

Update...

August 2020

It's been a while since the last edition of *Update* so, time to bring you up to speed with news on the nature reserve (WBPNRT).

BOARDWALK

You will have noticed a lot of activity on the boardwalk just before we went into "lockdown" in March where the picnic bench was moved from the water's edge into an open space that was cleared of dead vegetation.

There was good reason for this as the bench and surrounding area had become home to vagrants or "crabbers" who not only left their rubbish there, but also made (cooking) fires right next to tinder-dry bush. A fire-hazard of note!

The new site is already showing signs of new growth and soon should become an attractive area to picnic in again, with the added benefit of a bit of space for youngsters to play.



WALKING IN THE RESERVE

It has been most encouraging to see a significant increase in the number of walkers in the reserve and what a privilege it has been to have had our reserve to exercise in during Covid isolation?

Fynbos consistently delivers, regardless of season several species will be flowering. Right now it's the bitou that is most prevalent with great swathes of bright yellow.



Another notable that is currently in bloom is the Erica sessiliflora, a less common member of the Erica family.

The increase in activity has had an impact on some of the trails which are showing signs of erosion, which is being attended to, as you will note, especially on the more popular paths such as the Fynbos and Porcupine ridge trails.



Fallen trees continue to be a challenge in the forest as, with any strong wind, dead trees or branches tend to fall across the paths, in many cases blocking them off completely, a legacy of the fire of 2017. Compounding the problem is the fact that we don't have ready access to the maintenance teams and sometimes it can take a couple of weeks before they are cleared. We appreciate being notified of such cases, however rather than post a general message on the "chat-group", we ask that you communicate directly with Jenny via Whatsapp (0833247783) or eMail (jennygaylard@iafrica.com) with details of the location, which can be pin-pointed with reference to the Trails Map (eg. Tree fallen half-way up Bushbuck ravine). This will help considerably as we can identify precisely where to send the maintenance team. It will be much appreciated.

NEW TRUSTEE

We are sorry to have said goodbye to one of our Professional Advisors, Dr Tineke Kraaij, who recently emigrated to Croatia. Tineke was a great asset to us and we frequently called on her for advice on botanical issues, which advice she gave readily and in language that we could understand... We will miss you Tineke and wish you well in your new homeland.



With Tineka leaving we needed to find a replacement as we are obliged to maintain the structure of the board of Trustees, which is four Administrative Trustees and four Professional Advisors (PA's). We are fortunate in that a long-serving Trustee and former home owner with a depth of knowledge and experience of our reserve, Alan Crocker, agreed to take up the position of PA, which in turn left a gap on the board of Trustees.



Happily we welcome newcomer to our estate, Tony Buchalter, a nature enthusiast, who has agreed to join the board and is eager to add his contribution to the management of the reserve.

Thank you Alan for your continued support and welcome Tony, we look forward to having you on the team.

IDENTIFYING IAP's (invasive alien plants)

Eliminating invasive alien vegetation is an on-going exercise, more particularly post the fire three years ago which resulted in a serious infestation of our reserve. Thankfully we seem to have got on top of it and are once again upwards of 90% alien-free. There are the odd stragglers that pop their heads up above the fynbos and bracken from time to time, which are dealt with as part of our on-going eradication program, however there are a few clusters of aliens that persist in certain areas, particularly within the forest, that regrow each year and it would be a great help if "walkers" could keep an eye out for these, again communicating with Jenny as to their location (using the Trails Map).

The most common invasive alien trees in the reserve include **Black Wattle** (*Acacia Mearnsii*), **Blackwood** (*Acacia Melanoxylon*), **Port Jackson willow** (*Acacia Saligna*), as well as various species of **Eucalyptus** (Gum) and **Pine** trees.

We also have some nasty weeds such as **ink berry**, **bramble** and **lantana**

One of the most common species is the **Black Wattle** (shown here) often confused with the lowly **Keurboom**,



which is not an alien but an indigenous pioneer species.

While from a distance the trees look similar, the leaf structure is quite different.



Black Wattle leaves are small and plentiful, whereas the Keurboom leaves are larger

Small Wattle plants are generally easy to pull up, particularly when the ground is soft after rain, quite different from the ubiquitous **Blackwood** (left) with it's



spreading root system that does not yield easily and generally snaps off, leaving the roots to regrow. Herbicide is the only effective weapon against this invader.

A similar looking tree is the **Port Jackson willow** which is found



mainly around the lower regions of the Leopard Trail, however this has a much longer leaf.



Inkberry is a sparsely hairy, evergreen and poisonous shrub, 1–2 m high.

Flowers are greenish-yellow and fruit green, turning purplish-black.



Bramble. Erect to sprawling, thorny shrub up to 2 m high; stems deeply ridged; leaves green, sometimes densely grey-downy beneath; flowers white, rarely pink.

Lantana. Compact, floriferous shrub or untidy scrambler up to 2m or higher; stems usually covered with short, stiff hairs and recurved prickles, leaves dark green, paler below, rough and hairy; flowers pink, red, crimson, orange, yellow or white in compact flat-topped heads



So, if you see these on your walks, please drop Jenny a line, with details of where they are located. The more eyes we have out there the more effective we can be in eradicating them.

WILDLIFE MONITORING

Those of you who moved into Westford Bridge in the early days will no doubt have noticed the dwindling wildlife. There were times when our gardens were visited regularly by bushbuck, genet, porcupine and the like, which nowadays is a rarity. Clearly the fire of 2017 had a devastating effect on our game, but it is now three years later and one would imagine that the numbers would have normalised by now.

This has been a concern of ours (Trustees) for some time and we believe there is a likelihood that the game is being poached, particularly in the current economic climate and as our boundaries are totally unprotected. We have at time considered ways of establishing a more definitive picture but lacked the skills and resources to do so, until now, that is!

With the arrival on the estate of Jannie and Ronell Otto and family, with a professional background in game tracking, all that has changed.

They are ardent walkers on the reserve and were delighted to take on the project of monitoring our wildlife and will be reporting back on a regular basis. We look forward to sharing the results of their findings with you.

