



Phila Endalweni clubs

Noluvuyo Mshumpela

Picture: Allen Goddard



Excitement and sense of wonder fills the air as seven learners from Longmarket Girls School discover the diversity of life in a small stream at Bisley Valley Nature Reserve. Most of these girls have never seen nymphs before. A week before visiting Bisley Valley the girls investigated soil and compost life in their own schoolyard. They had fun discovering different kinds of worms and insects in the school garden. The greatest enjoyment came with making connections - what eats what and what compost is made of. It is this kind of learning that makes A Rocha's first Phila Endalweni-Creation Alive club appealing to Longmarket girls.

At Gateway Christian School during the start of our second club I was surprised by what excited the eager first timers. It turned out that they were excited to be joining a "green" club and were about to become famous! Most of these children come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have had no environmental education at all. What they know about environmental issues is what they see on television and hear on radio.

In Phila Endalweni Clubs we use outdoor teamwork games to help learners to build friendships. Through these games and outdoor learning activities, participants learn to work together and appreciate each other.

It is interesting to hear learners sharing indigenous knowledge from their cultures with each other. The Zulu girls once told of how ancient Zulu people roasted termites for a snack. A Rocha's Phila Endalweni Clubs can play an important role in the lives of young learners. We want to give them the opportunity to relate to and appreciate creation as God's artwork, to care for creation and to encourage others to do the same.

The Earth is the Lord's. (Ps24:1)...so what is its destiny?

A Rocha invites you to embrace God's purpose for creation, and answer Jesus' call to custodianship.

Meet Peter and Miranda Harris, founders of A Rocha, during our inaugural conferences:

Howick: 11-12 August

Stel'bosch: 18-19 August

Email us for details or contact:

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Darvill Bird Sanctuary – Over 20 years of bird ringing!

Article - pictures, Mark Brown

Picture the scene... the sky is just starting to get that grey hint of dawn, all is calm, and it is a cold winter's morning. The distinctive stench of treated sewerage drifts past... Yes, a perfect setting for a great day, if you are a bird ringer! Darvill Bird Sanctuary is part of the Pietermaritzburg Sewerage Works. Such works, due to their high nutrient loads (for obvious reasons!) are always a haven for high densities of birds. Most sewerage works have a network of treatment ponds or canals, which feed large tracts of reeds and sedges, the prime breeding sites for many bird species. The ponds and canals themselves, with associated mudflats, also attract large numbers of waterbirds, including ducks, teals and many waders.

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Isobel Johnson of SANBI supplied a picture of a Hilton Daisy for this logo. Many thanks for your partnership

Garden Sized Conservation

Dalton Gibbs, conservationist with the Cape Town City Council scales down conservation principles with some practical advice.

Many people are under the mistaken belief that nature is only to be found outside cities and large metropolitan areas, with rural agricultural farms being the last vestiges for some plant and animal species. Unfortunately the advent of mechanised agriculture has eradicated much biodiversity, and apart from some exceptions, intensively farmed rural areas do not support a great array of plants and animals. In fact studies in the Western Cape show a greater diversity of species in urban areas than in their rural counterparts, dispelling the belief that wildlife can only be experienced in a rural setting.

As a result, even city dwellers have great opportunities to enjoy nature and to pass it on as a heritage to the next generation, all within the confines of their properties.

Establishing a locally indigenous garden on your property is probably the most important step in conserving biodiversity that one can do. It should be emphasised that the term "indigenous plants" needs to be understood within the local context of the area that you live; a plant is not indigenous just because it is found within the boundaries of South Africa. Indeed, plants moved around within the boundaries of the country have in some cases become aggressive invaders. Visit a nearby nature reserve, do some research and find plants that are local to the general area where you live.

If you have limited space, choose plants that play support roles for animals in your local areas; for example, host plants for butterflies or fruits for birds.

Research what "drives" or renews the ecosystem you are supporting and attempt to recreate it as far as possible. In many ecosystems in our country this is fire, and while it may not be applicable to torch your garden, a short cropping with a lawn mower at the right interval and time of year can be a good surrogate.

Provide water in the form of a pond if possible. It is important that this should have sloping sides so as not

to become a death trap for small animals and insects. If you are using a water bowl, avoid one that will attract insects that may think it is a giant flower!

Avoid the use of insecticides and if you do have a problem with pests, research what animal controls them and attempt to create habitat to encourage these animals into your garden. Remember that the insects eating your plants can become the food source that will attract other animals into your garden, increasing biodiversity.

Where possible in South Africa's crime prone society, avoid using florescent or white light for outside lighting, as these will attract insects. If you are plagued by nocturnal insects, create a roost for bats by erecting a bat box.

Avoid vertical sides to paths and road verges; a mere 15cm road curb can become an insurmountable obstacle for some animals. Likewise where possible create small holes through walls to allow the movement of small animals. These do not have to be larger than the size of your hand.

Using our Space Against HIV/AIDS

Article - pictures, Allen Goddard

For a small minority of South Africans, many of them in positions of great influence, the pandemic engulfing our nation is a topic to be avoided. For most South Africans the disease is an unavoidable reality, systematically destroying personal health, livelihoods, family fabrics, and gradually compromising the capacity of every community, and indeed of our entire nation to sustain itself.

A Rocha's first response in this crisis has been to provide *Phila Endalweni* programmes for children infected or affected by the disease. Our first *Creation Alive!* Week for children of the Lily of the Valley Home near Pietermaritzburg took place last December. Here are some photos and an invitation to you, to help A Rocha reach out with love and integrity: We invite you to write an article of 850 words entitled *Earthing Heaven's Grace in the South African Pandemic*. The prize for the winning piece will be one free conference place at our inaugural *Hope for the Earth Conference* this August.



Noluvuyo teaching a Bible memory verse



Group photo



Picnic lunch



Learning team work

The winning submission will also be published in the next edition of A Rocha SA News. Please submit your article to Mark Brown at brownma@ukzn.ac.za by 1 July 2006.

Member
Custodians Everyday
 creation care stories
 by A Rocha people in South
 Africa,
 where they are:

Soil and Soul
 Heather Johnston
 Pictures: Allen Goddard

This activity means also that countless people fall heir to bunches of long-stemmed brilliant blue, magenta pink and soft green blooms - some as big as soup bowls. This is part of the raison d'être of the Beth Shalam garden - the gift of hydrangeas, daisies, roses, salvias, plectranthus for weddings, anniversary celebrations, seminary graduations and home or church arrangements in the seasons of Christmas and Easter. For some who stay here on retreat, doing flower arrangements for the chapel or public rooms contains some working out of the issues with which they are engaging. I vividly remember a vase of entirely green leaves, dead heads of daisies, and the spiky interiors of the weedy ginger lilies - all showing in graphic form the greening that was going on within the person who arranged them, and bringing blessing to all who saw it as they passed by.

Another, perhaps more enduring gift of the garden is peace, and the quiet space it offers to the many who come on organised *Quiet Days of Reflection*, or on days carved out of busy schedules to have uninterrupted and focused time alone, for prayer; sometimes making decisions; or for reflecting on the year just past. Sometimes they want simply to sit in the presence of God, listening to water tumbling gently into the little pool in the Secret Garden, reflecting on Him at work in their lives.

The garden is 'home' to many in the greater Pietermaritzburg area and indeed, beyond, for this very purpose. Quite a few have their favourite places – Millie's rock; Pam's spot in the top garden under the

pecan tree; Sally's seat near the water. One of mine affords me space to gaze at the pin oak which grew slowly and well, or enjoy the berries on the far cotoneaster - harvest for the prolific bird life of the garden.

The garden is an accurate monitor of the changing seasons, and of the change of a season itself – more accurate than any calendar. My colour planting for winter has been delayed this year, in spite of beds having been dug over and composted some time ago. Because of our extraordinarily cold and wet February and March, I am having to wait for the nursery to say they are ready *now* for planting.

So I am learning, slowly and yet again, new dimensions of waiting – one of the biggest themes in our growing with God. Although waiting is hard, for every gardener it is filled with hope. And we need to learn this for our spiritual journeys, taking on board Teilhard de Chardin's wisdom – that we cannot be today what only time will make us tomorrow.'

For a visit to Beth Shalam contact Heather at (033)343 3791.



Gardening, like many another thing, is beset by interruptions. Hence the garden at our retreat centre, Beth Shalam, is constantly in a state of never having arrived! At the moment the pruning of the hydrangeas has ground to a halt because two young, exotic and lively trees had to be taken down and an old but determined rose removed before it strangled our one remaining protea. Pruning time affords me much opportunity for pondering on what God is doing in my life. As I cut away the tired, old parts that have become woody and non-bloom bearing, draining much of the energising sap from the plant, I become aware of areas in my spiritual journey that need attention, especially those old and dead parts that are no longer life giving and therefore need to be stripped away.





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All things bright and beautiful...

Our biodiversity feature and picture is by John Roff, Environmental Officer at Hilton College.

KwaZulu Natal is the wettest province in South Africa, enjoying the moist air that comes overland from the warm currents in the Mozambique channel. The province has over 700 species of indigenous trees, and several forest types, each with its own unique blend of tree, herb and animal species. Amongst these trees, in the depths of the forests, come fascinating sounds, and among them is the clear, shrill whistle of the cryptic Natal Tree Frog.

These creatures spend most of their lives in the trees, where they rest during the day, and move around at night to catch their insect prey. Males call with a shrill whistle to attract females. It is remarkably difficult to see them, or even to find them by their call - I have frequented a place where they call regularly for nine years, and have only spotted them in the last six months.

In the daytime they survive the attentions of would-be predators by keeping absolutely still, and breathing slowly.

The frog in this picture was found in a plant sales nursery somewhat out of place amongst

black plastic bags and plant labels. I think it was only found because it jumped - and they can certainly jump! This one leapt onto my hand (the highlight of my day), wrapping its padded feet wetly yet firmly around my fingers, then jumped to the ground. A fall of a meter and a half didn't seem to bother it, and it sat quietly in the leaves, wonderfully camouflaged, for the rest of the day.

Like all of life, these frogs are part of a rich community in the forests and thick bush where they make their homes. Snakes such as the Boomslang and Red-lipped Herald will eat them, and the frogs in turn eat a wide range of insects. Being incredibly agile, they are able to reach parts of the forest canopy which other frogs cannot, and so form an important part of the web of life in our diverse forest patches.

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It is here, in amongst the reeds, that we set our nets, just as dawn breaks. Widows and weavers leaving their roosts hit the nets in a huge dawn wave, and the bulk of the days catch happens in the first hour. Later, it is the reed bed residents, the warblers and the bishops, who steadily get caught. Once netted, the birds are carefully extracted and individually "bagged", where after they are taken to the ringing station for processing. This involves placing a unique numbered aluminium ring on a leg, and taking a series of measurements. The bird is then released to go about its daily business, in the hope that one day it will either be re-caught, or found dead and the ring reported. Once a month, for 24 years now,



A ROCHA



Malachite Kingfisher. Our record is six netted in a morning

this process has been unfolding at Darvill, making it one of the longest running ringing stations in South Africa. Thirteen ringers have worked at Darvill, netting over 13 000 individual birds, with

Dr David Johnson being the main stalwart between 1981 and 2002. Since then, Meyrick Bowker & I have taken over the reigns.



Wood Sandpiper – ringed birds have been recorded from Russia, Finland, Italy, Slovakia.

Words cannot describe the sensation of holding a migrant warbler from Europe or Siberia, the ultimate example of a translocal messenger of Good News, or hand-painted kingfishers and bishops, bright colours shouting God's glory for anyone who will take the time to listen.

In the November 2006 Issue:

An interview with Elizabeth Martens, A Rocha SA's new environmental educationist.

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