

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:

Cape Floral Kingdom Expo

The Expo is being held again this year, from 27th August to 30th. BotSoc and our branch will again be involved. We are also planning a talk on: Veldkos/Indigenous medicinal plants by local Ona Davids who grew up in the area.

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.

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.

Events Report Back

CREW Workshop

Committee members Stephen Smuts and Dorothy Buggs attended this year's CREW workshop held at the Mizpah Youth Camp in the mountains near Grabouw from Friday 27th to Sunday, 29th March.

This is a wonderful opportunity to listen to report-backs from all the CREW groups from all over South Africa where CREW is active. It is so encouraging to hear so many CREW groups are discovering or rediscovering some of our highly endangered species so that active steps can be taken to safeguard these treasures for future generations. In the mornings there were talks given by a variety of experts and in the two afternoons, hikes were arranged through the fynbos lead by experts. We thank Rhoda McMaster for delivering part of the report-back on the Southern Overberg CREW group where one of our highlights was the establishment of the Haarwegskloof Renosterveld Research Centre. Thanks too to the organisers. This workshop was definitely worth attending.

There were also two successful outings.

Firstly, one was once again to the Agulhas National Park where we had the opportunity to explore the salt pans at Brandfontein on Earth Day. Since the beginning of winter the salt pan has filled and access is now difficult.

There was also a well-supported outing arranged to Flower Valley on 18th May, very much enjoyed by all despite a bit of rain. Thanks Flower Valley for your hospitality and making us so welcome. We'll come again.



SOUTHERN OVERBERG

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

NEWSLETTER/NUUSBRIEF

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Branch News

The 30th March seems a long time ago but it is when we held our well attended 2015 AGM in the premises of Flower Valley in Bredasdorp. This change of venue proved a great success even if we found ourselves rather squashed. Somehow it created an intimacy. After the election of office bearers, which included the addition to the committee of Christna Steyn from Suiderstrand, there was lively debate on issues such as the cost of membership and ways that we should try to broaden our membership base. The meeting charged the committee with taking ideas forward to Head Office particularly as the cost of membership puts membership out of reach of a great many.

We were particularly pleased to welcome Christna on board as she brings computer skills such as Facebook plus she is fully bilingual - English and Afrikaans. She is also a keen amateur botanist. These attributes will be invaluable as we try to reach out to a broader audience. Welcome Christna.

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



Know your 'weeds'

The common definition of a weed is a plant that grows where you don't want it. When we weed the garden, the weeds are often grasses. The invasive species such as Rooikrans and Port Jackson are often referred to as 'invasive weeds'. But there is a plant that is called 'Weed', 'Boom' 'dagga' in South Africa otherwise known as 'pot' Marijuana, Mary Jane, hemp, Cannabis and a myriad of other names throughout the world. And this weed has been around humans for thousands of years. Seeds have been found in graves dating back to at least 3000 BC.

In South Africa, cannabis was not illegal until the 1920s and in fact was prominently advertised as the main ingredient in many over the counter remedies. It was only when it became a recreational herb was it made illegal. It is still illegal in most countries which meant that scientific studies could not be legally conducted as you were not allowed to possess it. In several countries it has recently been decriminalised and in the USA, certain states have made it available for medical use.

So does it have medical use? It certainly seems to have. A wide variety. There are 2 main components to 'weed' – THC is the mind altering essence (tetrahydrocannabinol), the other is CBD oil – cannabidiol which has no psychoactive effects but is being used most effectively to treat a range of conditions from seizures, Parkinsons, asthma and even cancer. In parliament last year, MP Mario Oriani Ambrosini submitted a bill for the legalization of research and the administration of cannabis based medicine to South African patients.

Big pharmacy companies may oppose legalisation as 'dagga' is a natural herb and they are not in that market. Also, depending on the strain, the levels of THC or CBD are higher or lower. Some strains have almost no THC content. Its value then is as a strong fibre which can be used for textiles and even low flammability building material. Watch this space.

Snippets

Did you know?

The Cape Floral Kingdom

The Cape Floral Kingdom, also called the Cape Floristic Region, is the smallest of all the 6 Floral Kingdoms of the world. It is the only one to fall completely inside the borders of a single country.

It occupies about 90,000 square kilometres – that's only 0.04% of the land surface area of the Earth – yet it contains nearly 9,000 species of flowering plants – that's about 3% of all Earth's species. Furthermore, two out of three species in the CFR are endemic, which means they occur nowhere else on Earth. This is the highest level of endemism in the world.

What is a Floral kingdom?

Floral Kingdoms are the largest natural units that can be determined for flowering plants. Regions that share the same combination of plant families form part of the same Floral Kingdom. By contrast to the CFR, the largest Floral Kingdom is the Holartic which covers most of the northern hemisphere and covers 40% of the land surface of the earth.

Fire in the Fynbos

The fynbos must burn. Much as it is sad to see an area of fynbos burn with flames killing all in its path – plants, small creatures such as tortoises and insects, this is a necessary process for renewal. From the blackened landscape, the first to react are bulbs, some even flowering within a week or two of the fire such as the flame red *cyrthanthus ventricosus*. The best fires will be in late summer or autumn before the winter rains set in. By mid-winter there is a green cast to the blackened soil and by early spring the really exciting time begins. Over the next few months, bulbs that have not flowered since the last fire which may be 10 -20 or more years ago - grab their opportunity.

Good news for conservationists in the Southern Overberg is that the Overberg Emergency Services who do such a great job in fighting the wild fires that sweep across our mountains in summer are increasingly supporting the burning of block burns, despite the risks. Although a block burn or controlled burn may get out of hand, the chances of bringing it back under control are good because emergency plans will have been prepared and be in place. Once an area has been burnt, it becomes a wonderful firebreak for at least the next 4 or 5 years.

This spring, areas burnt in the 2015 autumn will be much visited by botanist and enthusiasts hoping to see some of the fire ephemerals – those plants last seen many years ago or perhaps never before. Also, shortly after the fire, if you walk through the burnt veld, you will be struck by how much seed has been released by the dead proteas in particular. What's fascinating is that only about 10% of their seed is viable. The plants produce so much as an insurance against mice and birds which eat the seed. The viable seed therefore has a better chance of survival to germination.

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

