

## Touch Wood

### Seasonal News from Platbos

#### Africa's Southernmost Forest

### Summer 2008

#### The Birds and the Bees



It is Summer time and the sky is abuzz with honey bees collecting pollen from the many forest trees in flower. The *Olinia ventosa* "hard pears" are covered in compact sprays of white flowers and the forest air is heavy with their sweet perfume. The *Kiggelaria africana* "wild peach", *Canthium mundianum* "rock alder" and the *Maytenus heterophylla* "spike thorn" are also now in flower and the *Diospyros whyteana* "monkey bladder nut" are bearing their decorative seed capsules.

The birds too are adding their voices to the forest symphony. The blue-mantled crested flycatchers are back, flying their brilliant-bronze tails like ribbons through the sky, while the Cape White Eyes play noisy games of catch amongst the foliage.

One morning I witnessed two Bar-throated Apalis males in the midst of a territorial-tiff. Throwing caution to the wind, they engaged in a tussle mid-flight and landed in a disheveled state at my feet. Fortunately for them, I was not a hungry caracal!

All over the forest, nests are being made and vulnerable young fledglings are acquiring their first fuzzy feathers. The snakes are active and it is quite a sight to see and hear brave parent birds joining together to dive-bomb stalking snakes. Whilst in the forest nursery one morning, I had my first sighting of an Amethyst (African Black) sunbird. He was feeding on nectar from the flowers of the *leonotis leonurus* "wild dagga" and appeared almost jet black until the sun caught him and turned his feathers a deep iridescent violet.



#### **Nature Reserve Zoning for Platbos Forest**

Cape Nature Conservation has offered Platbos the opportunity to change its zoning to a Contract Nature Reserve; this will assist us greatly in our efforts to conserve and protect this unique and precious forest ecosystem. Such zoning is only awarded to sites that are of significant importance in terms of their conservation value and it will enhance the forest's recognition and marketing exposure.

#### **Forest Visitors**

It was the annual **Glendowner Birding Festival** in Stanford recently, and on the 5th October, a birding group led by Peter Ryan, co-author of the *Robert Birds of South Africa*, 7th Edition, spent the morning at Platbos and neighbouring Flower Valley. A Knysna Woodpecker issued forth a few sharp shrills to remind us of its presence in the forest. A new discovery for many, the visitors were impressed by the age-old forest. It was an enjoyable visit and we wish Philippa Castle, who is in charge of marketing the Glendowner Birding Festival and related photographic competition, continued success in highlighting the Overberg as a desirable destination for avid birders.



#### Bird sightings at Platbos Forest morning of 5th October 2008:

- |                        |                                  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. African Goshawk     | 7. Forest Canary/Dusky Canary    |
| 2. Bar-throated Apalis | 8. African Dusky Flycatcher      |
| 3. Black Sparrow Hawk  | 9. Knysna Woodpecker             |
| 4. Brimstone Canary    | 10. Rameron Pigeon /Olive Pigeon |
| 5. Cape Batis          | 11. Black Saw-wing Swallow       |
| 6. Cape White Eye      | 12. Sombre Greenbul              |

We are looking forward to the visit of 60 members of the **Cape Natural History Club** scheduled for 1st March 2009.

#### **Nursery News**



We were excited to discover *Olinia ventosa* "hard pear" seedlings coming up in the forest. Olinias are stunning trees but are not easily propagated, and as a result they are difficult to come by. If left on the forest floor, only a handful of these tender young seedlings would make it through the hot, dry summer months, and most would die before even acquiring their first true set of leaves. Following the principals of "gap management", seedlings growing beneath openings in the canopy are left with the hope that they may survive the summer and one day establish themselves as mature trees. A portion of the remaining seedlings are carefully potted into plug trays for growing-on at the nursery, and in due

course, will be available for sale or for replanting the forest edge.

Olinias are fast-growing, ever-green trees and we recommend them highly as garden subjects. Their timber was much sought after in days past and many were heavily logged, both at Platbos and in the Knysna forests.

Our 50kg nursery trees (*Celtis africana*, *Ficus sur*, *Diospyros whyteana*, *Chionanthus foveolata*, *Canthium mundianum* and *Kiggelaria africana*) are looking great! These trees are specially chosen for their vigour, health and aesthetic form and are perfect choices as specimen trees. Please see our price list for current availability and prices.

We welcome Mtobeli Mtsokoba, a recent graduate from the Green Futures Horticultural College, to our nursery staff.

### **5th November 2008: Obama elected 44th President of the United States of America**

We join with the world in celebrating Barak Obama's election as President of the United States, and wish him and the American people well in bringing to fruition the positive changes he speaks of - changes that will potentially transform not only America but the world at large.



The global financial credit crunch has sent the world's economies into a serious tail spin and the outlook for the months ahead is far from bright. Simultaneously, the planet is facing an ecological crisis brought on by decades of unchecked industrial development and the resultant pollution that is poisoning our land, air and oceans. In a recent visit to South Africa, Chief Anyoaku, the President of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) International, said that "A good many politicians are beginning to realize that saving the planet is as important as saving the economy".

His visit to South Africa followed the release of the WWF's launch of the "Living Planet Report 2008" where it was highlighted that the recent downturn in the global economy was a grave reminder of the consequences of living beyond our means, and that the possibility of a recession paled in comparison to ecological collapse (Sunday Independent November 16 2008).

While governments can throw money at the financial markets in an effort to bail them out, the same cannot be done to rescue the planet from the peril she faces. Real changes are called for and we salute leaders such as Barak Obama who are prepared to take on the serious challenges facing the world today. It is up to each of us to make the necessary changes to our lifestyles and life choices so that we ourselves become part of the solution, not part of the problem. You can get an idea of the extent of your personal contribution to global warming by using our Carbon Chart. To remedy your carbon footprint, have a look at our suggestions for adopting a more sustainable lifestyle on our Global Warming and Climate Change page.

We hope to welcome you soon for a visit to Platbos so that you too can share in the tranquility of this ancient forest. As a friend of the forest recently commented, very few people will ever get to own a forest, but by participating in the activities of Platbos they have the opportunity to become part of a broader community of forest lovers and by so doing, share a stake in the future of the forest.

We invite you to sponsor the planting of trees at the forest and by so doing to become an active member of the greater Platbos Community.

With Season's Greetings,  
Melissa Krige  
Nov 2008



### **Famous Last Words**

"I awake torn between a desire to save the world, and an inclination to savour it. This makes it hard to plan the day."  
E.B. White

### **Our thanks to:**



**Global Carbon Exchange (GCX)** is a leading carbon and energy reduction consultancy set up by concerned individuals in response to the global threat of climate change. With offices in South Africa, Australia, Jakarta, UK, Beijing and Namibia, GCX works with companies and governments around the world using its unique end-to-end carbon and energy management process to help their clients make the right choices at the right time for their business.

GCX are currently assisting us to access funding to have an evaluation done of our **Platbos Reforestation Project**. If we receive the necessary accreditation required for issuing carbon credits, it will be a major boost to the forest and could result in up to 20 000 trees being planted annually on the forest edge. Our thanks to GCX for this valued support and assistance.

## Website

Those who have visited our website before will notice a few changes and additions. Some of the new pages are: **Global Warming and Climate Change**, **Carbon Calculator**, and **About Us**. Our **Reforestation** page has been reworked so people can get a better idea of where the new trees are being planted on the forest edge, why this is necessary, and how individuals can get involved with the project. We trust that you will find these new pages informative and inspiring and welcome your feedback.

Under **Articles** you will find a collection of essays that celebrate trees. If you have had a moving experience with a tree that you would like to share, please send us a copy so that we can add it to our collection of tributes to trees. Please email us at info [at] platbos.co.za.

Our thanks to webmaster Shalene Pirker of Webinvent for the wonderful work of updating the website.



Our **Memorial Tree Planting** services will soon be illustrated and explained in more detail when this new page is added to our website. Families can plant a specimen forest tree in memory of their loved one and afterwards spend a day together beneath the forest canopy. Specially made plaques will be available to order.

### **A Cottage by the Forest**

As of January 2009, Klaverjas Cottage will be available for letting over weekends and holidays. This delightful cottage overlooks Platbos Forest and is a haven for those seeking peace, space and bird song. It is a 15 minute drive from the Walkerbay coastline that offers stunning beaches and amazing whale-watching vantage points. Rates and booking details will be available on [www.platbos.co.za](http://www.platbos.co.za) shortly.



### **To quote Dr Roger Payne who has been studying whales since 1967:**

"We have a choice: either to be the greatest heroes in the history of life on earth - remembered for longer (probably forever) than any other generation before for having made the effort and roused ourselves in time to heal the world around us, or we can be the greatest villains in the history of life on earth - remembered for longer than any other generation before (and probably forever) for having sat on our hands and done nothing while the consequences of both our action and inaction destroyed the natural world".  
[www.oceanalliance.org](http://www.oceanalliance.org)

Let us choose the former and by so doing, add our efforts to the growing number of individuals who are choosing lifestyles that actively contribute towards healing the earth.