

HERBS

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This pictorial newsletter gives you the latest Hermanus Botanical Society news and views on the fynbos scene. It also appears on our website www.fernkloof.com



HERMANUS FLOWER & ECO FAIR

at Fernkloof

THURSDAY 22nd to SUNDAY 25th SEPTEMBER

9am to 5pm daily (Sunday 9 – 3pm)

Teas and Lunches

Eco-Tent

Plant Sales

FOREST & FLOWERS AT THE FLOWER & ECO FAIR

Flowers will combine with a mini forest at this year's Flower and Eco Fair.

2011 is the International Year of Forests so appropriately Hermanus landscape architect Riaan Maritz will create an Afromontane scene to make us aware of the vulnerability of both fynbos and tree biomes.

Entrance will be R30, **children free**, and a **pensioner special of R20 on Thursday 22.**

Come and enjoy:

- **Flower show and display of hundreds of specimens from the area;**
- **Sale of indigenous plants at the Fernkloof nursery;**
- **Delicious teas and lunches**
- **Eco info courtesy of Whalecoast Conservation (formerly Overstrand Conservation Foundation)**
- **22nd to 25 September**



At 3pm on Sunday the show will be dismantled!

On sale at special prices will be the flowers used in the floral exhibit as well as trees and other bagged plants used in the display. Be there for all the excitement!

What is an Afromontane Forest?



Although Fernkloof is incredibly rich in coastal and montane plant species, 1,600 naturally occurring in its 2000ha, only some of these are trees, 30 out of a total of more than 700 tree species occurring in South Africa.

These tree communities, known as Afromontane Forest, are generally restricted to moist, sheltered kloofs, protected from fires which periodically sweep through the Fynbos Biome.

Afromontane Forest is one of seven biomes (the highest level of plant community) found in South Africa. It extends from the Cape Peninsula in isolated pockets along the southern coastal mountains eastwards to Knysna where it covers 60,000ha. Requiring annual rainfall of about 800mm, it usually grows at altitudes lower than 1000m in South Africa.

As its name implies, Afromontane Forest is associated with the high mountains of Africa and small "forest islands" occur northwards into high elevations in Ethiopia. The same tree species which grow in the kloof in Fernkloof can also be seen in countries to the north.

Geraldine Gardiner
Photo: Christine Wakfer

LOOK CAREFULLY FOR THESE SHY PROTEAS...

You may not see the ground-level "skaamrosie" unless you are really looking for it.

Protea scabra, an unobtrusive ground protea with scabrous, rough to the touch, long tapering leaves, produces a small flower with rust-coloured bracts and cream inner surfaces. It is in its flowering prime July/August and three years after the big fire of 2008 along Klipspringer you can see it bordering some of the reserve paths after maintenance manoeuvres.

Ground proteas such as *P. scabra* and *P. angustata* are well adapted to survive veld fires. They have an extensive underground stem system which at intervals sends up tufts of foliage followed by a single terminal flower head. Veld fires burn off the leaves but the underground stems survive unscathed and resprout vigorously six months later, followed by a burst of flowering two to three years later. The flowers diminish with each successive year after this until a senescent phase is reached and another fire is needed.



Protea scabra



Protea angustata

Protea scabra was discovered at Eerste River 200 years ago by Dr. William Roxburgh (Assistant Surgeon to the East India Company at Madras in 1776 and Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden in 1793) while he was on a years' sick leave here.

The cryptically-concealed *Protea angustata* (angustata=narrowed, referring to the narrow leaf blades) was discovered by James Niven in the 'desolate mountains at Houw Hoek' during October 1801. It was apparently never grown in any European collection and was only introduced into cultivation at Kirstenbosch in about 1930.

It has a limited distribution along a 100 kilometres of south-western Cape coastline, growing on the southern foothills of the coastal mountains, and is listed as endangered in the Red List of South African Plants. Its small apple-green flower emits a yeasty smell on opening and is rodent-pollinated. But I will let you in on a secret – there is a small but perfect stand of these precious proteas just 50 metres from my house decorated with a small red ribbon so that they don't just disappear!

Geraldine Gardiner
Photos: Christine Wakfer

THE SPIDERS OF FERNKLOOF ARE MAINLY FRIENDLY!

This article by Prof. Ansie Dippenaar-Schoeman introduces us to a few of the less glamorous inhabitants of Fernkloof!

She is a Specialist Scientist of the Arachnology Unit of the Agricultural Research Council in Pretoria.

Little is yet known about the spider fauna of this beautiful Fernkloof Reserve, but it might be home to a rich fauna, as only a few ad hoc collecting efforts have so far resulted in a list of 22 families and 50 species.

Spiders can be divided into two main groups, namely the 'web dwellers' and the 'wanderers'.



Orb-web spider Photo: Geoff Andrew



Crab spider and it's prey! Photo: Jenny Fynn

The web dwellers build webs to catch their prey, the best known web dwellers being the Araneidae (*Argiope sp.*- garden orb-web spiders) and Nephilidae (golden orb-web spiders). They are known for their large orb-webs and are the best known as they are seen during the day. Other orb-web species like the hairy field spiders (*Neoscona sp.*) only make their orb-webs at night and hide during the day on plants. Other web types found in the Reserve include the sheet-web spiders (Linyphiidae), the gumfoot-web spiders (Theridiidae), plant mesh-web spiders (Dictynidae) and the ground mesh-web weavers (Phyxelididae).



Baboon spider Photo: Pat Miller

The 'wandering spiders' (photo left), do not use silk to catch prey but wander around on the soil surface, like the wolf spiders (Lycosidae), dark sac spiders (Corinnidae) and flat-bellied ground spiders (Gnaphosidae).

A large group live on plants and include the jumping spiders (Salticidae), the small running spiders (Philodromidae) and the crab-spiders (Thomisidae). The plant dwellers usually blend in with the plants they live on, the grass dwellers have elongated bodies, the bark spiders resemble bark and the flower spiders are often brightly coloured!

Spiders play an important role in nature as they prey on a variety of insects, frequently pest species.

A list of species that have been identified in the Reserve is available from the Botsoc office.

METALASIA (BLOMBOS) is honey-scented and waterwise

Metalasias are part of the Asteraceae family. There are six species growing in Fernkloof Reserve. The three pink flowering plants are *Metalasia cymbifolia* which grows at higher altitudes and *Metalasia erubescens* and *Metalasia seriphiifolia* which prefer the sandy flats. *Metalasia inversa*, which is white, is only found at Northcliff.

Metalasia densa and *Metalasia muricata* are both widely known by the common name "blombos" and are used by the indigenous flower industry for overseas markets. These two plants are common in Fernkloof but there is always a puzzle to try and identify them as at first glance they are very similar.



Metalasia densa

Both are large shrubs up to three metres in height. *Metalasia densa* grows on stony soil or sandy flats and *Metalasia muricata* on the coastal sands of the cliff path.

Metalasia densa has lance-shaped leaves 2-15mm long which are twisted and flexed downwards with ancillary tufts. *Metalasia muricata's* needle-like leaves are 2-9mm long, tufted and hooked at the tips.

The flower heads of numerous discoid capitula are at the branch tips of both species.



Metalasia muricata

Metalasia densa bears clusters of 3-5 flowered discoid flower heads with erect or rarely spreading bracts. The inner bracts are petal-like and white or sometimes brownish and the outer ones papery and sharply pointed.

Metalasia muricata has 4 to 6 florets which are free from one another and are surrounded by several tightly enfolding rows of bracts. These are brownish in colour with the outer ones rather thick-textured, blunt and faintly keeled.

SPRING HAS ARRIVED AT FERNKLOOF NURSERY!

Jack reports that spring has arrived early, the swallows are here and plants are giving us the gift of striking colours.

It is time to pay attention to climate change and plan for a garden that can sustain itself in drought situations.

Fernkloof Nursery will be promoting 'xeric gardening' (water wise gardening), so plan to visit the nursery where you can buy water wise plants at very affordable prices!

Visit
The Fernkloof Nursery
 at the
Flower and Eco Fair
 22nd Sept to 25th Sept

Ericas, Proteas, Leucadendrons,
 Salvias, Clivias, and more ...

Don't miss out!!
9am to 5pm



Rediscovery of *Oxalis levis*

CREW, the Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers, proclaimed a new botanical holiday on the 16th June 2011 (Youth Day) proclaiming it also as

Oxalis Day!

The mission of the CREW volunteers was to try and rediscover some of the 8 'Critically Endangered Possibly Extinct' species of Oxalis.

On a cold and wet winter's morning they visited a site close to Malmesbury and found, much to their delight, plants fitting the description of *Oxalis levis*. This plant was only known previously from the type collection made in 1933 by T.M. Salter and was thought to be possibly extinct.

Unfortunately the inclement weather caused the flowers to stay tightly closed! The photo does however show the plants growing in their natural habitat of seasonally wet flats of white clay soil which is overlaid with a thin layer of quartzitic sand.

We look forward to a photo of this exciting find with flowers open to greet the sun!

Photo: Rupert Koopman



With thanks to Ismail Ebrahim, Project Manager: CREW

HAVE YOU HEARD?

- The Editor reports that to date 81 species of flowering plants have been identified on the 7-11 Common in Voelklip (not including restios and grasses). Four species are described as 'Vulnerable' and one species as 'Declining' in the Red Data List, (photos below). The Environmental Impact Assessment carried out for prospective developers described the Common as scrub and unimportant coastal grassland!



Geissorhiza tenella
Vulnerable



Ixia dubia
Declining



Lachenalia peersii
Vulnerable



Lampranthus bicolor
Vulnerable

- Grant Forbes, Manager of Fernkloof Nature Reserve, reports that in May 2011 a tender was awarded to a local contractor to clear the 70kms of hiking trails in the Reserve. To date a number of paths have been cleared, including most of the favoured colour coded routes. The contract also includes the installation of the much needed water bars. Any enquiries please phone Grant on 028 3138103. No more wet feet after a pleasant walk in the mountain!

- Anina Lee, Chairperson of the OCF (now trading as Whale Coast Conservation), reports that the OCF has received a generous grant of R4m from Lotto Funds! The grant enables the OCF to establish an Eco-Centre which will act as a resource for information and technologies that promote sustainable lifestyles and for environmental education in our schools.

- If you have not yet heard the cryptic sounding term 'xeric gardening' you will certainly come across it more and more as it is the new catchword phrase used to describe 'waterwise gardening'!

- American Erica grower and president of the American Heather Society, Kara Lortz, visited the Fernkloof gardens and Visitors' Centre recently to see our massed display. But it was one tiny plant that stole the show and which she drove off with on her travels back to the cold, wet climes of Washington State – a Gengold, a golden hybrid of *Erica nana* and *Erica patersonii*.



- Birthday girl Belle Barker, who turned 86 on August 22, would like to thank everyone who contributed so generously to the Fernkloof Gardens Fund at the special tea given after Lynda de Wet's interesting talk recently.

- The Fernkloof gardens have been putting on a wonderful show of mauve and purple buchus and selagos, the air laden with their scents as you brush by! The orange and yellow pincushions are in flower and the *Erica caffra* shrubs heavy with white bloom! The blue aristecas are about to bud, followed by agapanthus in white and all shades of blue.

Arbor Week 1st to 7th September 2011

Every year Arbor Week highlights 2 specific trees, one common the other more rare, and this years chosen trees are the Jacket-plum (*Pappea capensis*) and the Common Wild Elder (*Nuxia congesta*).

So remember to plant a tree – Jack at Fernkloof Nursery has indigenous trees in stock and can advise the best for your garden!



Our dainty yellow Sebaea's connection to a "Cabinet of Curiosities"!

Did you know that the genus *Sebaea* was named after Amsterdam-based pharmacist Albertus Seba (1665-1736)? Albertus was also a passionate collector of animals, plants, insects and all things curious and fantastical in the natural world. In 1731 he commissioned illustrations of every specimen in his collection from exotic plants to stuffed animals and birds, snakes, crocodiles, insects, shells and corals, and other peculiar creatures which are now extinct! A four-volume catalogue with 446 plate engravings, which he called "Cabinet of Curiosities", was published in 1734. It is now one of the most prized natural history books of all time.

Recently an early complete copy of the original sold for US\$460 000.00!

Seba sold his collection to Tsar Peter the Great in 1717 and it is now housed by the Russian Academy of Sciences in a special building designed for it, the Kunstkammer.

Fernkloof has 7 species of *Sebaea*, the most often noticed being *Sebaea exacoides* (above left), with its bright yellow star-like flowers growing on sandy flats and slopes.

It is flowering now, so be sure to look for it and be intrigued by its celebrated link to the past!

Sandy Jenkin

DATES TO DIARISE

September 22nd to 25th

Hermanus Flower and Eco-Fair at Fernkloof Nature Reserve

9am -5pm daily (except Sunday 9am – 3pm : sale of plants and flowers at 3pm)

November 18th Friday

Frank Tennick will present an illustrated talk on 'The Geology of the Fernkloof Nature Reserve' Fernkloof Hall 7pm

~~We welcome any contributions to, or feedback on the newsletter.~~

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