



KORSMAN CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2017

Dear Members,

Annual Burn

Following extensive preparation and an eye on the weather forecast for weeks ahead, we burnt the three units on 21 August. The firemen and volunteers gave sterling assistance and enjoyed the day out. Smelling of smoke afterwards was all part of the good 'clean' fun.

Hendro Swanepoel and Cathi Marques, R, were two of the ten volunteers.



We burnt a bulrush stand in the water, which was sprayed in autumn. Burning the dead leaves instead of allowing them to decompose prevents deoxygenating the water. Our view over the Pan has been opened up, but the stand will still require follow-up management this summer.

Preparation includes protecting the fauna. We cleared around a Blacksmith Lapwing nest and transferred spider egg cases found on tall grass, tying them to stems outside the burn unit.

After the initial surprise when Hendro and I came across this beautiful Aurora House snake, a grassland resident, we relocated it too.



Studying the Pan



Masters student and Benoni resident Devon du Plessis visited as part of his research into acid mine drainage in lakes across Benoni. He and his supervisor, Prof. Chris Curtis, arrived complete with dinghy to analyse the depth and sample mud from the pan floor.

I joined them on the boat for a couple of hours and was relieved not to have to press the lifejacket into service, even though the pan isn't that deep: 1.5m at the moment.

Broody Goliath Herons

Our stately-comical Golis have nested again only a few months after the previous juvenile came into the world. The pair had chosen the nest location by 2 July. Although this seems early to breed, Roberts Birds gives their nesting months as June to January. When we saw a parent standing up in the nest on 12 August, no longer sitting and incubating, we knew the eggs had hatched. The feeding behaviour of the parents indicated two nestlings. We hope both survive.

Jan de Beer captured a moment between the courting pair, right.



During nest building in July, one bird (possibly the male) flew back and forth with sticks to present to the partner who wove them into the nest. Eugene Liebenberg was there to photograph the flight in continuous shooting.

Watch the stop-motion video of the series: <https://youtu.be/MWmpA5EIHGY> (38 sec) which includes these awesome pictures by Eugene.



Co-ordinated Waterbird Count

The winter CWAC on 23 July, led by Werner van Goethem, counted 25 waterbird species. This is three more species than at any of the other East Rand pans he surveyed with the East Rand Bird Club.

Our best record was a pair of Black Crakes – elusive little waterbirds which skulk in the reeds.

This picture was taken by Jan de Beer, who spotted one a few days before.

Back-2-Basics Wetland course – Report by John Livesey (John's blog [here](#))

At the end of August Jane and I attended a two-day course organised by the Gauteng Department of Agriculture & Rural Development. Despite the title it turned out to be much more than basic information, being presented by the Departments of Water and Sanitation and Environmental Affairs people with doctorates in various aspects of wetlands. It soon became apparent that these experts (adopting their definition of being people who realise how much they do not know) could only cover certain aspects and in their everyday work needed to call on specialist soil, vegetation scientists etc. Listening to such people gave context to our citizen scientist efforts to look after all aspects of our sanctuary.



“Catch!” Dr Piet-Louis Grundling 'distributes' soil samples being augered out on the left

Inevitably a concern of the presenters was the legal requirement in view of wetlands being under threat and in turn this required detailed investigation of the necessary buffer zone around a wetland. This provided a valuable insight for us on what restrictions might apply to housing developments and rezoning, such as we have in close proximity to the sanctuary.



Check the slope!

A major aspect of identifying wetlands, their characteristics and extent, is examining the soil profile. This involved us taking soil samples at various depths in the area around Leeupan on the edge of Wattville. The accompanying picture shows the presenter Dr Piet-Louis Grundling taking a view on what was an almost imperceptible change of slope but which could nevertheless impact on the movement of both water and soil particles of differing size.

Your pictured correspondent was amused by the difficulties of obtaining soil cores but denies saying it did not auger well.

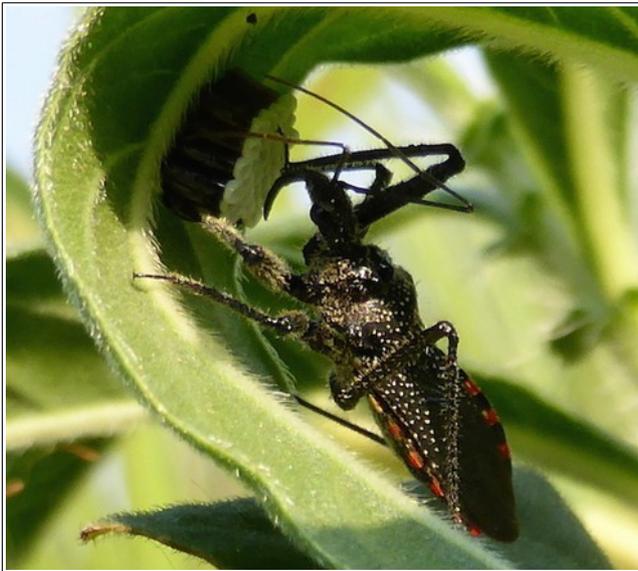


360 panorama of the course venue – the O.R. Tambo Memorial Precinct, Wattville

Did you Know? Paternal leave for insects

Seen last summer in Korsman. This Assassin Bug male (*Rhynocoris tristis*) is guarding eggs, one of the very few insect lineages that does this.

Being a New-Age dad is extremely attractive to a female Assassin; she searches out a male to mate with who demonstrates he will care for her eggs. Therefore, the brood can contain eggs of a few females.



But there is a twist in the tale: It has also been recorded that these guarding males, who can't leave their brood to feed, curiously don't lose weight... They cannibalise eggs around the edge of the brood, which are most likely to have been parasitised by wasps. However, healthy eggs are also eaten, which suggests that they use the eggs not only to attract females, but also as a convenient food source. Which makes this new-age 'Man Cave' nursery a bit of a con, being a larder too.

Reference: Filial cannibalism in an Assassin bug.
Animal Behaviour, 2003 LK Thomas, Andrea Manica

Bird ID Quiz

As reported in the June newsletter, Tracy Boggis built and installed two state-of-the-art owl houses.

Q. So what type of owl is this, nesting in one of the boxes?

A. It's an Egyptian-Goose-Owl

