

Touch Wood – Summer 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.



Summer's late arrival has had many muttering about the awful weather. The forest however is reveling with the additional rains. The mosses are still fresh and the hard pears, *Olinia venstosas*, are laden with red berries. The white pears, *Apodytes dimidiata*, are coming into flower, fragancing the clear air with their sweet, intoxicating scent. At dawn the forest trills with birdsong, loud and joyful. Our son Gustav awoke us at 5 am on his birthday to inform us that the birds were singing him "happy birthday" – what a glorious thought!



The baboons too have made their presence felt in the forest and have caused havoc in my labyrinth: were they searching for goggas under the shells, or perhaps it was a game of stingers? Whatever, it is now in disarray and I will have plenty of time to contemplate the meaning of their actions whilst recreating it.

With the warmer weather the children and I sometimes walk down through the forest to our neighbour who lifts them to their school in Gansbaai. On one such morning we noticed that a "bee tree" had deep excavation holes around it; at first a porcupine was suspected, but that theory was quickly tossed aside when we noted how single-minded, fearless and determined was the digging : it could only be the work of a honey badger. It obviously planned to tunnel under and up the tree to get at the honey as the entrance hole was too small to get in that way. A few paces later, our suspicions were confirmed when we found little paw prints further along the path. It must have abandoned its plan as the bees and their home are still intact.



Malacologists from the East London Museum visit Platbos



You will be excused if you do not know what a Malacologist is (I didn't know the term either). Malacology is the branch of invertebrate zoology that concerns itself with the study of mollusks. Led by Mary Bursey, this team of researchers spent two days investigating the forest floor, revealing some interesting information about the snail life of the forest. Mary was especially interested in a tiny little snail called *Chondrocyclus*. Under a magnifying glass, she showed us its hairy shell and explained how this is a new specie that has recently been discovered in the area. Apparently we have about ten different species of indigenous snails at Platbos many of which are carnivorous and enjoy lunching on each other with their razor-like tongues! They can be found under leaf mulch and decomposing tree bark. When you walk in the forest you are bound to notice bleached-white snail shells scattered here and there on the forest floor. These are known as *Trigonephrus* and one of their distinguishing marks is a dimple at the back of the shell.



The Malacologists also noted that this was the first time that they observed the exotic garden snail in a wilderness area – these like to cluster in the hollows of certain tree trunks and are especially keen on my small organic veggie patch in the nursery! They also found some velvet worms which are primitive invertebrates of ancient design. A minute ghecko was discovered under a log and it is thought that it could be a new specie but this still needs to be verified. It was a fascinating field trip and we enjoyed seeing the forest through their eyes. There is so much still to learn about the forest environment and we are always keen to welcome specialists in the Earth Sciences.

Climate Change

Unusual weather patterns strike an ominous note these days and all eyes are on the United Nations Climate Change Summit soon to be held in Copenhagen. Regardless of what political agreements are made at this two week long gathering, it is heartening to see how main-stream “green thinking” has become. There is a growing awareness that since we are all part of the problem, we are all, therefore, part of the solution.

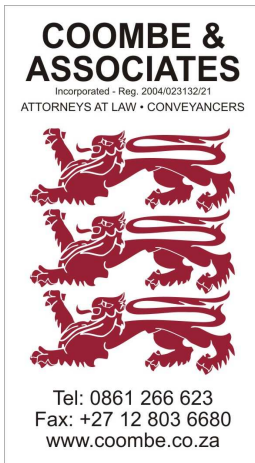
If each one of us takes it upon ourselves to live sustainable and environmentally-responsible lives, we can start to heal the destruction we have created. There is a wonderful array of publications and websites, products and resources to help us to achieve this. Have a look at our [Global Warming Page](#) where you will find practical suggestions to help you to reduce your carbon footprint. One of our Platbos Tree Planting Partners, [CarbonEthics](#), offers a carbon- auditing service whereby they will assess the extent of your company’s carbon emissions, and then assist you in reducing your carbon footprint.

If you know of a South African service or website address that should be listed on our Global Warming page and isn’t, please send me an email, I would welcome hearing from you as I know that this list is far from comprehensive.

Planting trees is an important way that you can give something back to the Earth and I would like to thank all of our Platbos Forest Friends who have sponsored tree planting at this very special forest at the foot of Africa. Without you, 1300? trees would never have been planted. One day, the reforested areas will be indistinguishable from the rest of the forest: what a wonderful picture that paints, and how heartening it is to think of all the many people who have come to know, value and love Platbos Forest. It is a truly great project to be involved with; thank you for being part of it.



Welcome to Coombe & Associates inc, our new Platbos Tree Planting Partner



Coombe & Associates Inc is a LAW firm, specializing in collection of debt and debt recovery. They are located in Pretoria, and the Company director, Mr Clifford Coombe, has a passion for the environment.

As Magda van der Merwe explains “One of the tasks Mr Coombe assigned to the marketing team, was to get Coombe & Associates Inc involved in environmental projects .Coombe & Associates Inc is already involved in recycling, minimum use of paper, and only uses recycled printer paper. When we found the Platbos website, Mr Coombe immediately thought of planting a Coombe Forest. The excellent idea of giving our clients a tree, instead of other gifts, really appealed to us. We hope to sponsor at least 1000 trees in our Coombe Forest. Mr Coombe is encouraging all our employees to buy trees for themselves and their loved ones. We started a campaign to introduce the

Platbos project to our employees and other people working in our building. All of us at Coombe & Associates Inc are proud to be part of the Platbos family, and hope to visit our trees soon!

Coombe & Associates inc is a wonderful example of how we can all become part of the solution by the choices we make in everyday life and we are proud to be planting trees on their behalf.

Update on the proposed Nuclear Station for Bantamsklip, Pearly Beach.

For keeping abreast with what is happening with ESKOM’S proposed nuclear power station earmarked for Bantamsklip, the botanical “hottest of hotspots” of the world, have a look at the Save Bantamsklip Association’s www.savebantamsklip.org. This is an excellent resource with stunning photos of Platbos’ precious surrounds, the Agulhas region. Through the site, you can join the association and become part of the resistance to the building of a nuclear power station at Bantamsklip.

Signing Off



On one level or another, 2009 has been a challenging year for many. It is easy to get bogged down with real and imagined fears for the future. One morning, en route to the nursery and lost in thought after reading an alarming report about the acidification of the ocean, I was stopped in my tracks by the sweetest, most intoxicating smell: the unmistakable scent of the White Pear Apodytes dimidiata. Her message is to embrace joy and to experience the profound beauty of life. Whether it’s a sunset, the perfection of a flower or the smile of a stranger, if your eyes are open to it, you will find this beauty wherever you are. So that is my wish for us all this festive season: to take time out to smell the roses, or white pears in my case, and to share this joy and gratitude with all you encounter.

With season’s greetings from us all at Platbos,

Melissa Krige

Famous Last Words: *The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.* - Albert Einstein