

Touch Wood – Spring 2009

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 or contact us at info@platbos.co.za to book a forest walk, donate a tree or to find out more about our varied activities at the forest.



Lime-green leaves unfurl against a sky the colour of corn flowers. The sun shines golden and the air is alive with bird song and bees a-humming. It is spring time at Platbos. The trees are lush and the forest floor dense with herbaceous growth: acid-yellow sorrel flowers, blue lobelias, dainty nemesias and gleaming arums. The sun is still gentle and the earth moist.

The first week of September is Arbor Week in South Africa. At Platbos, the winter months are our intensive time for tree planting as the cool, wet weather is ideal for settling the trees in so that come spring, they are ready to shoot.

From Chilly Fields to Fledgling Forest

At the end of June this year, we began to re-establish the forest in the fallow fields above Platbos. In times past, these areas of forest were cleared to make way for fields of chillies – the success of which seems to have been limited as cultivation was soon abandoned. The forest has started to come back to these areas in a tentative fashion, but so too have the alien saplings of Rooikrans (*Acacia Cyclops*). The 1938 aerial photograph (below left) gives a good indication of how heavily Platbos was exploited during the early half of the last century. Rough roads, visible as white patches, crisscross through the forest. When you compare it with the aerial photograph of present time (below right), you can see how well the forest has re-established itself in the centre. It is the forest edge which is of concern as this bristles with aliens that act like a tinderbox to further fuel runaway fires.



The newly planted trees are enclosed within a low-voltage, electrified fence that is energized by a solar-powered battery. This is to prevent browsing buck species (Bosbok, Duikers, Grey Rhebok, Steenbok and Cape Grysbok) from nibbling our Trees for Tomorrow into permanent bonsais!

When you sponsor a tree at Platbos, more than planting a tree, you are sponsoring a square metre of forest canopy and the myriad of life forms that this supports - from mosses, lichens, birds and bees, to bushbuck and honey badgers. Only Platbos tree species are used and the trees are planted densely together as nature does it. If you examine the photo of young trees in an area of forest edge that has been left to regenerate itself, you can see how closely the trees grow together of their own accord. This is how Platbos Forest likes to grow and dense planting rapidly achieves canopy cover which is so vital for creating the correct conditions for a forest ecosystem.

Like the trees of the forest, the newly planted saplings are protected under the auspices of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. They are mulched and watered until they form an integral part of the forest canopy and are able to fend for themselves.

In the last newsletter, we announced that the price of our Trees for Tomorrow would be increased to **R70.00 per tree**. We postponed this increase as the Trees for Tomorrow article in the September issue of Country Life Magazine carried the price of R50.00. The new price will be applicable from **November 1st 2009**.

It is an uplifting experience to visit this field of forest trees and it is thanks to the many individuals and companies who have sponsored their planting costs: an abandoned field is now a future forest.

Village Life: our new Planting Partner

Village Life We welcome our latest Platbos Planting Partner, the publishers of Village Life magazine www.villagelife.co.za, highly regarded for its conservation and heritage articles. Their Village Life Guide to the Cape Overberg & Surrounds is soon to be printed, but meanwhile you can visit www.villagelifeguides.co.za which contains much information about the beautiful Overberg region.

The Spring Edition of Village Life carries the article “Bantamsklip: Eskom’s Extremely Bad Idea” by Maarten Groos of neighbouring Farm 215, winner of the Cape Fox Award for Conservation Stewardship. Bantamsklip near Pearly Beach is the hottest of internationally recognized biodiversity hotspots, and as Maarten explains, the nuclear plant and associated swathe of transmission lines that ESKOM intends building there, will be devastating to this environmentally pristine area and the livelihoods of those in the region. Breath-taking photographs bear witness to this stark truth. If you would like to add your voice to opposing the nuclear plant at Bantamsklip, contact Danie de Villiers of the Strandveld Tourism & Conservation Association on 082 554 1762 or email stca@omail.co.za.

The Path with Heart



Recently, a new path, the Path with Heart, was added to the Platbos forest trail. This small pocket of the forest has been devoted to “Land Art”. Also known as Earth Art, this displays creative expression that is ephemeral and short-lived because of erosion and the elements. There is minimal disturbance to the environment. Andree Bonthuys’s creation gave the path its name. As Andree explains:

Each forest has its own energy and for Melissa, and probably most who meander in this unusual little forest, Platbos has a gentle, nurturing, heart energy. And so I decided to weave a heart-shaped "vessel/room/space" of gathered fallen bits of branch and old man's beard. Mossy exposed roots, in a little clearing which is surrounded by a great selection of most of the forest species, determined the exact spot.

While I was quietly weaving the low walls, I noticed "forest nymphs" revealing themselves to me in the shapes and hollows of the surrounding living trunks and branches. This led me to place three low stools (slices of pine from Francois' arborist jobs) in specific positions inside the heart. I painted these seats with bright pink hearts to encourage, in fact invite, meanderers to stop awhile, to sit quietly inside the nurturing heart, and become one with the "forest nymphs" and birds and rustlings and tune in to the different species in the immediate surrounds.

As with all land art, nature and the elements eventually claim back that which is created by mankind, so the forest and its heart energy will in time reclaim my creation too.

Read more about Andree’s work here: <http://www.baardskeerdersbosartroute.com/andreebonthuys.htm>

Here on the Path with Heart, you will also find the Platbos Tree of Dreams. Years ago, an old and twisty milkwood on the forest edge was burnt by a mountain fire and then bleached white by the sun. A large branch of the tree recently broke off and this, with Francois' help, I brought down to the Land Art site. I decorated this "tree" with raptor and forest bird feathers found and collected over the years in the forest, and also the ancient symbols for earth, water, fire and air – the elements upon which all life depends. The Platbos Tree of Dreams is there to hold and then release (the feathers) our dreams-wishes-prayers-intentions-blessings for the Earth. Visitors are invited to write down their dreams for the planet and tie them onto the Dream Tree, for, as Don Helder Camara put it "When we are dreaming alone it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality."

If you feel inspired to create a piece of non-intrusive land art as part of our Path with Heart, please contact me.

Platbos in Country Life

Andree Bonthuys' article on "Trees for Tomorrow" in the September issue of Country Life Magazine, has resulted in many new Friends of Platbos Forest. Welcome! We have enjoyed hearing from you. We hope that you will visit and experience this precious and unusual forest gem at the southern tip of Africa in person. (PIC 9)

Days to Remember

21st September Spring Equinox: Join with thousands of other South Africans on the 22nd September as they tend to their organic vegetables. The **aim of the initiative, launched by** Planting Season (www.plantingseason.co.za), is to inspire ordinary South Africans to grow an organic veggie patch or window box as a first step in becoming self sufficient in terms of nutrition and for reconnecting with nature. At Platbos we will be joining with twenty thousand (and counting) others while we tend to our organic vegetables on this day.

The 22nd September is also **World Carfree Day** – on this day, ride a bike, share a lift, walk or use public transport. A day to reflect on how you can reduce your carbon / pollution footprint by reducing your driving hours. (PIC 10)

1st October is World Vegetarian Day. The aim of this day is to highlight health considerations, compassion for animals, the global hunger and food shortage problem and ecological awareness. An example is the issue of water shortages - It takes 100 000 litres of water to produce one kilogram of beef and only 500 litres for one kilogram of potatoes.

2nd October is World Farm Animal Day This is a day to raise awareness around the humane treatment of farm animals. The day supports the notion that as long as animals are slaughtered for food, they deserve humane treatment during their short lives. Support buying free-range eggs, chickens and other products not just on this day but every day ("Days to Remember" reference: www.greenworks.co.za)



With season's greetings

Melissa Krige

Famous Last Words: "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed." – Francis Bacon.