

FRIENDS OF DIE OOG NEWSLETTER APRIL 2010



Dear Friends of Die Oog

“Die Oog Conservation Area” A New Beginning?

Big changes have taken place in the organization and management of the natural park areas of the City of Cape Town. The Department of Nature Conservation is now known as the **“Biodiversity Management Branch”** and an agreement has been reached between Biodiversity Management and the Department of Parks and Open Spaces regarding all the natural park areas in Cape Town. Biodiversity Management will be responsible for all the proclaimed Local Nature Reserves of the City and the remainder, **including Die Oog, will be the responsibility of Parks**. Die Oog however is included in the Biodiversity Network and the Heritage List of the City and **Die Oog has been officially designated a “Conservation Area”**. Biodiversity Management will assign responsibility for the various management actions and will be involved in some of the actions and will provide expertise and guidance for City Parks. Biodiversity Management and Parks have jointly drawn up an “Annual Plan of Operation” (APO) for Die Oog for 2009 – 2010. Some responsibilities have been assigned to the Friends of Die Oog include clearing of alien species, reintroduction of indigenous fish, monitoring and record keeping (birds and Leopard Toads), staff and visitor management, environmental education and communication. The Committee of the Friends have met quarterly with representatives of Biodiversity Management and Parks for several years in the Die Oog Partnership which will continue as the main channel of cooperation and coordination. A very encouraging meeting of the Partnership was held on 11 March 2010 when the APO for Die Oog for 2009-2010 was agreed. Until now the Friends have, de facto, assumed responsibility for the day-to-day management of Die Oog with the help of the Parks Department for mowing and major projects, and the advice and assistance Cassy Sheasby of Zandvlei Nature Reserve. We will have to see how it all works out. **In the meantime the Friends will continue its mission to maintain and improve Die Oog as a place of natural beauty and quiet recreation**

Aquatic weeds The overgrowth of hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and duckweed (*Lemna gibba*) has caused great concern. Apart from detracting from the attractiveness of Die Oog it was probably the cause of the non-appearance of the Western Leopard toadlets last year. The Parks Department employed a contractor to clear the weeds from Die Oog but the work was stopped when one of the contractor’s employees drowned. It is hoped that the clearance of the weeds will be resumed shortly.

The island In November last year the reed cormorant colony and part of the basmboo on the island collapsed and all the birds suddenly left. There is an overgrowth of oleanders which are invasive aliens. The island is also covered by a 50 cm deep layer of guano from the bird droppings that have accumulated over the years. The leakage of guano is believed to be responsible for the high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus in the water of Die Oog and to be the main cause of the overgrowth of aquatic weeds. It is proposed to clear the island of oleanders and also to remove the guano as a long-term solution to the overgrowth of aquatic weed. The necessary funds however have still to be allocated.

Birds Great excitement was caused in January when 5 open-billed storks suddenly arrived to roost on the island. Die Oog was invaded by bird-watchers, many of whom had not visited Die Oog before. The storks are very striking with their open bills that are used to extract the contents of snails without breaking the shells. Some beautiful photographs of the open-billed storks roosting at Die Oog can be seen on the website www.dieoog.co.za. The cattle egrets and sacred ibis have now started to return. During the Summer there was a population explosion of coots with at least 5 new families and the moorhen and dabchicks have continued to have chicks. Up to 20 yellowbilled ducks also come and go.

Fish There are no fish in Die Oog, Several attempts have been made to introduce the indigenous fish galaxia but all have failed. The failures have ofgten been attributed to poor water quality. An experiment

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has been carried out by Colin Hancox with the help of Sean Marr of the Zoology Department of UCT and both galaxia and Cape Kurper have kept in tank containing water from Die Oog for over 30 days. A further attempt will be made to introduce galaxia into Die Oog with Sean Marr's help very soon.

Western Leopard Toads The annual migration and mating of the Western Leopard Toads took place in August but very few toadlets emerged this season. Large number of dragon fly were seen at Die Oog during this time and it is believed that the spawn and tadpoles were eaten by the dragonfly larvae

Dam Wall A grant of 25,000 was made by the Protea Sub council for the repair of the wall. The money will be available on 1 July and it is hoped the work will be completed by the end of 2010.

Gripper Entrance Gate The gate is currently locked each night at 7.00pm and opened each morning at 7.00am by members of the Committee. It is hoped to install an automatic locking system using solar power. Brian Gripper who originally provided the gate has put much effort into the project and it is hoped the automatic locking system will be in operation in the not too distant future.

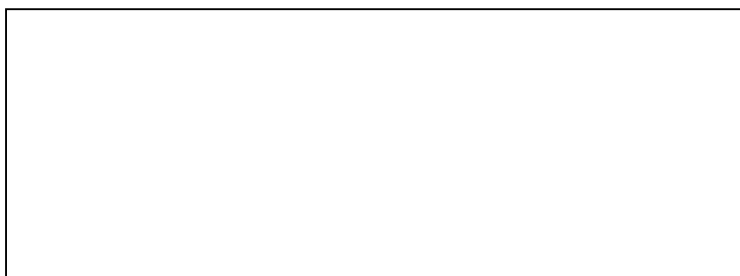
Education Three groups of about 30 grade 4's from Bergvliet Primary School (and some of the parents) visited Die Oog and greatly enjoyed the special education programme (arranged by Poll and Malcolm Pearce) which included a treasure map, a detective trail and bird and flower identification

Website The site has some excellent photographs and video clips of birds and toads and has become the main source of up-to-date information and communication about Die Oog

Notelets and Fund Raising The subscriptions and the generous donations by members do not cover the expenses of the Friends. The sale of notelets of photographs of Die Oog, produced by Poll and Macolm Pearce, has become one the main source of income of the Friends and has enabled the Friends to guarantee the employment a gardener once a week until the end of 2010 (The gardener Sibul is responsible under the guidance of the Committee, for keeping Die Oog clean and in good order). The notelets consist of 3 sets of photos of bird, flowers and scenes and are sold in packs of 8 at R50 per pack. They make inexpensive and attractive cards for thank yous' and similar messages. A new series is being prepared and the notelets can be obtained directly from Poll and Malcolm at 021 715 8666.

Die Oog has had its ups and downs and it seems as though we are embarking on a new era. Whatever the changes in organisation made by the City the support of the Friends will still be essential to conserve and maintain Die Oog as a place of natural beauty and recreation for future generations.

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Malcolm Pearce (712 1645) Vice Chairman	Pauline Pearce (715 8666) Education
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