



Waterberg Nature Conservancy Newsletter

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

Number 6, April 2009

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Next WNC Meeting

Date: Friday, 15 May 2009

Venue: Waterberg Academy (Main Hall), Vaalwater

Time: 2:00 for 2:30 pm

Guest Speaker: Paul Oberholzter, CSIR Researcher, Limnologist (a scientist who studies the properties of fresh water)

Cash Bar and Light Supper at Very Reasonable Prices

Paul Oberholster has discovered a particular species of protozoa in a "pristine water" tributary of the Lapalala River in the Lapalala Wilderness. He'll tell us about this discovery and why it indicates that the water is unspoiled and uncontaminated. He'll also talk about how the rich biodiversity in the area can be preserved if the mines and ecosystems are managed well.

The Road to the Waterberg

Richard Wadley's good sources provide a status report of the R33 from Modimolle to Vaalwater: The road is regarded as a national priority because of the primary link it forms in the arterial route to Lephalale, where there will be so much growth in the next few years. However, the road is expensive to rebuild (around R5million per km). To date, the only contract awarded - and recently completed - was for the first 10-12km out of Modimolle. The remainder of the work will be contracted out in stages. The whole road **will** be refurbished, but probably only during the course of the next two to three years.

Rain in the Waterberg

Helmut Lessmann has been recording rainfall since 1966 on his farm on Bakkers Pass Road and reports that the rain for this past January 2009, 384 millimeters, was the highest single month total in these 43 years.

Enjoy the Higher Rainfall - for a while

by Richard Wadley (yeldaw@mweb.co.za)

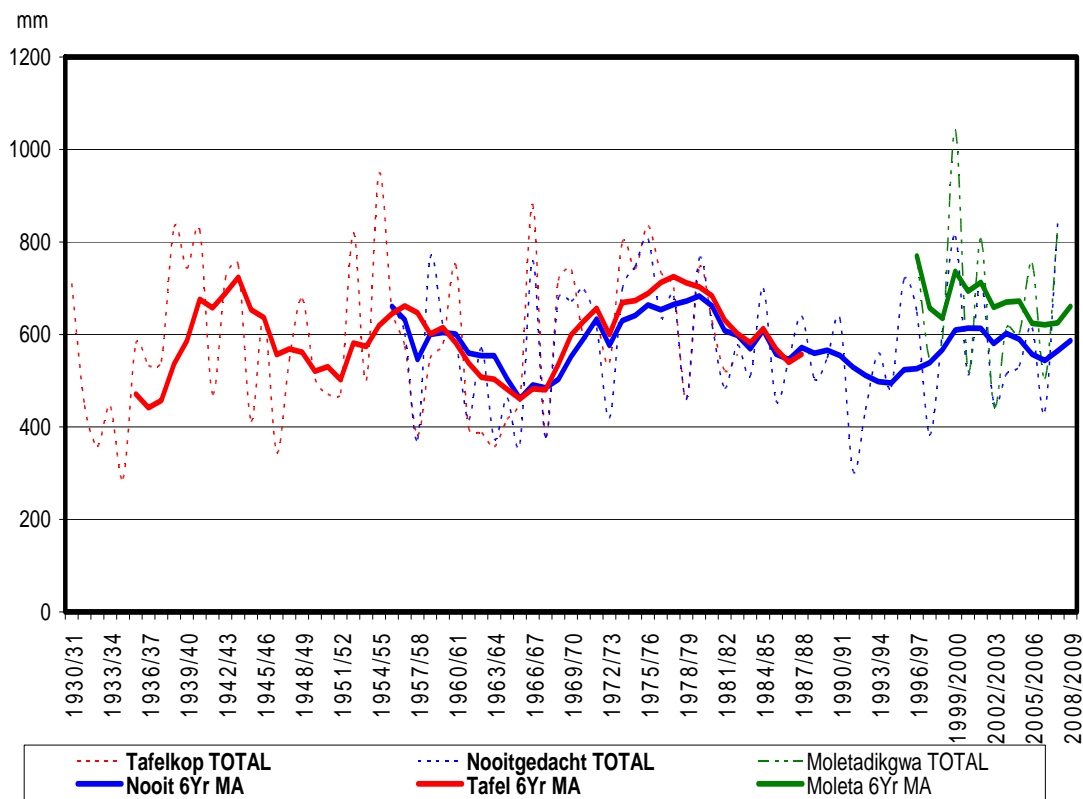
Nearly everyone on the Waterberg plateau - indeed, in most of South Africa's summer rainfall areas - has been enjoying higher than average rainfall the last two seasons. Some will probably say they've had *too much*; but that just goes to prove the old adage about farmers never being content...

In my area, near Tafelkop, I've been lucky enough to have obtained rainfall figures that form a complete series since 1930 - a record of almost 80 years. This was thanks to help from the archives of the *doyen* of Melkrivier, Louis Nel, who had been given the old imperial records from the Tafelkop (46KR) weather station (1930-1971); and my good neighbour, Peter Beith, who provided not only a graph of the same data, but also his own continuous record on his farm Nooitgedacht 50KR since 1955. Separated by about 10km, the two localities recorded very similar rainfall, as shown by the 15-year period during which their readings overlapped.

In looking at this extensive data set, I found, after applying a very simple six-year moving average smoothing process, a distinct and interesting trend:

that the rainfall alternates between well-defined wet and dry cycles, although the periodicity is irregular, varying from 12 to 30 years, with a mean of 18 years.

Tafelkop/Nooitgedacht/Moletadikgwa Long Term Rainfall Trends



As you can see from the graph, each dry or wet cycle (the period during which rainfall on average has been below or above the long term average of 580mm) lasts about 8 years on average, but may be much longer or shorter than that. However, the graph tells us some more interesting things:

- That we are moving into another wet cycle, after a very short dry one, (2003-2005) that in turn was preceded by a very short wet cycle (1999 - 2001). Of course, we cannot predict how long the present cycle will be, although the average length is about 8 years;
- That, contrary to most stories one hears around the Waterberg, on average, there isn't less rainfall these days than there used to be. On the contrary, if anything, the graph shows a weak upward trend in rainfall over the last 80 years, moving - at least in the Tafelkop area - towards a mean annual rainfall of 600mm; and
- That the amplitude of the cycles seems to be diminishing. In other words, although we still experience very wet and very dry years, the variation above or below the mean is not as great as it was in the past. Note, though, that in a wet cycle, for example in the one from 1954 to 1961, there can still be extremely dry years, e.g. in 1957/58 (373mm); and conversely, in a dry cycle, like that of 1962-1970, there can be occasional very wet years (>800mm). But the trend remains.

So, if we're still experiencing more or less the same annual rainfall as they had all those years ago, why is it that our streams and rivers don't flow as much as they used to? (There are several reports about how the streams used to flow throughout the year back then). My explanation - which is supported by comments from old timers like borehole guru Fanie Stander - is that over the years, increasing fire control in the region has resulted in greatly increased forestation, where once there was mainly open savannah. The higher density of woodland absorbs more rainfall than the grassland it replaced, leaving less run-off and less water to find its way into the groundwater reservoirs - and streams.

I'll be interested to hear how many readers can identify similar - or different - long-term trends in their own records; and whether there are other, better explanations for the drying up of our rivers in winter. In the meanwhile, perhaps the roads department can take note, and fix our roads before the deluge. Hello?

Reference: Tyson, PD & Preston-Whyte, RA (2000): *The Weather and Climate of Southern Africa* (2nd Edition). Oxford University Press.

Community Policing Forum

Captain Mpethi of the Vaalwater Police invited the Conservancy to participate in its Community Policing Forum (CPF) meeting. Greg Canning (General Manager, Jembisa Lodge) happily represented us and has in fact has agreed to serve as a permanent representative on the Executive Committee. Thank you Greg.

Greg reports on the first CPPF meeting, held on 18th February:

- Recommended that written crime statistics be made available at future CPF meetings.
- Inspector Maluleka from Vaalwater SAPS has been transferred to Modimolle SAPS and an investigation against him is complete. He is appearing in court on 8 April. No further hard facts available.
- Discussions with the owner of the property where the police station is located are continuing. Attempt to arrange a lease for the station to remain there for now. Recommended that the lease be only for a year as the community and the police themselves feel that the current station is not up adequate and a new one should be built.
- Sector policing is under way and there are four sectors for the Vaalwater police station. Each sector has a manager that is responsible for policing issues in their sector. Each sector manager needs to implement crime prevention measures and other projects to ensure a reduction in crime levels. Evaluations of each sector will be carried out. Recommended that this whole process be made more transparent and that all information is made available to the community, such as what is happening in the sectors and what the crime statistics are for each sector. Community involvement is seen as an important part of sector policing as it is a partnership between the SAPS and the community.
- SAPS requests that all houses and properties have clearly visible numbers or names on the walls to enable the police to find them easily.
- Currently, Vaalwater has no municipal by-laws by which the SAPS can act against certain problems, such as noise levels, disturbance of the peace, riding quad bikes on pavements, trespassing on municipal property, etc. This issue will be taken up by the SAPS with the local municipality, though such efforts seem to be going on for a long time and nothing has been resolved. SAPS also has issues with the municipality with regard to road repairs, street naming, and adequate lighting.
- Crime over festive period was low and crime levels for this period were lower than the rest of the year. This was due to extra crime prevention operations. The question is, if this can happen for this time period, why can it not happen for the whole year? The aim of SAPS this year is to reduce priority crimes (housebreaking and theft, assault and other contact crimes) by 50%.
- Community feels that SAPS is not doing enough with information they receive from the community regarding criminal activity.
- A community day is to be arranged (possibly in August) and all community members are requested to attend, particularly school children.
- The SAPS regards environmental crime as a new type of crime that they have not had to deal with previously. Though the stock theft unit is very good, it is hugely understaffed and not always available immediately. In any event, SAPS believes environmental crime is on the increase.

On this last point, it is possible that SAPS has so little experience with environmental crime that they would not readily recognize such crimes. For example, if they stop people at a roadblock and find protected plants or insects, they are unlikely to be able to identify them or know under which act to arrest and charge them. In this context, the Conservancy might help - we could arrange for conservation authorities to present a course to the SAPS and/or an appropriate Conservancy member could make a presentation to the local SAPS.

Eskom and electricity supply

by Richard Wadley

At our January Conservancy meeting, Eskom representatives made a presentation and answered a few questions from members. Eskom did its best to explain the reasons for the frequent, prolonged unplanned outages in the summer months, and told us of their plans for improvement. We appreciate Eskom's willingness to engage with a frustrated and often hostile customer group, and to invite us to meet with their engineering management group.

In both instances, the solution developed for these problematic lines was the construction of new sub-stations: at Dorset for the VS line and at Bulge Rivier for the VB line. The Dorset sub-station has been planned for many years, but its construction has been delayed by various factors, not least the intransigence of some landowners who refused to grant servitudes over their land. On behalf of the Conservancy, I offered to do whatever we could as a community to assist Eskom in resolving such issues, including lobbying involved landowners to be more co-operative, in the interests of the broader community.

It appears that the obstacles in front of a decision to proceed with the Dorset sub-station have now been cleared; and that those relating to the Bulge Rivier sub-station are close to resolution. I have appealed directly to Ms Nosipho Maphumulo (General Manager, Northern Region) to do everything in her power to expedite the construction of the Dorset (and Bulge) sub-stations in the current financial year.

In the meanwhile, I believe it is imperative that a moratorium be declared on accepting any new Eskom customers on either of these lines until the sub-stations have been built and the pressure on them alleviated. I was amazed and distressed to learn from one of the Eskom speakers at the Conservancy meeting that new customers were still being accepted, notwithstanding the fact that this was compounding the already dire technical problems associated with the lines. Clearly, this is an unacceptable practice and must be suspended.

The Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET) has made much of the tourism potential of the Waterberg region and the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve in particular. Many lodges in the area have subscribed to participation in the provincial effort to arrange accommodation for visitors attending the Soccer World Cup matches in Polokwane next year. And, tourism in general has been identified as the principal driver of economic growth and social upliftment in the Waterberg. However, the harsh reality is that, in the absence of a reliable, sustainable supply of electricity from Eskom, there can be no growth; and the facilities already in place are becoming discredited because they cannot guarantee their guests uninterrupted power.

Thaba Lesodi and the Limpopo Provincial Authorities

The View from the Conservancy

Dear Pat Nake,

I'm including Mr. Nape Nchabeleng and Mrs. Mihloti Hetisani on this e-mail because I think it is extremely important that managers at Limpopo DLGH are aware of what is going on.

I write as Chairman of the Waterberg Nature Conservancy. As a matter of urgency, I ask for your attention to the following:

As an interested and affected party to the Thaba Lesodi proposal, the Waterberg Nature Conservancy has been involved since the beginning. We have written letters and participated in Development Tribunal meetings. The most recent meeting that I was informed of was on 5 September 2008. At that Tribunal meeting, held in Modimolle, I represented the Conservancy and was the only opponent to the proposal. I made an oral presentation and left a written version of it with the Tribunal. The Tribunal Chairman told the meeting that he and the Tribunal would be meeting by themselves soon after and issue a decision shortly.

I waited and waited and waited. When I finally got hold of Hein Lindeque on the phone, he told me the Tribunal was meeting again with the applicants. I wasn't invited.

I waited and waited again. Next time I got hold of Hein Lindeque he told me the Tribunal had made a decision and I would receive the official decision. Of course I received nothing.

Finally, today, after daily attempts by me to get a response from your department, I received the decision document. It seems to be the final determination and says a hearing was held on 10 December, and the decision itself is dated 10 December.

I was not informed of the 10 December hearing, nor was I provided with this document until today, nearly 7 weeks later, and after I've asked many, many times for some formal news by e-mail and by phone to the Department of Local Government and Housing.

You have clearly not abided by the national laws and your own regulations about the public participation process. I can only deduce that the Department has knowingly and intentionally not included the Waterberg Nature Conservancy in any public deliberations on this proposal since 5 September.

As I look at the decision document, I see that point 5 has no amendment scheme number, nor does it provide any information of what the amendment might be. I also note that point 2 says the

environmental scoping report is adequate, even though the Tribunal Chairman told me and the hearing on at least two occasions that the environmental process was a completely different process and had nothing to do with the DFA hearing. In fact, the Chairman didn't want to hear any environmental issues raised by me or anyone else. He insisted that such a discussion was irrelevant to the DFA process, but now this decision accepts the environmental scoping report. I also note that the maintenance and access to an existing cemetery on the site was extremely important to the Tribunal, but I see nothing in this decision document that mentions it.

Thaba Lesodi is an enormous project, with dramatic consequences on the Waterberg and on Vaalwater. As an interested and affected party, we took our public participation role very seriously, but the Limpopo Department of Local Government and Housing did not.





Please respond to my points and tell me what you're going to do about the fact that you did not follow the public participation process.

John Miller
Chairman, Waterberg Nature Conservancy

Change in the Executive Committee

**Wait, there's more in this Newsletter.
Learn a little about some of our members.**
Scroll on.

<u>Company</u>	<u>Contact</u>	<u>Contact Numbers</u>	<u>Email</u>	<u>Web Address</u>	<u>Brief Description</u>
Ant's Nest and Ant's Hill Bush homes	Tessa and Ant Baber	014 755 4296 / 014 755 3584 / 083 287 2885	reservations@waterberg.net	www.waterberg.net and www.ridingsouthafrica.com	Ant's Nest and Ant's Hill are private bush homes in the magnificent malaria-free Waterberg. Enjoy fabulous horse riding safaris, guided bush walks or game drives on our privately owned property. Suitable for families, riders, honeymooners or just good friends travelling together
Izintaba Game Farm 	Nikki Eagar	014 755 4335 082 7057708 (limited signal)	izintaba@telkomsa.net	www.izintabalodge.co.za	Luxury fully equipped self catering cottages on a private game farm in the heart of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve
Jobedi Game Reserve 	Sharin	014 755 3993 / 086 612 9937 / 073 280 8670	game@jobedi.co.za	www.jobedi.co.za	Tucked away deep in the Waterberg Mountains is a private retreat. A purposely well kept secret set in a vast landscape of rocky terrain blessed with lush vegetation and scenic vistas of breathtaking beauty which lends itself to an abundance of peace and tranquility. We offer self catering units and camping and is the only reserve in the area offering self drive game drives.
Kgama Eco-Ranch (Pty) Ltd 	Steven Klagsbrun	012 362 2280 (office) 012 362 5982 (fax) 083 450 7510	steven@kdv.co.za		Conservation - Fauna and Flora - Ecological enhancement. Selected hunting opportunities.
Kololo Game Reserve 	Elize Oosthuizen	014 721 0920 / 014 721 0080 / 014 721 9910	admin@kololo.co.za	www.kololo.co.za	Kololo Game Reserve is situated in the heart of the Waterberg biosphere: A malaria-free area, home to a large variety of game makes Kololo a perfect safari destination. Visit neighbouring reserves and view the Big 5 - lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo, or enjoy a sneak preview over the fence, from the comfort of your chalet at Kololo.
Kwalata Wilderness CC  Where the real Africa begins!	Reinhard Heuser	014 755 4104 / 014 755 4249 / 082 414 5622	reinhard@kwalata.com ; caroline@kwalata.com ; office@kwalata.com ; werner@kwalata.com	www.kwalata.com	Our company's main activity is hunting. Kwalata consists of 13 000ha. Kwalata boasts 4 of the Big 5 and numerous plains game species and birds.

Company	Contact	Contact Numbers	Email	Web Address	Brief Description
<p>Lapalala Wilderness</p> 	<p>Roger Collinson (General Manager) Wild Revolution; Jessica Babich / Patrick Bonior (PR)</p>	<p>(014) 755-4071 (Lapalala Main Office) 084 404-7800 (Wild Revolution)</p>	<p>roger@lapalala.com info@wildrevolution.co.za</p>	<p>www.lapalala.com</p>	<p>A private reserve that is dedicated to conservation, ecotourism, community upliftment and environmental education</p>
<p>Mokabi Lodge, Moletadikgwa Wildlife Sanctuary</p> 	<p>Lyn and Richard Wadley</p>	<p>014 755 3506 083 609 1425 083 609 1464</p>	<p>yeldaw@mweb.co.za</p>	<p>www.mokabilodge.com</p>	<p>A luxury stone and thatch self-catering lodge set in secluded woodland affords guests a comfortable and tranquil experience in the magnificent Waterberg. Numerous clearly marked and annotated walking trails and mountain bike routes on this private game reserve enable visitors to enjoy the diversity of plant, bird and animal life offered by the unique environment of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve</p>
<p>M`solosolo Safari</p>  <p>Relax in the heart of the Waterberg biosphere, private but luxury!!!!!!</p>	<p>Dr. Volker and Marita Neemann</p>	<p>014 755 4106 / 083 450 6535</p>	<p>office@msolosolo.com</p>	<p>www.msolosolo.com</p>	<p>Nestled deep in the Waterberg, you enter a quiet, malaria- and crime-free paradise. Your German hosts have been successfully involved in the hunting and lodging business for over 12 years. Activities include hunting trips with a professional hunter, guided walks to bushman paintings, horse riding, clay target shooting, pistol shooting exercises, bird watching or game drives in an open 4x4 vehicle. We gladly organize elephant back rides, visits to the white lion park or a personal touch with rhinos. Longer trips e.g. to the Kruger National or Pilanesberg Park, sightseeing or tours to God's window or Tzaneen can also be organized.</p>
<p>Nkonka Bush Lodge, Nkonka African Safaris and Idube Safari Lodge</p> 	<p>Conway and Becky Volek</p>	<p>082 824 1750, 082 570 8494, 014 7554170</p>	<p>conway@nkonka.co.za</p>	<p>www.nkonkabushlodge.co.za www.nkonka.co.za</p>	<p>Under the shade of the bushveld, broad leaved trees, the 4 star Nkonka Bush Lodge, provides guests with an escape to enjoy the true beauty of nature surrounding them. Enjoy the small, intimate nature of the camp on a fully or self catered basis. Informative game drives or walks with our experienced guide, mountain biking and trips to surrounding attractions can all be enjoyed during your tranquil bushveld getaway. There is also the option of a self catered rustic bush camp, which is exclusive to one party at a time, so you are able to enjoy the beautiful Waterberg in the manner you prefer.</p>