

---

# SOUTHERN OVERBERG

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



## NEWSLETTER/NUUSBRIEF

Issue 61

0 03-394NPO

Spring 2015

---

### Branch News

#### 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

Kathy Hardy: 028 42 33 761

Christna Steyn : 082 711 4933

Perhaps it's a good thing that there is not much to report from a branch point of view. The committee still meet regularly to plan events and make them happen. We were not represented at the Botanical Society workshop and AGM held this year in Port Elizabeth. We did however make the submission raised at our own AGM about the fee structure and how important it is that high fees are not a barrier to joining. We also raised the point about the magazine needing to have greater popular appeal so non-members of the BotSoc would consider buying it. For example, the Birdlife magazine is certainly available in a large number of retail outlets. Our submission is that perhaps there should be a membership fee plus a subscription fee for the excellent Veld & Flora. It is a fact that many members join for the benefit of free entry to our botanical gardens for their beauty and tranquillity rather than because all members are keen

gardeners or botanists. As a result, it's acknowledged that while many Veld & Flora are distributed, not all are read.

Check us out on Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/botsocsouthernoverberg>

### Fascinating Fynbos discovery

Thanks to Melanie Gosling, Cape Times Environmental Writer

A tremendous amount of research has been done on the fynbos and continues to be done. Just when we think that we have pretty much discovered all there is to know some amazing discovery is made. Only about 30 years ago did research show why fire in the fynbos is so vital to the lifecycle of this veld. Another fascinating discovery was the role that our indigenous ants play - they take seed underground so it is protected from birds and mice and fire itself. (The ants take the seeds underground in order to eat off the fruit covering the seed.)

After fire, these protected seeds germinate. Clever system! Now UCT scientists have discovered another role player in taking seed underground. They have discovered that certain species of fynbos plants have seed that smells just like the droppings of antelope i.e. dung. So who gets fooled? None other than dung beetles who do what dung beetles do.



They take the smelly seeds underground thinking its dung where the seed, as in the case of ants, is stored safely away.

This rare example of plants using deception was discovered by Jeremy Midgley from UCT's Department of Biological Sciences and the results have been published this month. This burying of seed by dung beetles was not even suspected until a dung beetle marched up to a seed that the researchers were watching and simply rolled it away and pulled it down from underneath into the soil. If real dung, it would be soft and the beetle would lay its eggs in a dung ball but it would soon realise that it had been tricked by the seeds when it found the seeds too hard to penetrate to lay its eggs. Tests on the seeds have revealed that the chemical compounds given off by the seeds are similar to those emitted by eland and bontebok dung.

**From an article published in the Cape Times Tuesday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

## **Back from the Dead after 2,000 years**

In the excavations of Masada in Israel between 1963 and 1965, a few seeds of a date palm were discovered in an ancient jar on the battlements. The seeds were then put into storage and nothing further was done for 40 years until an expert in rare and ancient seeds wanted to see if any of the seeds would grow. It was known that some lotus seeds over 1,000 years old had been germinated so it was decided to try. 3 seeds were offered and treated to encourage germination. The seeds were planted on 25<sup>th</sup> January, on the Jewish Festival of Trees in 2005. One grew which proved to be a male. The seed had been dated as 2,000 years old, give or take 50 years so may well have been placed in the jar during the siege of Masada in 73 AD. The growing of this seed makes it the oldest seed ever known to produce a viable young tree – now 10 years old.



This is a variety that became extinct about 1,000 years ago although back when the Romans invaded Judea, they grew in thick forests. The pollen from this tree will be used to crossbreed with its closest relative date species from Egypt – the Hayany although it's DNA differs by 19%. The first dates of this breeding should be ready in 2022. A possible reason for the decline and disappearance of these forests and ultimate extinction is climate change.

The Judean date is chronicled in the Bible, Quran and ancient literature for its diverse powers from aphrodisiac to a contraceptive ... and as a cure for a wide range of diseases including cancer, malaria and toothache. The Arabs say there are as many uses for the date

palm as there are days in the year. The Judean date is also recorded as being unusually sweet and juicy.

**From sources on the Internet**

## **Forthcoming Events**

Although we plan outings and talks long term, opportunities do arise for spontaneous outings. We will advise members of these by e-mail or SMS so ensure that you have given our secretary your contact details.

**Please diarise the following activities that we are planning for this year:**

We are planning to visit the Harold Porter Gardens at Betty's Bay; also visits to the Caledon Wildflower Garden, De Hoop and De Mond  
Watch this space and our Facebook page for more details.

## *Events Report Back*

### **Cape Floral Expo**

The third annual Cape Floral Kingdom Expo held at the end of August was another success. Committee member Christna Steyn manned a small branch stand all 4 days of the show, taking the opportunity to promote membership and interest in our Southern Overberg flora. Our Chairman, again led conducted walks on the mountain above Napier. These 'walk 'n talks', a regular feature of the expo, introduce those interested to the wonders of the local fynbos.

### **Napier Commonage Outing**

We also have semi-spontaneous outings. One such was the exploration of the Renosterveld patch outside Napier in mid-August. All who took part came away amazed that the patch which from a distance looks so dull is in fact full of botanical interest. With Cameron McMaster to guide us, at least 20 different plant species were identified.



## Outing to De Mond - 15 /9/15

Although the weather did not look promising, it was decided to go ahead with the planned visit to the De Mond Nature Reserve (between Arniston and Struisbaai). As a bonus, we invited a lady from Napier, Leona Davids, to join us. She grew up on the adjoining farm, Vogelgesang. She shared with us her recollections from her childhood of using the local plants for both food and medicine. To prove her point, she had collected specimens and discussed the properties of each. She had even made bread infused with a local herb and also a jam. All who tasted the loaf, agreed it was delicious. As there was, by now a bit of sun, we took a walk through the unspoilt veld that was ablaze with many species of flower, of every colour and shape including orchids. Everyone at the well-attended outing agreed this was a particularly enjoyable morning that should be repeated. Thanks to the Kilpin family and CapeNature for making the day possible.



### 15 October: CREW group to Heidehof Farm,

Two of our Southern Overberg CREW group, Ronel Visser and Christna Steyn joined 5 CREW members from Cape Town to investigate the recovery of the farm Heidehof near Gansbaai. It burnt on 4<sup>th</sup> March this year. Ronel reports that it was sheer magic seeing the recovery; the resprouters and protea seedlings, the flowering bulbs and wildflowers. The damper flats in particular were a feast of flowers. Truly a day to remember! Our thanks go to the Schwegler family who own Heidehof who made the day possible.



On 20<sup>th</sup> October, a group of BotSocers went up into the **Napier Mountain** to look for orchids in the patches that were burnt this year in late summer. This too was a great success and much enjoyed by all who participated. Some most interesting orchids were found, particularly in the wet areas. Thanks this time to the members of the Napier Mountain Conservancy for permission to explore these fascinating areas. No doubt that there will be lots more exciting observations in these burnt areas this summer. Watch this space!



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.