



# KORSMAN CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

## AUTUMN 2023

### Hide Open Day 26 March

Members and invited significant contributors attended the hide Open Day after nearly two years of anticipation. Covid followed by high water levels delayed the event after the hide was actually completed. Even after we set the date, it was still nail-biting wondering if the water would be low enough for the path to be accessible. Photos by Shyur Ganespersad.





**Litter pickups**

Volunteers cleaned the Sanctuary, Park and pan on an ongoing basis during the season.



Plastic sachets from the Johnson Crane marathon were washed into the wetland by storm water. This is in addition to the number we collected in Aubrey Ritz Park.

We wrote to Johnson Crane Hire to request that the marathon is sachet-free next year and received a positive response.



Nature sightings during litter pickups are a reward for the work, such as finding this just-hatched terrapin.



### The grassland "Lady in Waiting"

The Banded Orb-web Spider *Argiope trifasciata* is common in grassland, where the female spins a large orb web and hangs head down waiting for prey.

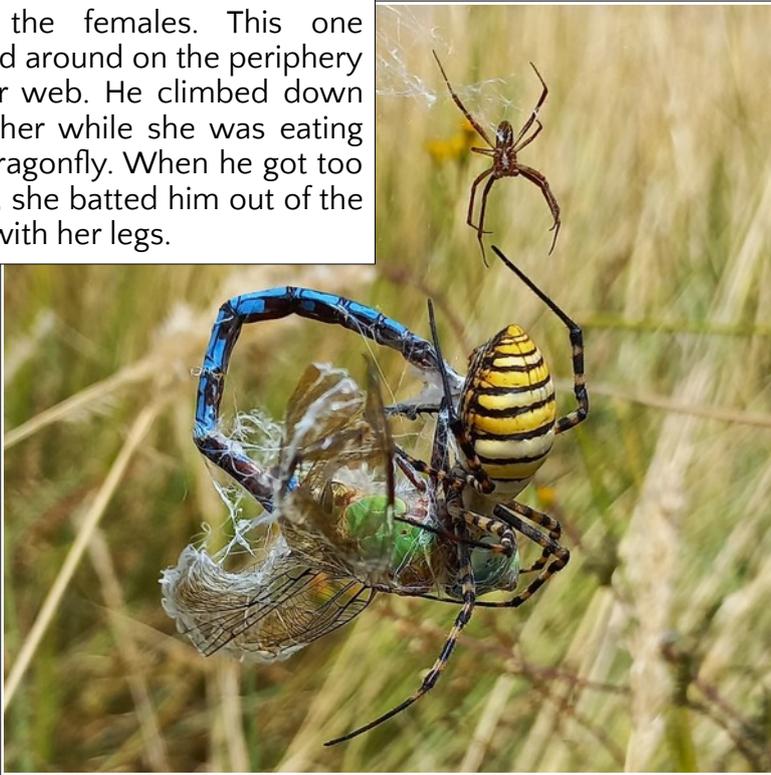
A scientific journal article (Nyffeler et al. 1987) reported that a different *Argiope* species caught prey up to 200% of their body size.

But this male Blue emperor dragonfly, average body length 77mm, is an astonishing 480% larger than the female spider's 16mm body.

When I came across the web, the dragonfly was nearly dead. Soon after, the spider came down and started eating. I checked the web 2 ½ hours later and she was still busy with her supersize meal.



Males are much smaller than than the females. This one waited around on the periphery of her web. He climbed down onto her while she was eating the dragonfly. When he got too close, she batted him out of the way with her legs.



The spider lays her eggs in papery sacs which become fair game for parasites. This little wasp injects her eggs into the sac, and the wasp larvae eat the spider eggs.

Did you know? Spider silk is a protein. To conserve nutrients, spiders consume their webs and rebuild them every day.



This Dancing Acraea butterfly blundered into another web. Webs can be as large as 60cm across.



**Municipal Services... or the lack thereof** It is a sad sign of the times that routine maintenance becomes newsworthy, as in the next two reports.

### **Where's the Cutting Edge?**

Aubrey Ritz Park was cut in April by a hired tractor, a desperate measure as Ekurhuleni had not cut the park for a year. Unfortunately, the driver didn't find the distinction between the dry grassland and wetland areas are clear as he assured me he did.... Nor did the driver of the second tractor, who went to rescue the first tractor and instead joined him in the mud :-)

Korsman Conservancy member Mark Greenslade to the rescue :-)

With his 4X4 skills he towed out one stuck tractor who could then drag the other out. Conservancy tools were also used to dig under the tractor wheels.

We are grateful to the Lakefield LMJ Mosque for sponsoring the tractor cutting of the entire park, and Bad Boyz security for the additional grass cutting and cleanup.



### **Fenced In**

After 18 months of our reporting, begging, pleading, cajoling, escalating, following up, publicising... Ekurhuleni finally sent contractors to replace the broken fence sections in three different areas. Finally the Sanctuary has its security and dignity back.



## GREBE GALLERY

The beautiful Great Crested Grebe is mostly found in Europe and they are sparsely distributed in South Africa. Their preferred habitat is open water in large water bodies. This means that they aren't easy to spot at Korsman, preferring to stay in deep water near the centre of the Pan. This pair treated us to exciting views of raising their brood when they brought their chicks closer to the shore to feed. These special photographs by David Dooley.

Grebes carry their chicks on their backs up to 21 days old, while the other parent catches fish to feed them.



Grebes dive for up to 50 seconds to catch small fish.



David's research revealed that the red spots on the chick's foreheads is related to begging for food, and the spots fade once the chicks are fed.

