

Touch Wood - Winter 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.

Ferns Alive!



exceptionally dry tail-end of summer.

The epiphytic ferns growing on many of the old, gnarled forest trees, are living up to their common name "Resurrection Fern" and have sprung back to life after the first winter rains. These tree-loving ferns, *Pleopeltis macrocarpa*, are the only epiphytic fern species found in the Western Cape. As the temperatures cool and the days shorten, growth, in the form of grasses and sprouting bulbs, returns to the forest floor in dazzling, luminous greens. The relief of the forest is almost palpable, for the lives of many of the young trees on the forest edge were hanging in the balance after the combined assault of a heat wave in March and the

Living in the heart of the forest, we are frequently reminded of life's transitory nature. A few mornings ago, I was stopped in my tracks by a fallen giant that had toppled over the pathway following a stormy night. Days before, I had marveled at this same white stinkwood's two metre wide trunk and commanding presence. How many hundreds of years old this ancient tree is, is anyone's guess, and although we mourn its falling, it will live on through a young side shoot that will take over as leader while the main body of the tree slowly decomposes. Perhaps hundreds of years hence it too will be a source of awe and inspiration; I like to think so.



On sunny days the tree tops are alive with forest birds that chase each other through the shadows and feast on the berries of white stinkwoods, rock alders, white pear and milkwoods. Whilst guiding a tour of the forest the other day, my guests and I enjoyed two separate, close-up sightings of the Knysna Woodpecker.

Other exciting news is the report of a leopard seen during daylight just a kilometer or so from Platbos. Encounters like this are rare, and we are encouraged that in spite of humanity's excessive urban sprawl, areas like Platbos continue to provide a haven for animals of the wilderness.

Platbos Nominated for the Mayor's Environmental Conservation Award

Platbos Forest was one of the finalists nominated to receive the Mayor's Floating Trophy for the most meritorious contribution to Environmental Conservation in the Overstrand region. Platbos was nominated as an example of sustainable living and a pioneer in land management practices that encapsulate: forest conservation, the "Trees for Tomorrow" Reforestation Programme, a wholesale indigenous tree nursery, a youth awareness program and an ecotourism venture.



Forest Visitors and Educational School Tours

The first half of the year was filled with lots of school and special interest group visits. The new record for the largest group to tour the forest was set at 95 when an energetic youth group from Norway visited the forest in April. Many of the youngsters were clearly thrilled and wide-eyed with the idea that our family actually lived in the middle of a forest! They wanted to hear all about snakes and spiders and the scariest thing that has ever happened to us here (that would be when our daughter almost stepped on a Cape Cobra on its way past the front door).



Children are fascinated by the forest environment and we are currently formulating educational school tours that will incorporate this unique forest environment and the need to conserve it, the importance of tree planting, reforestation and alien clearing, as well as sustainable eco-friendly living powered mainly from renewable energy sources. If you are interested in arranging or sponsoring a school visit, please contact us to find out more.

The Cost of Tree Planting at Platbos

With the general increases in the cost of living, it is necessary for us to raise the cost of our tree planting. Up to now, the cost for planting a “Tree for Tomorrow” forest sapling was R50.00 (excl VAT). This price must cover not only the production of the tree and its planting, but also alien clearing and ground preparation, ongoing watering and weeding until the tree is ready to fend for itself, and also the provision and maintenance of deer-proof fencing to ensure that your tree gets to be a forest elder and not nibbled into a permanent bonsai! Should a tree die through any negligence on our part (a faulty irrigation fitting for example) we replace the tree at our expense. The price of the tree also needs to cover the administration costs for invoicing, issuing e-certificates and website updates. In order to keep the project viable, we have to increase the cost per tree to R70.00 (excl VAT). What remains priceless is the “feel-good factor” that comes from knowing that there is a tree that has been planted with you, or your loved one, 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. The new price is applicable from the start of August 2009.



Nuclear Update: Our answer is clear and it is NO to Nuclear!

The National Chairperson of the Coalition Against Nuclear Energy (CANE) Mike Kantey was invited to attend two important meetings in the Overberg where Eskom plans to erect a 10 000 MW nuclear power station. At meetings in Kleinbaai and Hermanus, ratepayers, residents, conservation managers, farmers and eco-tourism stakeholders all agreed that it was unacceptable to have such a monstrosity in the middle of a globally recognized eco-tourist destination.

Kantey will return to the Overberg shortly to support the regional **Save Bantamsklip Campaign** to have the Bantamsklip site removed from the list of proposed Nuclear power station sites. We encourage you to visit CANE’s website www.cane.org.za and to add your voice to the growing group of Organisations, NGOs, Environmental Groups, Communities and Citizens from all over South Africa who are opposed to Nuclear Energy as a Power Source and are saying **NO!**

Trees for Tomorrow and our Tree Planting Partners:

Increasingly, businesses contact Platbos Forest to find out about the Trees for Tomorrow Reforestation Project. Our slogan “Give a Tree, Grow a Forest” captures the essence of this project: along with the many positive benefits that these trees give to the wider environment, they are also conserving and "growing" this unique and precious forest ecosystem. More than planting a tree, tree donors are sponsoring the biodiversity of a square metre of forest canopy and in addition, assisting in the long-term conservation of Platbos Forest as a whole.



The **Certified Tree Planting Partner logo** was created in response to growing corporate interest in our reforestation project, and it is awarded to companies who sponsor the planting of a certain number of trees at the forest each year. Increasingly, consumers are choosing products and services from environmentally-responsible producers over those that are manufactured in a non-sustainable, polluting and exploitative manner. This is how we, the public can make our greatest contribution to saving the Earth: through favouring “greener” products with our spending power. The Certified Logo was created with this in mind so that our Planting Partners can clearly identify their products and services with forest conservation and reforestation at Platbos.



Our featured Planting Partner for this newsletter is **SolarTech**, a Proudly South African company that is part of a new generation of environmentally-responsible businesses who are pioneering the development of a “low carbon economy” in South Africa. SolarTech’s annual installation of approximately 35 000 solar water heating systems make a combined reduction of 130 000 tonnes of carbon emissions per year.

About a year ago, I introduced our tree planting project to Managing Director, James McCallum, and was immediately impressed by his passion and enthusiasm for conserving forests and planting trees. After hearing about Platbos Forest and the Trees for Tomorrow project, SolarTech have sponsored the regular planting of 20 trees at Platbos every month.

James McCallum and the SolarTech team visited the forest in May this year to experience the old growth forest first hand and to meet the 200-and-some young trees that have been planted as a result of their sponsorship. It was a positive and energizing meeting and we were taken by surprise when they announced their intention to donate a 150 litre SolarTech water heating system to our household.

Our “Off the Grid” home is powered by 5 solar panels and up to now, we have used the old fashioned “donkey boiler system” for our hot water needs. We were under the impression that since the roof of our house was mostly shaded by the forest canopy, that a solar geyser would not be suitable. James explained how this is not the case and we are grateful for SolarTech’s gift that will in effect reduce our household carbon / pollution emissions down to just about zero. With our recent purchase of an energy efficient fridge that runs off one solar panel, it is now only our gas stove that can be considered polluting to the environment: one day soon we hope to replace the gas with methane produced by a bio-digester; but that is another story...



A big “thank you” to SolarTech for making Platbos Forest even greener

Spread the Word...

If you enjoy this newsletter and like hearing about Platbos and our work here, please spread the word by recommending our newsletter to a friend so that we can “sow the Platbos seeds” further afield. Everything that we do to conserve the forest can only be realized with the help of our Friends of Platbos Forest – that’s you!

If you have not yet had the pleasure of visiting Platbos, we hope that you will make a date to do so soon. The forest is particularly beautiful in winter and you may get to enjoy the company of an elegant Bosbok (Bush Buck), an honour I greatly appreciated today.

With Season’s Greetings,

Melissa Krige

Winter 2009

Famous Last Words:

"What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world. The poet Adrienne Rich wrote, “So much has been destroyed I have cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world”. There could be no better description. Humanity is coalescing. It is reconstituting the world, and the action is taking place in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, campuses, companies, refugee camps, deserts, fisheries, and slums."

Paul Hawken is an environmentalist, entrepreneur, journalist, and author. Visit www.paulhawken.com