

Hope in the City – The Living Msunduzi Waterways' Story is Unfolding

Allen Goddard
PHOTO David Payne

Imagine a river source in the densely settled and overgrazed foothills of KwaZulu-Natal's highlands. Think of twenty foot dongas carrying muddied streams down steep ravines to a century old Victorian Dam. Picture a young river gathering speed through the Edendale Valley, home to 550 000 people, living with either inadequate or no sewerage services. Imagine a youthful river harnessed by a canal. Think of factory effluent and motor oil run-off colouring the water white or black through pipes and inner-city tributaries.

And then spot the fishermen, static and hopeful, watching the surface for a splash. A tumble of Zulu speaking children cavorting in the water on a 40° C summer day. If you look a little closer, and listen, you may find a Likkwaan, a Hammerkop, a Goliath Heron, a Cape Otter, or a Jacana, each here for the same reason, but claiming their right to the river in their uniquely different styles.

This is one of South Africa's hardest working rivers – The Msunduzi. Twice in the year, the sluices of Henley Dam are opened wide to show the river's true mettle in our country's biggest canoeing marathons. South Africa's attention focuses on the Duzi and tens of thousands of canoeists for three days, and then the river seems to be largely forgotten, except by the fishermen, the children, and the paddlers, hopeful about improving their time at the next dice.

Clean water is increasingly scarce in the Msunduzi. E.coli pollution, some weeks as high as 1000 000 E.coli per 500ml, and many toxic effluents from industries would turn the river into a lifeless cesspool within one year, if it were not for the reprieve of good annual rains, and releases from Henley Dam. Recently KZN Water Affairs Officials mentioned decommissioning the Dam.



Riverside, A Rocha's temporary headquarters in South Africa, stands 12 metres above the Msunduzi as it flows through Kershaw Park. In the last year, A Rocha, together with local partners, have transformed a one-kilometer stretch of the riverbanks below Riverside into a conservancy. Invasive trees and shrubs, like Syringa and Bug weed have made way for Current Bushes, Quinine Trees and Wild Bananas. Small businesses, local schools and neighbouring residents have donated funds to employ Nkosinathi Chonco, A Rocha's Living Msunduzi Waterways worker, who supervises the rehabilitation.

A Rocha is currently looking for a volunteer to do a baseline survey of terrestrial and aquatic species in the conservancy. In the long term we envisage clean water, indigenous parkland, heritage walkways, community policing, facilities for fishermen, guided walks along

pristine waterways for schoolchildren, and a thriving habitat.

The future of the Msunduzi depends largely on massive construction of sewerage infrastructure for communities in the upper catchment. Focused environmental education to foster new attitudes to the river is also essential. A Rocha is building partnerships with local government, schools, community organizations, and churches, to play our part in bringing better quality of life and education to the people of the Msunduzi catchment. One of our partners, the Duzi, Umngeni Conservation Team (DUCT), a group of civil engineers, is following A Rocha's lead to raise funds for community development projects in a conservancy along the Msunduzi from Pietermaritzburg to Durban.

Each dawn at Riverside, a pair of Giant Kingfishers can be heard celebrating the day's first catch. At dusk, thousands of swifts spangle the sky and fill the air with their cascading twitters. After sundown the banks come alive with frog calls and the air 'tinks' with the sound of fruit bats. A free-flowing and living Msunduzi is a reminder that rivers have and always will be central to God's salvation story!

...OUR NEW LOGO! See Mark Brown's article on page 3.

Hope For the Earth!

Founding Conference of
A Rocha in South Africa
Meet A Rocha's Founders:
Peter and Miranda Harris
12 August 2006 in Maritzburg
19 August 2006 in Cape Town
Details Soon!

A Visit to the A Rocha UK Centre and Minet Country Park

Mark Brown

As a founder member of A Rocha South Africa, it was with excitement that I boarded a plane in early July 2005 for my first visit to an A Rocha centre. Allen Goddard and I were going to A Rocha's Leaders' Forum in the UK.



A "Robin Red-breast" (European Robin) up close, in real life, rather than on a Christmas card!

All National Directors (Allen), and National Chairs (myself) were invited to participate. We decided to make the most of the opportunity and spent a few days, both before and after the conference visiting the A Rocha UK centre in Southall, west London.

This was my first trip to Europe, although I have travelled extensively throughout southern Africa, Madagascar and Israel on work related or short-term mission trips. Well, my first experience of Europe was that it is safer in Africa at times! Allen and I landed in Heathrow the morning of the tragic July bombings. We had just arrived in Southall when they went off. In fact, we only heard

about them about 3 hours later after waking up from a much-needed nap!

The UK centre welcomed us as part of their community. We were immediately getting stuck in with chores that are part of life at the centre. Centre Wardens, Rob and Kathy Thomas are now good friends, as are Dave and Anne Bookless (UK directors). It was a good opportunity to experience life at an A Rocha Centre, and one that has spurred me on to try and visit another Centre!

One of the highlights for me was visiting the Minet Country Park with Claire Smith (environmental education officer), and seeing first hand, the flagship conservation project of A Rocha UK. Until 2001 this now wonderfully biodiverse and scenic site, was an illegal waste dump that was an urban eyesore. Through a partnership with local landowners, Hillingdon Council and other community groups, A Rocha turned this 90-acre wasteland into a beautiful urban conservation area. On Saturday 9 July I returned with Dave Bookless to do some bird ringing - my first experience of non-S.A. birds in the hand!

I invite all those who have not yet visited our website pages of all the A Rocha projects to do so. Why not make plans to visit one of these God-inspired project in the near in the future.

Reis van je Leven's A Rocha Journey...

PHOTOS Aart-Jan Koelewijn and Samantha Sheller

In August, the biggest group yet to do A Rocha's Created For Life! Course came from Holland. They took five days with us at the beginning of their South African visit, as preparation for 3 weeks of work in poverty stricken peri-urban communities. 22 Young adults and a 9 year old, joined the A Rocha team for an integrated programme of forest and grassland walks, Bible study, discussion groups, bird ringing, abseiling, and solo time in the wilderness. Here are a few things the team and visitors said they learnt from the course:

"God provides learning opportunities when you are ready for them, and he answers prayer." *Erna Stelma, Team Leader.*

God's created diversity gives so much fun and joy – it's important to spend time with God in Creation." *Bastian Both*

"It's clearest to me that although nature is ever-changing, God doesn't change at all." *Alide Kruizinga*





Green grass shoots up from a burned and barren land

All of these things happen, but do we notice? In August, at A Rocha's "Created for Life!" course, I had the opportunity to lead six women from the Netherlands on an interpretive walk through Cumberland Nature Reserve. It was one of those times where their reference in life, their realm of living, intersected with creation in an up close and personal way. For a few hours, these

women became free of technology, busyness, and all else that can so often control our lives. They were forced to do without in order to dig within and understand the roots of their own being...in order to walk in an area that reflected less the achievements of humankind and more the wonders of our Creator God.

To effectively share creation with urbanites means focusing on one thing: creating a space where they are to listen and to observe with all of their senses. During the first interpretive walk, it does not matter if the participants fully understand what they

observe or how it all works together. What is important

is that they "see" creation. The first walk should allow for a good taste of creation in such a way that the desire to learn more and to understand creation in depth can be birthed from within rather than from the facilitator. Once the participants have seen and discovered the intricacies of creation for themselves, their discovery will hopefully lead to a personal journey of searching for the Creator through his handiwork.

It is difficult to share a deep love for creation and admiration of the

Creator in one short walk, but as one learns in the end, Creation speaks for itself. All we need to do is stop and observe how the Creator has crafted His world.

Samantha Sheller is an A Rocha volunteer, working with Students Christian Organisation in P.E.

At Last – Our New Logo!

Mark Brown

In June 2005 the National committee invited A Rocha members worldwide to create a design we could use as a logo. Submissions were made by Allen Goddard, Miriam Steinberg, Júlio Reis and me. The National Committee then tasked Allen, Gert Swart (the South African sculptor) and me to finalize the logo. After input from the national committee and A Rocha members around the world we have come up with a logo that reflects A Rocha's vision and the unique, diverse country that we live in. We have included aspects of all the original submissions, using the organising concept of Júlio Reis.

The logo's 6 blocks use the rainbow colours of the South African flag. The bottom outer blocks represent land and water. Our land is surrounded by three oceans, and sustained by fresh water in our rivers. The remaining blocks symbolise just some of South Africa's diverse biota - the mammals (rhino), insects (butterfly), plants (daisy), and birds (sugarbird). We plan to change the butterfly to a dragonfly, to honour Miriam Steinberg's submission. We have chosen a logo that is "busy" because it reflects South Africa's astounding biological and cultural diversity. I hope this logo will become a symbol of hope for people of all faiths or no faith, challenging us to integrate creation care into our daily lives. I feel this logo also represents creation's window-like quality, inviting us to see Christ through Creation's wonderful diversity and beauty.

"It was very important for me to take a step back out of society, the pressure – without technology, and to be completely alone with God." Gauke Nanninga

"The most beautiful pieces of God's creation are human beings." Eric Korsaan

"It's possible to trust people." Nienke Bijl.

"I liked it when we learnt that in the Bible the heavens and the earth belong together."



Lianna Wubs

"Learning that 50% of every decision I make affects the creation made me wonder whether I really care." Reis van je Leven Leader

"Jesus shapes lives unexpectedly and beautifully." Marga Gunnink

Walking with Urbanites in the Wild

Samantha Sheller

Birds sing

Leaves dance in the wind

...such a dull, little bird!...

Non-scientific notes on the preservation of the Blue Swallow

Philip Le Feuvre

By whichever road you approach the attractive, Limpopo village of Haenertsburg, you will have to pass a colourful billboard, welcoming you to "Blue Swallow Country", with the added ideal expressed, "Ensuring That They Always Return". The sad irony is that, no sooner were the boards put up, then the birds failed to return to the slopes of the Iron Crown, and have not done so since.

The Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* is a flagship species. It breeds in holes in the ground exclusively in montane of mist belt grassland, precisely the terrain sought after for pine plantation, and in some places, mineral prospecting. What is more, very little grassland in South Africa is found in protected areas. The presence or absence of "this dull, little bird", as one thwarted investor called it, is a measure of the natural health of our montane and mist belt grasslands, not least in its ability to provide the necessary food source, aerial arthropods. The fact that the bird is critically endangered is a sad commentary on the state of a biome that in its natural condition is rich in plant life, insect, bird and animal life, and which, once destroyed, cannot easily, if ever, be restored.

As things stand at present, this summer, this visiting intra-African migrant has breeding sites in very limited areas of KZN and Mpumalanga. Endangered Wildlife Trust is sponsoring a small group of people, committed to "ensuring that they always return", but the prognostications are not good. Recent research is indicating that the breeding patterns of the birds have been so severely disrupted that the

chances of their survival in South Africa for many more years is minimal. But we have not given up yet, not even in Limpopo...

Rt. Rev. Philip Le Feuvre is Chairman of the Blue Swallow Working Group in Limpopo, and Board of Reference member for A Rocha in South Africa

In the May 2006 Issue:

"Garden- sized Conservation"
Dalton Gibbs
Phila Endalweni Clubs,
Noluvuyo Mshumpela
A Rocha in South Africa's HIV
and AIDS pandemic,
Allen Goddard

Orchid in the Forest

What a symphony coursed through your voice as you spoke this beauty into being? What music draws dust in to cells, lines, petals, bees, symbiosis, nuclei, yellow, roots, noses...

And did you think of Adam's line, breathtaken, investigating in child like wonder?

Perhaps you saw me smitten, fumbling, trying to catch the scent, the scene, the place, the awe, THE WONDER, the beauty;

with a glass lens and assorted electronic gadgetry from a realm called civilised.

John Roff



Polystachya pubescens John Roff - SANBI

FOR VOLUNTEER Opportunities in A Rocha South Africa

Please Visit our website:

www.arocha.org

CONTACT US with responses to our first newsletter or with ideas for articles, or letters to the editor:

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