



KORSMAN CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

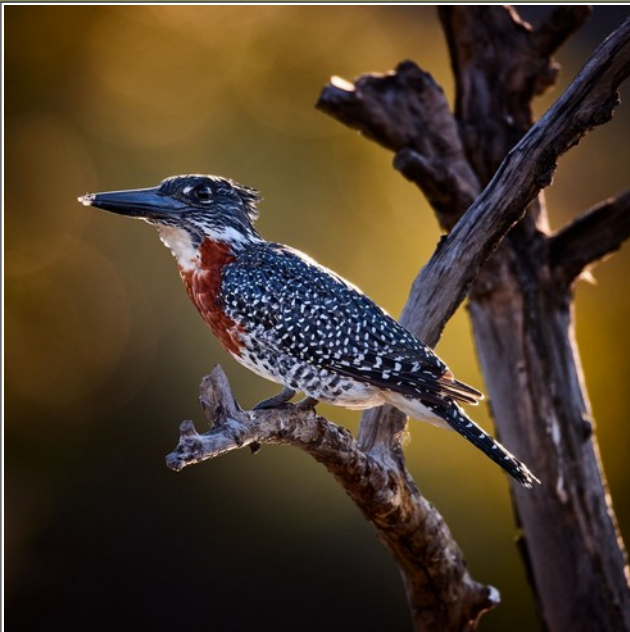
SUMMER 2023

Aquatic Biodiversity Project: Exciting Results

A year after the Fish Release and a few months after the carp netting sessions, we are seeing results. The project aimed to regenerate the native indigenous fish population and attract a greater variety of bird species which should be present here. In particular, kingfishers, as there were only very occasional sightings of Pied kingfishers and none of the other species.

Now schools of juvenile fish swim in calm shallow water areas, and kingfishers are regularly sighted. Squacco herons are also more evident.

Giant, Pied and juvenile Malachite kingfisher photos by David Dooley.



Floating Wetlands

The second part of the biodiversity project, indigenous water lilies in floating frames, was less successful. Many of the plants were eaten and we believe the culprits are terrapins. Hopefully, our latest aquatic flora experiment is less tasty: constructed floating wetlands.

These are planted artificial buoyant platforms which are growing in popularity for water treatment and biodiversity. Microbes on the roots, which dangle in the water, absorb excess nutrients and cleanse polluted water.

Although it sounds ideal, floating wetlands won't transform Korsman's water quality unless we covered hectares of water with the rafts. For us, the main benefit will be biodiversity – shelter for fish, crabs, aquatic insects and perches for birds. There are six rafts planted with indigenous wetland plants from along the shore.

No 1 water lily suspect, aka 'Jaws'



Typical commercial synthetic wetland matrix. Cost: \$\$\$\$\$\$



Korsman matrix: Scrap wood pallet, gumpoles and wire mesh. Cooldrink bottles provide flotation. Cost: \$\$\$



The Ganespersad family waded in to help position and anchor the wetlands.

We'll Cross that Bridge, When We Eventually Get It!

A year after we were approached by two donors, the composite bridges over the culverts facing 30 and 50 The Drive are finally completed. Pedestrians don't have to dismount the pavement to walk around and wheelchair users can now use the pathway to its full extent.



Yvonne Rimer sponsored "Ralphy's Bridge" in memory of her late husband, Ralph. Yvonne (with bubbly bottle) and her walking club for the ceremonial bridge opening.



Rahginie Pillay (second from right) and twin daughters Sharice and Shanice sponsored "Jayce's Bridge" in memory of their late husband and father, Jayce.

Observation Stand

Using a metal structure donated to us by Barry Jones, we repurposed it into an elevated observation stand.

The stand, accessed by the Kilfenora gate and via a special path, provides a lovely view of the water over the vegetation. It is freestanding so it can be moved to different locations in future.



Cam's Hotel

Cameron Cary, our most enthusiastic Junior member, built his own Insect Hotel over the December holidays (with a bit of help from Mom and Dad).

Going forward with the project, Insect Hotels can be installed any time and won't be fixed to a date.



Co-ordinated Waterbird Count (CWAC) Summer 2023

Led by the East Rand Bird Club, we counted 619 birds over 25 species on the specified waterbird list. Linda Stracker and I counted the central reed patch by canoe.

We counted dozens of Western Cattle Egrets which have bred there for decades. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Korsman (also known as Westdene Pan) was a major bird ringing site and thousands of nestlings of Western Cattle Egret, Glossy Ibis, Sacred Ibis and Black-capped Night heron were ringed. These days the water level is much higher and bird numbers lower.

Cattle egrets breed here in summer, but where do they go in winter? Historical recovery records show they migrate as far as central Africa. Birds were recovered in Zambia, Congo and as far as Uganda. The oldest recovered bird was aged 16 years.

Read more about the migration of Western cattle egrets

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318431969_Migratory_connectivity_of_south_African_cattle_Egrets_Bubulcus_Ibis_Ciconiiformes_Ardeidae



White Stork Release: Humans and Birds Part 1

On 10 February, a White Stork was found in Benoni. Wet, severely emaciated, dehydrated and unable to fly, it was taken to Friends of Free Wildlife in Midrand and treated for suspected poisoning. After seven days of special care it was moved to a flight cage for flight readiness testing. By 28 February, senior animal manager Claudius Sibanda was happy for it to be returned to the area where it was found.



The FFW went to Homestead Dam looking for a release site and found Derek Dingwall of Homestead Conservancy, who phoned me. I suggested they bring the bird to Korsman as the site is more protected.

The stork didn't take up residence. It flew immediately and circled on its giant wings looking for a thermal. Once it caught an updraft, it soared up to the clouds. Good luck on your journey, Stork.



Packaged for transport



Cleared for immediate takeoff

With Claudius Sibanda, Derek Dingwall and Carol Tatham (FFW) at the release site



Goliath Heron Entangled in Plastic: Humans and Birds Part 2

On 19 February, observers saw a Goliath heron with an orange netlon bag wedged on its bill. All we could do was keep track of it and see if it was able to feed itself. If not, we would have to have the bird captured when it weakened from hunger.

As a precautionary measure, we went fishing with landing nets to have something to feed the bird, just in case. I managed to catch one carp.

Fortunately by that afternoon we could see that the bag was only wedged on the lower part of its bill. Although we kept a good lookout, the bird was missing for the next few days. On the Friday, observers saw it again with the good news that it caught and swallowed a fish. The bird hasn't been seen since then and may be travelling around other pans. It is possible that it picked up the bag at a polluted pan elsewhere.

Research shows this isn't an isolated case. Goliaths get plastic wedged over their bills and the birds die unless they can be captured and their bills freed. Long term, the tightly wedged bag could also affect the health of its bill which is full of blood vessels and nerves.



And what happened to that fish I caught?
It became a free meal for a water mongoose.

Keeping it Clean

Volunteers had fun cleaning storm water inlets and along the fence on 22 December and 28 February. Thanks to those who took part.



Wacky Macki tools

Peter Hamilton donated unique, high quality garden tools from his company, Macki Metal Smiths. I was fascinated when Peter demonstrated laser metal cutting and robotic welding at his workshop in Anderbolt. macki.co.za



Cutting it fine: The laser cuts a custom point onto our spade.



The Spork – a cross between a spade and a fork. Good for digging out root masses.

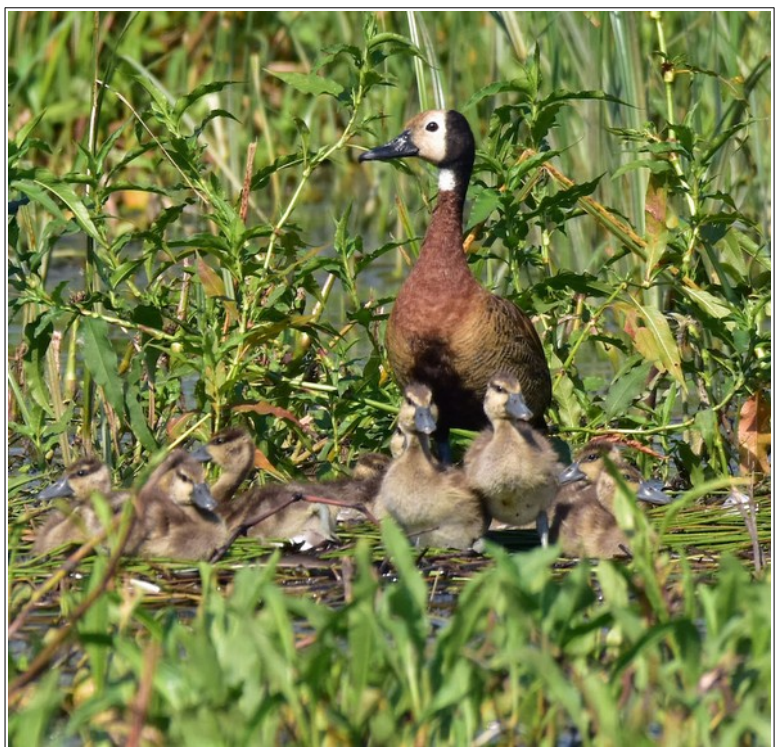
Noteworthy Sightings



A Long-crested eagle visited Korsman on 27 January and stayed for a few hours. In that time it successfully hunted at least two vlei rats.

A Long-crested eagle was last recorded at Korsman in March 2015.

Photo by David Dooley



One of a pair of White-faced ducks with nine ducklings.

They are one of the less common duck species at Korsman and we haven't recorded White-faced ducks breeding here before.

Photo by Eugene Liebenberg