

The *Astroloba* Rubric

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From the Conservancy Office

Welcome to the first edition of our rebranded Rooiberg Breede River Conservancy Newsletter! We have chosen the name *The Astroloba Rubric* in honour of the locally indigenous succulent plant depicted on our logo, *Astroloba rubriflora* (<https://pza.sanbi.org/astroloba-rubriflora>). However, we always welcome suggestions for improvement, so do chime in if you do happen to come up with the perfect newsletter name! This will be a quarterly newsletter, and will serve as a tool to raise environmental awareness,

showcase our achievements and challenges, and drive participation in the Conservancy. After all, the members are the heartbeat of the conservancy—whether landowner members, corporate sponsors, friends of the Conservancy or those falling under our new satellite membership category, you all play a valuable role in improving the sustainability of our region. While government capacity may be declining and the country is experiencing serious economic and social problems, in our little corner of the world

we can make a difference by taking care of our environment, and thereby improving socio-economic well-being as well! We hope you enjoy this issue and that it stimulates conversation. As always, do reach out to us with your questions and comments. *Your* participation breathes life into this Conservancy!

Conservation Greetings
Jacques

Annual General Meeting 2024

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We held our Annual General Meeting on 08 March 2024. We started off by showing interested members around our new Conservancy nursery site on Voorspoed, where Mr. Ernst Botha has kindly made long term office and nursery space available to the Conservancy. Afterwards, a productive meeting was conducted at Saggy Stone Amandalia —

a big thank you again to Adrian and Jackie Robinson for making this venue available at no cost to the Conservancy. 11 members were represented in person and 6 members voted by proxy, ensuring a voting quorum. Two minor updates could be made to the Conservancy Constitution, membership fee increases could be decided, and a new

Conservancy Committee could be elected, including two new members, Cecil Mitileni and JP Auret. The updated Constitution will be made available when editing is complete, but in the meantime members may refer to the meeting minutes distributed by Yolanda to view the decisions made.

Profile: new Conservancy Committee member

Most Conservancy members are familiar with Mossie Basson, who was formerly a driving force behind the Conservancy and Graham Beck Wines' conservation efforts. In late 2023, Cecil Mitileni was appointed to fill Mossie's big shoes at Graham Beck. We invited Cecil to tell us about himself in his own words.

"I am currently enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Nature Conservation program at Mangosuthu University of Technology. Before embarking on this program, I had completed my National Diploma in Nature Conservation and an Advanced Diploma in Wildlife Management, both of which I obtained from Tshwane University of Technology.

"I am currently employed as a conservation manager for Beck Family Development Foundation, a division of Beck

Family Estates. In this role, I am responsible for overseeing and implementing various conservation projects aimed at preserving the natural environment and promoting sustainable practices.

"As a board member of the Rooiberg Breede River Conservancy, my vision for landscape conservation is to create a sustainable and thriving ecosystem that benefits both humans and the natural world.

"As a passionate board member of the conservancy, I am dedicated in protecting and preserving our natural landscapes for future generations. Through my education and experiences, I have developed a deep understanding and appreciation for the delicate balance between human development and environmental sustainability."



Cecil Mitileni, Conservation Manager for Beck Family Estates. We welcome Cecil to the Conservancy and wish him success with his (almost) new position!

**Conservancy
Membership
now stands at
31!**

Membership expansion

Though the Conservancy's stated sphere of Influence encompasses roughly 51000ha, within that area only 31 members are active. Increasing our membership base is crucial to improving the overall environmental and sustainability management of our region, and generates economies of scale for the operation of the Conservancy.

Recently, we ran a promotional membership drive, whereby existing members were invited to recruit neighbours or other landowners to the Conservancy. We would like to recognise Jacques and Tertia Marais (Roam Rooiberg) for their contribution in recruiting their neighbouring property, Loewenheim. In addition, during 2023 we were joined by Alexkia in the Eilandia cluster, as well as our first two members in

the Nuy cluster, Leipzig and Nuwerus. Welcome again to Hanlie de Villiers, Amanda Rabie, and Christiaan Rabie of those properties, respectively.

Though our 2023-2024 promotional recruitment drive has now ended, members are reminded that they may assist by recruiting other landowners as members at any time, or by establishing contact with individuals interested in a "Friends of the Conservancy" membership, or even Corporate Sponsors. Note that we have recently also established a new membership category for Satellite members—properties outside of the core Conservancy boundaries, but who are within reasonable driving distance and would benefit from our community and technical support. Please forward membership enquiries to Jacques or Yolanda.

Educational event showcase

In November 2023, we were joined by Dr. Alan Lee of BirdLife SA's Science and Innovation Programme for a short presentation on birding, bird citizen science, and birding tourism. Owing to the interest received from members and guests—notably through Robertson Tourism and the newly re-established Robertson Bird Club— we decided to host another event in February 2024. An evening was spent

learning about the birding apps that can be used by the public to contribute to actual scientific research about birds, followed by a social braai. Early the next day, Dr. Lee facilitated a full morning of birding in a variety of habitats including orchards, succulent Karoo veld and a farm dam. A big thank you to Dr. Lee and BirdLife SA for sharing their expertise and time with us!

Tip: download the app called “BirdLasser” and log your bird sightings to help BirdLife SA and other science organisations with their research!

•<https://www.birdlasser.com/>

Also consult BirdLife SA's website to learn about bird conservation and their dedicated birding portal, “GoBirding”, for birding resources including avitourism:

•<https://www.birdlife.org.za>

•<https://gobirding.birdlife.org.za>



Terminology: an Annual Plan of Operations (APO), is a tool to schedule environmental management interventions and tasks over the course of a year. See a poster-style example below.



Send us your comments and suggestions for topics, guest speakers, and venues!

Get involved: environmental education

We are in the process of setting up an environmental education programme for the local farm schools that fall within the Conservancy. The goal is to expose our local youth to environmental issues in order to cultivate a sense of appreciation for and responsibility towards nature - and the environment in general. At least two schools have expressed interest, but are struggling with financial and human resources. If you can help in any of the following ways, please step

- forward! Since both schools already have small vegetable gardens, we would like to build on what is already there.
- Donations of vegetable seeds, especially for autumn and winter sowing
- Donations of compost and other soil amendments
- Donations of disused gardening implements
- Volunteering teaching time and or assisting the schools with administra-

tion for the environmental education programme

- Venues for "outdoor classroom" excursions including hikes to be co-hosted by Conservancy Manager
- If you have contact with local farm schools in Eilandia and or Nuy, introduce them to the Conservancy Manager for inclusion in the programme
- Donate an barn owl nesting box to help control rodents around gardens



**Share your
interesting
submissions for
inclusion in the
next issue!**

Get involved: send us your stories and observations

If you observe anything in nature that is interesting, out of the ordinary, or simply beautiful, why not submit your stories and or pictures to the Conservancy for sharing with other members? The camera trap images below, for example, were contributed by Bruce

Gilson (Tierhoek) and Anel Botha (Dassieshoek area).

Here is how you can contribute:

- Arrange to have a Conservancy camera trap set up on your property
- Submit pictures from cam-

era trapping of your own

- Report serious incidents pertaining to snaring, environmental crime, and harmful developments
- Send us your questions about environmental problems you have identified



Rooiberg Breede River Conservancy

Why not make an appointment to pay us a visit and support our indigenous nursery?

Voorspoed Boerdery
Noree Road
Robertson
6705

Phone: 071 301 1781

Email: manager@rooibergbreederiverconservancy.org

Email (Yolanda): admin@rooibergbreederiverconservancy.org

<https://rooibergbreederiverconservancy.org>

Non-Profit Organisation
Number 124-019

Banking Details
ABSA Bank
Robertson
91 9328 7376

**Once-off donations
accepted!**
(Do notify us for accounting purposes)

