that restored and released into the wild one of our baby owls, injured by a car. Radical Raptors feature Flying Displays daily and can be contacted on 044 532 7537.

**Trustees**

Keith Hollis (Chairman), James Botha, Peter Godsell, Councillor Hart, Myles Ruck, Esther Townsend and Roger Voysey.

**Management Committee**

Councillor Lizwani, Councillor Hart & Jonathan Mabula nominated by Knysna Municipality, Ricky Maskew and Roger Voysey by LIRA, Peter Godsell by Friends of Steenbok, Maretha Alant by SANParks James Botha, Dave Edge and Esther Townsend co-opted by MANCOM. Manager: Roger Voysey 083 754 5390

The annual subscription is R 320. Alternatively, Life membership is R 10,000

You can join online at <http://www.steenboknaturereserve.org.za/> or contact Sue on 044 384 1108 or Peter on 044 384 1237

## **Summary of progress with 2013/2014 Action Plan presented to the AGM**

### **Completed**

- Remove non-functional water valve west of tennis courts using loose rock at Kingfisher Creek.
- Extend salt marsh at east end of Park by cutting/removing grasses.
- Reduce mowing area of the Common to facilitate spreading southwards of the salt marsh.
- Expand tree copse (opposite Kensington Gardens) with additional species including pioneers to provide wind protection during the establishment phase.
- Register as an interested and affected party in the Knysna Integrated Strategic Development Frame Work (ISDF) and commit to actively support the overall aims of the ISDF.
- Review the August 2012 Management Plan and up-date/re-map where appropriate.

### **On-Going**

- “Freshen up” and improve web site by changing pics, updating flora species, adding a new section for SNP Fact Sheets and moving the “Link” button to a more visible position.
- Implement Dog Litter Education Programme with distribution of info and signs along the main walking routes appealing for compliance.
- Include in newsletters information on Steenbok related issues such as activities of the Knysna Basin Project.
- Restore areas south and north of Indigenous Garden, particularly east of concrete path, by removing Cotton, Kikuyu and Buffalo grasses to allow regeneration of other indigenous plant species.
- Pursue registration as a formal Nature Reserve. As an alternative to seeking recognition as a “Protected Environment”, within the Knysna Protected Environment (which is likely to be problematical), continue representations to Knysna Municipality to be zoned under the new Zoning Regulations as a Nature Reserve.

### **Other**

- Investigate the desirability of converting the wetland west of the board walks into salt marsh by allowing tidal flow through pipes.
- Obtain professional advice on re-establishing nesting use of the Owl Box west of the tennis courts. See article in this issue.

<http://www.steenboknaturereserve.org.za/>

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