



# Waterberg Nature Conservancy Newsletter

Occasionally issued news of interest to WNC members and others in the Waterberg

Number 3, August 2008

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## Next WNC Meeting

Date: **Thursday 11 September 2008**

Venue: Waterberg Academy (Main Hall), Vaalwater

Time: 2:30 for 3:00 pm

Guest Speaker: Reinhard Meyer, Groundwater in the Waterberg and Beyond

Cash Bar and Light Supper at Very Reasonable Prices

RSVP to Carolyn Ingram by Tuesday 9 September 2008.

Reinie Meyer devoted much of his 35 year career at CSIR to groundwater related research and projects in southern Africa. His work included drilling site selection and quantifying groundwater reserves. Most recently, he has been involved in a new geophysical method for groundwater exploration – a technique equivalent to a "scientific stokkie" (divining rod).

Reinie will provide a brief background on SA geology with some basic concepts of groundwater. His presentation will cover SA's groundwater reserves; how to find groundwater; drilling for groundwater; the groundwater situation in the Waterberg; responsible groundwater use and management; and the National Water Act.

## Unusual Wildlife Sighting - Tortoise Battle

Bertus van Zyl (and visitor/volunteer Rob Adie) report witnessing a Tortoise Battle earlier this year at Leopard Creek Reserve. *From a distance, we first heard the clashing. Having no idea what was making the noise, we quietly crept up to where the noise was coming from, about 40 metres away. We were surprised to see two hinged tortoises (probably Kinixys spekii) fighting. The battle was intense. Both tortoises would raise themselves as high as possible and launch themselves at their opponent, making a very loud bang with their shells. The fighting also included much biting, often going for the legs. We watched for about 25 minutes and then left them to it; they were still going strong, neither backing off from the other.*



## WNC Secretary/Treasurer

Unfortunately, Glynis Brown has had to resign as the Conservancy's Secretary/Treasurer. Glynis has provided us with exceptional service and has been a most vital institutional memory of the Conservancy.

Our new Secretary/Treasurer is Carolyn Ingram who can be reached at 014-721-9901 and [carolyn\\_ingram@telkomsa.net](mailto:carolyn_ingram@telkomsa.net). Please communicate with Carolyn when responding to meeting invitations, when changing any of your contact details, and other such matters. And don't take it personally when she chases you for the fees that you owe. Just honour your commitment, support our cause, and pay up.

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## WNC Executive Committee

Unfortunately, due to other personal commitments, both Dean van Heerden and Andrew Eager have had to resign from the Conservancy's Executive Committee. Kelly Abram has joined the Committee. The ExCo now comprises John Miller, Richard Wadley, Andrew Parker, Peggy Parham, Colin Palframan, Conway Volek, Solly Nkhumane, Franz Rolink, and Kelly Abram.

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## SMS Fire Warning System

During the fire season (mid August until first serious rains), a daily assessment of the prevailing fire risk will be made using a formula devised by Sappi. This takes into account temperature, humidity, wind speed and days since last rain. The assessed fire risk is then communicated to a list of over 100 cell numbers in the area by bulk SMS, sponsored by the Conservancy, the idea being to sensitise recipients to the risk of fire. The same system is used to inform all those on the list of any reported fires in the area and whether assistance is needed. Fires, together with as accurate a location as possible, should be reported to Richard or Lyn Wadley, (083 609 1425 or 083 609 1464) who manage the SMS system and will send out the messages. Anyone who would like to be included in the fire warning system and was not involved last year should also contact the above with their cell number(s).

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## Modimolle Municipal Property Rates

The Modimolle Municipality has issued its final property rates policy. Though parts of the written document are not perfectly clear, municipal officials have told me some important information. I'm willing to accept what they've told me, but we should all be a bit cautious about relying on it completely. Here's what they tell me: The category of agriculture includes eco-tourism, game farms, and hunting. Thus, such properties are eligible for several kinds of rebates. Each agriculture property will automatically get a 50% rebate (for basic municipal services not provided) and can apply for additional rebates based on the circumstances of the farm.

In addition, for the new policy's first year phase-in (July 2008 through June 2009), there is an automatic deduction of 75%. This will decrease next year to 50%, the following year to 25%, and ultimately fall away altogether.

The new established rate is now .014 rand cents per R1,000 of land valuation. To calculate the property tax due on an agriculture property with an assessed value of, for example, R2,000,000, one would first multiply  $R2,000,000 \times .0014 = R2,800$ . Divide this number by 12 months = R233 as the monthly rate. Apply the rebates of 50% for agricultural land = R117, which would be the monthly rate payable. During the first year of phase-in, reduce that figure by 75%, thus bringing your monthly tax due to R29.

The new policy and rebate application are available at the Modimolle municipal office as well as on Modimolle's website. As a result of great efforts by your Conservancy, go to [www.modimolle.gov.za](http://www.modimolle.gov.za) and click on Legislation and Documents, then on Policies. You'll find the Rates Policy at the bottom of the list. For the Application Form for Property Rates Rebate, click on Municipal Documents where you'll find a link to the Form at the top of the page.

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## Residential Developments

The Conservancy has been involved in recent public meetings on two proposed developments in the Waterberg. At a 23 July Tribunal Hearing for a DFA application for Thaba Lesodi, the Conservancy objected to the high density and the questionable water supply. Thaba Lesodi is a development of enormous scale. Located about 12 kilometres on the Vrymansrust Road, which heads east from the R33 about six kilometres south of Vaalwater, Thaba Lesodi proposes what they call a Golf and Game Estate, or holiday resort, of 850 stands, two boutique hotels, two golf courses, and many other facilities and recreation activities. In explaining to the Tribunal that it is not planned as a residential town/suburb, the Thaba Lesodi lawyer compared it favourably to Sun City. The Conservancy is well aware that many Waterberg residents would like to see such a development in the area. At the same time, the Conservancy remains determined to see that the project is well-planned and that any mitigation measures proposed are adequate and adhered to. We were happily surprised that the Tribunal asked the developers tough questions on many issues (especially density), and didn't seem to be satisfied with many of the answers. As this is written, the Tribunal has not made its final determination.

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The other proposal of great interest to the Conservancy is Nyathi Wildlife and Eco Estate. Located on the Melkriver Road, 30 kilometres from Vaalwater, the project has been contentious for several years. The Tribunal pre-hearing that was held on 11 July reviewed the developer's DFA application. The Waterberg Biosphere Reserve has engaged the law firm of Bell Dewar & Hall to represent its views and the Conservancy is part of the team of Objectors to the development. The discussion took the form of a courtroom debate between legal teams. The issues related to density and visual pollution, among others.

With contributions from individual Conservancy members, we are helping to pay for some of the legal costs. While the process may take some time and the outcome remains unknown, the cost may become significant. In order to relieve the burden on the few individuals who have pledged their support so far, the WNC is appealing to other members to join in contributing to our legal cause. And note well – this is just one proposal that impacts on the Waterberg and for which we need legal help. You can be sure there will be others and they may well affect you and your property more directly. So, please, make the effort to contribute. To hear more about this, contact Richard Wadley at 014-755-3506.

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