



**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Diamond Route Research Conference**



**Species find refuge in protected diamond mining properties**

*The 2nd Diamond Route Research Conference was held at the De Beers Campus, south of Johannesburg, in late August this year. There were 122 delegates present from 66 national and international organisations. In addition to papers concerning research done on the Diamond Route properties, subjects relating to topical issues, often less explored, from work being done on sites elsewhere in the country were also presented and discussed. In all, 32 papers were presented: eight on invertebrates, six on birds, four on culture and education, six on impacts on wildlife, four on plant studies and four on mammals.*

*Adding to the impressive range of work presented, 26 detailed and colourful posters were displayed on a wide variety of important subjects from rhino conservation, invertebrate ecotourism, developing mine restoration protocols, soil conservation, pollen content of fossil dung and mistletoes as keystone species, to alien invader plant species.*

The keynote speaker on the first day was Prof Mike Picker of UCT's Zoology Department, the discoverer of the world's only jumping cockroach, found on Table Mountain. The insect is a powerful jumper with huge eyes which are actually whipped back by the forces generated during take-off. He questions why only one species in the world, whose closest relative is the common household cockroach, should have developed this remarkable form of locomotion and why it ostensibly occurs only on Table Mountain in the Western Cape.

He and his students recently rediscovered the strange heel walkers, near Kleinsee, described only from specimens fossilized in amber. These insects are so named because they walk holding most of the tarsus (toe) up in the air. Picker also spoke about South Africa's megadiverse insect fauna and its over-representation of relictual groups – there are 150 ancient species of Gondwanan origin on Table Mountain alone.

He advocated the need for future conservation planning and reserve

selection to be more inclusive and not merely to consider plant and vertebrate data – but that there should be some inclusion of invertebrate profiles. He maintained that the present technique of using the plant profile for biodiversity conservation purposes, hoping to capture some of the richness of other species, needed to be reconsidered.

**Announcement**



View the nine sites on the new Diamond Route website, which has been extensively revamped:  
**[www.diamondroute.co.za](http://www.diamondroute.co.za)**

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## Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve



Mark Berry (with Tumi), Piet Oosthuizen, Jamie Zylstra, Corne Anderson, Johnny Laing (pilot), Duncan MacFadyen, Warwick Davies-Mostert and Suzanne Rautenbach (pilot)

## Annual aerial game census: Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve

A key component of the wildlife management strategies is the annual aerial census programme, employing helicopter-based technology and census methodologies which have evolved since the early 1980s into highly accurate scientific techniques.

Wildlife is identified and counted from a helicopter by four observers; the information is recorded onto on-board laptop computers by two data capturers and is geo-referenced to create a spatial

distribution of all sightings for use in determining habitat preferences for wildlife species. Distance sampling techniques are subsequently employed to estimate the accuracy of the census and to inform management decisions for the reserves.

Nicky Oppenheimer has a deep-seated and active interest in environmental conservation. This is reflected in his leadership of the census team each year across the different Diamond Route

properties, as he pilots the helicopter and encourages the enhancement of techniques through technological innovation.

The census this year was very successful and included the counting of lion, hyena, elephant, hippo and a variety of antelope species, such as kudu, eland, waterbuck, impala, duiker and steenbuck.

The census at the Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve took place from 2-4 October.

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Strilli Oppenheimer presented Melissa Whitecross, currently studying for her BSc Honours in Ecology at Wits University, with the trophy for the Best Paper of the conference. She has spent the last year working in the Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve testing the effect of freeze events on the population structure of the Mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*). She spoke about investigating the mechanisms behind the damage to and recovery of such populations after a frost event.

Duncan MacFadyen, manager: research and conservation at EO&Son, in his appraisal of her paper, said that her presentation style was excellent and the content of her paper, including the way in which she had executed her project on the Venetia property, demonstrated the applicability of her research to the vitally important factors of climate change and bush encroachment. He commented that she had added to our understanding of southern Africa's savannahs.

The Trophy for the Best Poster went to Gordon O'Brien of the School of Environmental Sciences and

Development at North West University. The poster considered whether yellowfish behavior could help in the management of the Vaal River, one of Africa's most utilised river ecosystems. The poster pointed out that due to this excessive use some components of the river's ecosystem were under threat, including some fish populations. The Vaal River yellowfish species are of great economic, social and ecological value – the Orange-Vaal Largemouth Yellowfish (*Labeobarbus kimberleyensis*) is listed as a threatened and protected species, and both Vaal River species are used as indicator species in the management of various components of the river's ecosystem. The poster explained that the biotelemetry methodology used in the study by O'Brien *et al* had characterised the behavior of the two yellowfish species for the conservation and management of the Vaal River.

MacFadyen said that the impressive poster with its attractive layout had highlighted the need for research on water issues in general, that the information provided had been good and that the importance

of the yellowfish in the Vaal River system had been clearly emphasised.

Other papers covered a variety of interesting topics such as, amongst many others: predicting the influence of land development on the movement and activity of the Brown Hyena; a modelling approach to acquiring better understanding of what limits elephants so as to predict the effects on management of future numbers; the impacts of mining activities on the Damara Tern in southern Namibia; a survey of arachnids at Brenthurst Gardens; Angolan biodiversity conservation strategies; the historical archaeology of Mapungubwe; the effect of a nature experience on eco-alienated and at-risk youth; pioneering consciousness-based education; the possible effects of solar energy facilities on birds; the influence of perimeter fences on the prey selection of the African Wild Dog; and a new technique for counting road kill.

Most of the PowerPoint presentations given by the speakers have been downloaded onto the website: [www.diamondroute.co.za](http://www.diamondroute.co.za)



Body measurements as well as blood samples were taken to ensure the cats were in excellent health prior to release. (This is the female cat)



### Female Black-footed Cat makes her home at Ezemvelo

Dr Alex Sliwa who is the leading authority on the Black-footed Cat worldwide provided guidance and support on site when two rescued cats were released from their holding enclosure on Ezemvelo Nature Reserve in June this year (see article in Diamond Route Newsletter June 2011). The really good news is that, now in early September, it appears that the female cat has established itself on the reserve.

After the release, Alex commented that if the cats survived and were learning to hunt after a period of two months, their acclimatisation could be considered a success. The male has unfortunately left the reserve and its whereabouts are unknown. Ewann Ströh, a student presently enrolled in Nature Management at Centurion Academy, who is living on Ezemvelo and monitoring the cats, is however hopeful that the male will return as it has disappeared and returned previously.

Alex maintained when questioned about their life expectancy that the longest survival record for the Black-footed Cat in captivity is 16 years, whereas in the wild he said that an educated guess would be a survival rate of 6 to 8 years. Previous releases into the wild have not been monitored and now their behavior can be closely monitored at Ezemvelo by means of telemetry.

The cats hunt mice and small birds with about 1% of their diet comprising invertebrates. They usually choose old Aardvark or preferably Springhare burrows as their dens, where they sleep during the day. They are active after sunset, although they usually sleep for a couple of hours at night as well. Duncan MacFadyen, E Oppenheimer & Son Research and Conservation Manager, who visits the reserve regularly has seen wild Black-footed Cats on several occasions.

Alex confirmed that their enemies on Ezemvelo would be firstly the Black-backed Jackal and then possibly the Brown Hyena but only if the cats were to be injured or become ill. He said that there was a small likelihood of Honey Badgers attacking the cats, whereas Caracal were other possible predators, as experience on the Diamond Route sites in the Kimberley area had shown. He added that a possible daytime predator might be the Black Eagle (now known as Verreaux's Eagle) and said he hoped that the newly released cats would take cover in appropriate dens during the day.

Initially, in the immediate post release phase, the cats were followed for a few hours every night. Commenting on tracking methods, Alex pointed out that a slow silent approach was essential so as not to frighten the cats. He also cautioned that if they were being tracked to their dens in the daytime, great care should be taken not to break into the den accidentally.



The team involved in the release of the two Black-footed Cats from left to right: Neil MacFadyen, Elsabe Bosch, Duncan MacFadyen, Daniel Shai, Maroti Tau, Dr Alex Sliwa, Ewann Ströh, Nicci Wright and Dr Adrian Tordiffe  
Right: The missing male Black-footed Cat

He said they were most likely to hole up in old Springhare burrows. He noted with great interest that, already after three days, the male had made the choice of a tight fitting den – a highly suitable choice to avoid the possibility of being pulled out by a jackal. The female had chosen a small crack between rocks.

Alex commented that the Ezemvelo project would allow a unique opportunity to establish what the dangers were for these cats that were without the benefit of their mother's teaching.

In early September, Ewann was asked about the ongoing behaviour that he had observed and he explained that initially the cats had been searched for every night, starting just after sunset for about an hour and a half, and again between 7:00 and 8:00 in the mornings. A decision had then been made by Alex and Nicci Wright of FreeMe (see previous newsletter) to monitor their movements (and recently only those of the female, as the male has not been seen for five weeks) on a less frequent basis. This was based on the fact that the female had established her territory and no longer moved far afield. Now Ewann, in the company of another student, only searches for the female once during the week for an hour and a half from 19:00hrs and over weekends.

Ewann commented that the female was constantly active during the time that she was being followed and that most of her hunts appeared to be successful. She is catching field mice. It is a remarkable learning curve that she is going through as she was reared in captivity and had never hunted prior to her release in June. He also remarked that when the cat heard jackal calling, she lay down and kept dead still in the grass. He observed that the cat was clearly very aware of the jackal but there had been no sign that the jackal had seen the cat.

Any future observations concerning the Black-footed Cats on Ezemvelo will be reported in 'On the Lookout' on the Diamond Route website: [www.diamondroute.co.za](http://www.diamondroute.co.za)

## Brenthurst Gardens

### My journey of exploration will not stop

*Do everything you can – even the smallest thing – to make a difference*

*In her inspirational talk given at Little Brenthurst on her recent visit to South Africa, world renowned scientist and conservationist Jane Goodall said that she had been studying chimpanzees for fifty years and that she was still learning extraordinary things about them. "How like them we are...how they resemble us in their behaviour... they kiss and embrace and hold hands...they swagger and shake hands. We used to think these actions and gestures were unique to humans ...chimps have taught us that there is no solid line between humans and animals."*

*At the end of her introduction to her recent book titled 'Hope for Animals and Their World' which tells how endangered species are being rescued from the brink, Jane says, "One thing is certain – my own journey of exploration will not stop. I shall go on collecting stories, and meeting and talking with more extraordinary and inspirational people. ...Even when our mindless activities have almost entirely destroyed some ecosystem or driven a species to the brink of extinction, we must not give up. Thanks to the resilience of nature, and the indomitable human spirit, there is still hope. Hope for animals and their world. And it is our world too."*

At Little Brenthurst where Jane was warmly received by Nicky and Strilli and an assembled group of all kinds of people interested in hearing her message, she spoke about how she started as a scientist and went on to being an activist – travelling around the world talking about conservation and setting up expeditions into Africa. It was during her travels that she came to realise the nature of the problems besetting the people of Africa, which had resulted in the young people being angry and depressed – this largely concerned the fact that developed nations were taking the non-renewable resources of the continent and not paying the people back adequately. The young people felt that previous generations had compromised their future. She felt the desperation in these young people and saw that they thought there was nothing they could do.

She did not believe this to be true and she went on to tell about the formation of the Roots & Shoots movement twenty years ago. The first group was born in Tanzania out of a gathering of 12 secondary school students on Jane's veranda in Dar es Salaam in 1991. They talked about their concerns and that the school syllabus was inadequate, as it ignored these problems. The politicians were not doing anything constructive, leaving the large corporations in control. Jane's deep-seated belief is that each one of us can make a difference every day – no matter how small that difference is. The students decided what they were going to do to make a difference... and Roots & Shoots is now in 27 countries, including a group at Wits University in South Africa.



*In remarkable synchronicity, Strilli's dog Mpevu came up and stood next to Jane as she was making the point that there is no dividing line between humans and animals, and that we are in partnership together on this Earth. Jane was delighted by the relevance of the dog's action.*

In her talk, Jane emphasised that we have compromised the future for our young people but the situation is not hopeless. The message of Roots & Shoots is that people, wild animals and the environment are compatible "if the younger generation grows up to be better stewards than we have been". Young people need to go out into the world with a respect for all living things and to get away from the obsessive idea that the only thing that matters is making money.

Her latest book encourages the youth to make a difference. She says the name Roots & Shoots is symbolic: the first small shoot of a germinating seed "looks so tiny and fragile – hard to believe that this can grow into a big tree. Yet there is so much life force in that seed that the roots can work their way through boulders to reach water and the shoot can work its way through cracks in a brick wall to reach the sun."

*Roots & Shoots groups undertake projects that improve things for people, for animals and for the environment – and the movement is growing with more and more groups being formed worldwide.*  
Website: [www.rootsandshoots.org](http://www.rootsandshoots.org)

*'Hope for Animals and Their World' was published in 2010 and Jane Goodall's co-authors are Thane Maynard and Gail Hudson.*  
Website: [www.iconbooks.uk](http://www.iconbooks.uk)

## Rooipoort Nature Reserve

# Appreciation of visit to Rooipoort Nature Reserve and The Big Hole Museum

Write-up by Anna Botha, Business Studies Programme Manager, and Lyn Klemp, Tourism Lecturer



Standing Angelo Hopley, Kagisho Jobson, Zanele Kunene, Asanda Qokola, Lyn Klemp, Nolufefe Wayiti-Sondlo, Gaolese Sethlodi. Front: Boniswa Mabiya

A generous sponsorship by De Beers Consolidated Mines offered the NCUFET College Tourism students the privilege of experiencing the Rooipoort Nature Reserve and the Big Hole Museum. For these students, it was a rare privilege indeed. None of the group had previously spent time on a nature reserve or had the opportunity to do the full tour of the Big Hole Museum.

### Rooipoort

A few minutes after entering the gates of Rooipoort, the close-up sighting of Red Hartebeest and Zebra elicited screams, gasps and delighted laughter. Needless to say, the animals made a hasty retreat. Students soon realised that it is the quiet of the bush that is part of the spirit of the place, and that excitement that is whispered tends to allow for longer, slower viewing of the equally curious Rooipoort wildlife.

The early morning tea and coffee, served 'Out-of-Africa' style at long tables under spreading trees outside the historic Shooting Box, was described by students as a five-star experience.

Viewing both the accommodation offered at the Shooting Box and the Rooipoort Safari Tented Camp, afforded the students the opportunity for questions and insight into the valuable services offered by housekeeping and catering staff. And even more importantly, the behind-the-scenes work needed to keep accommodation up to standard. City-based students don't always realise that many reserves do not have 'piped water' from a municipal supply...that river or borehole water needs to be pumped and pipelines installed, and pumps need to be maintained – all part of sustainable services and ensuring client satisfaction at this beautiful reserve.

Amongst the insights the students gained was an understanding of the role played by and necessity for offering hunting operations on Rooipoort and how these contribute to sustaining the reserve.

Another first for the students was a 'walk-on-the-wild-side', searching through the infamous 'haak-en-steek' for San Rock engravings – yet another opportunity to understand the value of conserving

heritage and the contribution it makes to tourism. Once again, the spirit of the place enthralled the young people – for some it resulted in serious conjecture about the petroglyphs and what inspired these fascinating works of art...for others, a feeling of being lost in the bush thickets of the koppie and so a return of the hysterical laughter of earlier when they saw their first game.

All credit must go to Rooipoort's manager, Andrew Stainthorpe. Andrew's relaxed but always amazingly informative interaction with students, and his ability to make young people think and to draw informative conclusions for themselves, was of immeasurable value. The professionalism of both the manager and the staff at Rooipoort proved excellent material for class discussion during Client Services classes.

Our thanks to the Rooipoort staff for providing the students with fine examples of quality service in the tourism industry.

### The Big Hole Museum

*"Now we know what the word 'museology' really means – the design and organisation of so much information is amazing."*

.....the response of NCUFET students to their visit to the Big Hole Museum, generously sponsored by De Beers.

Lecturers equally appreciated the opportunity to explore, with the students, one of the finest examples of a thoroughly modern concept of museology – and how this approach reveals our history through a fascinating combination of practical engineering and multi-media techniques, allowing the visitor to experience Kimberley's diamond history and much more.

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## The 5<sup>th</sup> Helli Lasch Challenge at Tswalu Kalahari

*Snippets from the article by Iain Baker in the online magazine: SoaringCafe.com*

In 1968 one of Helli Lasch's three daughters, Orcillia (Strilli) married Nicky Oppenheimer. Nicky has always been an aviation enthusiast – a few years ago he took delivery of an Agusta AW139 helicopter in Italy and was one of the flight crew for the ferry down through Africa to Cape Town. The 2001 World Gliding Championships (WGC) in Mafikeng were actively supported by the Oppenheimer family, who were keen to promote gliding in South Africa.

The WGC2001 was possibly one of the best championships in recent history and showed the gliding world that South Africa had some spectacular soaring conditions. This became the catalyst for the Helli Lasch Challenge.

First held in 2003 and every two years subsequently, the Helli Lasch Challenge has been hosted by Nicky and Strilli Oppenheimer at Tswalu Kalahari. The objectives of the Challenge are to serve as a living memorial to Strilli's father, glider pilot and legend Helli Lasch; to foster international relations; to promote South Africa as a gliding destination; and to develop the competition skills of the South African gliding team.

The Challenge is an exclusive, invitation-only, all-expenses-paid event where the current World Champions in the Open, 18m, 15m and Standard Classes are invited (with their partners) for two weeks to the Tswalu Kalahari. Uniquely, the Helli Lasch Challenge combines staying at one of the finest game lodges in Africa with some of the finest soaring in the world.

Outside the period of the Challenge, Tswalu Airfield is solely used to ferry visitors from Jo'burg or Cape Town to the reserve, so for the Challenge lots of special arrangements are made: the sailplanes for the World Champions are ferried to Tswalu; a tug plane is also ferried in; Avgas fuel has to be organised; and the runway lighting posts are removed to avoid potential incidents.

Members of the current South African team squad are also privileged to attend for a

week. The current World Champions share their knowledge and expertise with the South African pilots to help develop the competition skills of the South African squad.

### **The World Champions invited to the 5th Helli Lasch Challenge, March 2011, were:**

- **Michael Sommer (Germany)** – WGC2010 Open Class Champion at Szeged, Hungary (and Open Class Champion at WGC2006 and WGC2008).
- **Sebastian Kawa (Poland)** – WGC2010 Standard Class Champion at Priedvidza, Slovakia (and previously Champion at WGC2003, WGC2004 and WGC2006).
- **Stefano Ghiorzo (Italy)** – WGC2010 15m Class Champion at Szeged, Hungary.
- **Zbigniew Nieradka (Poland)** – WGC2010 18m Class Champion at Szeged, Hungary.
- **Sue Kussbach (Germany)** – WWGC2009 Standard Class Champion at Szeged, Hungary.

The SA Squad coach is Andy Davis (Standard Class Champion in WGC1993 and WGC2003), and the World Champions also contributed to the group discussions in the mornings, giving their own perspective on competitive techniques and winning factors. Each day one of the SA Squad flew with Andy in the ASH25.

### **Personal reflections: Sue Kussbach**

This was my first time in South Africa and a lot of people had told me that it would be nice. In fact it was more than nice, it was excellent!

Tswalu is a special place. Everyone was so interested in taking care of us, answering all the questions that we 'city people' had about the wildlife. I've often been to zoos

in Germany but seeing the animals truly at home was wonderful. The combination of being able to go on a game drive and have a great flight in one day was really special (though at the end I was so tired, you would not believe it!).

The flying conditions are so good, you cannot compare them to Germany. My longest flight was 720km – landing after a big storm. The fastest was a 400km task that we all flew in the first week, with probably everyone achieving around 140kph. I think I must try and come back to South Africa in the future.

At Tswalu, the combination of flying with excellent pilots and the game drives was so special.

### **Personal reflections: Stefano Ghiorzo**

I was already a little familiar with South Africa, having participated in the 2001 WGC at Mafeking and also sharing an ASH25 with Thomas Gostner in 2000. Today, my business takes me to West Africa regularly and I can confirm that the reality of southern Africa is far removed from the colonial term "Dark Continent".

The world of Tswalu is in fact very different. The southeast corner of the Kalahari, known locally as the "green Kalahari", is a remote and fascinating territory which elicits the so-called "mal d'Africa" (a nostalgia for Africa) from its visitors. Tswalu conceals a fauna that is so rich and primordial that it stuns you – and the game rangers knowingly arrange well-organised safaris to highlight this.

At Tswalu every moment is a magic moment: the exclusive resort, the airport in an enclave surrounded by predators and the JS1 gliders which are a true 'revelation'.

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## Tswalu Kalahari

### Stick making at Tswalu

Article based on the brochure written by Brian Barnes, a stick making hobbyist in London, UK, who works for Nicky Oppenheimer.

Tswalu Kalahari is South Africa's largest private game reserve covering over 100 000 hectares in the unspoilt Southern Kalahari. Nicky Oppenheimer suggested that members of Tswalu's staff that were interested should undergo some training sessions in the art of stick making.

My mission was to liaise with Dylan Smith, a very enthusiastic and (now) more skilled stick maker, who could act as the 'stick making co-ordinator (SA)'. I also needed to identify local trees/shrubs with reasonably straight branches for use as stick shanks. I would in addition collect suitable gazelle/antelope horns from the veld that could be used as stick handles. Horns with as much solid matter as possible toward the 'business end' would be the most desirable as they would ensure a sturdy joint with the selected shank. We held a number of workshops for interested staff to demonstrate all aspects of stick making from the cutting of suitable shanks, through the steaming and straightening process to the selection of horns and the polishing and finishing of the shank.

After several hours of scouring different landscapes on Tswalu, the Raisin Bush (*Grewia flava*), the Kalahari Currant (*Rhus* (now *Searsia*) *tenuinervis*), the Kuni Bush (*Rhus* (now *Searsia*) *burchellii*) and the Silver Clusterleaf (*Terminalia sericea*) were identified as providing suitable shank material. A dozen or so shanks were cut after much cursing and bloodshed. Dylan was a bit unsure about the amount of bend in some of the shanks that were cut, until it was explained that it would be possible to straighten most of them with little effort.

As I had planned to demonstrate the art of stick straightening during one of my sessions, the lack of seasoned (dried) shanks was a problem as it is not possible to straighten fresh ones. Salvation came in the form of Graham Berry, who alerted me to the existence of a couple of *Syringa* trees that had been killed by porcupines and

subsequently bulldozed. Graham took me to these trees and after throwing in a casual, "Oh, watch out for the Kalahari Cobras, Puff Adders and Tree Snakes," drove off, leaving me hacksaw in hand. Two hours later I had cut about 20 well-seasoned sticks for the demonstrations.

The next foraging expedition into the bush was to find suitable horns for use in the making of stick handles. Many horns had been damaged beyond usefulness by exposure to the sun, causing over-drying and splitting. We did, however, gather some Buffalo, Wildebeest, Hartebeest, Eland and Impala horns that seemed suitable, as well as some large Warthog tusks that could be used on a small ladies or child's stick.

Before carrying out the first formal session, I spent an afternoon with Dylan in order to demonstrate some of the finer points of finishing sticks. I didn't want to overload the 'students' with information that they could get from Dylan at a later date, once they had mastered the basics. The first session saw about a dozen students gathered at the Kraal. Dylan and I gave them the names of trees suitable for the cutting of shanks, stressing that they should take a good look at the proposed shank from all angles before cutting. We also emphasised that they should only cut one or two sticks from any bush (unless it was an invasive species), so that the plant could recover.

When straightening sticks in the UK, I use an electric heat gun to apply heat carefully before bending – but as this tool would not be widely available to the staff at Tswalu I demonstrated the old-fashioned method. A big pot of boiling water and some kitchen foil to concentrate the steam onto the area that requires attention is a tried and

tested method that works well. The enthusiastic questions at the end of the demo were encouraging.

The residence of Dylan and Theresa was the venue for the next workshop, where Dylan had constructed a neat, open air work area. I demonstrated the following techniques:

- cutting a dowel onto the shank onto which to fit the handle;
- selecting a piece of horn that would fit onto and complement the shank;
- checking the handle for best fit to the hand before cutting;
- cutting the horn and drilling out the bone core.

The African horns appear to have a lot less solid matter than the Indian Buffalo horns I use in the UK. However, it is quite acceptable to leave the bone inside the horn on the finished stick rather than drilling it all out and filling the cavity with something else.

I went on to demonstrate:

- How to test, fit and mark the shank/handle before gluing.
- How to glue on the handle. (Not always as easy as it sounds!)
- How to clean up and smooth the joint.
- How to sand down the handle prior to finishing.

The different methods of finishing the stick were explained to those present. I covered varnishing, oiling and waxing which was a subject most, if not all, seemed familiar with.

The project was a great success with a number of staff from Tswalu showing a great deal of interest in stick making. They now have the knowledge to get started on the basics, in an environment where outlay in the way of costs should be minimal.

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### *Raised mortality rate in Cape Fur Seals?*



*If you live on the coast anywhere between Port Elizabeth and Henties Bay in Namibia, finding a dead seal on the beach is nothing new.*

It may be the large carcass of a seal bull, with or without visible wounds, especially between November and January. The primary objective of the seal bull at the start of the breeding season is to gain dominance and subsequently his own harem. This translates to bitter fights, sometimes resulting in the demise of the weaker contender.

Far more common, especially within breeding colonies, is the sight of dead, newborn pups. These hapless little fellows are often fatally injured by rivalling bulls or perish from heat way out on the beach or may find themselves helpless between relentless waves and hostile rocks. There is also the threat of predators such as Black-backed Jackal (*Canis mesomelas*) and the odd Brown Hyena (*Hyaena brunnea*) which will target a weak or sleeping seal pup when other food is not readily available.

To a lesser degree, one may even find the carcass of a weaned pup, usually around this time of the year.

However, when reports of carcasses of weaned seal pups washing up around Cape Town, Lamberts Bay and Kleinzee recently seemed to be happening a tad more than usual, the Department of Environmental Affairs immediately took an interest and started investigating the possibility of raised mortality.

Kleinzee is home to arguably the largest breeding colony of seals in the world and Oceans and Coasts in Cape Town, a division of the Dept of Environmental Affairs, that is also custodian to the Kleinzee colony, requested the assistance of the Strandveld Conservation Club, trading as *Diamond Coast-Forever Namaqualand* (DCFN), to gather specific data on the colony. Sandy Blake, an accredited FGASA tour guide who has accompanied tourists, researchers, photographers and the occasional film crew to the colony over the past five years, not only did substantial research

on seals, but has had extensive exposure to the colony and is quite *au fait* with its life cycles, ways and habits. Assisted by Dudley Wessels, also an accredited (4x4) tour guide, a very brief visit was all that was required to conclude that the number of fresh carcasses of weaned pups was definitely substantially higher than one would expect.

What was furthermore noticeable was that live pups, which were clearly in the majority, all seemed perfectly plump and in good health. Those that were looking less healthy, weak and/or dying – as was the case with fresh carcasses found within the colony – were by no means emaciated, only moderately thin, making it hard to believe that they were dying of hunger.

A detailed report was submitted to Mike Meyer from Oceans & Coasts and three experts were immediately dispatched to Kleinzee during the week of 3 October 2011. Tissue and blood samples were harvested on site from fresh carcasses. These are essential for intensive tests, in an effort to determine the cause of these increased mortalities.

Obviously, it is too soon for results and a follow-up article will be submitted once the outcome of the research is available.

*Access to the Kleinzee seal colony is currently suspended due to logistical challenges associated with recent changes in Namaqualand Mines' ownership, but we are hopeful that tours will be resumed once Transhex have established ownership and commenced mining in the Buffels River Complex where the seal colony is situated.*

## Flamingoes Benfontein



The rainy season has really made its mark at Benfontein with the Flamingoes flocking to the overflowing pans, a beautiful and majestic sight.



The vegetable garden is still going strong at Benfontein, thanks to the lessons learnt at the biodynamic course attended by Koos Jooste and Andrew Soul at Brenthurst Gardens in November 2010.

Featured in the photo are, Koos Jooste, Finley Markham and Andrew Soul.

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### The Big Hole Museum

The opportunity for the students to be tourists, as opposed to role-playing as tour operators, proved to be of great value.

A great deal of the value lay in the post-tour discussion about 'historical' and 'cultural' tourism. It also proved a valuable link to how socio-political tourism is drawing both local and international tourists. The Big Hole revealed that it is not only the likes of famous politicians that draw people to places like Robben Island but projects such as the Big Hole Museum that serve as a draw card to those interested not only in the 'deepest hole dug by man' and the diamonds mined there, but in the 'human elements' that made our history – the people affected by the whole industry, as reflected in the film and in this museum's excellent storyboards.

For students whose studies include Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Operations and Client Services, both Rooipoort and the Big Hole provided highly effective experiences of on-going and proven sustainable tourism, highly effective tourism operations and real life examples of client services.

Above all, thanks for time 'in the bush' and the opportunity for students to be tourists!

### Helli Lasch Challenge

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In addition to all of this, I was blown away by the generosity of the Oppenheimer family towards the South African soaring community (both seniors and juniors). In the spirit of the Helli Lasch Challenge, beyond simply remembering a gliding pioneer, there is the clear desire to perpetuate his sense of adventure and discovery.

Andy Davis skillfully analysed the fundamental concepts of contest flying and the factors that determine success in competition – an excellent mix of theory and practice.

But not only this, having all the world champions re-united and primed for discussion gave a unique and interesting opportunity for comparing and contrasting individual values and points of view.

*Stefano's sentiments are shared by everyone who has had the opportunity to visit Tswalu with the Helli Lasch Challenge. The Challenge is a genuinely uniquely special event, and it is indeed a privilege and an honour to be invited by the Oppenheimers.*

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### Stick making

Dylan is on hand to give assistance in order to keep people enthusiastic. There is the potential to get a small cottage industry started at Tswalu and even though no-one will get rich, a little extra cash could be generated by doing

something that can be an enjoyable and rewarding hobby.

There is no feeling like the one you get when you get complimented on, and sell, your first stick!

*My thanks go to the following people: Nicky Oppenheimer for making it all*

*possible; Gus van Dyk and Dylan Smith for cramming my time at Tswalu with so many different and interesting activities, and filling my head with so much knowledge; and Graham Berry for his valuable assistance in obtaining some of the necessary raw materials.*



# Shape the Future

Every child in South African has a right to education, but without proper books that right is often not realised.

Therefore, in an effort to instil the culture of learning in our community, De Beers Kimberley Mines has requested employees to donate children's reading books, especially pre-school and primary school books.

The objective of this initiative is to encourage the culture of reading in children to ensure that they grow up knowing the importance of reading and education.

*Contact to make donations: Zanele Mdoda at 053 839 4365 / 838 7235.*

