

Korsman Conservancy Newsletter March 2016

WORK IN THE SANCTUARY

Summer weed removal continues unabated. We have removed a vast amount of spear thistle, fleabane and Purple Top already, so have been able to tackle blackjacks and khakibos earlier. We slash large areas before seeding and noted that a section we worked on last year is already being recolonised by indigenous grass.

Ekurhuleni: Reed spraying was done minimally in December with little effect. We have sprayed patches by hand ourselves, but it is very time-consuming without powered pumps. We still hope that Ekurhuleni will get the correct hoses in time to spray for autumn.

The fence has finally been repaired in the two places where it was damaged by a falling branch and a car – after a year of asking and following up.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

Bat house and Echolocation video



Bat house

Grant Provan sponsored a bat house which was erected near Shannon Street. Tracy Boggis and Gina Fraundorfer also contributed to the project by donating the gumpole and information sign.

The bat house may take some months to be occupied and can accommodate up to 400 bats.

Most bats sound silent as their echolocation is above human hearing range, but some species are audible.

I captured these on video. Watch on YouTube (22 sec) <https://youtu.be/ncTnFuSI5i0>



Owl box

Owl Box

Pieter Greyling and family donated an owl box which Tracy Boggis 'engineered' to install into an oak tree opposite Aubrey Ritz Park, a site recommended by EcoSolutions.

Blesbokspruit Hiking Trail sign

The historic Blesbokspruit Hiking Trail (no longer safely in use) passed around Korsman. A deteriorating route map stood in Walsh St.

I believed the charming sign deserved better so we took it down, restored and re-erected it inside the fence near the Walsh St corner.

Several members and volunteers contributed: Eleanor Swan repainted the sign, Terry Oldbury welded a new frame and stand, and Pieter Greyling sprayed it with protective varnish. (Terry also welded the stand for the bat house information sign.)



Before



After

The 'rescue' turned out to be just in time – the sign would have been flattened by the site clearing of the corner stand in January.

EVENTS FEEDBACK

CWAC 23 January

Werner van Goethem and the East Rand Bird Club, assisted by Korsman member Linda Stracker and veteran bird counter Andy McLetchie, counted 871 waterbirds over 35 species.

The team was in the right place at the right time – they rescued a rather stunned juvenile reed cormorant in the road (which probably flew into the fence) and restored it to safety in the Sanctuary.

A first for this count was the use of modern technology. A drone, flown by professional cameraman Willem Viljoen, enabled us to see the reed island from above for the first time and showed fascinating detail not visible on Google Earth.



Spider Club event 24 January

Astri Leroy visited Korsman in 1986 but the species list has been lost over time. I invited her and the Spider Club to see what they could find now.

Astri and her fellow arachnologists netted through the grass and dug into rotting vegetation, and even had Korsman members enthusiastically trapping spiders as tiny as 2mm. Astri gave us fascinating information about the arachnid world and I gained a new appreciation of piles of dead weeds.

They identified many of the catches afterwards under a microscope. The final species list will take time as unidentified spiders, especially the mysterious zebra-like fellow below, may have to be identified by SA's top academic arachnologist, Ansi Dippenaar.



Weed pull 31 January: Six volunteers enjoyed a sunny morning of work in the Sanctuary removing blackjacks and khakibos. A fun part was the wildlife discoveries – such as this Stick Grasshopper nymph (note the partially formed wings). Sighting and picture by Calvin Becker.



Dragonfly morning 21 February

Odonata expert Lappies Labuschagne read on our revamped website that we welcome researchers to Korsman. He contacted me to arrange a visit to find species and offered to give us a talk on dragonflies.

Lappies found a Swamp Bluet damselfly, our first sighting in Korsman. Although fairly common, it is exceptionally beautiful. He complimented us on the cleanliness of the Sanctuary, as the absence of dragonflies is a bio-indicator of polluted water.

A charming non-dragonfly find was a just-hatched terrapin barely bigger than a thumbnail. A couple of months ago several females were seen laying eggs near the fence and this baby was making its first journey down to the water. Junior had been a bit stuck in the grass, so we helped it to the water's edge.



More of Lappies' photos are on the new website, Fauna: Insects gallery. As this document doesn't do the pictures justice, please have a browse of the site.

R: Female Broad Scarlet dragonfly



RECENT SIGHTINGS



A n Ovambo Sparrowhawk has been seen twice recently, another new species on Korsman's bird list. The first sighting was by guide Leon conducting a Lawson's Tour (the bird made a kill while they watched).

Photo by Valerie Gebert from New York.

Climate change?

The following sightings may be the result of our prolonged heatwave: two insects normally recorded in warmer regions such as Limpopo, were sighted recently. Scarlet Tip butterfly and Phantom Flutterer dragonfly.



Please collect: Plastic bags

Do you hate dog poo on the verge? Please help us collect clean used plastic bags for a planned project of home-made dog poo bag dispensers. Once made, we will stock them with used bags and ask the community to deposit bags too.

Small bags are also suitable, such as chemist, bread or vegetable bags. I will notify you when we are ready to install the dispensers and make arrangements to collect – in the meantime please start gathering!

If the project is successful we can look for sponsorship for a more permanent solution.

Website

The website has new pages and photo galleries. The History section is expanded with information supplied by Anne Mearns, and Dian Cockcroft of the former Friends of Korsman.

The site will be kept updated with new sightings and planned future pages.

<http://www.korsmanconservancy.com>