



# KORSMAN CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

## JUNE 2017

Dear Members,

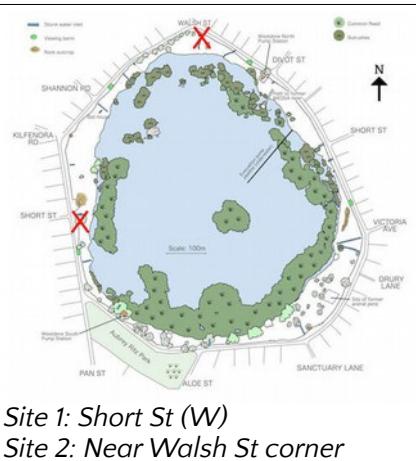
### Owl boxes

Tracy Boggis built and installed two owl boxes designed for Spotted Eagle Owls (apparently owls have specific taste in houses).

They are located in two large cottonwood trees near Short St (west) and Walsh St. Tracy's attention to detail includes elements such as staircases up the trunks to service the boxes, and numbering them Site 1 and 2 for easy reporting should you spot an owl at a box.



*The open design is recommended for Spotted Eagle Owls*



*Site 1: Short St (W)  
Site 2: Near Walsh St corner*

### Reed management

This season, Ekurhuleni sprayed some patches of bulrushes (before the pump broke down...) We sprayed other sections ourselves by hand using herbicide supplied by Ekurhuleni.

We have now slashed many of the dead patches, clearing the view. We will continue slashing reeds and spraying regrowth in spring, but this will be a big project needing support.



### Black Swan family

When exotic Australian Black Swans first arrived at Korsman they were an unusual sight. But when they hatched cygnets they changed from being a curiosity to a potential invasive threat.

The swans had been allowed to escape into the wild by irresponsible owners. Although beautiful, they are territorial, aggressive birds which are already seen as a threat to biodiversity in the UK.



We have reported the swans to GDARD and requested them to develop a plan to capture and rehome them humanely.

Photo by Lee Thain

## Litter Pickup 23 April – Report by John Livesey

I was happy to oblige when Jane asked me to do a litter pickup. After all I had experience carrying Freddy Foster round on a litter in the Henry VIII themed school play. Happiness turned to despair when it became apparent that the object was not to pick up a litter but to pick up litter.

Anyone seeing my study, garage, office, you name it, would instantly realise that I had never cleared litter. I know where everything is but no-one else can see that for some reason. However the object at the Conservancy seemed to be to collect litter and not just to know where it all was.



Linda Stracker, Emma Laing and Marie-Louise Rose

The prospect called for a steep learning curve. I quickly picked up on the more important aspects. The first was that the people in wellies often waded into deep mud on the shoreline to pick up plastic and paper. The second was that the storm water channels brought in large amounts of glass, cool drink cans, plastic wrappers etc. The combination of these two elements was serendipitous. Wait for a channel to be cleared of rubbish by those on a shallower learning curve, then follow someone in wellies until they were stuck in the mud at which point take their part filled bag which would be lying on the shore. Then walk purposefully over to the cleared channel, spray on some of that non-evaporating sweat Tom Cruise uses to make it look as though he's been doing something, and have a rest, being careful not to raise your head above the bank, and only after spreading dry leaves around to warn of an approaching colleague. In the unlikely event of any intrusion exclaim how exhausted you were after clearing the gully.



Sue Wallace, Paige Coburn, Hendro Swanepoel and Dumisani Nkosi

I finished with two or three admirably filled bags. (Thank goodness it was rubbish collection day on The Drive.)



### Help from the younger generation: Willowmoore High School Interact Club

On the morning of 6 May, 25 Grade 10 and 11 learners undertook a community service project of removing invasive Chandelier plant from the Victoria St rockery.

Scientifically known as *Bryophyllum delagoense*, it is a highly invasive succulent. There were hundreds of tiny plants – a perfect target for the learners with nimble fingers and good eyesight.

Their efforts helped preserve the sensitive ecology of the rockery and its indigenous plants.



## Citizen Science project: 'Inharmonious' Harmonias

John Livesey offered to collect invasive Harlequin ladybirds (*Harmonia axyridis*) for a project analysing genetic variations in the beetles, being run by Dr Minette Karsten at Stellenbosch University.  
John reports:

Harlequins originated in Central and East Asia and have arrived in other parts of the world not just by accidental introduction but also via biological control initiatives. The distinguishing feature is a white "w" or "m" pattern on the head forming an incomplete or solid image. Colouring and spot patterns vary widely. They can outcompete and displace many native ladybird species and are predatory with a broad dietary range including the eggs and larvae of native ladybird species.

Jane and I undertook this as a citizen science project but almost by definition the citizens involved are not scientists and have to go through a learning curve. In our case this initially involved about three hours gaily wafting butterfly nets and collection tools of doubtful origin through the air and along the tops of bushes over a large area to the extent that passers-by questioned whether virtual reality tennis was allowed in the Conservancy. While we collected numerous interesting insects, they did not include too many Harlequins. Just as troubling to me was discovering that Jane's backhand needed some serious work.



Variations in patterns and colouring of our first collection



John Livesey on the *Harmonia* hunt

In covering quite a large area we found that around oak trees was the most promising. However a snag arose in learning that any find which was more than 50m from the closest other find could not constitute a single site and at least 20 specimens were required for genetic analysis from each site.

For the next collection we accordingly concentrated on two sites dominated by large oak trees with long branches hanging quite low over the ground. Initially we had thought that the beetles were preferring the small *Solanum "umsoba"* plants under the oaks until it dawned on us that it could be a case that the beetles just happened to drop from the oaks onto these plants. This was

then the solution as we managed to fairly quickly collect some 60 or so of the ladybirds from the trees over the two sites. The beetles are frozen, ready to courier to Stellenbosch.

John's blog at <http://livewiresa.wordpress.com/>

## New committee members

At our AGM in May, new Committee members elected are Tracy Boggis (Maintenance portfolio) and John Livesey (Publicity and social media portfolio). We look forward to harnessing their passion for the Conservancy. The rest of the Committee comprises Jane Trembath (Chairperson), Catherine Marques (Secretary), Roger Baldwin (Treasurer), Alison Bainbridge (Membership) and Max Herold.



### Did you know?

That dragonflies and damselflies are carnivorous predators are at the top of the insect food chain. This young female Tropical Bluetail damselfly caught another flying insect and guzzled it within a couple of minutes.



### Indigenous Orchids

Because Aubrey Ritz Park has been mowed less frequently this summer, it gave several wild flower species a chance to grow and seed. Our botany expert member, Calvin Becker, recognised a wild indigenous orchid species, *Habenaria caffra*, which grows in late summer.

We had initially discovered them growing in the veld near the Racecourse Rd gate. They are threatened there by invasive vegetation and illegal dumping, so Calvin invited the Orchid Society to come and have a look. They are helping us to apply for a permit to move some from the Racecourse Rd veld into the Sanctuary next season.

Below: Bill Mincher and Duncan McFarlane of the Orchid Society with Calvin (centre).



**Last word: Are you talking to Me?**

Eugene Liebenberg captured Junior Goliath, bemused at being pestered by a Grey-headed gull.

Junior appears to have moved on from Korsman. Goliath Herons are solitary and territorial and only one adult is generally seen now.

