



THE DIAMOND  
ROUTE

# Newsletter

www.diamondroute.co.za

Above: The Namaqualand Diamond Coast – unspoiled and evocative

March 2011



**Please diarise:**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Diamond  
Route Research  
Conference will be held  
in Johannesburg on  
29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>  
August 2011**

*For more information please e-mail:  
diamondrouteconference@debeersgroup.com*



Unusual photograph of lions eating a baboon taken at Tswalu Kalahari

## Discovering South Africa one gem at a time

The *Diamond Route* is the epitome of passion in action. De Beers and the Oppenheimer family have a long respected legacy of walking the talk when it comes to environmental and conservation concerns.

The *Diamond Route* is the culmination of years of dedication and commitment to this field. The route is a partnership project between the renowned mining house and the Oppenheimer family in a bid to maximise the potential of their properties for conservation purposes – and in so doing give back to the people of South Africa.

Promoting conservation and research, environmental awareness and contributing to tangible social upliftment are all priorities of the *Diamond Route* properties – as is encouraging nature lovers to experience the diverse and unique offerings at each enticing destination.

From mopani woodland to riverine forest, bush, savannah, grassland and the evocative sandscapes of the Kalahari, all these diverse habitats can be enjoyed along the *Diamond Route*.

Add colourful Namaqualand and the historic and world-renowned gardens of Brenthurst.

The *Diamond Route* offers the full spectrum for nature, culture and heritage lovers – anyone who embraces the essence of South Africa.

The *Diamond Route* is home to more than half of southern Africa's bird species – over 500 species in total – including 40 endemics and 69 species on the Red Data list.

Two *Diamond Route* properties are also listed in the definitive Important Bird Areas of Southern Africa directory. Adding to the lengthy bird list are over 50 mammal species, including white rhino, sable and roan antelope.

Lion tracking is a major attraction at Venetia, as are archaeological tours at nearby Mapungubwe.

Mine tours and visiting the Big Hole, along with seeing rock engravings (petroglyphs), are popular attractions in Kimberley, while Tswalu in the Kalahari boasts vivid orange sand dunes and teeming wildlife.



### *Trip adviser*



*Ezemvelo for the birds*



*Namaqualand for carpets of nodding spring flowers*



*Brenthurst Gardens – an oasis of calm in Johannesburg, where you will feel far from crowds and chaos*

## Dronfield Nature Reserve update



### Young Sable now safe

Fourteen young Sable bulls were recently relocated from the breeding camps on Inglewood to a holding camp on Dronfield.

This is standard practice as the dominant breeding bulls are inclined to kill younger bulls that have been weaned from their mothers. The process was overseen by an experienced veterinarian.

A quick check for injuries or parasites were done and the necessary treatment administered before the animals were loaded.

Ear tags were also secured for quick identification. This is important in respect of indentifying bloodlines – crucial for an effective breeding programme.



One of the young Sable checked and tagged for easy identification

### De Beers Ecology Division team building exercise



Corne Anderson (Ecology Division Manager) and Terrence Mabi (Assistant Reserve Manager) seemed to really enjoy the team building exercise held at Dronfield Nature Reserve



"If only I could just get myself out of these straps" Finley Markham (Assistant Reserve Manager)



Lindey Aylward (Accountant Business Support Systems) and Tanya Schoeman (Senior Administration Officer) working really hard at trying to untangle themselves from each other

### Dronfield Nature Reserve: ideal meeting room venue or self-catering retreat

The Dronfield Nature Reserve offers a great accommodation option or small meeting room venue for the upcoming International Wildlife Ranching Symposium.

The chalets cost R575 per night, self-catering. Breakfast, however, can be arranged at an additional fee.

The meeting room can accommodate up to 30 people (cinema style) at a rate of R3 450 per day.

**THE DIAMOND ROUTE**

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# Ezemvelo Nature Reserve



## Rural university to educate youth in conservation and 'green' industries



Nicky and Strilli Oppenheimer meet students at the Maharishi Institute, an organisation aiming to develop training opportunities for youngsters in conservation, tourism and hospitality.

In 2008, the Oppenheimer family donated the 3700 hectare Nature Reserve, Ezemvelo, to the Maharishi Institute to provide a stunning location for a new sustainable rural campus, the Maharishi Ezemvelo Rural University (MERU).

The Maharishi Institute is a non-profit education organisation, focused on providing world-class consciousness-based education that is experiential, profound, holistic, and transformative. MERU is being founded to educate disadvantaged youth in the conservation and "green" industries. Education access in these fields is usually completely inaccessible to learners from such backgrounds for several key reasons, not least the in-affordable tuition fees that are normally charged.

The breakthrough concept combines education, poverty alleviation, and climate change awareness into one solution. MERU allows students to

live and study in a rural area while still enjoying the best the world has to offer. The education and entrepreneurial development training will centre on conservation and wildlife management, but will include the latest knowledge in eco-tourism, sustainable energy businesses, eco-construction, and African heritage related businesses.

The goal of MERU is to develop a new breed of young leaders and managers in the Environmental Management and conservation arena, with students working towards a degree in Environmental Management, with the ability to get certificates and diplomas along the way.

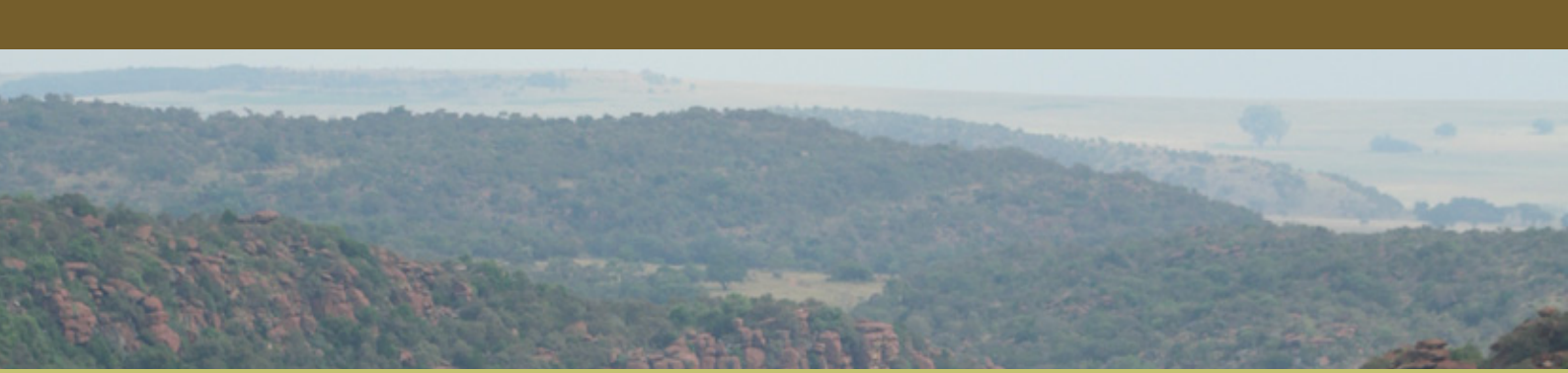
MERU is planned to be a model rural campus, incorporating personal, financial, and environmental sustainability with high quality education and experiential learning in nature, with the students having full opportunity for living in the nature they are learning to

conserve. It will also be a showcase of the finest appropriate technologies that can be found for poverty alleviation.

The beautiful campus and nature reserve will also promote environmental and conservation awareness to students and visitors alike and hopes to develop with its partners' a climate change exhibition centre, earth centre, universe centre, and consciousness centre, along with short courses, symposia, and field studies.

Both full-time long-term students will live on campus, and short courses will be provided to members of the general public in a form of educational tourism. The first full-time students at MERU are expected to begin their studies in May 2011, and are being hand selected at present.

The founders of MERU, through their work in the Community and Individual Development Association (founded 1979) have educated 5 500 young people in South Africa out of poverty, who are now working in jobs, earning over R230 million together in annual salaries.



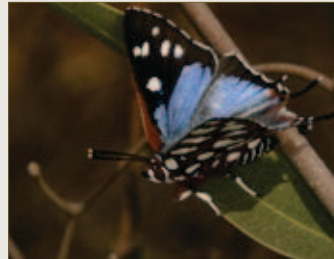
 **Huge selection of butterflies discovered at Ezemvelo**  
(by Jeremy Dobson)



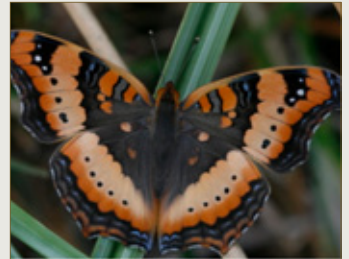
Pirate (*Catacroptera cloanthe*)



Constantine's Swallowtail (*Papilio contantinus*)



Hutchinson's Highflyer (*Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*)



Marsh Commodore (*Precis ceryne*)

Ezemvelo Nature Reserve, on the eastern border of the Province, is one of the largest, relatively unspoilt zones of butterfly-habitat within Gauteng and should contain at least 100 butterfly species.

To date more than 60 butterflies have been recorded at Emzemvelo, according to the Lepidopterists' Society of Africa (LepSoc), an organisation dedicated to the study and conservation of Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) within sub-Saharan Africa.

LepSoc, in conjunction with SANBI and the ADU, has been actively involved in South African Butterfly Conservation Assessment (SABCA), a project aimed at improving our knowledge of butterfly-distribution within South Africa and subsequently identifying rare and potentially endangered species.

As Chairman of the Gauteng branch of LepSoc ("The Gauteng Butterfly and Moth Club"), I was tasked with coordinating surveys within Gauteng.

The butterflies within the Ezemvelo reserve were surveyed by Peter Roos of LepSoc in 2005.

A team of LepSoc members, including Justin and Yolande Bode, Steve Woodhall, Peter Webb, Dave McDermott and I recently visited Ezemvelo at the invitation of Duncan MacFadyen.

The reserve is predominantly grassland, but includes patches of riverine bush, wetlands and bushveld. As a result, most of the butterfly species are grassland species, such as the Pirate (*Catacroptera cloanthe*).

Two relatively uncommon butterflies, the Marsh Commodore (*Precis ceryne*) and the Marsh Sylph (*Metisella meninx*) are found within wetlands and marshes at Ezemvelo. The Marsh Sylph in particular is a strict wetland inhabitant and is confined to a few localities within Gauteng, N W Province, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal.

The Macomo Ranger (*Kedestes mocomo*) and Constantine's Swallowtail (*Papilio contantinus*) are fairly common and widespread butterflies, however they are rare in Gauteng and have only been recorded from a few other localities outside of Ezemvelo.

Ezemvelo is also home to some very common and widespread species, such as the African Monarch (*Danaus chrysippus*), Brown Veined White (*Belonois aurota*) and the Citrus Swallowtail (*Papilio demodocus*).

Our checklist to date numbers 64-species (this includes Peter Roos's data, plus observations from our visit last month).

Based on surveys of areas adjacent to the reserve, there are certainly many more butterflies waiting to be discovered at Ezemvelo! LepSoc intend to re-visit the reserve in Spring, as this is often the best time for many of our local grassland species.

One of the butterflies that we hope to find is the magnificent Hutchinson's Highflyer (*Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*), an ant-associated species that uses Wild Syringa (*Burkea africana*) as its larval food plant – this tree is common within Ezemvelo.

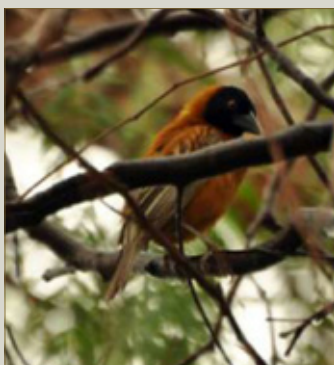


An (*Eulophia ovalis*) only found in grasslands and rocky places





## *Ernst Retief on tempted twitchers and avid atlasser*



*There have only been two reported sightings of the Chestnut Weaver in South Africa*



*The roughly, but solidly built Chestnut Weaver's nest*



*The keen bunch of twitchers who travelled more than a thousand kilometres to witness a Chestnut Weaver near Tswalu Kalahari*

When Ben Smit posted his note on a breeding Chestnut Weaver near Van Zyl's Rus, Dawie Kleynhans contacted me and the next day Dawie Rotteveel, Dawie, Surita Kleynhans and myself were on our way to Tswalu Kalahari. We were later joined by Louis Heyns and his wife, Ralda.

The twitchers had been tempted and hooked. But we only had one and a half days to do it all in.

To make the trip worthwhile we agreed that even if we missed the bird we could do a virgin pentad or two. Only avid atlassers could use that as an excuse to travel the round trip of 1 400km from Sasolburg.

Just as we turned off the main road at Sonstraal it started to rain – and rain and rain. According to staff at the reserve, twice their average monthly rainfall for January fell in an hour. There was water in the Kalahari wherever you looked.

Now of course the tension started. Had the rain driven off the Weaver? Gus van Dyk at Tswalu Kalahari had kindly arranged that he would meet us at one of the entrances and take us to gasa where the bird was last seen building

a nest. At gasa it looked even worse... floods in the Kalahari?

With baited breath we moved round to the tree where the nest was... Undoubtedly a Chestnut Weaver's nest. Roughly but very solidly built. The faces watching that nest were comparable to a lovelorn teenager looking at his first love.

But we wanted the bird, not the nest. The rain started dripping again.

Then suddenly a Weaver that was not yellow appeared and our hearts were racing 15 to the dozen. Next look and he was in full view.

What a sighting. The closest Chestnut Weavers in Namibia were about 900km away. This only the second report of one within South Africa's boundaries.

He was trying to breed as well, but the Southern Masked Weavers were having nothing of the sort.

We started out at 02h30 on Sunday and at 18h30 we were back in Klerksdorp. But what a trip. What an experience.

Six twitchers each got their lifer!

### *Everyone full of smiles*

To all the other avid atlassers: the Northern Cape is a long way from virtually everybody.

But chew on this – we got six ORFs in four hours atlassing. Common Swift, Chestnut Weaver (900km away from its known range), Black Cuckoo, Bradfield's Swift, Monotonous Lark and Cardinal Woodpecker. We also saw Martial Eagle and Brown Snake-eagle in the pentad adjacent to the one we covered.

Ben Smit has seen Striped Pipit and Violet-backed Starling within a few kilometres of the place we saw the Chestnut Weaver. All these birds not known to be in the area.

What else is waiting to be discovered? Imagine having your name linked as the first person to discover a species in that area or, like Ben, to find it for the first time in South Africa? Come-on, go North and Atlas!



## **Brenthurst proud home for the Heritage Bonsai Collection**

Brenthurst Garden is a 16ha privately owned garden situated in Parktown, Johannesburg. The Brenthurst Garden has many aspects which have been expertly blended into a harmonious whole, one of these being the Japanese Garden. One of Japan's greatest Masters, Kitayama Yasuo designed and constructed this beautiful Chisen Kaiyushiki garden, two of its main features being an 18m waterfall and an authentic Tea Ceremony House.

Derry Ralph, President of Shibui Bonsai Kai and Strilli Oppenheimer realised during a discussion that there was a synergy between the need for a Heritage Bonsai Collection and an opportunity for Brenthurst Garden (especially with the Japanese link) to provide a suitable home for such a collection.

An appropriate area on the Estate was selected. Work started in 2010 to clear the area and erect a small exhibition structure and an outdoor display area. The Bonsai are suitably displayed both under a copper roof, and outdoors on old Eucalyptus stumps. The existing Heritage Bonsai Collection of Shibui Bonsai Kai, together with selected contributions from other enthusiasts

has been moved to Brenthurst and form the foundation of the Collection. The official openings of the collection was held on 15 October and 5 November 2010.

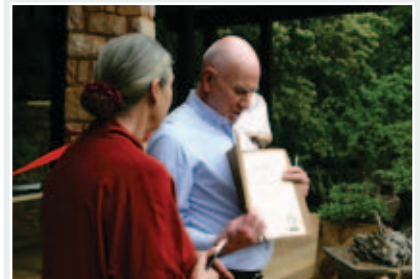
An area, directly behind the display area will be used as a potting shed and a small holding area for excess Bonsai stock. All maintenance and work on the Bonsai is carried out by experienced Bonsai growers.

Brenthurst is the private Estate of the Oppenheimer family. Brenthurst Garden is open by appointment and tours of the Garden can be arranged through the Brenthurst Garden office. This will apply to the Heritage Bonsai Collection as well. Details are available on the website: [www.Brenthurstgardens.co.za](http://www.Brenthurstgardens.co.za)

This is an exciting project for all Bonsai enthusiasts and with the anticipated overwhelming support from fellow volunteers and growers in the country, we are confident we will provide and leave future generations with a great Bonsai Heritage. To the Oppenheimer Family, how can we express our gratitude for this tremendous opportunity? Dōmo arigatō gozaimasu.

If you require any further information, please contact Derry Ralph on +27(0)11 788 6104, 082 435 7126 (cell) or e-mail: [bonsaikabana@mweb.co.za](mailto:bonsaikabana@mweb.co.za)

## **Brenthurst Garden**



*Derry Ralph presenting honorary life membership of Shibui Bonsai Kai to Strilli Oppenheimer.*



*A portion of the heritage Bonsai Collection of Shibui Bonsai Kai now located at Brenthurst.*

## **Proceeds from Lighton's book to go to research on mosquito biodiversity**

Norman Lighton's *Insects of Medical Importance* by Maureen Coetzee, Duncan MacFadyen and Richard Hunt is currently on sale. Proceeds will be used for research on mosquito biodiversity. Research at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases have recently discovered a new species of Anopheles in Northern Malawi. Further studies are needed to determine the biology of this species.



**R500 To order this book**

contact Prof. Maureen Coetzee [maureenc@nicd.ac.za](mailto:maureenc@nicd.ac.za)





## Road kill study helps reduce the threat to biodiversity

Wendy Collinson is currently coordinating the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Roadkill Research and Mitigation Project, a joint venture with Rhodes University, Tshwane University of Technology and De Beers Consolidated Mines.

The main aims of this project are to establish a means to rapidly and effectively assess the frequency of wildlife collisions on our roads, provide a better understanding of the impacts of road traffic accidents on wildlife and implement mitigation measures to reduce the threat to biodiversity.

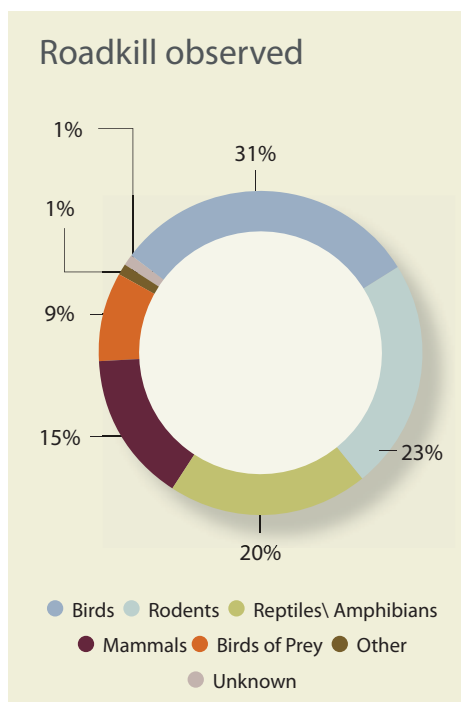
Through the assessment of existing methodology and studies, a standardised toolkit for collecting data on roadkill will be developed. These methods will then be applied to conduct an assessment of the rates of road collisions in an important conservation area in South Africa, namely in the Greater Mapungubwe Trans-Frontier Conservation region (GMTFCA), a World Heritage Site.

Despite recognition of roads being a threat to biodiversity, road density continues to increase and huge budgets are devoted to construction and upgrading of roads with little or no allocation to mitigation measures to protect biodiversity. Little statistical data is available in South Africa at present on wildlife roadkill.

Why then is it so important? The reasons are threefold, particularly in the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area (GMTFCA), in Northern Limpopo. Firstly, with the development of the GMTFCA, and the planned removal of fences which will embrace land from Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa, it is prudent to examine wildlife road kill rates whilst fences are still in place.



Wendy Collinson recording valuable road kill data on the road between Mussina and Alldays



Roadkill observed during a 3 month pilot study on a 40 km transect (R572 & R521), Northern Limpopo, South Africa (171 WRTA total)

Baseline data can be obtained on roadkill rates, and then compared once fences are removed, since fences are known to deter animal movement and therefore reduce collisions. Secondly, the Road Traffic Management Corporation in 2009 stated

that traffic volumes and road improvements are on the increase. With the GMTFCA having the potential to become a major tourist destination in southern Africa, tourist-borne traffic is expected to increase. It is therefore critical to determine what effect, if any, the increase in tourist-borne traffic will have on the wildlife corridor.

And finally, there is the future prospect of excessive traffic in the way of labour, transport and other heavy vehicles on the eastern fringe of the GMTFCA, with the development of the proposed Vele Coal mine and associated power station site at Weipe.

A pilot study in this area over a three-month period in 2010 showed that of 171 roadkill, birds were the most commonly impacted species.

Whilst this may come as no surprise to many of us, it is the possible impact on the populations of rarer bird species that occur in this area which may highlight a bigger threat than we realise.