

Succulent Karoo Update

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In the March issue of Veld and Flora we introduced the Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Plan (SKEP). This project is funded by Conservation International, which has identified the Succulent Karoo biome as a global biodiversity hotspot. It aims to identify priorities for conservation action in the Succulent Karoo biome.

The Succulent Karoo biome does not exist in isolation, so we made the planning domain for the SKEP project broader than just the biome itself. This means that the SKEP planning domain captures outliers of Succulent Karoo vegetation, and also transition zones between Succulent Karoo and other vegetation types. Transition zones are especially important for understanding the impact of ecological processes such as climate change.

As the map shows, the SKEP planning domain covers a wide area – with different land use patterns and different socio-economic issues in different parts of the region, as well as different vegetation patterns and types. To deal with these differences, we divided the SKEP planning domain into four sub-regions, also shown on the map:

- Namibia-Gariep
- Namaqualand
- Hantam-Tanqua-Roggeveld
- Southern Karoo

While the role of experts and scientists is clearly essential, we felt it was important to make SKEP a more inclusive process. To facilitate this, we identified people in each of the SKEP sub-regions to act as “champions” for the project. The SKEP champions are people who work in existing organisations in the SKEP sub-regions, such as state conservation agencies or development NGOs. Some champions have expertise and experience predominantly in biodiversity and conservation; others in the socio-political arena. Each champion has a full-time assistant, funded by Conservation International.

The champions have played a vital role in informing people in their sub-regions about SKEP, and running workshops to gather information to input into the conservation planning process – for example information about agricultural activities, the state of grazed land, mining, tourism and communal areas. Alongside this information gathering process, the Biodiversity Component of SKEP has been gathering information on vegetation types and species distribution throughout the biome.

Towards the end of June, we will hold a broad workshop in Cape Town to review the information gathered, and to set conservation targets for the Succulent Karoo biome. Each sub-region will then hold a two-day action-planning workshop, to review the conservation priorities in the sub-region and identify projects to take forward conservation action. **If you would like to be involved in the workshop in your sub-region, please contact the relevant champion.** People from all sectors are welcome, including agriculture, mining, tourism and conservation.

Contact details for SKEP sub-regional champions

Namibia-Gariep

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Namaqualand

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Hantam-Tanqua-Roggeveld

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Southern Karoo

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If you have difficulty getting hold of any of these people, please contact:

- Mandy Driver, the SKEP Biodiversity Component Co-ordinator (021-799 8700 or driver@nbict.nbi.ac.za)
- or Daphne Hartney, the SKEP Socio-Political Component Co-ordinator (021-448 3778 or daphne@ecoafrika.co.za)

Pics:

- MAP OF PLANNING DOMAIN SHOWING SUB-REGIONS
- pics from workshops (I have K'hoop and K'kroon?)
- examples of mapping exercise? Ask glynnis
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