



CRY THE BELOVED CONSERVANCY



We have known about the Gautrain for some time but reality strikes when we see and experience the effects. Like it or not, it's here and we're going to have to live with it, even when it despoils our wonderful conservation park. We can only hope that some good will come of it and that we don't add a white elephant to our animal list!

The 'Road often Traveled'. This is what greets you as you walk towards Vic's Falls just after leaving the tree lined part of the road from Isidleke.



The view of the meadows (on your left) as you walk from Isidleke towards Vic's Falls.

This was once rich in grassland birds and insects. European Bee-eaters made their home here as did a family of jackals. We may see the bee-eaters around here again.



Remember the pain of climbing up the hill between Vic's Falls and Isidleke after a long and arduous walk to the extremities of the park? Well that's what's left of it. This is where many small seedeaters, e.g., canaries, firefinches, waxbills, white-eyes and the like could be seen in shrubbery to the west of the road.



Downstream from the causeway at Vic's Falls. Gone are the trees and shrubs that provided nesting sites for the numerous weavers and a perch for kingfishers. The area resembles a WW1 battlefield.



The Caprivi Strip as it is now. Gone are the beautiful bulbs and grasses. Ellen almost lost her testing station (left of pic) to the bulldozers!



Fences are once again scarring the landscape and restricting the movement of man and beast.

Jackals, reedbuck and other wild animals that occur outside of the game area are at huge risk from loss of habitat and poaching.

It seems that the authorities have given little or no consideration to their fate.

Comment:

In some respects this particular situation may not be a bad as it may at first appear. Most members will recall the laying of the new sewerage pipe through the conservation area.

A trench several meters wide and deep, cut, dug and blasted its way from near the entrance gate through to Mia's Land. However, Mother Nature did a fantastic job of restoring the gash in the landscape and with 18 months or so of the work being completed one needs to search for evidence of the excavations.

Unfortunately, in respect of the current operations, when the contractors have completed their work their legacy will be the Gautrain!

Regrettably even the dreaded Gautrain will pale into insignificance when Heartland's plans for the conservation park come to fruition. Houses, roads and all manner of "developments" will change the character of Modderfontein forever.

The MCS is doing all that it can to preserve at least some of our heritage and we can look forward to continued albeit curtailed activities. At least once the Park boundaries become known and established, tenure and usage should be secure.

Photographs and text by Dave Gordon.

Note: The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the MCS Committee.

Norman Doak, one of the hardest working members of the MCS Committee, is probably best known for his enthusiasm as a "Walk Leader." Norman regularly reports back on what transpired during these suburban adventures:

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER WALK, AT MODDERFONTEIN

"Hi Everyone,

I stood in for John Clark and had a super walk in the park last Sunday AM. Had 18 visitors and with Alison (Coppin) and I the party was 25 strong. We had one of the best game-viewing days I have experienced at Modder.

Everything lined up for us in the old paddock down near Dam 5 and the Wildebeest ran away but came back to look at us about 3 times.

The Blesbok charged around up and down the hill and put on an impressive display while the Zebra ran away and came back twice to look at us before galloping off.

The best were the Springbok. They ran off and came back 5 times to stare at us from about 60 meters. Told everybody to freeze and gather together like a herd of non-aggressive animals and we had the whole lot fooled into curiosity

Birds were a bit scarce but we had a good look at the Steppe Buzzard both while flying and sitting in a tree.

The CHERRY on TOP was the Blue Cranes. The whole family walked across the wall of Dam 5 for us to view at our leisure. The "Family" consists of Ma, Pa and 2 half-grown chicks! Everybody was ecstatic at the sighting and even the rookie birders were hushed in awe at the rare sighting. Didn't know there were 2 chicks but what a thrill to see them and so plainly from 70 or so meters.

On the Saturday afternoon the day before, there was a whole fusillade of shooting from fishermen at Dam 5 and I was thrilled that the birds were unharmed, and seemed at their ease although they strolled off quite purposefully when we appeared.

The day was well enjoyed by all, especially the visitors, most of whom want to join up.

Norman"

World Wetland Day celebrated at Modderfontein

Pupils from Waverley Girls High School's Eco School turned out to celebrate World Wetland Day at Modderfontein on Friday 2 February.

The girls were treated to a walk in the Modderfontein Conservation Park. They were encouraged to collect and test water samples from the Modderfontein Spruit under the guidance of Ella Janse van Vuuren of Rand Water.

Jenny and Inge from River Rangers brought their trusty steeds and gave the children a good insight into why it is so important to look after and preserve our precious water resources.

Gauteng's "Mr Wetland", Paul Fairall was also present, as were members of the Modderfontein Conservation Society.

This is the first time that WWD has been celebrated at Modderfontein. It is planned to expand the activities into a full-scale high-activity event next year when the day falls on a Saturday. All Eco-Schools in the surrounding communities will be encouraged to take part.

Robbie Vermont

MODDER PHOTOGRAPHERS

We have no shortage of photographers at the Modderfontein Conservation Society.

Members and visitors attending the AGM were treated to a presentation of both slide (transparency) and digital images taken by MCS members. The standard was incredibly high and Modderfontein has certainly been amply and ably immortalised!

Note: A special word of welcome to the new committee members who were elected at the AGM, some of whom before the meeting had no idea that this was a remote possibility. For details kindly refer to the attached updated committee list.

Another of the highlights of the evening was a Power Point presentation by John Cruickshank entitled "A Walk in the Park." This presentation depicts entering and travelling through the Park as if on a walk.

John has kindly given his permission for copy CD's to be made available for sale. It should be possible to view these CD's on almost any personal computer or TV via a CD/DVD player.

I have the master CD in my possession and will be pleased to make copies to order at a cost of R15.00 each (profits to MCS funds). To order a CD of John's Walk in the Park, please contact me, Dave Gordon, on 083 625 6778.

Pat Ayling was our March speaker (and photographer). Pat gave a two part presentation on his visit to South America. Part one was a travelogue on the towns and places he and his wife visited – it's amazing just how clean a place can be! Part two focused on the bird life.

The bird life of the continent was particularly interesting as not only did we see birds that are strange to us southern Africans but birds that are quite familiar to us and similar to ours despite the vast distances between the two continents. I was fascinated to learn that parrots happily exist in Patagonia in the extreme southern tip of southern America against a backdrop of icebergs! I have always associated parrots with tropical regions and rude jokes about English vicars.

EDENVALE PHOTOGRAPHIC CLUB

While on the subject of photography, did you know that there is an excellent photographic club in Edenvale?

One does not need to be an experienced photographer or an Anthony Armstrong Jones to join. New members are automatically given a one star (beginner) rating. Through experience and learning from other individual members, as well as club workshops etc., one can progress through (the years) to the top five star (Honours) rating.

Attaining 5 Star rating should probably not be the aim, certainly not to start with; nor is it necessary to have expensive equipment. Having fun and improving one's photographic skills is what it's all about.

If you would like to learn more about the Edenvale Photographic Club please contact me on 083 625 6778, Colin Hall on 083 380 5480 or club chairman Mario Bracco on 082 854 2950.

Dave Gordon

Central – Anzeiger 19 December 1894

In a previous Newsletter we published Dr Eric Lundholm's recollections of Modderfontein in the earlier part of the 20th century. Dr Eric has subsequently sent us a parcel of memorabilia (more of that in another Newsletter) including an original copy of the above German language newspaper. For the benefit of the young, and maybe not so young, maidens among our readership an article in that edition has been kindly translated into English by Helmut Sandmann:

“NITRO-GLYCERINE AS CAUSE TO IMPROVE THE MARRIAGE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG WOMEN

We are familiar with the practical use of nitro-glycerine for the blasting of rocks; we also know that nitro-glycerine is a dangerous part of the anarchist's bombs – however, until now nobody knew that applied to the human organism it would have a very positive impact.

Professor Vivian Leives made the interesting discovery that nitro-glycerine improves the health of persons with a weak heart, and even increases the heart action in healthy people. Prof. Leives performed tests in a big English nitro-glycerine factory with surprising outcome, all young women employed at this factory – also those with weak constitution – gained weight after a certain time and became so pretty that most of them soon left the company and married.

As soon as this fact was known to the public young women applied in great numbers for even low paid jobs in such marriage facilitating nitro-glycerine factories.

Maybe we will soon receive news that also women of the higher establishment will apply for jobs in such factories to get a fresh and pretty appearance and subsequently a husband, and we will see that step by step such factories will be operated only by the hands of females which will lead to a drop in the price of nitro-glycerine.”

That's odd; there are no reports of husbands sending their wives along to work at the nitro-glycerine factories! – Ed.

MODDER BIRDING NOTES

Feb 07: With 6 experienced ornithologists visiting from Birdlife in Pretoria and North Gauteng plus our usual birders we were quite a large party. This didn't seem to matter to our watchful and largely silent group. All being keen birders there was little chatter except to discuss which LBJ (little brown job) was calling and which raptor that was. We ended the day having seen 106 different species!

From the animal enclosure ('the zoo') there is an air corridor which is used by soaring raptors - much like a 'Gautrain in the sky' - and within a few minutes we had seen 6 different species. Particularly exciting was the black eagle which obligingly swooped to show off the 'Wit Kry's' on its back. Could this have been one of the Walter Sizulu Gardens birds getting some afternoon exercise or on a food recce? The blue crane party of 4 were still evident at dam 4 so any scepticism on the part of our visitors soon vanished.

March 07: As we entered the reserve and stopped at the stone bridge as usual, we saw a Malachite Kingfisher downstream, and a pair of Half-collared Kingfishers on the other side (upstream), followed

by a pair of Pied Kingfishers (flying up and down), and a young Brown-hooded Kingfisher further downstream. So there must be plenty of food available in that vicinity. If only we'd had a decent camera + telephoto lens the half-collared especially were posing close to us in the sun and kept returning to the same spot.

We also had wonderful views of a confiding lizard buzzard near dam 3 plus several blue waxbills feeding on a couple of different patches of rank weed. There were plenty of assorted seedeaters all around, with a possible Black-cheeked Waxbill amongst them, but this certainly needs confirmation. Please keep your eyes open for this species.

Leslie, Philip and I were very intrigued as to the identity of a raptor at stone bridge. Was it a pale black kite, young honey buzzard or a strange plumaged steppe buzzard (all late leaving the area)? My opinion after hours of poring over books at home was that it was a very pale juvenile steppe buzzard (white belly and vent with pale head - otherwise the plumage was dark chestnut) but the behavior fitted well with honey buzzard as it flew lazily from tree to tree. I think only Philip had any sort of view of the underwing and that was no more than an impression.

Today brought 3 Long-crested Eagles soaring in a group, good views of fish eagle, and the best was 8 or so Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters. The latter we haven't seen for couple of years but they are special regular visitors in May, June and July (despite what the books say regarding 'where found!'). The Goliath Heron flew majestically around dam 4 and landed in a nearby bluegum looking like a Boeing compared to other birds. Walkers had views of Three-banded Plover, Black-crowned Tchagra, grey heron plus other regular resident species. It is always surprising how many pairs of black duck we find at this time of year - today was no exception.

Pat van Nierop

Photocopying by courtesy of TOPTURF for landscaping, irrigation, golf courses and maintenance.

Dedicated to the 'Art of Green'.

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