
SOUTHERN OVERBERG

Branch Of The Botanical Society Of S.A./
Tak Van Die Botaniese Vereniging Van S.A.



NEWSLETTER/NUUSBRIEF

Issue 63

0 03-394NPO

Winter 2016

THIS ISSUE

Branch News

Australian ants

What, Why of Herbaria

Snippets

Forthcoming events

Events Report Back

CONTACT DETAILS

PO Box 278, Napier, 7270

southernoverberg.botsoc@gmail.com

Chairman:

Stephen Smuts: 028 42 33 049

Vice-Chairman:

Sarah Foyle: 028 42 33 358

Secretary

Dorothy Buggs: 028 42 33 128

Treasurer:

Vacant

Additional members:

Lyn Hawkins: 028 42 33 672

Louise Hislop: 028 42 33 512

Christna Steyn : 082 711 4933

Marion Naude : 028 42 33 434

Branch News

Following the AGM, we welcome aboard a new committee member, Marion Naude, a retired farmer and conservationist who is keen on being involved in the alien clearing initiatives that we get involved in. It's great to get new blood on board. Marion we wish you a long, happy and productive stay on our committee.

Much as we welcome Marion, we are sad that the energetic Kathy Hardy has decided that she wants to make a contribution in other areas. Our committee certainly will feel her loss. She always brought great ideas and suggestions and now, even though off the committee, has offered to help our branch wherever and whenever we need her help. Thanks Kathy. We will miss you at our meetings.

Please remember that the committee consists of just a few of us, members like you or I. If you can or want to volunteer help in organising an event, the committee would be most grateful.

Check us out on Facebook :

<https://www.facebook.com/botsocsouthernoverberg>

The Cape Argus recently carried news under the headline

‘Invasive Australian ant settles in SA’.

Most of us will be well aware of the Argentinian ants found in most of our homes carrying off the sugar or something sweet that been left out. They are not however confined to our homes. These little pests also make colonies in the fynbos. The problem is that many, many fynbos plants rely on ants for their survival. Our indigenous ants carry fynbos seeds down underground where they are safe from birds, mice and fire. Underground, our indigenous ants strip way and eat the seed coating leaving the seeds themselves unharmed and able to sprout when the time is right. The Argentinian ants however eat the seed covering but do so on the surface leaving the seeds exposed to being eaten or burnt.

The Australian Copper-bellied ants (*Ochetellus glaber*) were recently spotted by Botsoccer, Peter Slingsby of map making fame in pot-plants he had purchased. They are apparently much smaller than the Argentinian ants otherwise look similar. This is the first that they have been recorded in Africa although they have already spread around the world into mild climates. We can but hope that they don't become as big a pest as the ants from Argentina. The newspaper article records that both species are very antagonistic toward each other and attack on contact.

This observation made me wonder. In the last few years I have not seen any ants in our house. One so often saw the lines of ants making their way from here to goodness knows where but seldom if ever these days. I wonder why.

The What, Why and Where of Herbaria

A year or two ago, I had the privilege of having the doyen of ericas, Ted Oliver give me a conducted tour of the Herbarium at SANBI, at Kirstenbosch. So what is an herbarium? Wikipedia defines an herbarium (plural : herbaria) as a collection of preserved plant specimens and associated data used for scientific study. It can also refer to the building or room where the specimens are housed or to the scientific institute that not only stores but uses them for research.



Ted Oliver in conversation with John Manning at the SANBI Herbarium at Kirstenbosch

The first thing that you are aware of when you visit is that all plant material must be treated before entry to ensure that no harmful bugs or diseases etc. can get in to feed off the specimens. Secondly, inside you don't see lots and lots of dried plants but a massive

collection of white cupboards with sliding doors and drawers. If you have been out with a CREW group, you will be familiar with the plant presses in which they place plant specimens that require further examination and identification. These specimens in these drawers are laid out on sheets of special paper recording when and where the specimen was collected. Chances are that a sample already exists at the herbarium against which the new specimen will be compared. There will be a record of where the original was collected to compare to where the new specimen was collected? Are there differences? Is this a type variation or subspecies? Perhaps a range extension? Perhaps it's a new species if there is nothing similar in the herbarium. If identical to the type specimen in the drawer, the identification of the new specimen can be confirmed.

You can imagine with our approximately 9,000 species and any number of sub-species in the Cape Floral Kingdom alone, that being organised is absolutely vital. Filing is based on plant names and classification not forgetting that plant names change so one really does have to be organised. When sadly a plant species becomes extinct, an herbarium may be the only place one can prove it ever existed.

The largest herbarium is Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. There is also an excellent herbarium attached to Stellenbosch University.

Snippets

In the spring and early summer of last year, following a fire on our Napier Mountain in April 2015, there was great excitement about seeing many orchid species in bloom. These species are totally fire dependent so will not flower in that area until the next fire which may only be in 10 -20 year's time. Exciting? Yes but did you know that: ?

Orchids make up 8 – 10 % of all plants.

They grow everywhere but deserts and ice fields

Vanilla is an orchid (*Vanilla planifolia*). It is a creeper that can grow to 35 metres producing the vanilla pods

The *Orchis* genus has a tuber shaped like a pair of testicles from which orchids derive their name. Orchis is the Latin for testicle.



Forthcoming Events

Barefoot in the (National) Park

Where : **Red Windmill**

When : **29 June 2016**

Time : **18h00**

Charge : Members = R 75.00

Non- members = R 100.00

Includes light meal

Giel du Toit, well known to many of us who attend BotSoc functions in the Agulhas National Park and know him as being almost always barefoot, will entertain us with the recalling of interesting escapes and escapades in his years in conservation.

Note venue is not licenced so bring your own tippie.

Book with Louise or Lyn. Seats limited.

Please keep an eye on your e-mail and the Southern Overberg BotSoc Facebook page for outings and talks that we sometimes arrange at short notice

Events Report Back

2016 AGM

Our 2016 AGM was again well attended. Members seem to enjoy the Flower Valley venue. The Chairman was able to report that the branch had again enjoyed a good year of fun, outings, talks and friendship. The financial report prepared by Head Office confirmed too that the branch finances are on a sound footing.

It was gratifying to have Alliston Appel from the Agulhas National Park attend. There was some discussion of what we can do for them and what they can do for us. Marion Naude showed great interest and on that basis took on the responsibility of liaising with them. We were delighted too that Marion accepted being elected to the committee.

At the conclusion of the meeting Christa Steyn and Sharon Brink gave talks on the value to the society of Facebook and Tweets. Both made it clear that if we want to engage with the youth, we have to adopt this form of communication. The meeting finished with drinks and snacks.

Please remember that attendance at any of our functions/outings are at your own risk and neither the Botanical Society nor this Branch can be held responsible for any injury or loss that may occur.

CONTRIBUTIONS

We would like to make this newsletter interesting as well as informative and would appreciate hearing from you. Possibly you have an interesting story to share with the other members? Remember that it does not have to be very long or strictly botanical. We also require articles in Afrikaans.

Please send your contributions to:

Correspondent, Box 278, Napier, 7270

or email them to: southernoverberg.botsoc@gmail.com