

whatsUp!

Waterberg News, Happenings and Events April 2020

Tourism is the life blood of the Waterberg

No tourists, no lodges, no hunting, no activities, no money, no goods or services, no employment! We cannot allow tourism to become a Corona-victim! Shouldn't we rather look at this as an opportunity to do the housekeeping, maintenance and refurbishments we've been putting on hold? We must look at what we are offering and do our best to adapt to these new and changed circumstances. Realistically it will take some time before foreign tourists return so we need to consider our local market. What can we offer that is different from other destinations in this beautiful country? How can we come together as a community to survive?

Waterberg Tourism has the experience, expertise and the network to assist all those that want to make a difference. Together we can do it!

Call Ken on 082 324 2252, or Judi on 083 285 2979

Ken Maud

Max the Champion Metal Rhino



In 2018. Tess Baber donated a life size metal rhino to **STWR**. Known as Max - he was such a hit that he now travels hundreds of kilometres around the Waterberg with Daniel Mashasha our community liaison officer. Max is the most popular ambassador you could possibly imagine - and the discussions he starts amongst schools and communities is incredible.

This year, Max underwent a change of wardrobe, now transformed into real rhino colours - with a dash of rainbow for colour. The splashes of colour all over his body are the handprints of school children, who dip their hands into paint and pledge their support for rhinos by placing a handprint onto Max.

Over to Daniel:

Max spent over two weeks on the bakkie and I introduced him to pupils at over nine schools that are situated in the Steilloop and Bakenberg circuits. When I was collecting money for seedling purchases and doing deliveries, Max had an

opportunity to meet pupils and teachers at their schools which is when I let them touch and take pics and when I shared rhino stories and answered their questions.

Max is now recognised almost as a member of our community. At Thekwane, my home village, the young kids always ask me where Max is. Unlike the adults the young ones will tell me, not ask, tell mind you, to bring him with me when I come home – then I would obey their instructions – these are our “FUTURE NATURE CHAMPIONS”

Daniel Mashasha & Jessica Babich STWR - image Jessica Babich

Daniel will be contacting schools to book dates with them to bring Max for formal introductions and interactions including rhino talks.

Over 435 learners saw and met Max during the seedlings run trip – awesome

Bushbabies a Welgevonden Story - Last October we found a young Lesser Bushbaby outside the Welgevonden offices. Unable to find the family group, we



decided to adopt the tiny furball with the intention of eventually releasing him back into the wild. In early November he weighed a mere 30 grams but with a healthy diet of full fat yoghurt, mealworms and moths, by mid January this had increased to 100 grams. In February, with the permit in hand, we got three bushbabies from Friends of Free Wildlife in Kyalami, two siblings and one tiny female.

They were released along with our little one into a specially built cage in our garden to enable them to bond with one another. On 24 February, we cut open a small hole in the cage which allowed them to venture out at night and return during the day. Sadly our little one did not make it and the following day we found him dead in one of the boxes. We're waiting for an autopsy to find out what happened. On a happier note, the siblings have bonded with the bushbabies that live in our garden and live in a hole under the roof of our cottage, whilst the little female that we fondly christened Girlie still returns to her nest box. At dusk we put out food for her, and watch her appear to check out her surroundings before hopping out to eat. The others all jump into the trees and hang around with us for a bit before bouncing off into the night to forage for food. Hopefully, soon, she will find a mate and have babies of her own.



Story and images Nikki McCartney - Welgevonden

Protecting our Painted Wolves - co-operation between EWT and Lapalala Wilderness

In recent months, there has been escalating conflict between farmers and the Vrymansrus pack. It's been confirmed that the pack has hunted livestock and one farmer requested removal while another asked for a destruction permit for the pack.



EWT with LEDET officials, wild dog experts, reserve managers and vets present at a WAG meeting held on 27 February, it was decided that the capture and removal of the pack was the only option to ensure the pack's survival.

The dogs were extremely distrustful of humans as they had frequently been shot at by certain landowners. After a false start due to Covid 19, the capture and relocation commenced again on the 3rd March. The pack members were successfully darted and relocated to Lapalala Wilderness in a 5 day capture operation. They will be in a boma for some time before they are released onto the reserve. **Derek van der Merwe** - image **Robin Taylor**

Hunting Trees or The Tree Police Strike Again

Last October, while preparing a presentation for Lapalala Wilderness School showing the difference due to direct sunlight on vegetation on the northern (lots of sun) and southern (little sun) slopes of a hill, I noticed a clump of strange-looking trees on the southern slope.

A gang of alien invaders, I thought, and called for armed response back-up in the form of Lyn. We discovered the clump was a single multi-trunked conifer: *Widdringtonia nodiflora*, mountain cypress/bergsipres, growing at 1430m, way outside its normal above 1600m (Schmidt et al 2007). Its large bole size was evidence of it having been there a very long time.



Downward Lyn and I went and found another unusual tree, *Olinia rochetiana* – rock hard pear/rotshardepeer:. A species confined to “mist-belt Afromontane forest or on wooded rocky outcrops in montane grassland” (ibid).

An exciting discovery, they are growing at least 200m below their normal habitat in today's climate. How to explain it? Lyn's suggestion is they may be the lone survivors of a population that used to grow along this southern slope at a time when the climate was cooler and moister than today. Global warming again?

But, these two trees could be remnants of a floral regime that may have prevailed in this area until as recently as the 1850s, which was pretty well the end of a 300-500 year period of global cooling known as the Little Ice Age.

This surely shows Waterberg flora has much greater diversity than has been recognised. The identification of these two species surely adds to the call for a comprehensive survey of Waterberg flora.

Richard Wadley - Story & Image

General meeting February 13

The first meeting of 2020 was well attended with more than 50 members and guests who were well entertained, and I'm sure educated, by our diverse speakers.

The title of **Michelle Thompson's** talk, 'Hot Birds Research Project,' certainly raised some eyebrows with imaginations running wild. Given the huge interest and international discussions on global warming, Michelle's talk on using bird behaviour to assess species behaviour on three continents relative to climate changes was intriguing, exposing a little known field of research to members.



Lesiba Masibe wearing his Biosphere hat introduced **Gavin Fleming** of consulting firm Kartoza who spoke on the Biosphere's successful approach to USAID to assist in the extension of the Biosphere boundaries to include key bio-diversity areas such as Nylsvlei. A technical talk on an important and complicated subject.



STWR director **Jessica Babich** gave a fascinating talk on the recent TUSK meeting in Kenya - hopefully 16 African countries cooperating to help stamp out the scourge of poaching as well as other collaborative measures to promote the protection and health of Rhinos across Sub Saharan Africa A subject close to all in this area.



The rain stayed away and we were all able to enjoy the apres meeting socialising around the braai in the gardens.

Pictures: **Marilize Greyling**

Welcome to new Members:

Lesiba Masibe

Letticia Mahlatji

Waterberg Tourism (assoc)

Phillip Bronkhorst

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of WNC member David Hodgkiss OBE of Melkriver Game Breeders. David contracted Covid 19 while in the UK about the middle of March and died there later that month. David and his wife Shirley spent some of their time here in the Waterberg as well as their home in the UK. David made a huge contribution to the Waterberg community and will be sadly missed by all who knew him. WNC wishes to pass deepest sympathy and condolences to Shirley and family.

Stop Press - there is some good news! Because beaches in Thailand are empty due to Corona virus, environmentalists are reporting the highest number of nests of the vulnerable leatherback turtles on the beaches in 20 years, and in Venice with no tourists and drastically reduced pollution fish have returned to the canals. There are many stories like these from all around the world.

<We are always looking for articles for 'whatsUp!' - please contact the editor>

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