

Project Update: December 2015

Timeframe: July – December 2015

Project summary

Herbanisation aims to bolster community conservation efforts by bringing together and working with two otherwise disparate groups who share interests in Cape Town biodiversity – formal economy, predominately middle class conservation managers and policy makers, and informal economy, predominately working class Rasta herbalists. Through a variety of activities working with each of these stakeholders the project aims to: 1) Build local ecosystem resilience through providing specific reports that offer guidance to conservation officials of the demands for specific flora and fauna species within local protected areas; 2) Build investment in ecological infrastructure through developing street gardens, in this case containing ~1,000 culturally important traditional medicine plants as selected and propagated by the Rasta herbalist community; and 3) Encourage broader inclusivity in conservation through joint dialogue sessions between stakeholders with the aim of developing a set of mutually agreed guidelines to be utilised for future open space conservation projects in the city (such as urban greening of public open space).

Activities to date

Herbanisation is an ongoing project that was established 2012 based on prior learning gained in a 2011 Rufford grant “A Pilot Exercise of Biodiversity Mapping in Cape Town’s Illicitly Harvested Habitats for Future Conservation Reference”. Gaining a Second Rufford Small Grant in 2015, we are now actualising the community garden approach as a pragmatic attempt to enhance local conservation and community development efforts.

As planned in our proposal we have propagated over 1,000 new indigenous plants for our street garden programme, and in September 2015 we established a new garden of 500 plants in the working class suburb of Retreat. The planting event involved bush doctors, and conservation officials and ongoing garden maintenance has been provided by two local residents.

Through our original WWF-SA (Table Mountain Fund) support and Rufford funding Herbanisation has thus now expanded to our main site (over 2,000 plants), and two satellite gardens (collectively a further 2,000 plants) and over six smaller offshoot gardens that have emerged in nearby areas in partnership with local residents. The project boasts an inventory of some 40 plant species, with all but six of those being indigenous.

The project has also seen a continued generation of livelihood support and income for Seawinds and Retreat youth, herbalists and a number of other community residents. Three people are paid monthly stipends for garden maintenance, and one Rasta bossiedoktor and his propagation team are paid per plant produced for the project.

A further planting event will occur near the Retreat site in 2016, which we anticipate will allow the fulfilment of the objectives of the Rufford Small Grants for Nature proposal.

The following images capture the planting day that occurred in the new garden in Retreat

on 19 September 2015.



Gammad (in orange) the garden maintenance manager digs a hole



Greenfields site in Retreat



SLF staff Andrew Charman and Andrew Reid at the planting event



Volunteers on planting day - Retreat



Conclusion of planting day (September 2015)



Project managers – Neville van Schalkwyk, Andrew Reid and Leif Petersen

Constraints and addressing measures

Theft, maintenance and watering remain as challenges to the development of street gardens in socio-economically marginalised areas of Cape Town. We are constantly thinking of novel means of ensuring greater plant survival and reduced need for garden maintenance. Our current model of paying stipends and water bills for garden maintenance support has worked well to date, although the costs of water provision are high during summer months.

Whilst beyond the scope of this project, learning from the Rufford funded component includes the development of a successional planting scheme which would see street gardens being created according to a 3-year planting plan. This approach would begin with pioneer species being planted in the first year to help secure the soil while providing shade for soil organisms and creating a wind-break for more sensitive species. It is believed this method would ultimately result in reduced maintenance, watering and plant death.

Planned activities for next reporting period

The new street garden site in Retreat has important scope for growth and has a dedicated, reliable maintenance manager. The planting of this garden occurred in September, and we anticipate planting garden close to this site in second quarter 2016.

A full report, and financial summary of costs and activities be presented to Rufford once the second garden is established.

We are grateful for the financial support of the Rufford Foundation in supporting the development of this component of the Herbanisation project.