

botfriends newsletter nov 18



The future of the wild horses of Fisherhaven

The horses of Fisherhaven are, at present, in good condition especially because of the abundant, reasonably good quality food sources within Fisherhaven. There is, however, still considerable feeding of the horses by private land owners. Unfortunately, this is leading to the taming of the wild horses, which in the long term will be to their detriment.

So what of their future?

- A real possibility exists for further, more severe droughts in this area due to climate change, with the advent of water restrictions which could rapidly reduce the amount of quality food available.
- The horses do not eat Port Jackson, myrtle and pine - all invasive, alien species - which, under the present environmental management plan, or lack thereof, have taken over large areas. This reduces the food supply to the horses considerably.
- More people within the area are fencing off their gardens from the horses and, should this gain momentum, there will be even less food for the existing population of horses, and a rise in conflicts between landowners and the wild horses.
- The grazing capacity of fynbos for the horses is inherently low; Rooisand has maintained a population of 24 for many years and now the Lamloch swamps area has been fenced off. This could lead to more horses moving into the Fisherhaven area, putting more pressure on the limited food available.

The horses are now part of the environment due to their considerably long presence in it. They are the only real bulk grazers left here and they fit in, and are well-adapted to, the fynbos environment with very little damage from their presence. If we manage the environment correctly as a fynbos environment, we will be able to maintain a reasonable population of wild horses, which will not only maintain a good, aesthetically-pleasing environment for us to live in, but will maintain the wild horses as an integral part of this environment. This will lead to a stable, sustainable and unpolluted environment for the foreseeable future.

Michael Austin

Our wild horses don't eat Port Jacksons or myrtles - and nor does any other animal! Invasives are only a hazard and a fire risk. What do *you* think about the future of the horses? Email us @ botvlei@gmail.com.



Respecting new building sites

Development of any new building site results in damage to the environment. Building regulations mean that it is no longer permissible to erect a small mud hut with a grass roof, occupying only a tiny piece of ground, so that we touch the earth as lightly as possible. Today we are forced to bring in heavy earth-moving machines to clear a large area for the house, then clear more to lay a driveway. We plant non-indigenous gardens to "beautify" the plot and generally turn the site into something totally unrecognizable.

Every piece of land that we build on has been largely undisturbed for thousands of years, previously serving a vital function in the environment and supporting a wide variety of life. It has an expectation to continue serving that purpose for thousands of years to come. But every time we cut into a piece of land, we disrupt the corridors which wildlife use in their daily routines and every time we plant or allow an alien species to grow, we disrupt the natural life cycles in the area.

Clearly we cannot build without damaging the site in some way, but we can give the site serious consideration when designing our buildings, to cause the minimum amount of damage. We can also design with the aim of restoring the site as closely as possible to its original state. Sadly, like most new developments, in 1959 when the Walker Bay Investment Company moved onto the piece of land which is now Fisherhaven, little or no consideration was given to protecting the environment: the plots were simply marked out and sub-divided, with roads and services put in where they best served the township layout, regardless of the damage caused to the environment. This has meant that much of what was on the sites we now build on was already destroyed long before we start a new project. But it doesn't have to be that way and if we could put the local environment at least on a par with, if not ahead of, profit when we design, we would be able to tread so much more lightly on this planet of ours.

Despite the damage that has already been done, the natural beauty of Fisherhaven can be saved. But we need to do things right in every aspect of conservation and that includes building our homes - it's not just about alien clearing. With careful consideration at the design stage, we can reduce the negative impact we cause with every new home that we build. If we treat each site with dignity and respect and do not destroy everything in a single stroke of an earth-moving machine, many of the natural elements that do still survive can be protected and allowed to flourish so that they can play their vital role in the ecosystem: it's simply a choice that each of us can make.

Alan Woolnough



Being firewise – Botfriends' response to the new OSM fire policy

Generally the OSM fire policy document as it is presented in the September 2018 revision should be scrapped. The recommendations by the DEA&DP, Scientific Services, Cape Nature and the Kogelberg Branch of the Botanical Society of SA, amongst others, have been ignored, as have the NEMA 1998 and NEMBA 2004 acts of legislation. As stated at the start of this policy document, there has to be a balance between the fire regulations and environmental regulations. Many of the more than 1500 indigenous species which occur in this area are endangered and are referred to generally as fynbos and are protected under general regulations. Many of these species are endemic to small areas within this region; some new ones have only recently been discovered. The application of this policy, as it is, and I quote from Cape Nature "anything outside of a proclaimed nature reserve is targeted for clearing of all vegetation, not only aliens species (which are also not being targeted effectively)". Scientific Services quote, "landowners should not be obligated to clear indigenous vegetation", and "All AIS to be cleared in terms of CARA and NEMBA regulations", is ineffective.

These comments illustrate how unworkable and unlawful the proposed policy document is, in its present form, as do the above comments. The application of this policy document may achieve the reduction of fire risk but would result in the total destruction of fynbos, creating an ecological desert with a very unstable, unsustainable vegetation environment dominated by very few species. This could, in a very short time, lead to potentially high fire risks. Examples of this poor management strategy already exist in large patches in the area.



Botfriends know the area well and have the expertise in both fire prevention and environmental protection to assist in workshoping a new document, providing training where necessary and identifying the worst invasive alien plants (IAPs).

Michael Austin

WE NEED MORE MEMBERS

Have you completed a 2018/19 membership form? If not, email botvlei@gmail.com and we will send you one. We are also interested in enrolling the farmers and other estate owners in the area, so if you can help in this regard, please do so. Area: from Hoek Van Die Berg to Bot River and to Rooisand. Many thanks.

Jonathan Robinson – Executive member

My family and I are new to the Overberg region and the Fisherhaven community. We moved to the village because of its peace and beauty. My interest in conservation started as a youngster, growing up in Klaserie Nature Reserve in Hoedspruit, Mpumalanga. By trade, I am a private travelling chef; this has afforded me the privilege of seeing and experiencing Southern Africa's many biodiversities. I am honoured to be involved in the next stage of Botfriends and its commitment to preserve this beauty.

Can we reach the beach?

The long-awaited Coastal Access report has finally arrived. In the last year or more, most of the issues which finally affect the coastal area from Rooiels to Cape Infanta have been delayed or put on hold until this report appears. The access to the coast via Middlevlei has been pending this report. The management strategy for the estuary, even pollution problems draining into the estuary, has been partly put on hold, awaiting this report as well.

The report has produced maps which are the baseline for any further discussion and conclusions. Unfortunately, there are many errors in this data.

The discussions in the introductory pages only conclude how much work needs to be done, and how many years of additional data and study will be required to arrive at any workable solutions to the problems. The whole study was so limited that the only real conclusions drawn were that this was just a "snap shot in time" and that the meagre data presented has to be done again.

Extremely limited options were presented for Middlevlei access. No advance or discussion or any proposed conclusions are offered, except that a separate study is required which is constrained by funding. In the meantime, access is denied. Brief mention of the court cases and court orders is made. The coastal access report response just notes these discussions and states that no recommendations are to be done at this stage. It concludes that, if the area is selected as a pilot study, it will be followed up. However, in the first 30 pages of the report, there is a very long-winded section selecting precisely this as a pilot study area. The maps and elementary data gathered from site visits and meetings covered in the next 230 pages discount any actions to be taken, except to refer most areas for further study by Cape Nature, San Parks, launch site program or the municipality for further investigation.

Page 273 to 289 is mostly a repeat of the background information and the minimal data gathered, and an oft-repeated appeal for stakeholders to supply data. Pages 290 to 366 consists of name lists, attendance registers and pages of very limited notes which only show that someone actually attended a meeting. This, in itself, is full of errors.

The objectives as stated in this coastal access report are:
*to delineate what coastal access sites exist: **there are very limited maps with tables of audits, mostly showing nil returns**
*the conditions of these sites: **an exceptionally inadequate audit that a casual observer could have made**
*to identify conflicts and improvements required: **the report states that issues need further investigation or should be referred to other bodies or are listed as outside of the scope of this report**
*to make recommendations: **a really brief, very general two-sentence recommendation is given.**
Obviously, a substantial amount of money has been used to gather the data and do this report. It is questionable that taxpayers' money has been wisely spent.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this exceedingly padded, very elementary report is that there is a dire need for such a study to be done and that there are no finances to do so. As a result, all issues related to coastal access and the deterioration of this critical environment are to be put on hold for the foreseeable future as are most access problems or disputes. This has and will have a great impact on the people whose livelihoods depend on access to the coast.
Michael Austin



Spider orchid