

Pennington Conservancy

October 2020

A month has passed since the silent and distant AGM and it has been a time of trying to overcome the hurdles of level 1 restrictions and formulating the proposals for the year ahead.

A new year always has an element of excitement about it. Hopefully, we learn from our mistakes of the past and anticipate a better year ahead. The new committee has met and projects for the year ahead initiated.

The Conservancy is fortunate in gaining a group of volunteers that have started off the year with amazing vigour and enthusiasm. The list of priorities for Nkomba has been drawn up and already action has been taken to make the area more accessible and enjoyable. Trails have been cleared and the entrance area has been tidied up. By the time the evenings have warmed up enough Nkomba will be ready for some enjoyable sundowner evenings again. Neil vanZijl, Allan McClennan and Peter Woolcock are investigating possible improvements to the bird hide and other

areas and together with Adrienne Edgson, Nkomba will see tremendous improvements in the year ahead. There is a wonderful opportunity to create a birding spot of exceptional interest and beauty and I would urge as many members as possible to volunteer to assist in creating this special venue.

Sadly, we still have no progress on the lease for Impithi but despite this handicap we have commenced with some enhancements to the facility. And when we talk about enhancements it was with a brave heart that a new colour scheme has been introduced.

Preparation for the upgrade will commence soon and all the work will be undertaken by volunteers. The setback of Covid-19 conditions has slowly been overcome and there is great optimism for the months ahead. Pennington has seen an increase in the number of restaurants in the last year or two and we must make sure that we remain an attractive and sought out venue in the future.

Consequently, there has been much discussion and planning to upgrade Impithi and I am immensely grateful to Chris and Engela Wehr, Colette Carty and Viv Sandwith for all their enthusiasm and interest in making Impithi more attractive. Impithi is dependent upon your support and all suggestions to improve the facility are very welcome.

Kezia Dukes, a professional chef provided training to the staff during September and she prepared a new set of dishes that we will incorporate into our menu in the weeks ahead. Our intention is to add new and exciting dishes to the favourite items on our existing menu. It's not normal to have food pictures in the conservancy report but the new dishes are top class.



Impithi Gardens

The Bush Workers commenced with restoring the gardens around Impithi last Saturday and made the most spectacular start to remodelling this area. This group of volunteers has become such an asset to the conservancy, and I would urge all members to support this group in whichever way they can.



During last Saturday's work group in the gardens around Impithi two groups of visitors mentioned to me that they would soon be moving to Pennington permanently and the reason that they chose Pennington was because of Impithi.



The Tourist Map that was recently completed has been a great success and almost all the advertising space has been sold. Janice Dryer has done a wonderful job in initiating and managing this project which generates a significant amount of money for the conservancy,



New member of the committee, Allan McClennan has kindly volunteered to share some information about local birds we commonly see in our gardens and when we walk in the forests.

Red-capped Robin-Chat

When asked to write a short article every month on our local birds of the area my mind went into a spin as there are so many birds to choose from! I guess why not start with one of the most popular robins in South Africa, that "early bird" that is so often heard (and not always seen) first thing in the morning and last in the evenings. This beautiful bird can be seen around most houses in our area. When you do see it, it is normally foraging around in hedges and bushes.

It cannot be mistaken with its beautiful orange underparts, grey, bluish wings, and beady brown eyes. It used to be



very well known as the Natal Robin, but it is now known as the Red-capped Robin-Chat (no comment)

They are normally solitary, monogamous birds and are territorial through most of the year. They have an amazing double syllable call, "see-saw, see-saw". Their mimicry repertoire is impressive: up to around 30 different bird calls are mimicked by these little birds.

One morning I awoke to a call I thought was from a Crowned Eagle, so I ran out with my binoculars, started scanning the skies expecting to see this glorious eagle only to have the sound coming from in my hedge!



Males are the ones thought to do this to show off their *Roberts Eggs and Nests* abilities and win a lady over. Once the pair have found each other they will typically set up their nests in hollow

stump tops, but they are not very fussy – nesting in more open areas or ledges if stumps are absent. The pair would then lay eggs anytime from September to January though more likely to be October or November. They have been known to be parasitized by the Red-chested Cuckoo (Piet-my-vrou) although not frequently. Incubation is normally 14½ days and young are fed by both dad and mom.

Along the KwaZulu-Natal Coast they are present through the whole year but in other areas with lower winter temperatures, they are altitudinal migrants (e.g. cold KwaZulu-Natal midlands to warmer Zululand coast in winter) I have to say after writing this I sent it to my son to edit and without knowing it, he sent it to his friend who happened to be a co-author for the new edition of Sasol Birds of Southern Africa – whew – talk about testing my skills!

References

Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds). (2005). Roberts birds of southern Africa

Some Admin Issues

With some sadness we have removed the Recycling Depot that was one of the very first projects initiated by the conservancy. In recent times it had become a nightmare as inconsiderate dumping of items that were clearly not recyclable were dumped without any thought to the inconvenience caused. The introduction of the weekly recycling pick-up on Wednesday has been very

well supported and it seems that it will become a permanent feature of our recycling efforts. We are trying to become as efficient as possible and would prefer to move recycling directly from your vehicle onto the truck, but we are handicapped by people offloading their recycling before 11h00 so please assist us in this regard.

Some members have mentioned that they do not receive notifications or messages on whatsapp. Arnoud Wiense has done remarkable work in getting the membership list tidied up but there are times when details are incorrectly provided and errors creep in. If you have problems with receiving information, please contact us and we will do all we can to rectify the situation.

We do make frequent use of our Facebook page to make announcements concerning upcoming events so please have a look at our page on a regular basis.

We have two events scheduled for October. On the 18th we are planning to have an informative talk on life in the intertidal zone for children, parents, and grandparents. We will send out the details in the next few days.

On the 20th October we will be having our first Sunset Supper Club. This will be a super evening of food and wine with a three-course meal and wine pairing. Kezia Dukes will be finalising the menu this week and it promises to be a great evening.