Exploring the wealth of geophytes in the BCA

Cliff Dorse (BCA Reserve Manager)

A consequence of having three distinct vegetation types represented in the Blaauwberg Conservation Area (BCA) is the exceptionally high plant diversity, with 521 plant species recorded to date. A characteristic of the Fynbos biome is the great diversity of geophytic (bulbous) plants. While the sandy soils of both the Strandveld and Sand Plain Fynbos habitats at Blaauwberg have species-rich bulb communities, it is the clay soils of the Renosterveld that are the most species-rich. These geophytes become dormant during the harsh, dry summer months and at the onset of the winter rains, they produce new leaves. Most flower in spring, but from May through to November, there is always some winter-growing geophyte in flower.

The most well represented geophytic family is the Iridaceae, of which 45 species have been recorded within the BCA. This spectacular family includes some of the world’s most famous flowers, including the Gladioli (8 species), Moreas (9 species), Watsonias (1 species) and Ixias (2 species). Unfortunately many of these spectacular plants are also threatened with extinction and six of the Irids within the BCA have Red Data Book status. The rarity of these plants and most other threatened Fynbos plants is due to habitat destruction. However, alien vegetation and illegal collecting are also severe threats to some species.

Besides the well-known Iridaceae, there are numerous other important geophytic plant families to be enjoyed at the BCA. These include the Amaryllidaceae, Oxalidaceae (Oxalis, souring or sorrel), Hyacinthaceae (Viooltjies or Lachenalias), Orchidaceae (Orchids) and Geraniaceae (Geraniums). Anyone who is interested in enjoying the spectacle of the famous Cape bulbs can do so at Blaauwberg and you are urged to join the Friends of BCA monthly walks! [See page 4 for details.]
Talented workers promote the BCA
Patrick Dowling, WESSA Western Cape

The C.A.P.E. Partners’ Conference, *Fynbos Fynmense*, provided an opportunity for members of the Du Noon contract team to strut their stuff and further publicise the work being done at the Blaauwberg Conservation Area (BCA).

Phumla, Portia and Penuel volunteered to do a short presentation at the Conference, held on 7 and 8 June at Kirstenbosch. With the help of veteran community worker and frequent training translator, Solomon Cedile, they put together a dramatic piece, succinctly describing the practical work challenges at the Blaauwberg reserve, but also covering the range of individual talents in their team, from hairdressing to preaching, crafting to care giving. The sketch has the trio appearing uniformly garbed in khaki, but then revealing the inner individuals who sing and dance a BCA tribute, enthusiastically received by the audience.

Meanwhile another three members of the team, Fundisile, Mcedisi and Alicia have been honing a number of skills during their three-month work-shadowing experience. They now all have their learner drivers’ licences, thanks to the helpful Milnerton Traffic Department who went out of their way to accommodate them at a test session. Between them they also have a chainsaw operator’s qualification, competency in several software packages, insight into the details of quoting and tendering, as well as experience in plant propagation after two days at the University of Western Cape’s Environmental Education Research Centre. The day-to-day experience they are getting from their work-shadow hosts is invaluable and WESSA: WC thanks the Nature Conservation Corporation, African Voices and Jakkalsfontein Private Nature Reserve for all their help with this initiative.

A diversity of talent is emerging from this biodiversity hotspot!

Left: Portia, Penuel and Phumla, the “3 Ps”, pose for a photo before their presentation!

Right: BCA Environmental Education Officer, Lizanne Engelbrecht, presenting a programme during World Environment Week.

Blaauwberg Conservation Area Environmental Education (EE) Programme
Lizanne Engelbrecht (BCA Environmental Education Officer)

The complex layers of natural, historical and cultural diversity within the Blaauwberg Conservation Area (BCA) comprise of a comprehensive range of outcome-based educational opportunities. This rich heritage can play a crucial educational role as an open-air classroom.

The programme at BCA is offered from Mondays to Fridays and the centre can accommodate 50 learners.

The location of the BCA, within the borders of the Cape Metropolitan Area (CMA), ensures easy access to thousands of learners - pre-primary to post-graduate level - for first hand experiences in:

*Archaeology* – artefacts from the KhoiSan period,
*Ecology* – studies of fauna and natural environment,
*Botany* – the high density and variety of plant species,
*Geology and Geomorphology* – dune and shale formations,
*History* – studies of various historical periods,
*Marine Biology* – studies of beach and sea life, and
*Geography* – human settlements, studies in urban growth and pressures.

...more overleaf
The programme’s activities include a slide show, PowerPoint presentation or video-based on the programme theme. It also includes a guided walk along the beach and parts of the reserve followed by a lecture or discussion in the Environmental Education centre.

Under these themes, specific topics are targeted as requested by the schools or group/s. Special programmes are offered on enviro days/weeks such as World Wetlands Day, Water Week, Arbour Week, National Clean-up Week and Marine Week. Holiday programmes are also offered where kids can enjoy a video show in the EE centre followed by a walk along the beach.

To make your booking or for any further information please contact the Blaauwberg Conservation Area on (021) 554 0957 or e-mail us at bca@sybaweb.co.za. Alternatively you can visit our website at www.bca.org.za

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**Omega Substation update**  
*Sam Ralston, WESSA Western Cape*

Previously we informed you that Eskom, as part of their ‘Cape Strengthening Programme’, is proposing to build a substation just north of the BCA. The proposed substation is huge. It is envisaged that it will be between 35 and 50 meters high, and cover 50 hectares. WESSA Western Cape has since submitted comments on the draft Scoping Report. Fortunately, it appears that no significant pockets of natural vegetation will be disturbed, but at this stage it seems that, if the development goes ahead, either a seasonal wetland and Blue Crane breeding habitat will be lost, or important heritage resources will be impacted on. In either case, the proposed substation will have significant impacts, and we believe that a full EIA is warranted. From the BCA point of view, the most significant impact will be the blight on the landscape, particularly from Blaauwberg Hill where it is envisaged that tourists will come to view Table Mountain and Robben Island, the site of the Battle of Blaauwberg, and surrounds. For some strange reason the visual impact assessment undertaken during Scoping failed to take views from Blaauwberg Hill into consideration. We objected strongly to this oversight.

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**City acquires Holliday Farm for the BCA**  
*Joanne Jackson, City of Cape Town*

Holliday Farm, an important land parcel that was in private ownership has been purchased by the City of Cape Town, as part of the City’s land consolidation programme for the Blaauwberg Conservation Area.

Holliday Farm, situated on the western slopes of Blaauwberg Hill, is a key property from a visual and landscape continuity perspective, not to mention its biodiversity significance. It is the second private land parcel that the City has acquired for the BCA, as part of the goal of consolidating all private land holdings in the BCA’s Primary Conservation Zone into public ownership to ensure their protection and conservation into perpetuity.

The City is engaged in negotiations and discussions with other private landowners whose properties form part of the BCA’s Primary Conservation Zone. It is hoped that these negotiations will bear fruit and that further announcements can be made, in the not too distant future, of exciting progress with the BCA land consolidation programme.

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**BCA publications database**

As part of the BCA-CEPF Project, a list of publications relating to the BCA has been compiled. It includes books, reports and theses. Some of the publications are housed at the BCA EE Centre, but details of where the others can be found are given in the database.

If you would like to view the database, please contact Michelle Preen on (021) 701 1397 or email info@bca.org.za

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To find out more about this unique area, please visit  
[www.bca.org.za](http://www.bca.org.za)
Massacre in BCA – aliens get no mercy
Louis Raubenheimer, Friends of BCA (FoBCA) chairman

What do you get when the Scouts, the ACW (Afrikaans Christian Women’s Association) and children from informal settlements join forces in the Blaauwberg Conservation Area? A lot of dead aliens, that’s what!

It all happened on a Saturday morning in May. Seven members of the First Bothasig Scouts under Russell Hope met up in the BCA with fifteen youngsters from Rietvleibos and Wolwerivier Informal Settlements. These kids, most of them between 9 and 13 years old, were accompanied by Lynette Nel and Santa van Antwerpen of Koeberg ACW. The object of the hack was to help rid the BCA of alien invasive plants and it was organised by the Friends of the BCA (FoBCA), with Cliff Dorse, BCA Reserve Manager, and Ilke Vermeulen, nature conservation student, providing technical leadership.

From a hilariously chaotic start, all newcomers soon got into the swing of things and settled down to some serious alien clearing. Within ninety minutes a sizable patch of Fynbos, previously covered by Port Jacksons, was opened up, significantly increasing the area already cleared in previous efforts. Concluding with a well-earned picnic on top of Blaauwberg Hill, everyone could appreciate not only the breathtaking view across Table Bay, but also the tremendous progress made in alien clearing and erosion control.

Companies or individuals who would like to help can provide eats and drinks for the children or financially contribute towards their transport. Organisations like the ACW would dearly like to do more, but are short on finances.

Organisations can also become actively involved by adopting an area for clearing and having unemployed people clear the area of invasive plants under the guidance of the FoBCA.

Anyone interested in getting involved can contact Louis Raubenheimer at (021) 554 2221 or 082 651 5437, or email Lraubenh@mweb.co.za

Steven Louw and Gavin Stopford make a good team “popping” alien trees in the BCA.

FoBCA HACKS are held at 9am on the FIRST Saturday of each month and WALKS at 9am on the THIRD Saturday of each month during winter.

Please contact Louis Raubenheimer on tel (021) 554 2221, cell 082 651 5437 or email Lraubenh@mweb.co.za if you are interested in joining the BCA hacks, and Louis or John Bell on tel (021) 554 3649 if you would like to take part in the Blaauwberg Hill walks.

The Friends of BCA are a voluntary group whose mission it is to contribute to seeing that the BCA is protected and utilised to the benefit of the general public, now and for the future. The group is affiliated to WESSA Western Cape.

You are encouraged to join the Friends of BCA and thereby actively participate in the realisation of the BCA vision.

Please contact Louis Raubenheimer on (021) 554 2221 or 082 651 5437, or email Lraubenh@mweb.co.za

If you would like more information on the BCA or are interested in becoming involved, please contact:

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