Spring 2011

BotSoc/CANSA Tea Party in the Avenue
Sunday 11 September 10.30 for 11.00 am

Please help us to make this year's Tea Party in the Avenue an event to remember. Tables are still available and we encourage you to book more than one. Why not invite friends and family to a great get together in the Plane Avenue? With the usual mix of fun prizes for fabulous themes, we hope that the spring date will encourage a whole new selection of table decor and fancy hats.

There should also be a wonderful choice of indigenous flowers, so who knows – you could walk away with the prize for most creative use of indigenous flowers.

See the Events page of this newsletter for contact and ticket sales details.
Report back: AGM & ‘Botanising Galapagos’ talk

The AGM of the Botanical Society KZN Inland Branch was held on June 4th in the Clivia Room at the KZN Botanic Gardens and was attended by about 35 members. For the second year running the report-backs were presented in Powerpoint format, which seems popular. The report-back by the KZN-NBG Curator, Allen Nene, and the report by KZN-CREW Manager, Isabel Johnson, were both informative and enjoyed by all. It is great to see so many positive things happening, both in the Gardens and by the Custodians for Rare & Endangered Wildflowers.

Christina Curry

The AGM was followed by a much-anticipated talk by David Johnson on the Galapagos Islands, which he has visited several times. These islands are well known for their unusual origin and their vast number of endemic species. And, of course, they have gained fame from the fact that Darwin’s many observations of speciation on the islands contributed to his theory of evolution by natural selection.

Beginning with a very understandable explanation of the complex geological history and climatic patterns of the islands, David kept us entertained with his fantastic photos of the islands and his humorous accounts of the strange behaviour of the many varied creatures which inhabit them. I was especially interested in seeing the daisy trees (Scalesia spp.), the ‘Darwins finches’ of the plant world, which show adaptive radiation patterns similar to the finches.

David is always an excellent speaker, and he certainly lived up to his reputation with this talk. The Galapagos have joined my ‘bucket list’ of wish destinations.

After the talk we proceeded to the restaurant for a light supper of Penny Hattingh’s delicious soups and a dessert – a great ending to the afternoon. We will really miss Penny’s catering.

Isabel Johnson

Our KZN Inland branch committee were all re-elected at the AGM.

Committee composition:

Dr Christina Curry (Potgieter) – Chair
Dr Jason Londt – Vice-Chair
Mrs Judy Harrison – Secretary
Mrs Mary Thrash – Treasurer
Mr Leigh Harrison – General
Mrs Alison Young – General
Mrs Isabel Johnson – CREW representative
Mr Allen Nene – SANBI representative
Mrs Celma Croudace – Demonstration Garden (co-opted representative)

We look forward to another successful year for our branch, the Gardens and our members. Please support our activities as much as possible.
Report back: Demo Garden: Bulb Talk @ Aloe Festival

This was my first visit to the Aloe Festival in Ashburton, organised by the Lower Mpumulanga Conservancy, but it will certainly not be my last. The 2nd of July date was perhaps a bit early for most aloes in the veld to be in bloom, but it was a beautiful weekend which ensured bumper attendance at the Festival.

Our branch was fortunate to host a BotSoc/Demo Garden talk in the Saturday morning slot at Rocky Wonder Aloe Nursery. It attracted about 50 people and gave our branch and the Society exposure to new folk, which is always welcome. We asked Calvin Becker, a young bulb enthusiast, to give us a talk and demonstration on the popular topic of how to grow bulbs. Calvin is studying towards his Honours in Plant Pathology, but has had an interest in growing bulbs for a number of years. As with many keen growers, Calvin found it easiest to show us how to do things, but that is exactly what Demonstration Garden is about. Everyone loved hearing all his helpful tips and hints and the questions kept pouring in until, after an hour, we decided to give him a break!

We thank Calvin for the effort he put into his talk and for all the interesting bulbous plants that he brought with him to show us. Thanks are also due to Alison Young and the UKZN Botanical Garden for making plant material available for the demonstration. Alison gave a talk in the Sunday session which was also well attended. Pandora Long and the Conservancy kindly agreed to give BotSoc members discounted entry to the talk, and they arranged the lovely venue – surely the most amazing Aloe nursery and a succulent collector’s dream.

After the talk my husband and I stopped at the Tea garden venue and Top Rock Geological Museum, which was another surprise: A wonderful collection of rock, gems, archaeological and geological artefacts with interesting signage and an even more interesting owner. The venue is open on weekends and is certainly worth the drive out to Ashburton. An added bonus was a gorgeous, large *Schotia brachypetala*, Weeping Boerbean, bursting with deep-red buds, at the entrance to the property. I wish I had managed to go back there a few weeks later to see it all in flower.

Christina Curry

Thanks & Go well, to Penny Hattingh

After many years of running The Strelitzia Room Restaurant in the Gardens, we’ve had to say goodbye to Penny Hattingh who has moved on to concentrate on her guest house, Heritage House, as well as starting a new restaurant on those premises, called Traffords. Traffords will open from later this year and will serve lunch on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday; and dinner on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

If you want to get onto Penny’s mailing list, e-mail her: info@strelitziaroom.co.za or phone 083-2250238. She is still available for function catering as well.

Our BotSoc branch will miss Penny and her catering at the Gardens and thank her for all the wonderful meals and teas over the years. We wish her well in this new venture.
News from the KZN National Botanical Garden

- On Saturday 1st of October the garden will be hosting Maritzburg Day Music Festival: The Parlotones band, Plush, Jeremy Loops and many more will be performing.
- On the 15th of October we have a Bridal Exhibition Show in the garden from 11:00 to 14:00; the garden is mainly marketing its facilities.
- The braai area for the public will be opening in the middle of September.
- The Garden will be exhibiting at the Sunday Times Garden & Leisure Show from the 30th of September to 02 October at the Royal Agricultural Show Grounds.
- **As from the 4th of October 2011, Pensioners will get free access to the garden every Tuesday. This is another way of thanking our loyal supporters who are now pensioners, especially those who have been supporting us for decades.**
- The Butterfly book will be on special next month - R100 a copy to anybody (BotSoc/non-BotSoc members)
- We had a successful Locknville Concert on the 28th of August 2011; more than 5500 people came to support it.
- Our main target for this year in terms of visitor numbers is 100 000 and R1m in garden own income; with your support I believe we can achieve this goal. Thank you.

*Allen Nene & Thandeka Zondi*

**KZN NBG Weather Records May, June & July 2011**
(Average rainfall for month in brackets)

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Scenes from the successful Locknville concert held on 28 August at the KZN-NBG.
*Photos: A. Nene*
Events Calendar: September – November 2011
KZN Inland (Pietermaritzburg) Branch

Please feel free to invite friends and family along to our outings. All Botanical Society events are attended at your own risk. Confirm details of outing in case of changes.

Sunday 11 September  Tea Party in the Avenue  10.30 for 11.00 am

The 4th annual BotSoc/CANSA Tea Party in the Avenue promises to be the best one yet. Tickets are on sale at the office of the KZN National Botanical Garden or the Cancer Association Office in Killarney terrace. Or contact Christina directly on botsockzninland@gmail.com or 082-0622939 to arrange for payment and ticket pick-up. Tickets cost R40; children under 6 get free Garden entry and need not pay for the Tea if they do not take up a seat at a table. Why not bring a picnic blanket for the kids?

Sunday 18 September  DVD: The Eden Project (Part 1)  3.00 pm

The planned August screening of the first DVDs fell on a cold, miserable day with few people arriving, so it was decided to postpone the screening, and to only watch one DVD at a time. We will screen the first part of a fascinating set of four DVDs on the Eden Project (situated in Cornwall, UK), on 18 September.
Venue: Clivia Room, KZN-NBG.
Contact Christina with queries: botsockzninland@gmail.com or 082-0622939.

Sunday 2 October  Walk at Broadleaze farm, Pmb  9.00 am

This farm is situated as close as you can get to an urban area, near Jesmond Dene nursery at the top end of Hesketh Drive. We hope to see spring flowers in the grassland (which had a winter burn), but there are also many tree and shrub species to see and ID, and the views towards Ashburton are amazing. It promises to be a wonderful outing, with the added advantage of being close to town. Bring a picnic lunch or tea to enjoy.
For directions and to RSVP, contact Alison Young on YoungA@ukzn.ac.za or 082-4065638.

Sunday 20 November  Outing to Cumberland NR  8.30 am

This is a private reserve close to Pietermaritzburg and if you have not discovered this gem yet, now is the time to. Entrance is R10 per person, which you pay as you arrive. To beat the heat we will have an early walk and break for a mid-morning tea under the Paperbark Acacias in the picnic site. Anyone keen to stay on for lunch is welcome to do so – there are braai sites and we will arrange for wood etc. With a range of walks, from easy to more strenuous, and lots to see in the picnic area, this outing is suitable for those that prefer to be more sedentary as well.
For directions and to RSVP, contact Christina Curry on botsockzninland@gmail.com or 082-0622939.

Advance notice: Friday 2 December  Biodiversity Quiz night

Diarise this date for our Year-end Quiz at the KZN-NBG, with Dr David Johnson.
CREW have been asked to give these six young members of the local community botanical training in plant identification and surveillance, so that they can contribute to the understanding and conservation of the plant biodiversity of this potential stewardship site in the Drakensberg, near Creighton. So far we have been out with them three times, in the grassland, the forest, and this week they assisted with mapping of the local cycad community. We have monthly visits planned for the rest of the season. The project has had support from the Underberg CREW group, as well as the A-team, especially Sally Johnson and Christina Curry, who had input into the planning and will hopefully come to some of the field visits.

In the last few weeks we have also had two visits to Zululand with the Zululand Tree Society, who are very keen to become involved with CREW. At the beginning of July we visited the False Bay sand forest at St Lucia, home to *Warburgia salutaris* (EN), and *Newtonia hildebrandtii* (Declining). Many of the latter are old trees and there are no signs of seedlings, which is a concern. In August we visited Usutu Gorge, a community owned Stewardship site on the western boundary of Ndumo Game Reserve. The property has a fantastic diversity of trees, and we listed an impressive total of 113 species in a morning. We are planning a return visit in January, when more plants will be in flower.

A fantastic achievement of the Threatened Species Programme in this last month has been the development of the website for the Red List of SA’s threatened plants. The site is really great (thanks to Lize von Staden) and has information on all of our plant species, and pics and maps of many. The site is interactive and your comments are welcome. Visit it at: http://redlist.sanbi.org

*Isabel Johnson & Suvarna Parbhoo, CREW KZN Team*
The Budding Botanists

The focus is on trees this month, with Arbor Week, Trees of the Year and the wonderful display of new leaves decorating so many of our trees. Arbor Week encourages us to plant trees, especially those chosen as Trees of the Year, and this time round they are *Pappea capensis*, *Nuxia congesta* and the genus *Pavetta*.

When the idea of a tree of the year was first mooted, only one was chosen; then there were two, a more common one and a more rare one. Now, for some reason, there are three, with the third this time being an entire genus of the mostly shrubby *Pavetta*.

Let's start with the common one. *Pappea capensis*, the Jacket-plum or Doppruim, is a densely branched tree occurring naturally in the warmer areas of bushveld and wooded grassland. Nothing to be learned from the generic name as the tree is named for a man called Carl W.A. Pappe who was the first Colonial botanist and professor of botany at the South African College (which later became the University of Cape Town). He established the South African Museum Herbarium, which is now part of the Compton herbarium at Kirstenbosch.

The specific name *capensis*, simply means that this tree was first identified in the Cape region. Both the English and Afrikaans names refer to the fruit, gloriously red and jelly-like, held in a velvety brown capsule - the 'jacket'. The flowers are tiny and insignificant, and the bad news is that the sexes are on separate trees. This means that if you are thinking of planting this tree with a view to feeding the birds, or making delicious jams and jellies, you have only a 50% chance of choosing a girl. If only there was some reliable method of sexing a young tree!

Some books claim that this is a frost-resistant tree, but I have yet to find one growing naturally in a frosty area, so my advice would be to plant it only if you live in a warm or at least sheltered area. Another personal observation is that fruiting is very erratic; one year a bumper crop and then years will go by with practically nothing. But when you do come across a fruiting tree, feast on it, as this fruit is mouth-wateringly good.
The Budding Botanists continued...

Now for the lesser known tree, *Nuxia congesta*, Brittlewood Nuxia, Wild-elder or Wildevlier. The genus is named after M. de la Nux, a French botanist, while the specific name, *congesta*, refers to the closely packed flowers. In the wild this tree is found in scattered localities, both coastal and in the mistbelt. I do not personally know this tree, but reading about it in the various tree books available, it seems to be very variable in most respects. The small, white and fragrant flowers would certainly attract insects and it follows that little warblers and other insectivores would like it too. This is certainly a tree for the more adventurous among you to plant in your gardens and who knows – it might prove a winner!

The third subject is the genus *Pavetta*. This genus holds the more than 20 varieties of Brides-bush or Bruidsbos, a very apt name describing the wonderful clusters of white flowers with both stigmas and stamens protruding from the corolla tube, giving a pincushion effect. All members of this genus have bacterial nodules in the leaves and these appear as black lines or dots when held up to the sunlight (it has to be sunlight, the light of even the brightest of household lamps is not strong enough). *Pavetta lanceolata* is the most well known species and the one easiest to find in a nursery. Called the Weeping Brides-bush, it makes a delightful small evergreen tree or shrub, covered in gorgeous white flowers around Christmas time.

Love from Sally

2011 is the International Year of Forests.

Find out more at: