

The Friends of **THE STEENBOK NATURE RESERVE TRUST**



OCTOBER 2026 NEWSLETTER

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

A new season brings new growth for Nature and for Steenbok Reserve. This Newsletter covers some of the interesting developments and bright new things that have taken place this winter. We hope you will enjoy all our news. Happy reading!

TRIBUTE TO DIANA STROMBERG

Diana is stepping down after having devoted many selfless years to Steenbok Reserve. Diana took the reins from her mentors Roger Voysey and Peter Godsell, building on their legacies, and filling the roles of Reserve Manager and Chair of the Management Committee. Always in the Reserve, she has lived by her mantra of 'Peace, Love and more Tolerance'.

Diana's contributions have been enormous. She has introduced countless children to the fascinating biodiversity of the flora and fauna, giving them an appreciation of all things bright and beautiful. She has brought joy to those who have lost loved ones, by her carefully-positioned memorial benches and beautiful gardens. She has developed a special comradeship and friendship with the teams from SANParks and the Municipality and Ivy Garden Services, and with other volunteers, and by so doing has kept the Reserve neat and well-maintained, while always retaining its natural unspoilt character.

Diana has personally designed the comprehensive Steenbok signage system, to be both informative and attractive: entrance signs, maps, bench and dog bin plaques. She has developed and maintained the magnificent website, which is illustrated with her colourful photographs. She has lovingly crafted the popular 'Friends Recipe Book', and the 'Look Deep into Nature' children's activity book, and her hand-made gifts have raised funds at the annual Steenbok stall at the Leisure Isle Festivals.



Diana's simple farewell message to the Management Committee was that when in doubt, they should always go back to the objectives of Steenbok's founding Agreement: to nurture and protect the natural biodiversity, encourage plant life indigenous to the Garden Route, and most importantly create a welcoming place for all residents and visitors to enjoy.

Thank you Diana, from all of us who love Steenbok Reserve.

STEENBOK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Steenbok Reserve is a wonderfully successful public-private partnership established in terms of a joint management agreement between the Knysna Municipality and the Leisure Isle Residents' Association. A Management Committee, the MANCOM, with representatives from the Municipality, LIRA, SANParks and the Friends of Steenbok Trust meets twice annually to oversee Reserve activities, and to ensure that the objectives of the Agreement are met.

At a recent MANCOM meeting the 2026/27 SNR Management Plan and Budget were approved, and these will now guide our activities for the new financial year, which starts on 1 October. The meeting was special for two reasons. We had the privilege of attendance from the head of SANParks, Lwazi Khuzwayo, and from Philip Hendriks, newly-appointed head of the Municipality's Environmental office, as well as from regular attendees Vanessa Weyer, Elmonique Petersen, Ivan van Wyk, and Diana, Ingrid, Lexi and Dave. Apologies were received from Mulalo Musekene and James Botha.

And Diana Stromberg, who has chaired the MANCOM for some years, announced that she was stepping down. Ingrid thanked Diana for the many years she has given to Steenbok. Dave Stromberg will now take the chair. The Management Plan and Budget will be posted on the Steenbok website, as will the audited financial results of the 2025/26 financial year, once these have been ratified at the Trust AGM in December. Despite its rather complicated institutional arrangements, Steenbok Nature Reserve continues to operate efficiently and responsibly, and the stakeholders, volunteers, and service providers work together to ensure that Steenbok retains its natural beauty, protects our biodiversity, and is a welcoming place for all visitors.

2026/27 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

September marks the end of our financial year, and Friends of Steenbok Trust membership subscriptions are now due. This year's subscription is R650, and because the Reserve is a Public Benefit Organisation, all donations are tax-deductible, and donors will receive Section 18A certificates.

The donations received in 2025 / 2026 were used to:

- Cover the cost of supplying and collecting 60 000 dog poop and 2500 refuse bags
- Repair the sinkhole in the Towpath Seawall
- Maintain all the established gardens and natural pathways
- Provide educational signage, brochures and Newsletters
- Plan and execute the new Harbour Road Parking area



Apply on our website to become a Friend, and make your annual payment of R650 to:

The Friends of Steenbok Nature Reserve Trust, Standard Bank, Knysna Branch 050-314, Account No 082579342

WHAT'S NEW IN THE RESERVE? Improvements to the Harbour Road Waterfront



The improvements to this area have now been completed, resulting in a car- and trailer-free lagoonside recreation area, with reorganized parking areas for visitor's cars and for boat trailers. We consulted widely before starting this project - with the Boat Club, the Municipality and SANParks, and LIRA, and we presented our proposals to the SANParks Estuary Users Forum, as well as publicizing them widely in Newsletters and on social media.

The work involved erecting low post-and-rail fencing to demarcate the visitors' parking area, extending the paved pathway to allow easier access for those with disabilities, and the provision of informative signage. The grassed lagoonside area was neatened up, and bins and signs repositioned, and this is now a lovely leisure space for fishermen, children, and Reserve visitors. Older folk can now park here and enjoy unobstructed views across the lagoon. The project required the removal of the many trailers that had been using the Reserve for long-term parking. This has cleared two large areas for short-term parking for cars and trailers of boaters using the public slipway. We will now be working with the authorities to have the remaining abandoned trailers removed, to create more short-term parking space before the busy holiday season. If you know someone who owns one of these trailers, please assist us by asking them to make other arrangements.

Thank you to all those who have made this project possible. The Harbour Road waterfront is now an attractive area for all to enjoy, as this weekend's gathering of the Sisters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints showed.



THE FUTURE IMPERATIVE OF OPEN SPACES

Steenbok is not just a walk in the park! The Reserve is a small part of the Greater Garden Route National Park, and we strive to preserve and protect this open space. Two good examples of our conservation efforts are:



1. The preservation of the Land's End dune forest and Kingfisher Creek Salt Marsh, ensuring that these will still be here with all their marvelous biodiversity and carbon sequestration in the years to come, contributing to the future resilience of the area and the planet. The goal is that many years from now people will still be able to see a slice of Leisure Islands' biodiverse flora and fauna, insect and arthropod life.

2. Restoration and rehabilitation of areas that were previously monoculture invasive grasses by carefully re-introducing indigenous species native to the area, and encouraging propagation and self-seeding. The long Congo Grass sections along either side of the Paved Pathway are an example of this.

More and more open spaces will become potential corridors for biodiversity in-between human development. These spaces will make a world of difference as we face unprecedented times, for example the relationship between biodiversity and water security. The impact of this relationship for Leisure Isle will be the relationship between the indigenous biodiversity we can nurture and our rain-dependent aquifer.

For a broader perspective on this for the Western Cape, we recommend Cape Nature's podcast *Green Noise* [S3 E1: 'How Biodiversity Restoration Secures Our Water Future'](#). By being mindful of biodiversity, we can also all contribute to a resilient future in our gardens, patios and sidewalks.

OTHER WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE FUTURE IMPERATIVE OF OPEN SPACES

The psychological impact of the climate crisis can be overwhelming, and we may not all be able to turn our properties into solar punk green corridors. Yet, when we zoom in a little, there are always other ways for us to invest in a sustainable future, and we can all pick a flavour that suits our own needs and lifestyle. Here are some examples of small actions that have a big impact:

- Forward this email to someone you know who enjoys Steenbok Nature Reserve.
- Come and get involved with our volunteers: send us an email with your number and we will add you to our dedicated volunteer whatsapp group for updates and info regarding our volunteer days.
- Not keen on group activities? That's cool, maybe you'd like to start implementing 'plalking' or 'plogging' in the Reserve? "What's that?", we hear you say; well they're terms for picking up plastic on your walks and jogs. Here's a video to get inspired about this small action we could all implement: [What Is Plogging?](#)
- Pick a biodegradable bag over a plastic bag for the doggy doo: They're available at More coffee shop.

And there are many more examples. Whatever it is that fits into your life easily, all those small actions add up to resilience and sustainability. Remember that action, no matter how small, is the antidote to climate crisis doomerism.

CONSISTENT CONTENTION: STEENBOK DOG PARK VS STEENBOK NATURE RESERVE

While we really enjoy that dogs get their daily steps in, we do implore dog owners to keep the Reserve dog-poo free. While dogs are allowed in the Reserve (on a leash/controlled), we are part of the Greater Garden Route National Park (a balance of conservation and tourism), and the sheer number of dogs visiting us daily makes our job skating this line very difficult. We ask for awareness of the By Laws and reasonable behavior when it comes to your furry friends. The By Laws applicable for Steenbok are the same as they are for any public area:

PUBLIC AMENITIES BY-LAW

9(2) Where a person is permitted to bring an animal upon a public amenity, he or she must have direct and physical control over the animal by means of a leash or other device.

BY-LAW FOR THE RECREATIONAL USE OF BEACHES AND BATHING AREAS

15(1) No person shall cause or permit any dog belonging to him or in his charge to be in or on any beach area except on a leash after the Municipality has defined such beach area as an area in or on which dogs must be kept on a leash and a sign erected at such beach area specifying that dogs must be on a leash therein or thereon.

BY-LAW RELATING TO THE KEEPING OF DOGS

8. No person shall permit any dog owned or kept by such person to be in any road or public place except on a leash and under control of some responsible person, unless in a free running area specifically designated for that purpose by the Municipality.



WHAT'S NEW IN THE KIDS CORNER?

The whimsy of worms for the big kids and the little kids!

Learn about the important work of earthworms in our latest [FYI](#) post.

Perhaps feel inspired to make a worm farm in our [FUN TO DO](#) post.



THANK YOU TO DANIELA AT MORE FOR THE CONSTANT SUPPORT



Steenbok is very grateful to Daniela Dotan and More at The Gallery for all the support over the years. We are lucky to be a benefactor of Daniela's friendly smile and community-driven initiatives

Thank you for selling the biodegradable dog bags, our beautiful 'Look Deep Into Nature' books, for offering our volunteers a complimentary coffee every month, and for your generous donations from the children's easter egg hunts - we so appreciate your support.

Check out the More shop if you're interested in any of the above mentioned goodies.

THE WINTER CWAC COUNT AND A RARE VISITOR



This winter the world wide Coordinated Water Bird Count took place on the 27th of July. It was an overcast and freezing day but nonetheless the teams across the estuary counted our precious water birds. Diana Stromberg and Lexi Meier from Steenbok joined two teams this winter - the Mud Plodders and the Small Boat teams. You can see all the data collected from the CWAC counts over the years on our website in our [Fact Sheets](#) page. Here is the [Winter 2026 Data Sheet](#) for your perusal.

Twitchers get excited for this one!! The Mudplodders team were lucky enough to see a rare Eurasian Oystercatcher in the Knysna Estuary and Robert Smith has generously written an article about it for our Spring Newsletter.

... THE EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER Robert Smith August 2, 2026

During the latest Coordinated Waterbird Count (CWAC) held on 27 July, 2026, a single Eurasian Oystercatcher was observed in and amongst other foraging wading birds on the mudflats close to the Small Boat Harbour, which is situated on Leisure Isle.

Attention to the presence of the bird was first made apparent by its agitated flight-call which is slightly more rapid and persistent to that of the African Black Oystercatcher. In addition, a close examination, by means of the telescope, revealed a Eurasian Oystercatcher, in its black and white livery, gleefully foraging amongst an assortment of Whimbrels, African Black Oystercatchers and Greenshanks in the mudflats.

Roberts VII, describes Eurasian Oystercatchers as “rare Palearctic migrants” which mostly occur in South Africa during the summer months. They are recorded throughout the year, but young birds are known to overwinter. The assumption can be drawn that the observed bird was most probably an overwintering juvenile.

The species breed from Iceland to central Russia and far eastern China. Overwintering birds are mostly seen North of 20° in Africa and those that move southwards habitually take an easterly route down to South Africa.

The presence of the bird here was immediately reported on the “Garden Route Rares” App and had many excited birdwatchers in and around Knysna searching for it. In the ensuing days, it was observed independently a number of times at Brenton-on-Lake and also on the Leisure Isle mudflats. Obviously, this bird is happy to move around the central part of the Knysna Estuary.

The Eurasian Oystercatcher is highly gregarious in the non-breeding period, so their presence in association with African Black Oystercatchers on the Estuary, suggests that they accept each other’s company and do not see each other as competitors.

By comparison, the Eurasian and the African Black Oystercatchers are more or less the same size, with the Eurasian Oystercatcher measuring 40-45 cm and the African Black Oystercatcher, 42-45 cm. The Eurasian Oystercatcher has a weight of 400-700 g, while the slightly larger African Black Oystercatcher tips the scales at between 665-730 g.

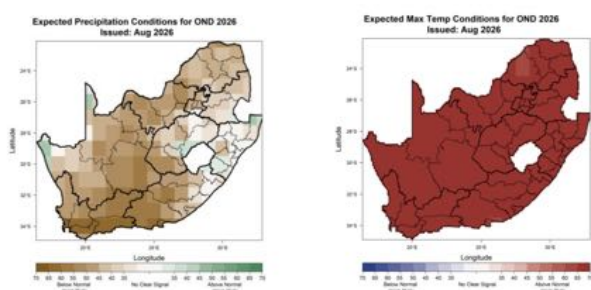
References:

Hockey, PAR et al; Roberts Birds of Southern Africa, VIth Edition; John Voelker Bird Book Fund; Cape Town; 2005.

Hume, R; Birds of Britain and Europe; Doring Kindersley; London; 2002.

Visit the Steenbok website to access the factsheet comparing the [Eurasian and African Black Oystercatchers](#)

SOUTH AFRICAN WEATHER SERVICE STATEMENT ON THE 2026/27 EL NIÑO



Read the South African Weather Service’s predictions for weather this summer and the coming El Nino event developing in the Pacific Ocean - most strong El Nino events bring below-normal rainfall and elevated temperatures.

Read the full media release below:

[South African Weather Service Media Release 1st September 2026](#)

SEAWALL REPAIRS

The repairs to the sinkhole on the Towpath have at last been completed. The sinkhole was caused by gaps opening in the joints in the concrete pipes that pass beneath the Towpath. These pipes provide the tidal flow that sustains the Boardwalk Saltmarsh. Incoming water would ‘suck’ the sand into the displaced pipes, and eject it into the saltmarsh, leading to the sinkhole.

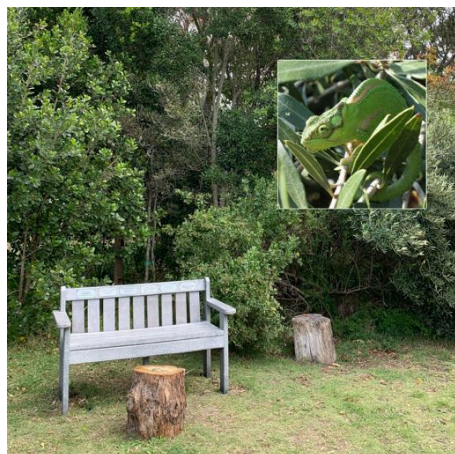
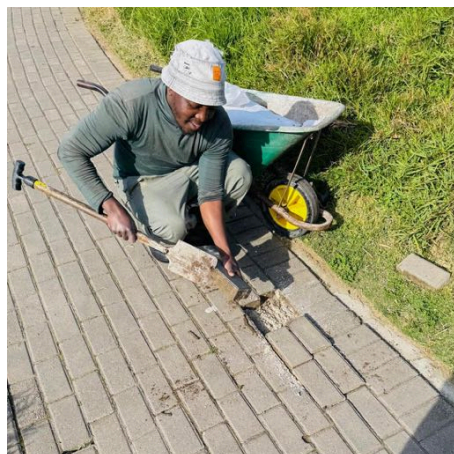
The repair work necessitated mechanical excavation to expose the pipes, the building of sandbag coffer dams to keep the excavation dry while the pipes were realigned and cemented, and finally filling the hole with compacted sand.

The result is a Towpath that is once again level and safe to use, with a hardened surface layer to resist erosion from the periodic overspilling of the seawall in high spring tides. We are now considering a project to allow tidal flow into the adjacent stagnant Western Saltmarsh. The reintroduction of tidal waters will result in a fascinating rejuvenation of this area, and make a small contribution to replacing some of the Estuary’s lost saltmarshes.



SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR WEEKLY MAINTENANCE AND RESERVE UPKEEP

We moved this bench to preserve the chameleon’s home and fixed the paved pathway with Fortune’s help. Ivy Gardening Service came to the rescue with their ride-on the mower, and helped us with the trimming of Roger’s Way. What an exciting couple of months!



OCTOBER & NOVEMBER FLOWERS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

Looking forward to more purple, yellow and blue:

Remember you can identify most of the plants in Steenbok Nature Reserve by making use of the comprehensive lists on our website: [SNR Flora Lists](#).

Take a walk down the winding paths between the tennis courts and Land's End and you'll spot these colourful beauties painting the Reserve with their bright spring colours.



[Polygala fruticosa](#)



[Senecio pterophorus](#)



[Lobelia anceps](#)

KNYSNA DWARF CHAMELEONS: ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOURS TO THERMAL EXTREMES



In October 2025 the University of Johannesburg's department of Natural History observed how *Bradypodion damaranum* (the Knysna Dwarf Chameleon) has adapted to increasingly extreme temperatures in the summer months. For the first time the chameleons were observed and documented descending from their perches to seek shady shelter amidst thicker vegetation and leaf mold as temperatures rose towards 40 degrees celsius around mid day.

We continue to be amazed by the innovative resilience of the natural world!

Read the research on these interesting habits here: [Tolley, Krystal & Barends, Jody & Stanton-Jones, Wade & Alexander, Graham. \(2026\). Natural history observations of the Knysna Dwarf Chameleon, Bradypodion damaranum \(Boulenger, 1887\): thermal extremes and feeding on flora. Herpetology Notes. 19. 219 - 228.](#)

PROF BARNES' LATEST PUBLIC ACCESS PAPER

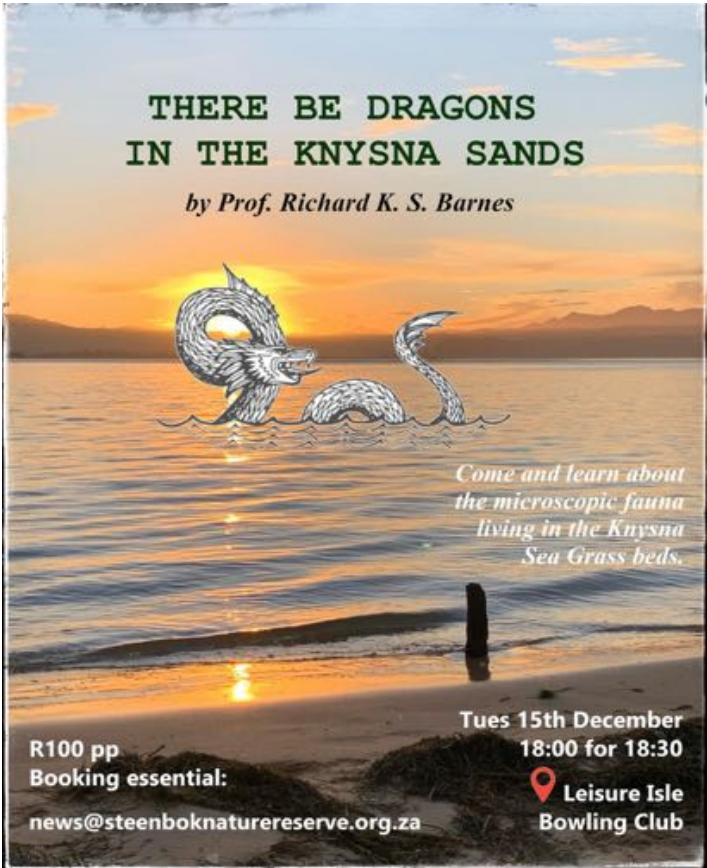
We are so fortunate to be in touch with Professor Richard Barnes, a world-renowned marine biologist and long-time researcher specializing in microscopic aquatic creatures. Prof. Barnes kindly sends us his open-access research papers pertaining to the Knysna estuary.

Read about his latest research on the tiny things living in the Knysna lagoon sands and sea grass beds from [Ecology and Evolution](#) here.

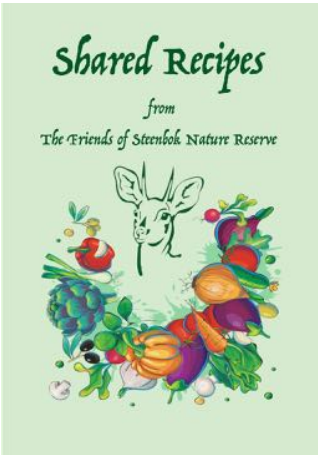
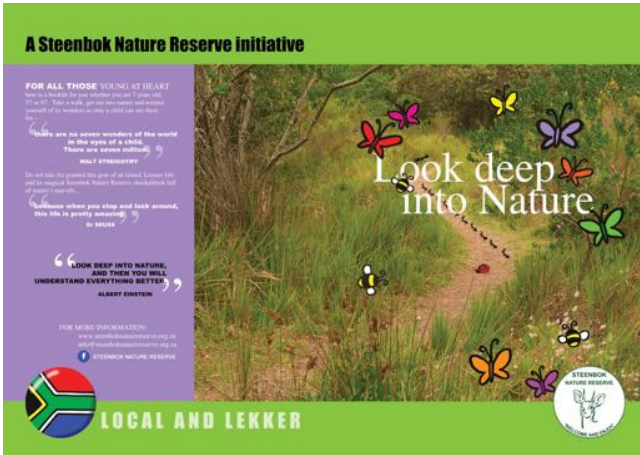
... A talk not to be missed ...
“There Be Dragons In The Knysna Sands”

Join us this December to listen to the auspicious
Professor Richard K.S. Barnes in person.

R100 per person, booking essential: news@steenboknaturereserve.org.za
18:00 for 18:30 at the Leisure Isle Bowling Club
There will be a cash bar and snacks available.



FIND US AT THE LEISURE ISLE FESTIVAL



Steenbok is grateful for the donations received from the Leisure Isle Festival every year. Without fail we will be there this year on the 7th and 8th of November at Stall Number 74 with our custom-made goodies. This year our incredible Diana Stromberg has created limited-edition, reusable birthday calendars. Be sure to come and grab yours while the stocks last.

