



A hint of what is to come

IN MY Annual Report (*Veld & Flora* September 2006) I reported on the new Wild Flower Guide, No. 12, *Wild Flowers of the Table Mountain National Park*, now available for purchase, and how BotSoc was going to use this book as one of the vehicles in their transformation process. At the annual Botanical Society Branch Forum in September, we explored transformation issues with all Branch representatives, and will soon present to the membership our 'Transformation Charter'.

BotSoc has an extremely proud record of being associated with plant biodiversity conservation for over 93 years. In the past most of the Society's energies were focused on supporting the National Botanical Gardens – and essentially Kirstenbosch. Then some ten years ago we started to focus formally on extension programmes through the Conservation Unit. This was not our first foray into 'the community' because for years we have been publishing the Wild Flower Guide series and *Veld & Flora* and through the Education and Flora Conservation Committees, the Society has a long and proud record of doing things for the community. Over time this engagement with communities was formalized with the formation of the Conservation Unit (CU). And two of the most effective CU projects to date are the Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers (CREW), and the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI) – both projects being focused in selected target areas. The CU has on-going projects that are 'changing the way we do business', which to my mind is transformation. However, by their nature, all the CU projects have a reasonably narrow strategic focus – as 'research' projects generally, do and that is why these CU projects have been so effective.

However, Council now believes it is time to engage the wider community (which includes all BotSoc members, locally and internationally, as well as all other South Africans) in an extremely ambitious programme aimed at actively involving the youth in plant 'conservation action'. BotSoc does not yet have the resources to go national with this innovative and exciting thrust, so we aim to first focus on Cape Town's schools (and already we are thinking about relevant programmes in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, with an extremely interesting node in the Eastern Cape, but this needs extra funding that we will be planning to access). This new Cape Town based initiative is to introduce Grade 10, 11 and 12 scholars to plant conservation issues, and eventually to formalize this through the national syllabus. We hope to capture the interest of scholars in innovative ways. We are determined to succeed, so the challenge is on.

To borrow an example from Leif Petersen, who we have contracted to handle this programme, he shows an image that has three city vistas. One is of the beach at Camps Bay, looking up to Table Mountain. The citizens of this part of Cape Town are wealthy and have access to the best beaches and to the whole Table Mountain National Park (TMNP). The next is of the eastern suburbs where most people have a garden, a partner, a pet and access to the TMNP. Finally there is a picture of a squatter community somewhere on the Cape Flats where the people have no garden, are lucky to have a toilet and running water and maybe electricity and certainly no access to the TMNP. The latter is our main target group: the majority of South Africans who possibly have never heard

of biodiversity, let alone understand it.

So why Cape Town? Because it has the biggest BotSoc membership, and it is the only city with a National Park within its precincts, as well as a network of small conservation sites in the surrounding lowlands. The City Council have a Structural Plan that aims to link its many natural sites by corridors to the TMNP, thereby linking people to biodiversity. We are convinced that if our vision of 'biodiversity conservation for all' is to work anywhere in South Africa, we have the best chance of making it succeed in Cape Town. And lessons learned will help to institute similar programmes elsewhere.

BotSoc has managed to win support for this vision from its many members who have contributed magnificently to the concept through their generous response to the appeal BotSoc launched in tandem with the book. We are getting excellent support from a number of organizations as the conservation education programmes get started, and have amassed R2 million which, although a significant amount, is about a quarter of what we will need over the next few years.

So well done to our members and those organizations that have donated money, and well done to those who are partnering us and have promised to get involved. We are off to a flying start and I am certain that this project will become a beacon for the future of transformation in BotSoc.

Eugene Moll, Chairman of Council, BotSoc

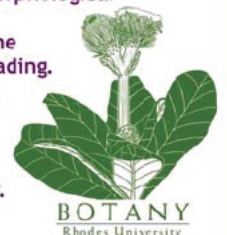


The Department of Botany at Rhodes University offers a variety of study opportunities for Honours, MSc and PhD students.

Rhodes University places a strong emphasis on postgraduate training and research, and has one of the highest per capita research outputs of any university in South Africa. Rhodes is ideally situated for botanical studies, being positioned close to five major biomes in the Albany centre of plant endemism. The University is well equipped, and students enjoy access to a range of modern research facilities and expertise.

The Department of Botany offers funded post-graduate study opportunities in the following areas of research:

- Ecophysiology of C₃ and C₄ photosynthetic grass subtypes and coastal sand dune plants.
- Evolutionary and biogeographical studies on African plants using molecular (DNA) and morphological techniques.
- Transport phenomena in plants, and the effect of elevated CO₂ on phloem loading.
- Population, rangeland and restoration ecology.
- The ecology and evolution of plant-pollinator interactions.
- Conservation biology and ethnobotany.



For additional details or enquiries please contact the HOD, Prof Brad Ripley: B.ripley@ru.ac.za, phone 046 603 8592. For further information on the department and our research interests, please visit <http://www.ru.ac.za/botany/>