

# Wolwekraal Conservation and Research Organisation (WCRO)

PO Box 47 Prince Albert 6930

## EXCO MEETING

Held at 15.30 on 2013.10.31

At Renu-Karoo Nursery Shed, Wolwekraal Part 3, Prince Albert

## Operations report

### Membership

All members, other than Francis van Hasselt, responded to the invitation to attend the Special General Meeting on 2013.10.31.

### Wolwekraal management plan

The management plan was audited by Dr Wheeler of Cape Nature on 20 August 2013. A synopsis of the recommendations is as follows:

- a) Draw up an Alien Clearing schedule to be followed– update annually. Karoo Project Manager will be involved;
- b) Draw up research protocol;
- c) Recording of data on SOB. Need to include on CN SOB database;
- d) Sewage overflow. Municipality needs to take to rectify the overflow problem, CapeNature and landowners must follow up with Municipality regarding implementation;

### Fencing

Stock proof fence comprising 12 strands (5 plain, 7 barbed) along 1200 m of the 1442 m boundary of WCRO with the District Road (R353) was completed in August 2013. Costs of labour and materials for fencing were refunded to Renu-Karoo on 18 October 2013. Over the past two months it has been necessary to repair the fence between the garbage dump and WCRO on two occasions when it was cut by people to gain access to neighboring farms via Wolwekraal Nature Reserve.

### Fence Patrols

Twice-monthly fence patrols in September and October 2013 indicated that people continue to enter WNR under the mat fence across the Dorpsrivier on the Wolwekraal boundary with the Municipal garbage dump. Groups of children regularly enter the Nature Reserve from the R353 and cross through the Reserve to swim in the Dorpsrivier. Sandmining continues to undermine the newly-constructed fence on the eastern bank of the Dorpsrivier.

### Trail Camera

The Bushnell trail camera was set up in the nursery in September and at an aardvark burrow in October. Feral cats, feral dogs and a Zorilla were photographed near the compost heaps at the nursery. An aardvark, a Grey Mongoose, a Porcupine and a hare were photographed near the burrow entrance.

### Alien clearing

No progress. The *Tamarix ramosissima* population continues to spread downstream.

### Erosion control

The erosion control work on the hiking trail path was carried out in the first week of July 2013 using chipped branches of *Acacia karroo*. The mulch appears stable but

since its application the area has received only 15 mm of rain, the largest event being 5 mm.

### **Biodiversity Surveys and Research**

No news

### **Reptile releases**

**There were few reptile releases during the reporting period.**

### **Restoration Research**

MSc student, Willem Matthee, registered through NMMU sent a progress report in October 2013 (**appended**). Most plants established in his mini-catchment experiment on Wolwekraal NR remain alive despite the dry conditions.

Sue Dean continues to supervise Andrew Jackson on the dryland rehabilitation research that he is conducting in collaboration with the Endangered Wildlife Trust in degraded and salinised Riverine Rabbit habitat near Loxton. Andrew Jackson is registered for an MSc degree through the George campus of NMMU. His research investigates effects of mini-catchments on survival of transplanted shrubs on floodplains of ephemeral rivers.

On 27<sup>th</sup> September Sue Dean attended a meeting called by Dr Christo Fabricius of the Sustainability Research Unit at Saasveld (NMMU. George) to prepare a bid for a call from DEA to provide Training and Support for Resource Management in the Eden Region. If the bid is successful, consultants in the consortium would be required to provide monitoring services and training to the government Working for Water and Working for Land Programmes operating in the Eden and Southern Karoo regions. These programmes employ unskilled people to clear invasive alien plants and carry out rehabilitated activities on degraded land, particularly on land managed by the state (e.g. nature reserves and national parks), but also in privately owned priority fresh water catchment areas. Should the bid be successful, Sue Dean would invoice the consortium for time invested in monitoring and training activities and contribute part of the funds generated to WCRO.

### **Environmental Education and Awareness Activities**

#### *Albert College*

Albert College learners have now completed the field work for their studies of (1) the effects of sewage effluent on soil attributes and plant communities, and (2) factors affecting the density and distribution of the *Seothyra* (bokspoor spider). The intention is to publish the results of the studies in *QUEST*. This journal is produced by the National Research Foundation and is intended to reach high school and university readers.

#### *Prince Albert Primary*

Jacobus Minnaar, the senior science teacher at Prince Albert Primêre unfortunately was unable to schedule environmental outings for the grade 7 learners on Wolwekraal Nature Reserve that were planned for July 2013. We hope that these will take place early in the first term of 2014.

#### *Winter School*

The talks on Karoo biodiversity presented by Sue Dean during the autumn "Winter School" in Prince Albert were well attended (ca. 40 people). These talks, together with two guided walks on Wolwekraal Nature Reserve for Winter School participants, raised R3,250 for WCRO.

#### *SANParks*

Sue Dean presented a talk on approaches to arid ecosystem restoration to SANParks personnel at the Karoo National Park at Beaufort West on 22 August

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2013. The talk led to a decision by SANParks (Addo and Karoo Parks) to send 8 people who have been appointed to work in the new SANParks community nursery projects to Renu-Karoo for training on propagation of indigenous plants. The training took place on 1 and 2 October 2013 at Renu-Karoo farm nursery.

#### *Prince Albert Garden Club*

On 4 September Sue Dean presented a talk on Asteraceae to the local Garden Club. A short report on this talk was published by the Garden Club in the October edition of "The Friend" newspaper.

#### *De Rust Eco-festival*

On 12 September. Sue and Richard Dean will attend the De Rust Eco-festival and presented a talk on Invasive Alien Plants to the farming community. The information was well received by an audience of about 50 people.

#### *Other public talks on environmental issues*

On 6 October Sue Dean presented a one hour talk to a group of Norwegian visitors on risks posed to Karoo environments by various types of mining that might take place in the Karoo to obtain mineral and energy resources. On 19<sup>th</sup> October, at the invitation of Colin Bower, Sue presented a talk on "An Eco-business Model for the Karoo" at the Libertarian Spring Seminar. The audience of about 30 people included academics, economists and writers. The talk dealt with the opportunities for business that arise from the need to repair environmental damage as fast as it arises in order to supply the food and energy needs of a rapidly growing human population.

#### **Tourism**

During the period 1 August to the end of October 2013 Sue and Richard led 158 people on nature walks on Wolwekraal Nature Reserve. These included local and overseas tourists, individuals and large groups. Walks at special rates were offered for large groups (R60 pp for groups > 10 people, R50 pp for groups >20). The largest group walk was for the Plett Bird Club on 18<sup>th</sup> September. Funds (R10,914.94) generated from walks (and talks) were paid into the WCRO account for fence maintenance.

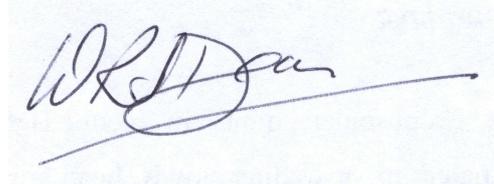
#### **Funding**

No funding applications were prepared or submitted during the reporting period as a result of work pressure.

#### **Networking**

South African Environmental Observatory Network (SAEON <http://www.saeon.ac.za/>) representatives have not as yet given any feedback to Richard Dean following discussions with the about the possibility of including Wolwekraal Nature Reserve in the network of Arid Zone research facilities.

Sue Dean has signed a contract with the South African National Biodiversity Institute that commits her to collecting data on vegetation cover twice annually for two years in return for a modest fee to be paid to WCRO (R6,000/year). The draft contract is available for viewing and can be e-mailed to EXCO members.



Signed W Richard J Dean (Chairperson)