

# Touch Wood

## Seasonal News from Platbos

### Africa's Southernmost Forest

Platbos, located between Stanford and Gansbaai, is an ancient forest at the foot of Africa. Visit our website at [www.platbos.co.za](http://www.platbos.co.za) or contact us at [info@platbos.co.za](mailto:info@platbos.co.za) to book a forest walk, donate a tree or to find out more about our varied activities at the forest.

## Autumn 2009



### **In the forest**

February and March are the driest months in the forest; the ground is dry and much of the spring growth wilts painfully. The mists that bathe the trees in the early mornings are the forest's only relief. Fires in the Western Cape have been especially fierce and frequent; touch wood they stay clear of Platbos!

The Milkwoods, *Sideroxylon inderme*, are in flower and their warm, slightly sour smell has the bees in bliss. Stop beneath one and listen to their hum as the pale golden petals fall about you. Standing within their embrace, it is easy to understand why our forefathers chose to build their houses close to Milkwoods. Their dense, umbrella-shaped crowns created a roof for the "meat chests" that pre-dated refrigerators. At Platbos there is an ancient, stooped giant – referred to simply as The Big Milkwood – somehow it survived the axes when the forest was logged in the 1930's. We reckon this Forest Elder to be well over 1000 years of age. (photo of boy and old tree)



### **Forest Ecology and Reforestation at Platbos**

Dr Coert Geldenhuys, Forest Ecologist and Associate Professor in Forest Science at the University of Stellenbosch, visited Platbos on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February. For anyone with an interest in forests and reforestation, Dr Geldenhuys is a gold mine of information and inspiration. Our Trees for Tomorrow Reforestation Project has been modeled on his guidelines for reforestation and alien control so it was a great honour to walk the forest with him and to show him our areas of reforestation. (photo of Francois & Coert).

Central to Dr Geldenhuys's approach to rehabilitating natural forests is to utilize alien vegetation as an ally in the process. The aliens are cleared in patches and young forest trees are planted into these clearings. The aliens on the perimeter are left as they provide a natural 'nursery' area for the new trees to establish themselves. As the young forest trees grow, they shade the earth around them and inhibit further alien seed germination. The 'nursery' trees can later be removed once they have served their purpose. An important aspect of this method is his observation that berg-wind fires determine the location pattern of natural forests in the landscape. From his studies, Dr Geldenhuys has determined that natural forest patches survive and persist in sites naturally protected from fire, i.e. fire or wind shadow areas. Reforestation must therefore always be restricted to these areas. Our Trees for Tomorrow Reforestation occurs only in such natural fire shadows. We wish Dr Geldenhuys well in his next field of research: sustainable timber harvesting in the forests of Gabon.

## The Platbos Forest Tree Planting Partners



We all share the responsibility for healing our world and each day we make choices that have an impact on the environment. Growing public awareness around the issue of global warming and climate change, in conjunction with the recent international economic crisis, have meant that consumers are spending their pennies more wisely and consciously. We empower ourselves as positive agents of change when we use our spending power to support and reward those businesses that, in addition to supplying a quality product, conduct themselves ethically and with environmental responsibility. Asking questions such as where, how and

from what was the product manufactured, give us a true sense of the cost of the article in question. For the cost of the product is not only reflected in our bank balance; there is a cost to the Earth as well.

On our [global warming page](#), we have a number of suggestions as to how you can make your life style less polluting, and more Earth friendly. And it is with great pleasure that we introduce our **Platbos Forest Tree Planting Partners**. These are companies who actively encourage and sponsor regular tree planting at Platbos under the auspices of our [Trees for Tomorrow Reforestation Project](#). We welcome new Planting Partners and are currently developing a “Certified Platbos Forest Tree Planting Partner” Logo that our corporate sponsors can use to identify their association with tree planting at Platbos. Please visit our Global Warming Page to view our current Planting Partners – I envisage that this list will increase as awareness of the Trees for Tomorrow project grows. I hope that you will visit these links and read more about how our Planting Partners, in addition to sponsoring regular tree planting at Platbos, are making a positive difference to the world.

## Nuclear Power Station

ESKOM is forging ahead with its plan to build a Nuclear Power Station on one of three locations in the country. Bantamsklip near Pearly Beach is one of the sites. This unspoilt area is regarded as the world’s



“hottest of hot spots” in terms of its biodiversity and number of endemic species. Environmental Impact Assessments are currently underway for the transmission lines: 80 metres high, four pylons abreast, they are to occupy large corridors of the Overberg landscape. One of the proposed routes cuts directly over the canopy of Platbos Forest! I appeal to communities in the Overberg area to contact ESKOM and find out whether or not they will be affected by the development and to duly register as an Interested and Affected Party. There are still many landowners who remain uninformed about this looming threat. You can

register through NMA Effective Social Strategists: 011 447 9737 / email: [theoh@nma.org.za](mailto:theoh@nma.org.za). Shortly, we will post a link on our Global Warming Page which will provide updates, meetings, and environmental data around the proposed Bantamsklip Nuclear Power Station and its Transmission lines. (photo of seascape with “Bang!” )

## **Forest Visitors**



On a lighter note, Platbos hosted its largest group to date when 60 members of the Cape Natural History Club visited the forest on Sunday the 1<sup>st</sup> of March. In spite of exceptionally hot weather (38°C in the shade!) the visitors had a memorable time at the forest which included an informative walk in the forest and a tour around the tree nursery. A delicious chicken braai beneath the forest canopy revived flagging spirits and before embarking home to Cape Town, a few members enjoyed an unscheduled skinny-dip in the neighbour's dam – fortunately the neighbours didn't mind! The Natural History Club also set another record for Platbos with the oldest walker in the forest – 88 years old – well done! (pic of forest braai)

## **Platbos Guest Cottage**

Klawerjas Guest Cottage offers a unique sense of peaceful solitude, privacy and space. Overlooking Platbos Forest and backed by rolling hills of fynbos, Klawerjas really is a perfect weekend get away for city-weary folk. Take advantage of our special offer that is valid from March until the end of August 2009. Read more under [Klawerjas Cottage](#) on the Platbos website. (pic of Klawerjas)



## **Tree Nursery:**

Our tree nursery continues to grow and we are branching out (pardon the pun) to include a few non-indigenous favourites such as Oaks (English Oak, Cork Oak and Canary Oak), Plane Trees and Carob Trees. Over the last years, we have noticed some confusion around the issue of non-indigenous plants versus indigenous plants. Planting indigenous trees is a good thing to do since these trees are perfectly adapted to our local conditions. However, exotic trees, provided they are not invasive, are also wonderful to have around. Sometimes, an exotic tree actually fits the bill better than an indigenous tree. I think here of the Norfolk Island Pines of Gansbaai, that in spite of pummeling coastal gales are able to reach stately heights that no indigenous tree can equal. Exotic trees still have a place in our gardens and city streets; it is all about balance.

## **Trees as Gifts:**

Planting trees for others is really a wonderful gift, particularly now as many of us are re-examining the prevailing consumerist society of more, more and more things! There is something very special about knowing that there is a tree that has been planted with you in mind, and that it forms part of a wider forest community of trees that are doing all the important things that forests do for the Earth. Whether for a birthday or wedding present, welcoming a new member of the family or for commemorating the memory of a loved one, there are many good reasons to plant a tree. Gift vouchers are also available for forest walks. For R165.00 you can sponsor a tree and send a forest greeting card, with a forest walk voucher included, to your special friend. Please visit our [Plant A Tree](#) page to read more. (pic no 6)



The 21<sup>st</sup> of March marks the Autumn Equinox in the Southern Hemisphere. In days past, this was a time for giving thanks for the fruits of the Earth. It was also a time to for sharing with others and for applying the maxim: what goes around comes around. Let us in turn cultivate an “attitude of gratitude” and share generously the fruits of our good fortune with others.



With Season’s Greetings,

*Melissa Krige*

Autumn 2009

### **Famous Last Words**

“...each of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous Jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the Mimosa trees of the Bushveld”

Nelson Mandela, Inauguration Speech 10 May 1994.