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1.1 WHEN TO MOW A MEADOW?

The predominant vegetation of the Greater St Francis Area is bushy: shrubs of fynbos affinity (bucus, passerinas, blombos etc.) grow interspersed with, or alongside, subtropical thicket shrubs and low trees (white milkwood, kershout, dune gwarrie etc.). However, in some places – for example coastal areas subject to fierce, salt-laden winds, and dune swales that become waterlogged after heavy rain – much grassier vegetation prevails. Also, regular mowing can convert shrubby bottomlands (the level areas between dune ridges) to grassland, as has occurred at the “airpark”, on golf courses and on almost all of the open spaces in St Francis Bay. Moreover, many gardens in both St Francis Bay and Cape St Francis include lawns that were established by removing the growth of indigenous shrubs (no non-indigenous grass was planted). Characteristic grasses that dominate these indigenous lawns are buffalo kweek (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) and common kweek (*Cynodon dactylon*). The presence of kikuyu (*Pennisetum clandestinum*) – a native of the east African uplands – is a sure-tell indicator of a planted lawn.

These “false”¹ grasslands harbour a rich flora and fauna. Amongst the plants, we need only think of the beautiful bulbs that emerge from late summer (e.g. gifbol *Boophane disticha*, blood lily *Haemanthus sanguineus*), autumn (Algoa candelabra *Brunsvigia gregaria*, St Francis candelabra *B. litoralis*), winter (*Massonia pustulata*) through to spring (*Satyrium princeps*, *Gladiolus huttonii*, *G. floribundus*, *Lachenalia algoensis* and many more). Added to this are the magnificent displays of spring herbs, for example wild cineraria *Senecio elegans*, *Lessertia stenoloba*, *Cotula* spp. etc.

Grassy areas also provide a habitat for many animals, including small mammals such as the striped field mouse, the vlei rat, shrews, tortoises such as the parrot-beaked padloper, a host of birds that prefer to feed and nest in open veld (plovers, dikkop) and, of course, a myriad of insects, including some that are important plant pollinators.

In order to maintain their grassy aspect, these areas require regular mowing. When and how often should this be done in such a way as to minimize the negative

¹ I use the term false, because in the absence of mowing, the grassy vegetation would be replaced by shrubs

impacts of mowing on the plants and animals of these habitats? This regularity will vary from place to place, depending on the management objectives. For example, a garden lawn will need to be mowed more regularly than a rough pasture, village open space, or an airstrip.

For open spaces (such as plover place, golf course “rough”, and the airpark) I recommend a single mow as follows:

(i) A mow, with the blades set low, should take place somewhere between mid December and early February, after the spring flowering period is over and all plants have set seed, but before the appearance of the late summer bulbs (e.g. *Haemanthus sanguineus*). Note that these can appear very early on in the year, depending on how much rain falls during the normally dry months of December and January. Also, the rain lily *Cyrtanthus sanguineus* can appear abruptly during this time after good rains, so try and avoid mowing then, so that these plants, which only last a short time, can set seed. Mowing at this time also benefits the dikkop and crowned plovers, since breeding is mostly winter and spring (the dikkop breeding season does extend into summer and even autumn, but they breed several

times a year, so the impacts should not be great. Most of the other small animals breed in spring.

(ii) In the case of turf around homesteads, and other situations where there is a need to keep the grass shorter, I recommend another mow in mid-winter (June and July). In this case, the blades should be set higher, so as to avoid removing too much of the growth of annuals such as the wild cineraria, and many bulbs. Fortunately, many of the latter have leaves that hug the ground.

Should the lawn be dominated by kikuyu, a grass that is very unfriendly for the indigenous flora and fauna, then regular mowing is permissible. Also, bear in mind that if your turf has been subject to regular mowing in the past, it will take some time before indigenous plants and animals return. Be patient, they will come back. Finally, the worst time to mow is spring (September to November); avoid mowing then at all costs!

Richard Cowling
FOSTER (Friend of the St Francis Nature Areas)

1.2 A FACE-LIFT FOR THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Some 120 000 years ago the first humans lived along the Southern African coastline, more specifically the Eastern Cape coastline, in caves such as the ones at Klasies River, Tsitsikamma area, which has subsequently fondly become known as ‘The Garden of Eden’. In comparison, the first finds of *homo sapiens* in Europe can only be dated back to about 30 000 years ago. Traces of these first inhabitants can be found all along that coastline in the form of middens, which basically were their rubbish dumps, albeit biodegradable ones, thankfully.

Over the millennia and centuries, the Garden Of Eden has been allowed to mature gracefully, until over the past 50 years it has suddenly shown deep furrows in its once so unblemished countenance. Portuguese sailors first named the treacherous point jutting out from the beautiful bay at the mouth of what is today known as the Kromme River: Cape St Francis. Many shipwrecks later the 2nd lighthouse in South Africa was erected there in 1876, using cement made from seashells, which has withstood a century of weather-bashing. All the material had to be taken over

the dunes and through the Kromme River by ox-wagon. During one of these storms, a pair of swans on board a passing vessel, on their way to some foreign destination, was washed overboard and decided to relocate to their own private island in the Geelhout River, where their offspring lived happily ever after, until it seems, they were decimated by otters in the mid-seventies. These noble birds were possibly of the first alien invaders in the area, although one can hardly classify them as ‘invasive.’

Far more serious invaders arrived much later, around 1920 in the form of Rooikranz, originally brought in from Australia and found to be useful by the property owner to stabilise the wandering dunefields so that the area could be made habitable in the mid-fifties. Those who may be familiar with the famous surfing movie “Endless Summer”, shot in the 60’s, will acknowledge that this was a good strategy, when compared to St. Francis Bay town today, half a century later. In those days a handful of venturesome spirits inhabited the dune area. Today we have a population that is impossible to keep track of, as about half the

residents of the 1600 houses in St. Francis Bay alone do not live here permanently. Separate settlements at holiday spots in Cape St. Francis, Oyster Bay and along the Kromme River have also mushroomed, and there is no counting the inhabitants of informal settlements that have sprung up largely as a result of the chokka fishing industry, which has created jobs for hundreds since the building of the harbour ten years ago, and the ever-increasing demand for new housing that has attracted the building sector. Alas, it also meant the death-knell for a large section of the Garden of Eden, as these aliens did not confine themselves to the dunes, but spread like an allergic rash throughout the adjacent fynbos, so that today there is no local region that is not infested to some degree. The repercussions of recent human intervention in the area cannot be overlooked. The damming up of the Kromme River has led to the silting up of the river mouth. The marine canal development has also interfered with the natural flow of the river. The Rooikranz and housing infested dunes can no longer wander naturally, with the result that the entire structure of the bay has changed, to the extent that there is no sign of a sandy beach at high tide any more. The original inhabitants of the Garden Of Eden would probably not recognise their playing fields if they had to make a quick visit tomorrow.

Taking a serious look at yourself in the mirror and acknowledging that something drastic needs to be done about improving your appearance is the first step to actually doing something about the situation. The St. Francis area is very fortunate to have Prof. Richard Cowling as a local resident, who not only knows the area backwards from a botanical angle, but has its concerns at heart too. He got together with landowners at Rebelsrus, a privately-owned stretch of coastline, who had some years ago formed their own private nature reserve. He proposed the idea for WESSA BCU to use Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund funding to develop a management plan for the Rebelsrus area. Now, as everyone knows, a state-of-the-art face-lift involves digging rather deeply into your pocket. Adjacent landowners such as at Mostertshoek and Rocky Coast were included to raise R20,000 for a management plan and to seek funding from CEPF. This money was raised by asking a R500 joining fee from landowners. One problem encountered with this, was some landowners' misconception that by paying their R500, their land would be

cleared of aliens for them. Sorry, no such easy luck!

Before any surgical procedures can be undertaken, the patient has to be informed of all the pro's and con's, and next of kin need to be identified. To get landowners more involved and to find out what the exact needs for a conservancy were, an expert workshop was held, hosted by CAPE. At this workshop, vision and mission statements were thrashed out and afterwards the private opinions of participants were circulated to all involved parties.

To function efficiently, all activities in a hospital have to be synchronised. Our Conservancy superintendent par excellence is Brian Reeves, who, working for WESSA, has devoted the past two and a half years to the success of this operation. He drew up a proposal for the formation of the ST FR CONSERVANCY and for an interim management plan. He started a quarterly electronic newsletter and put together an application for recognition by DEAET. The Garden Of Eden's face had to be mapped to determine which areas needed special attention, which needed drastic surgery and which only minor tucks. Brian worked overtime to develop an initial version of a priority system for alien plant clearing, after which a workshop was held to discuss alien plant eradication within the Conservancy. As said before, beauty operations are known to be costly, and aging beauty queens are forever on the look-out for sugar daddies to cater for their whims. Brian has compiled a document which has been presented to representatives of 'Working for Water' stating our case for assistance, and we are eagerly awaiting the outcome thereof.

Every patient needs a support group, and from those who have been dedicated to the Conservancy from the start, an interim steering committee was formed. This consists of landowners and other interested groups, voting members being representatives of the various landowner groupings. Over the last few months the conservancy has grown to include several surrounding landowners who all see the benefit of belonging to such a conservancy. We now have as members, amongst others, a game farm, a links golf estate, a private airfield, an eco-friendly property development and two river sanctuaries. Each of these has its own specific needs according to the ecological diversity of the properties, but all have the desire to preserve and restore the ca. 5500 ha that

make up the St. Francis Conservancy. Our plans for the future are to eventually link up all the way to the Tsitsikamma National Park, which would then include the archaeological caves at Klasies River and the much-debated Huisclip area. To this end we have honed our constitution and a management committee was formed to see to the day to day issues of the Conservancy. We have formed partnerships with existing nature groups in the area such as the Fourcade Botanical Group and the Custodians of Rare Endangered Wildflowers, who collect data on rare endangered plant species in the Conservancy. Examples of such plants are the *Brunsvigia Literalis*, which only grows between the Tsitsikamma River and Port Elizabeth, the endemic *Felicia Echinata* and the endangered wetland ground orchid, *Satyrium Halackii*, which we envisage to grace our logo one of these days. The official guinea-fowl logo of Nature Conservation has been erected at several strategic points, thanks to ESKOM.

So now the scene is set for the plastic surgeon to carefully wield his scalpel. The first minute, biological incisions have been made in the form of weevils that were set out some months ago to attack the seeds of the Rooikranz. There are also signs of the gall-midge's activities in some areas. Every now and then, veld-fires help to burn down the

dense infestations, but there needs to be a radical follow-up programme to eradicate new growth. On a more practical level, once we have secured funding, we are looking into employing several permanent teams to physically remove alien vegetation by various methods.

However, alien eradication is only one reason for the existence of the St. Francis Conservancy. There is a great need to educate the public to become more responsible for its own environment and we aim to address this situation by doing workshops with and giving talks to schoolchildren, and exposing problems and their solutions in the local press. Just imagine walking in the Garden of Eden in a few years' time, with no more quadbikes ruining the sensitive dunefields of the Sand River, no snares to torture unsuspecting grysbokkies, fields of *Brunsvigia* and *Felicia* instead of cultivated kikuju lawns, no threat from perlemoen poachers and pristine beaches free from garbage washed up by the chokka boats. It can be done if everyone in our conservancy feels equally responsible and as dedicated as the pioneers who piloted the scheme.

Elisabeth Rautenbach
Chairperson – St Francis Conservancy

2.1 VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS OF THE ST. FRANCIS CONSERVANCY

VISION: “ St Francis Conservancy – this unique natural and cultural heritage, preserved and restored by its custodians as a place of enrichment and inspiration for all.”

MISSION: “ The St Francis Conservancy exists to preserve and restore the patterns and processes of this unique environment and inheritance to be shared for the benefit of current and future generations, by a collaborative self-sustaining venture involving all interested role players, managed primarily by landowners, with the help of specialists, according to conservation best practise principles and ethics.”

2.2 DE AET

The Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism has sent a letter dated 19.10.2005 to Inform the St Francis conservancy that all appropriate documentation regarding the registration of the conservancy was received and as such DE AET recognises the St Francis Conservancy as a conservancy.

- Shortened Ed -

3.1 QUAD BIKES

Excerpt from article in Our Times:

The eyes and ears of the public are being sought in an earnest appeal to assist the newly established St Francis conservancy in ridding the area of a scourge that is tearing up the natural environment to the detriment of plants and animals. Public participation is the only way this problem will be solved,



and if anyone sees these illegal quad bikers, please phone the police immediately on 042 294 0703.

Several "Sand Toad", as well as other frogs have been found crushed by bikes. The Sand Toad is only found in the wetland at the edge of the Sand River and is endangered.

- Shortened Ed -

The following e-mail was circulated by the National Association of Conservancies of South Africa

Hi All

NACSA receives many complaints re Quad bikes destroying our open spaces . We are willing to lobby Local and National Government to ban quad bikes on open land, beaches, etc If you support this proposal please let us have your complaints in writing.

Regards

Ivan (*National Association of Conservancies of South Africa*)

The following are comments that have been received from interested and affected parties (I and AP's) and are sent to you in reply to the NACSA request email. Thank you for the opportunity for Conservancies to participate. Please advise on the outcome.

Megan Hope (*Secretary: Eastern Cape Conservancy Association*)

Conservancy:

We are also unhappy about "squad bikes" especially the noise pollution angle.

We actively discourage them but it is difficult if some-one arrives with one. We then confine them to farm roads only. As they can go anywhere people tend to want to do just that. Of far more concern to us are the scramblers which can really rip up the veld and do a lot of damage. We have had some bad experiences with them.

Conservancy

I do not think we have a quad problem in our area. No vehicles are allowed on the beaches already.

I have not witnessed any Quads in the reserve - they seem quite happy at Rover, although I have seen them riding parallel to Victoria Drive near to the Tip. Our problem is more with Scramblers riding on the verge of Sardinia Bay Drive and in the reserve!

However I have seen how destructive these quads can be - 4 fat tyres close to each other and you can go anywhere on one, including places where scramblers or 4x4's could not venture.

Do they not already fall under the same legislation as 4x4's? If not the same should apply!?!

Provincial:

Note that quad bikes are very much banned from beaches, dunes etc in terms of the *NEMA Regulations for Control of Vehicles in the Coastal Zone*. There is however an issue with quad use on

"private" dunes e.g. at Maitlands where property extends to the high water mark. In terms of the Regulations, vehicle use in the coastal zone on private property, by the property owner or with his / her permission, is a "permissible use."

Municipal:

no vehicles are allowed on beaches - the regs are in place and working well where there are men on the ground to enforce it in the E cape there is a piece of Ordinance. that reads along the lines of "no person may drive anywhere other than on a public road without the written permission of the land owner". - it works in areas where there are men on the ground and the land owner is prepared to lay a charge. Even if the land owner does not know the Ordinance most are aware of Trespass.

In a nut shell -people control people - not laws/regs etc thus the thrust of any agitation should be in that direction - the whole reason for Conservancies was to get people into the veld to check / manage / control / take action where needed.

Conservancy:

I agree whole heartedly with the proposal to ban quad bikes from open spaces. Such activities should be handled in the appropriate manner through organised channels such as offroad clubs. The usage thereof should be through such organised channels in areas demarcated for off-road usage.

One of the problems associated with these vehicles is that they do not utilise the exact same spoor as off-road vehicles (e.g. bakkies) thereby creating an extra spoor and increasing erosion along dirt tracks and gravel "middle-mannetje" routes. These are the kind of issues that will need to be addressed by organised off-road clubs.

I believe the driving of vehicles along beaches is adequately addressed by the NEMA amendments and hope that Minister van Schalkwyk's comments late last year about legislation to control off-road vehicles in mountainous areas will assist with these quad bikes as well.

Please put the Diaz Conservancy at Boknes / Cannon Rocks (still being formed) on the list supporting the ban of quad bikes in open spaces.

Conservancy:

Problem with quad bikes is that they can go anywhere and often do. We have even had them going through planted lands!!!!!!

Because of their excellent traction they don't do much damage but just let a scrambler loose those things really tear up the grass.



4.1 FYNBOS FYNMENSE

As lid van die St. Francis Conservancy was ek bevoorreg om in Junie vir twee dae deel te neem aan die C.A.P.E. konferensie in Kirstenbosch, onder die naam 'Fynbos Fynmense'. Dit was twee dae van pure genot en inspirasie om te sien en te hoor wat ander instansies dwarsdeur die Kaapland doen om ons natuurlike erfenis te beskerm en te bewaar. Ons het byvoorbeeld gehoor hoe die inwoners van Macassar op die Kaapse Vlakte, hulle inheemse plantegroei probeer bewaar en die inwoners inlig omtrent brandgevaar en hoe om 'n brand te bestry. Hulle het 'n wonderlike program begin waar hulle die skoolkinders inlig en betrek by die bewaring. Dan is daar die Vriende van die Sederberge wat 'n groot poging aanwend om die publiek in te lig oor die belangrikheid van die endemiese plantsoorte in daardie gebied. Daar word tans gepoog om die bergkwagga daar te hervestig nadat dit lankal uit daardie area uitgeroei is. Ons het ook gehoor wat alles gedoen word om die bobbejane rondom Tafelberg te beskerm, op 'n manier waardeur die bevolking nie onnodig gepla word nie. Mens en dier moet in harmonie saamleef en dit is die mens wat ingelig en opgevoed moet word, sodat hy nie die

natuur misbruik of skade aandoen nie. Daar is vertel hoe die gemeenskap in die Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve gaan baat en deel wees van die nuwe Natuurresewaat, en ons is ingelig oor die rol van gidse op die nuwe Tafelberg Staproetes. Ons het gehoor van die belangrike rol van voëltellings om bedreigde spesies te monitor en hoe die lede van die Heiveld Koöp organisiese rooibos te vir uitvoer kweek.

Van ons kant af het ek die konferensiedeelnemers vertel van hoe ons Conservancy tot stand gekom het, uit watter soort lede ons bestaan, wat ons doele en belange is en watter vordering ons tot dusver gemaak het. Hierdie samevatting het ek onder die titel " A facelift for the Garden Of Eden" geplaas. Enigiemand wat dalk daarin belangstel, kan by my 'n kopie daarvan kry. Daar was altesame veertig kort praatjies of voordragte en seker sowat tweehonderd mense het aan die twee dae deelgeneem. Ten einde is daar diskussies gehou om die bevindings van die verskillende instansies te evalueer. Watter lesse kan geleer word, tot watter insigte het ons gekom, watter aanbevelings kan gemaak word en in watter rigtings moet die toekoms strew? Hierdie word tans in 'n omvattende rapport bymekaargesit en ons sal dit binnekort kan sirkuleer. Dit was sowaar twee dae se intensiewe deel van ondervindings en ek dink almal het daar weggegaan met nuwe inspirasie en moed om die groot take in hulle deel van die land aan te pak.

Elisabeth Rautenbach
Conservancy Chairperson



4.2 REPORT OF MEETING HELD AT THE HARDIE RESIDENCE: 12 MAY 2005.

PRESENT Jan Kapp (Marine & Coastal Management), Lorraine Egan (Kouga), Gerry Ferreira (Nature Conservation), Frank Silberbauer (Environmental Control Officer St Francis Links), Sandra Hardie (Kromme Trust).

The purpose of this meeting was to find a way forward to ensure the protection and preservation of The Sand River dune system. At the close of the meeting it was decided that this matter should be addressed and pursued by The St Francis Conservancy.

Some of the issues discussed include:-

- 1 The environmental implication of large quantities of sand being removed from the dune at the main road entrance to the Sand River. The need to ascertain from The Department of Mineral & Energy the status of rights available. The dumping of rubble and compacting of such to provide access to the sand dune for trucks and the possible consequence of the rubble being carried down the Sand River in times of flooding.
- 2 The manner in which quad bikes and scramblers can be prevented from accessing the Sand River.
- 3 The possible introduction of a permit system allowing people to walk on the golf estate section of the Sand River. The money generated from this system would be ploughed back into the planned alien eradication programme for sections of the Sand River owned by the golf estate. This area will be a proclaimed nature reserve.
- 4 Fencing used in the Sand River section of the golf estate would allow the passage of fauna and the area would be constantly monitored by rangers. It is questionable as to whether fences can be erected on areas of shifting sand dune.
- 5 The extension of the nature reserve all the way to Oyster Bay would be an ideal progression. Subsequent to The St Francis Conservancy meeting on 23rd May 2005 there should be dialogue with the landowners of all sections of the Sand River.

The issue of snaring was also discussed and it was agreed that Lorraine Egan and Sandra Hardie would erect boards portraying the horrors of catching animals in snares and the fact that the practice is strictly illegal. Gerry Ferreira quoted a recent incident where a person caught in the act of snaring a Grysbok was arrested and fined R6000. The problem is of course one of socio-economics. An education programme would be investigated. Lorraine Egan recommended a black ranger called

December from Van Staden's Reserve as an ideal person to address the local community. This matter should also be raised at the forthcoming St Francis Conservancy meeting.

I have contacted Elizabeth Rautenbach chairperson of The St Francis Conservancy and she has agreed that these matters should be placed on the agenda for the forthcoming committee meeting.

There was positive interaction between the participants of this afternoon's meeting and Frank Silberbauer was particularly pleased to meet Lorraine Egan, Gerry Ferreira and Jan Kapp and to discuss their fields of expertise. It was pleasing that likeminded persons from local government and those representing commercial interests could meet for the benefit of conservation and the environment.

Sandra Hardie



4.3 SNARING OF ANIMALS

Excerpt from article published in the Our Times:

A cause for concern is the snaring of animals taking place in the surrounding nature areas, and particularly in the area opposite Sea Vista. A group of volunteers is needed to come forward for an anti-snaring campaign to assist Derek Cook with monitoring the area and removing snares.

Hennie de Beer will head up the team and educate volunteers as to where snares are likely to be found, and how to remove them.

Please phone Derek Cook on 082 779 9575 if you can help. – *Shortened Ed* -



4.4 ECO WALK WITH EXPERTS

Excerpt from article published in the Our Times (5 August 2005):

Elisabeth Rautenbach, a member of the new St Francis Bay Conservancy, organised an eco walk on the conservancy with experts in their fields explaining what an amazing natural heritage is bound up in this area but that alien plant species, pollution, and uncontrolled animals and coastal development were the greatest threats at present.

The St Francis Fynbos Thicket mosaic falls within the Cape floral Kingdom, the richest in the world, and which is a National Heritage Site. Although it is the smallest of seven in the world, it has about 9000 species of which 70% are endemics (found nowhere else in the world).

Sarah Blakeman, whose husband is Professor Andrew Balmford from Cambridge University in England, explained how important it was to keep the entire biodiversity of a region intact because all things in it depend on each other for survival.

Caryl Logie and Godfried Potgieter of the Fourcade Botanical Group then had everyone, especially the youngsters on hands and knees examining the dry seed capsules of little pink vygies then watching the effect of water poured on them.

Shell middens, littered with the remains of things that people who roamed here thousands of years ago and left behind in heaps, were next on the list with Frank Silberbauer, an archaeologist, holding everyone's interest. He also explained why it was so important to leave artefacts where they were found for archaeologists to work on.

The consensus at the end of the walk was that many more people should participate in an exercise of this nature to find out more about what is on their doorstep. Elisabeth promised that further walks would be arranged, during the school term too, so that children and others could benefit from this knowledge.

- *Shortened Ed* -

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Merry Christmas