



CONSERVANCY

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2008

HABITAT CONSERVATION: Identifying the hotspots

- ❖ The Randjes Conservancy have a current programme which will identify the wetlands in Randjesfontein, as well as the potential breeding grounds and habitat for marsh owls, francolin, hares and other creatures that inhabit our estate.
- ❖ A map will be posted on the website identifying those areas, some of which may be on private plots. If any resident can assist in highlighting some of these areas, please let us know:
- ❖ info@neutralfutures.com





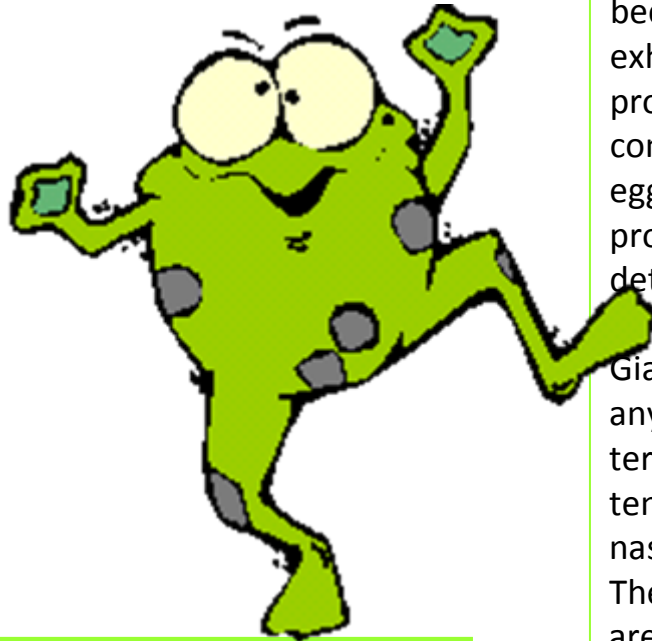
TREES

Randjesfontein Forest Project

During Arbour Week, there was a tree sale on the corner of Elevation and Everfair. Thank you to all those residents who supported this initiative. After the first rains, our tree planting will begin, and we are grateful to those residents who have offered to care for the trees planted on their borders during the months immediately after planting. The mix of trees will include those that encourage and provide food for birds.



The Bullfrogs are back



PLEASE REPORT ANY SIGHTINGS TO
info@neutralfutures.com

Giant Bullfrogs live in open or wooded grassland with poorly drained soil where shallow pans develop during the summer rains. Adults then congregate at these pans to feed and breed over a period varying from a few days to weeks depending upon their gender, social rank and environmental conditions. After this time they then disperse and bury themselves into the ground where they remain dormant in a cocoon made of shedded skin for the rest of the year. This period of dormancy also enables them to survive long periods of drought.

After the eggs are laid in the pans they take two days to become tadpoles. The large territorial males then exhibit parental care by actively defending their progeny from threats and by digging channels to connect the drying depressions containing their eggs/tadpoles to deeper water. These channels also provide the tadpoles with escape routes from deteriorating environmental conditions.

Giant bullfrogs are voracious feeders and will eat anything they can fit in their mouth ranging from a termite to a small chicken. They also have cannibalistic tendencies. They are not poisonous but can deliver a nasty bite if threatened.

These animals are highly endangered in the Gauteng area due in the main to human activity destroying their habitat and that is why it is so important to have conservancies that can help protect them.

NO TILL GARDENING: Natures Way



- ❖ The practice of turning and digging garden beds does serious damage to trees and plants, and necessitates the use of expensive plant foods. The best practice is to apply mulch and loose winter leaves to cover the beds – this helps to retain moisture and provides all the nutrients required as the organic matter decomposes. Digging beds damages the fine feeder roots of plants and trees, the very roots that absorb water and nutrients. The below ground root system of a tree is a mirror image of the tree itself, and so the best watering area is in a wide circle, following the outer tips of the branches.





ORGANIC SOLUTIONS: The power of vinegar and lemon juice

- ❖ Consider the effects of bleach, phosphates in soaps, discarded oil, and disinfectants on the quality of water in the underground water table. For one, you will have to empty your septic tank regularly, when the bacteria are destroyed by harsh chemicals.
- ❖ An inexpensive alternative is at hand. A solution of vinegar and warm water acts as a bleach for those stubborn clothing stains, even red wine. It's great for cleaning floors, and removing stains from carpets. If the smell of vinegar is too much to bear, throw in a drop of essential oils like cedar or lavender. A few squirts of lemon juice or vinegar in the sink will cut the grease.
- ❖ If you suffer from stomach ulcers or acid reflux, believe it not, half a cup of a mixture of apple-cider vinegar, lemon juice, honey and a little hot water, twice a day will fix the problem.
- ❖ And when you consider that floor-cleaner is R30.00 a litre, and vinegar is R4.50 a litre, there's no contest.





The DA is spearheading an investigation into many developments that do not have the required Environmental Impact Assessments or approvals. At the core of their investigation are allegations that the MEC for Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Environment, has rubber-stamped developments where environmental approval has not been provided.

Amongst those are the Waterval Estate development on the Mia's Farm. Construction is currently underway without an EIA. This large stretch of egoli granite grassland alongside the Ben Schoeman highway between Johannesburg and Pretoria, is set to become a high-density housing development of 3 220 units and a giant "commercial district". The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, or Wessa are appealing the development.

DEVELOPMENT WATCH: Waterval Estate Egoli Grassland

The preferred land use for the area was originally identified, at provincial level, as "conservation" because rare plant and animal species known to exist on the site. Despite this, permission to build was given to the land owners with the provision that they cough up cash to purchase what is known as an "off-set" piece of land. However, it is the last remaining area of egoli granite grassland in the area. In April this year, concerned environmentalists together with the Democratic Alliance, presented a twenty page report to Gauteng Premier Mkhazima Shilowa requesting an enquiry into allegations of misconduct against the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL WATCH

Rivers and wetlands

The National Water Act is very clear as to actions that are considered unlawful, and constitute a criminal offence:

Amongst them are:

the direct or indirect alteration of the physical, chemical or biological properties of a water resource so as to make it -

- (a) less fit for any beneficial purpose for which it may reasonably be expected to be used; or
- (b) harmful or potentially harmful -
 - (aa) to the welfare, health or safety of human beings;
 - (bb) to any aquatic or non-aquatic organisms;
 - (cc) to the resource quality;

Listed under Offences – section 151 – are the following:

- iii) Unlawfully and intentionally or negligently committing any act or omission which pollutes or is likely to pollute a water resource
- iv) Unlawfully and intentionally or negligently committing any act or omission which detrimentally affects or is likely to detrimentally affect a water resource

Report any violation of the National Water Act to the Green Scorpions at 0800-205-005



Death of an owl

A very large spotted eagle owl was found lying dead under a tree in October in the cricket grounds, by a resident driving past. The conservancy sent the body for a post-mortem by a pathologist to determine the cause of death. The major cause of death of owls is pesticides used for insect and rodent control, but this owl died as a result of a 4cm abscess in the oesophagus.

Spotted Eagle-owls mate for life. They are able to breed at around one year of age. They make their nest on the ground and have been known to nest on window ledges of buildings. Breeding begins in July continuing to the first weeks of February. The female lays two to four eggs and does the incubation, leaving the nest only to eat what the male has brought food. The incubation period lasts approximately 32 days. The young owls can fly at around seven weeks of age. Five weeks later, the young owls leave the nest. They have a life span of up to ten years in the wild and up to twenty in captivity.



Grapev



Any resident who has noticed a film of oil on their dams or ponds, please let us know.

The treatment by Bombela of the river close to the old Excel petrol station has not gone un-noticed. Ironically it is the Kyalami Conservancy who have raised concerns about environmental infringements during the construction of Gautrain. Report infringements when you see them, to us at

info@neutralfutures.com

A fire on the empty properties in Elevation Avenue opposite the cricket oval, has destroyed grassland used by plovers sitting on eggs in the current breeding season. It is also inhabited by many hares, guinea-fowls and francolins. We urge residents to keep watch for fires and report them as quickly as possible to Johan or Porky.: