



# Newsletter

[www.diamondroute.co.za](http://www.diamondroute.co.za)

Above: Tswalu lies at the foot of the Korannaberg Mountains in the Northern Cape Province – the largest privately owned nature reserve in the RSA

June 2011

## *Tswalu Foundation encourages visitor participation on many levels...*



The Tswalu Foundation was created as a result of the forward thinking and love of the Kalahari by Jonathan Oppenheimer in 2008. His founding vision for the Foundation was to develop a platform on which local and international visitors could contribute and involve themselves in community and environmental research on Tswalu Kalahari – either to an existing project or to suggest and fund specific projects in areas of particular interest to the funder. The Kalahari system is a unique, vast and understudied area, thus this Foundation assists in developing research programs and protocols and therefore assists in the development of a better understanding of its unique fauna and flora in a direct, hands-on manner. The Foundation is fundamental in not only developing a greater appreciation for the beauty of the Kalahari and its abundant wildlife, but also provides encouragement and support to gain knowledge to better manage this unique part of Africa.

Tswalu Kalahari is driven by a strong conservation and community development ethic, and whilst the

Oppenheimer family have sanctioned numerous projects, the Foundation affords more researchers to study in the Southern Kalahari. Experience over the years has taught us that the longevity of the project is determined by the interactive nature of the project. We encourage researchers to share their concepts and progress with our guests – who, if inspired by the work, will continue to contribute to funding the project through the Foundation. Essentially, it becomes a self-funding campaign through guest contributions.

Each project is obliged to provide some form of research material to be displayed at the main lodge, and the staff will undergo an induction into the reasons and objectives of the research. In this way, they are fully equipped to share information and to create interest on behalf of the researcher – who in turn is given ample opportunity to present the project to the guests at Tswalu Kalahari.

For further information, email Duncan MacFadyen: [Duncan.macfadyen@eoon.co.za](mailto:Duncan.macfadyen@eoon.co.za)



Above: Benfontein is located in a transitional zone where the dry Karoo, grassland and Kalahari thornveld savannah meet

## *Benfontein vegetable garden builds self-sustainability*

Built only last year, Benfontein's veggie garden is fast helping the reserve become self sustainable with the harvesting of a rich bounty of healthy vegetables.

"We had our first crops of butternuts, carrots, cabbage, spinach, tomatoes, watermelon and green beans at the end of March," says assistant manager Finley Markham, adding that they are currently planting seeds for a winter crop comprising beetroot, spinach, cabbage, mielies and a selection of herbs like mint, coriander and parsley.

Finley hopes to pick the winter crop within the next couple of months. "We would like to thank Sharon Stainthorpe and the De Beer's Ecology Division for providing the funds necessary to start our vegetable garden here on Benfontein."

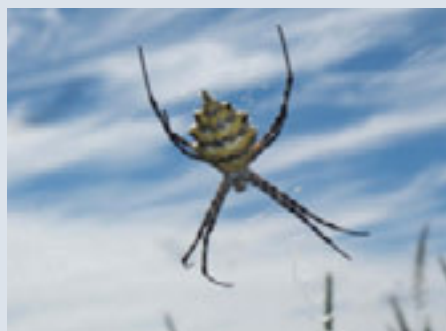
For more details email Finley Markham:  
[Finley.Markham@debeersgroup.com](mailto:Finley.Markham@debeersgroup.com)



## *Spider enthusiasts uncover web of activity at Benfontein*

Although our time was limited and only five members of the Spider Club of Southern Africa were able to drive from Gauteng to Kimberley, 15 spider families were recorded and one family, the Phyxelididae, could become a new record for the Kalahari region.

Central South Africa experienced a record summer rainfall this year and Benfontein was incredibly lush and wet. Before the sun sucked up the dew in the mornings everything was almost smothered in spider webs, both large and small, and of many different shapes and sizes. Grass, bushes, fences and trees were appropriately decorated with "diamond necklaces" of sparkling orb webs. The end of summer is prime time for those spiders with an annual life cycle and many of them reaching adulthood before the dry winter season. This year invertebrate numbers and density were exceptionally high, probably because of the very wet summer.



Large web-building spiders: Banded-legged Nephila, *Nephila senegalensis*, Common Garden Orb-Weaver *Argiope australis* and Funnel-web Nursery-web Spiders, *Euprostenops australis*, were the most obvious examples. A patch of alien cacti was almost entirely covered by webs of both *Argiope australis* and *Euprostenops australis*. We were able to point out that males of big orb-web builders are tiny in comparison to the females, but in the case of the Nursery-web spiders, which build huge non-sticky

funnel-webs, adult males and females are more or less the same size.

On Saturday 19 March, The Spider Club hosted the Kimberley branch of The Wildlife and Environmental Society of SA and took them on a Spider Walk. In the evening at the campsite Astri Leroy gave an illustrated talk on spiders whilst everyone enjoyed a bring and braai.

Thank you De Beers for your hospitality, Duncan MacFadyen, who kindly arranged for us to stay in the farmhouse and Finley Markham who went out of his way to make us feel welcome and sorted out some problems most of which we brought upon ourselves. We would be thrilled to be able to visit Benfontein again to make a more complete list of the arachnids found on this farm.

By Astri Leroy for The Spider Club of Southern Africa. May 2011.



## *Brenthurst Garden guides achieve skills training certificates*



Top (from left): Sam Mogale, Willie Tshukulu, Bruce Shange, Frenky Malange and Nhlanhla Shange.  
Bottom (from left): Vusi Ngcobo and Dr. Mkhize



Top (from left): Nhlanhla Shange, Dawid Klopper, Willie Tshukulu, Kirsty Brebner, Strilli Oppenheimer and Sam Mogale  
Bottom (from left): Dr. Mkhize, Bruce Shange, Vusi Ngcobo, Adam Pires, Frenky Malange

Seven Brenthurst Garden guides were recently presented with certificates in recognition of their achievement in completing a nature guide skills training programme.

The guides, all young men employed as gardeners at the Brenthurst Garden, were participants in a skills development programme through the Garden and with input from the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT).

This was the first custom-designed course that the EWT had presented since obtaining full accreditation as a registered training service provider through the Sector Education Training Authority (SETA).

The skills programme was aligned to the unit standard 'Conduct a guided nature experience in a limited geographical area', pitched at the National Qualifications Framework level two.

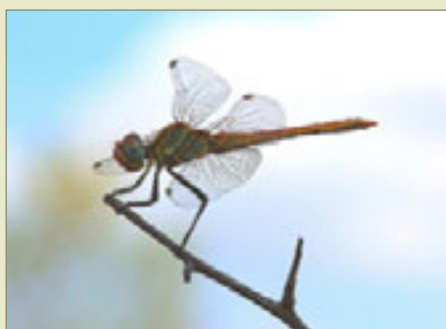
While some of the subjects presented were specific to Brenthurst Garden, the guides were also able to use the course to develop their general guiding skills.

Subjects covered included: guiding etiquette, golden rules for guiding, interpretation and communication skills, health and safety aspects of guiding, guiding in Brenthurst Garden, using field guides for interpretation; identifying prominent plants and animals, ecological

processes, sounds and signs, cultural history and orientation in the gardens.

Mrs Strilli Oppenheimer, Brenthurst Garden's custodian, handed the guides their certificates at an award ceremony held at the Garden. "This training is another step forward for each guide and forms part of a lifelong learning process," said Mrs Oppenheimer during her opening speech.

Brenthurst Garden, one of nine properties that make up the Diamond Route, encapsulates the history of the Johannesburg landscape: once open veld...now, one of the largest man-made forests in the world!



*Note: Brenthurst Garden will be closed for tours from May – September 2011*



## 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Diamond Route Research Conference announced

This is the first announcement for the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Diamond Route Research Conference to be held at De Beers Johannesburg Campus from Monday, 29 to Tuesday, 30 August 2011. Registration will take place on the Monday morning.

This conference will be hosted by De Beers Consolidated Mines, E Oppenheimer & Son and Ponahalo Holdings, the three partners in the Diamond Route.

Anyone wishing to attend the conference is requested to send an email to [diamondrouteconference@debeersgroup.com](mailto:diamondrouteconference@debeersgroup.com) for a registration form. All parties that have conducted research on any of the Diamond Route properties (Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve, Ezemvelo Nature Reserve, Rooipoort Nature Reserve, Tswalu Kalahari, Benfontein, Dronfield, Brenthurst Garden, Namaqualand and the Kimberley Big Hole) as well as other sites within the De Beers Family of Companies and E Oppenheimer & Son, are also encouraged to attend and present their respective papers at the conference.

### **The objectives of this conference are to provide a platform for researchers to:**

- Share the outcomes of the range of research projects that have taken place across the Diamond Route properties and other sites within the De Beers Family of Companies and E Oppenheimer & Son.
- Provide an opportunity for students to present their research to a wide range of researcher's and media.
- Provide a networking opportunity for the site managers and researchers working across these sites.
- Guide future research and post-graduate opportunities across the properties.

Day 1: Monday, 29 August 2011  
08:30 – 17:00

Registration  
Presentations & Poster session.  
Sponsored Conference dinner at the  
De Beers Campus

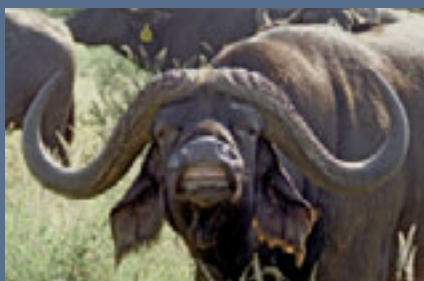
Conference fee: There will be a nominal fee of R300 for conference participants.

Deadlines: Call for Abstracts: 27 May  
Submission of Abstracts: 20 June  
Communication on Acceptance of Abstracts: 1 July  
Distribution of Conference Programme: 1 August

Day 2: Wednesday, 30 August 2011  
08:30 – 15:00

Registration  
Presentations & Poster session.  
Sponsored Conference dinner at the  
De Beers Campus

## De Beers Conservation Forever



De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited (DBCM) has always deemed sustainable environmental conservation a critical part of the management of their property portfolio, whether it entails mining or biodiversity management, which includes game ranching. The dedicated, highly skilled and dynamic team of the Ecology Division manages the latter operation.

The Ecology Division has a twist to the renowned "A Diamond Is Forever" slogan in that it drives the "De Beers Conservation Forever (DBCF)" vision. Instilled in their management structure is an ethos of sound conservation principles, which includes sustainable resources utilisation, as well as the intensive breeding of high-value game species, such as Cape buffalo, roan, sable and tsessebe. Good husbandry practices, such as the selective breeding, daily monitoring and effective nutritional

supplementation of the different herds, are all part of their success in breeding fine specimens. The semi-arid climate of the Northern Cape further ensures clean, disease and parasite-free animals.

DBCF Mofenyi, a spectacular sable bull, was recently sold at the Scholtz Bros Game Auction at Kalkdam near Douglas, Northern Cape. DBCF Juluka, one of their top buffalo bulls (pictured here), was selected to sire part of the next generation from top-quality cows. Apart from DBCF Mofenyi, breeding groups of De Beers roan, sable and tsessebe also went under the hammer. Educated buyers, recognising quality animals, bid vigorously, the result being satisfaction on all sides and the winner being wildlife in general, its conservation ultimately linked to financial value.

Valued expert nutritional, veterinary and ecological advice and assistance round off an effective and professional breeding and conservation operation. DBCM Ecology Division endeavours to improve on the high standards already set and will continue to supply the market with top-quality breeding stock, some of which will be available on the next Scholtz Bros auction, taking place on 7 September 2011.



## *Ezemvelo Nature Reserve*

### *The black-footed release project*



**Ezemvelo is now home to a pair of rare Black-footed Cat siblings. In this article Nicci Wright, senior animal manager of the FreeMe Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, tells us more about their rehabilitation.**

According to Nicci, the siblings were raised by a farmer until they became unmanageable and needed releasing. This species is Africa's smallest feline and their status is listed as vulnerable. Because of their rarity, much thought and planning was needed to prepare for their release.

Ezemvelo Nature Reserve is an excellent site for several reasons: it's close to where the two cats were found and the grassland offers perfect habitat in which the species does occur albeit not in large numbers.

"We were fortunate to have the guidance and support of Dr Alex Sliwa who is the leading authority on this species worldwide," explains Nicci.

The first stage of their rehabilitation involved cage enrichment and diet to stimulate their natural instincts. Sparking the behaviour and recognition of the species, natural prey items of dead rats, mice and birds is part of the first rehabilitation phase.

"I established a public appeal for funding to cover the costs of the enclosure and telemetry equipment and was overwhelmed with donations which have enabled us to cover all costs! A great site for the pre-release enclosure was identified at Ezemvelo and the building of the enclosure was started.

"Finally the day arrived! I took the cats through to the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria where Dr Adrian Tordiffe tranquilised each cat and took genetic samples (blood, urine, stools) to add to the species information database.

"We weighed and examined each cat thoroughly, checking teeth, ears, eyes, feet and a clean bill of health was given to each.

"At Ezemvelo, I met Maroti Tau, Elsabe Bosch and staff at the enclosure. We double-checked that the enclosure was secure, placed the box inside, opened it and waited for the cats to emerge.

"Responsible rehabilitation of wildlife includes post-release monitoring which tells us how the animal is managing, hunting, interacting etc. Two reserve staffers will be trained by Dr Sliwa in the tracking of Black-footed Cats which is quite tricky due to the distances they cover at night and their size.

"Once released, they'll be support-fed if necessary and monitored for as long as possible to ensure that our special cats are managing.

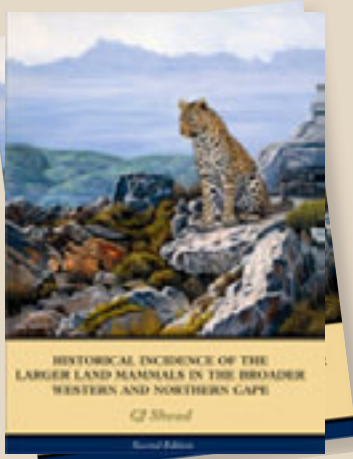
"FreeMe Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre is looking forward to successful release, on another Diamond Route Reserve. We're all very excited about this unique project involving these rare cats!

We're hoping to gain new information and glean new insights into their behaviour as well as knowledge of how well rehabilitated Black-footed Cats do when released. "Nicci Wright Senior Animal Manager FreeMe Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre.

If you wish to donate to FreeMe: Please contact Nicci wright [www.freeme.org.za](http://www.freeme.org.za)



## *New book records the historical distribution of game animals*



Early records of game animals in the Western Cape, the Northern Cape, the western part of North West Province and the South-Eastern part of the Eastern Cape, are the subject of a new, 535-page volume, written by the legendary zoologist and historian CJ Skead and published by the Centre for African Conservation Ecology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. Entitled *Historical Incidence of the Larger Land Mammals in the broader Western and Northern Cape*, the book contains a brief review of the mammal position when the first European visitors and settlers arrived at the Cape, as well

as descriptions of the nature of the veld in the area in question, based on the contents of the diaries and journals of these hardy pioneers. The main part of the book comprises a fully revised account of the known historical distribution records for a wide range of mammal species. The book is a companion to *Historical Incidence of the Larger Land Mammals in the broader Eastern Cape*, by the same author.

Both books can be ordered from the Centre for African Conservation Ecology at [ace@nmmu.ac.za](mailto:ace@nmmu.ac.za) or (tel) 041 504 2316 and (fax) 041 504 2946.

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