

Redford Conservancy - Report for 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM)

October 2020

Due to COVID-19, the Redford Conservancy Committee has decided not to hold an 'in-person' AGM this year, but rather to present in writing the information that would normally have been reported and discussed at the AGM. If members have any questions or comments in relation to the information reported here, please get in touch.

Minutes of the 2019 AGM

The minutes of the 2019 AGM, held on 3 November 2019, are attached.

Report from the Chair and members of the Redford Conservancy Committee

2020 has certainly been an unprecedented year. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many aspects of our lives, and continues to do so on a global scale. Due to the lockdown restrictions, the Committee of the Redford Conservancy has been less active than in previous years, but it's important to stress that the environmental and conservation issues that the Redford Conservancy aims to promote are as important as ever, perhaps even more so. Despite the lockdown restrictions, conservation work has continued. A summary of the main issues is provided below.

Invasive alien vegetation, and the Crag as a buffer-zone for conservation in the Garden Route

The management of invasive alien vegetation remains a critical issue for the conservancy, and one that will remain a priority in the long-term.

The Crag is situated in the domain of the Garden Route National Park, which is within the even larger domain of the Garden Route Biosphere. It is located within the Cape Floristic Region which was declared a world Heritage Site in 2004 and extended in 2014. The Crag is an important "Buffer Area" to conservation zones such as Soetkraal to the North, Whiskey Creek National Park to the south, Keurbooms Nature Reserve to the west and Tsitsikamma National Park to the east. It is an area that stretches from the Tsitsikamma mountains down to the sea, has high scenic value, has high levels of biodiversity and has a rich cultural and historical heritage. As such it is highly desirable for tourism, and includes urban, forestry, conservation and agricultural land uses.

In November 2019 a 10-year Garden Route Management Plan was approved by Barbara Creecy, Minister of the Environment. This plan outlines the importance of buffer zones.

What it wants is that the buffer area provides functional ecological corridors which enhance the integrity of the Park. For this it needs the 'buy in' from landowners who recognise, appreciate and protect our heritage.

What it does not want is infiltrative alien species, fire which is often aggravated by large stands of runaway pines, bluegums, wattles, blackwoods, inappropriate development, pollution and lack of cooperation from landowners to ensure landscape continuity and corridors.

Although each landowner is responsible for their own property, SANParks helped private owners to remove alien vegetation in The Craggs and nearby areas such as Soetkraal, and has already spent about R 35,000,000.00 in the area. Since 2013 the Redford Conservancy has been involved in this project, known as the Buffer Zone Project or the Biodiversity Social Project. The Project has two aspects, the clearing of invasive alien plant species, and job creation. It involves a three-way partnership between SANParks, landowners and Work for Water Teams. In the Redford Conservancy area 25 farms have been involved and cleared. The southern Craggs Conservancy was also included and huge properties such as Forest Hall and Kuthumba were cleared by Working for Water teams.

In March 2019 we were informed by SANParks that there would be no more funding for new farm applicants, but that all past signed contracts would be completed. Three new farms with contracts were cleared but are still in need of follow up operations to clear new growth. In March 2020, with the arrival of Covid 19 and the economic consequences, all funding of private property, including new and existing contracts, was withdrawn until further notice. Given the budget cuts experienced by SANParks, it appears highly unlikely that further funding will be provided in the short to medium terms. This is clearly very disappointing news as the funds provided by the SANParks and Working for Water project has been a significant catalyst for the management of invasive alien vegetation in the area. It will be important for us as a community to continue to drive efforts to manage invasive alien vegetation.

We will in due course make direct contact with those landowners that currently have contracts with SANParks. The message to them from SANParks is not to let all the work that has been done go to waste, and to get a plan in place to deal with the re-growth. Each property will have its own specific challenges and the committee will do its best to come up with good advice or solutions. The committee has been approached by a number of new landowners wishing to access funding for alien clearing. Although we are unable to facilitate access to funding currently, we will continue to provide advice and resources to support ongoing clearing efforts. We encourage any landowners or residents to contact us if they have any questions in this regard.

Fire

A related issue, and one that is almost always fresh in peoples' minds, is the management of fire. Much of the natural vegetation in the Redford Conservancy and broader Craggs area is now close to 20 years old, and it is important that we are proactive in understanding the ecology, management and risk in respect of fires in the area. The fire that affected the Redford area in December 2016, and especially the much larger Garden Route fires in June 2017 serve as a reminder of the importance of ensuring we have effective fire management and protection strategies in place. It is important for us to remember that fynbos is a fire-driven vegetation, and fire is an integral component of the local ecology that needs to be properly managed. The Redford Conservancy interacts closely with Craggs Fire Management Unit (CFMU), to discuss issues relating to vegetation and fire management, and to ensure close collaboration between the two organisations. Such an approach will help ensure that we can work together to meet the twin objectives of fire management, and that is reducing the risk of uncontrolled and damaging fires, and fulfilling the ecological needs of the fynbos vegetation within the Conservancy.

Recycling

The recycling initiative in The Craggs continues to progress, with a slow increase in participation as more residents become familiar with the system. There are still some outstanding items and issues that need to be addressed to improve the recycling efforts further, and the committee will be implementing a number of actions to help support these efforts.

Events

Another of our aims is to stimulate an awareness and ongoing interest in the conservation of our area, and the Redford Conservancy. One of the main mechanisms we use to support this aim is through the organisation of outings and events. This year, the Conservancy outings and events were seriously challenged by the lockdown associated with COVID-19. However, before lockdown struck, we were able to enjoy two events. The first was an outing to Die Poele, the stunning waterfalls in the Keurbooms pine plantation at the end of Redford Road, led by the hugely knowledgeable local naturalist and guide Mark Jones. The second event was a fascinating presentation by Mark Robson of Radical Raptors on Birds of Prey as a natural pest control solution. We look forward to organising more outings and events in the coming months, especially as the lockdown restrictions ease, and will keep members informed of our plans.

Treasurer's report (spreadsheet detail available if required)

• Balance in the bank as at 01/01/2020	R14,287.19
• Subscriptions for 2020	R1,899
• Events	R250
• Cash deposits to bank	R1,500
• Petty cash opening balance	R1,740
• Income events (petty cash)	R481
• Less bank deposit (see above)	R1,500
• Less expense (security guard)	R200
• Petty cash at hand (12/10/2020)	R521
• Bank charges	R189
• Total available as at 12/10/2020	R18,268.19

Membership subscription

Membership fees for 2021 will remain unchanged. A fees notice will be sent out in due course.

Committee election

Two of our committee members, Sharon van Hees and Lizette van Huysteen, are stepping down after years of valuable and greatly appreciated service to the Redford Conservancy. All other committee members have agreed to stand again for another year. We would welcome the nomination of additional members.

Other matters

- **Proposed upgrade of the DR 1797 (Redford) Road.** The Western Cape Provincial Government has appointed Hatch Africa (Pty) Ltd as the engineering consultant and Environmental Assessment Practitioner in respect of the proposed upgrading of the Redford

Road. As part of this process, and in order to comply with the legislative requirements, Hatch have conducted an Environmental Assessment, and released a draft Basic Assessment Report for review by the public. The relevant documents are available at <https://www.hatch.com/Draft-Basic-Assessment-Report-for-the-Upgrade-of-the-DR1797> The deadline for comments and responses is 02 November 2020. The documents are very detailed, and it is clear that the independent assessment of the botanical and aquatic impacts has been thorough and professionally undertaken. The findings of the assessment indicate that there are no 'red flags' associated with the proposed activities, at least from an environmental perspective. A number of recommendations have been made in the reports to mitigate any potential impacts of the work. The Redford Conservancy will be submitting a response noting the results of the assessment, and urging the authorities and contractors to ensure that all the recommended mitigations are adhered to. We encourage all of those with an interest in the project to access the documents and provide your inputs through the formal process.

Redford Conservancy Committee Members:

Anton Wolfaardt

Jane Luck

Colleen Noble

Sharon Van Hees

Inez Jamieson

Sean MacBean

Wania van Wyk

David Collett

Pru Bolus

Richard Bolus

Lizette van Huysteen