

KORSMAN CONSERVANCY MEMBER'S NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2015

Dear Members,

A summary and highlights of our work and events of the last three months.

Council

Ekurhuleni Parks has assisted by emptying the litter bins and cutting the grass on a semi-regular basis. Water Dept has run the evacuation pump and there is a noticeable drop in the water level, although it still has much further to go.

Mary Goby's intervention led to two broken branches on the verge finally being removed, but one branch damaged two fence panels in the fall and replacing these will take a little longer.

Work in the Conservancy

Volunteers and workers continue to maintain the Conservancy and make inroads against invasive vegetation. This season's sustained work is making a big difference to preserving our grasslands and biodiversity. Some of the projects:

- Brush-cut large swathes of blackjacks to prevent them seeding.
- Sprayed poplar, Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), invasive crabapple and syringa saplings.
- Pulled out American Ash saplings, fleabane and Purple Top (*Verbena bonariensis*) a Cat 1b invader.
- Cleared the weedy bank opposite Nos 24 and 26 where the fence dips away, which was piled up with dumped grass clippings and had been deliberately built up with soil.
- Volunteers continued removing Spear Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) another Cat 1b invader, and very little has gone to seed this year. More importantly, each and every pompom weed plant has been removed when seen, and none has gone to seed.



Bank - before



Bank - after



Restoring the grassland

CWAC

Not a misspelled duck noise! CWAC is a Co-ordinated Waterbird count, an ongoing worldwide programme to keep track of a specific list of waterbird species. A count should be accomplished twice a year at least, in summer and winter.

On 21 February, Werner van Goethem assisted by Ken Malherbe counted 28 species and 844 birds from various vantage points around the Sanctuary, although it is very difficult to estimate how many birds there are on the central reed island.

Special sightings included a Little Bittern and two African Jacanas.



Species identification

The birds are most easily seen and identifiable, but what else is in Korsman? Apart from the dozens of grasses, sedges and restios (a grassy-looking plant in a bushy formation) there are numerous wildflowers and insects.

I have identified several wild flower and insect species by uploading observations on iSpot (<http://www.ispotnature.org>) and the Animal Demography Unit's Virtual Museum, where experts in the respective fields are often able to name them.

Grasses, being more difficult to identify, will be a project for next year.



This unusual flower is a Berkheya Radula (Boesmansrietjie).

Not only is it striking to humans, it is also attractive to a wide range of insects, such as in picture 1: Ten-spotted Leaf beetle (Cryptocephalus decemnotatus) and Green Bacon clerid (Exkorynetes analis), and picture 2: Shield-back bug (Sphaerocoris testudogrisea) feeding on the dried flower seeds.



LepiBASH

Scientists capture butterflies in nets, and amateurs capture them on camera. Since the beginning of January, 21 butterfly species have been photographed in Korsman, such as this Spotted Joker. There are certainly more, as well as numerous moths.

As an upcoming photographic event, we will hold a butterfly hunt for the Animal Demography Unit's "Autumn LepiBASH" to snap as many species as possible in a week end April / early May. More info closer to the time.

Should you know any expert lepidopterists interested in joining us, please let me know.



Stevie Sea-gull

Patrick and Sasha Harvey found a fluffy ball of feathers on a busy road, saved it from the traffic, and hand-reared the Grey-headed gull for three months. When Stevie's squawking grew in intensity they contacted us to ask if he/she could join Korsman's gull community. At the water's edge, Stevie took the first few flaps to a new phase of life. Curious gulls flew around us at the release.

Patrick returned the next day to check on Stevie, who although in the company of other gulls, recognised him with a SQUAWK! which brought a lump to Patrick's throat.



Events: Weed pull 1 February

Our work party was featured in the Benoni City Times – thank you to the members and volunteers who pulled out long weeds invading our grassland.



Photographer's day 11 January

Professional and hobby photographers captured stunning shots of birds and nature in the Conservancy on 11 January in morning and afternoon sessions. Enjoy some of their images.



Pin-tailed Whydah displaying to a female by
Prelena Soma Owen



Black-collared Barbet by Robbie Aspeling



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The water's edge... by Conservancy member Debra Russell