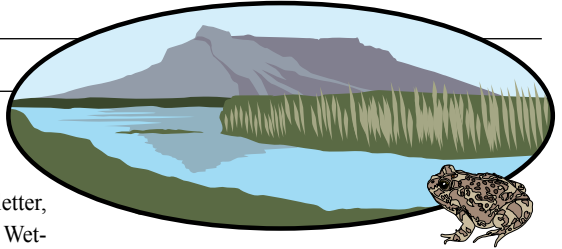


# Vlei Time

First Issue Summer 2010



## *It's your green space*

**T**ake time out – it's Vlei Time! This newsletter, produced by Friends of the Paardeneiland Wetlands and published at every change of season, will help you enjoy the hidden treasure of the area. Very few other communities are lucky enough to have a vlei on their doorstep.

We want to help you discover the pleasures of your vlei. There are birds to watch (40 species seen on a recent quick count), seasonal wild flowers to identify, and fish and frogs to be found in the water.

We'll keep you informed about the new MyCiTi bus route along the edge of the wetlands, plus the latest plans for landscaping and improvements. Right now we're eagerly awaiting planting in the rich black soil spread on the banks of the vlei.

Have you tried out the new benches overlooking the water? They're surprisingly comfortable.

In this issue Peter Albert, chairman of the Friends,

sets out our aims and appeals for members, and Patricia Tallant, manager of Paarden Eiland City Improvement District, calls on industrialists to help the Friends' efforts.

You'll share the experiences of the Vleipaddas, adults and kids who give up time on Saturday mornings to help clean up litter; go bird-spotting with Ronel Scheffer and Frank Wygold and learn how Paardeneiland earned its name. Gail Kirkwood investigates the catfish invaders that are gobbling up the platanna population and Lannice Wouldidge explores paths around the vlei.

Enjoy Zoarvlei this festive season. It's your green space. Please, don't spoil it by littering!

*The Editor*



Paddas who regularly clean up litter on Zoarvlei usually take time out to explore the paths and water. That's how the young fellows pictured here with Gail Kirkwood recently discovered a healthy population of junior Cape Kurper and Mozambican Tilapia under the causeway behind the Italian Club. Congratulations to Yusuf Galant, Lucky Mohale, George Moyo, Thando Janda and Arsene Diabanza for producing proof that Zoarvlei is worth preserving. They used a cut-off plastic cooldrink bottle to corner the little fish.

■ **Join the Vleipaddas on the first and third Saturday mornings of the month (report between 8 and 10 am in the cul-de-sac at the bottom of Wemyss Street if you want to help).**

**DISCOVER PAARDENEILAND'S GREEN LUNG**

## CHAMPIONS OF THE VLEI

Chairperson Peter Albert explains the aims and history of the Friends of the Paardeneiland Wetlands

The Friends of the Paardeneiland Wetlands group was founded in 1993 with the assistance of Wessa (Wildlife and Environmental Society of SA). The first committee comprised Pema's (Paarden Eiland & Metro Association) environmental body, concerned Brooklyn residents – Hazel Petrig is still serving as secretary – and interested individuals. Meetings were held at Klein Zoar, home of David and Jos Baker.

The objectives were, and remain, the preservation of the remnant of Zoarvlei, which is an extension of the Deep River; bird life, plant species and to prevent further degradation due to building activities.

Support was sought from property owners on the edge of the wetland, Pema, schools, and residents. The active involvement of Pema was particularly welcome due to the wider membership of industrialists. There was much enthusiasm for the concept, with its modest membership fees, and AGMs were well attended, with about 30 active participants.

The group has remained active through its participation on the forum of the Zoarvlei Manage-

ment Action Committee, (ZMAC), which is the ongoing municipal involvement over the status of the vlei. The achievements have been concentrated on Dr Frank Wygold's West Coast Field Studies Centre (WCFSC) and its educational programme via schools, with scores of pupils benefiting.

Bird counts have been undertaken for national Co-ordinatured Waterbird Count (Cwac) studies, and pathways established through funding from Total. Other on-going activities include alien vegetation removal, monitoring of water levels and pollution, plus prevention of squatting and dumping.

Education in this sphere is essential, as is the incentive to improve and maintain adjacent property values. No-one wants to live on the border of a rubbish dump!

We need the enthusiastic response and participation of an enviro-friendly community and welcome your interest in our activities.



## CALL TO INDUSTRIALISTS

By Patricia Tallant, manager of Paarden Eiland City Improvement District and deputy chair of the Friends

Despite being on the edge of a wetland, most industrialists in Paardeneiland seem unaware of this precious asset right on their doorstep.

This is a wake-up call. Recently granted "voluntary conservation area" status by the City, the Paardeneiland Wetlands, or Zoarvlei, is under enor-

The waterways were well tended by the City during the year

mous stress. Support for plans to alleviate problems would be more constructive than complaints.

For several years most businesses close to the wetland area (particularly Milner, Gray and parts of Auckland streets) have complained of the unpleasant and damaging effects on staff and property by the seasonal dispersing of bulrush seeds, degradation caused by the invasion of displaced people setting up campsites and the continued dumping of rubbish in the area. A huge fire allegedly started in one of the camps a few years ago brought into focus the vulnerability of buildings and other assets close to the vlei.

The prime objective of the Friends is to upgrade and preserve the area, yet interest from businesses is decidedly poor.

## WHY PAARDENEILAND?

Jos Baker explains the origin of the name

**D**id you know that Paardeneiland was once a real island, separated from the mainland by a tributary of the Salt River, fed by the sea at the second Salt River mouth?

Its name dates back to the days when the Dutch East India Company owned the land. According to a report written in 1785, the island was used for grazing the donkeys that carried hay for the Company's horses.

Fishermen used to moor their boats in the river, and smugglers used it as a convenient route for landing cargo of contraband brandy.

Klein Zoar, the historic cottage on the edge of the vlei, built in 1710 and reputedly the home of folk hero Wolraad Woltemade, was originally separated from Paardeneiland by a wide stretch of water. Fish were caught from the grounds within living memory.

*Photograph from the Elliott Collection, Nation Archives E1916*



Four houses were built on the island in the 1930s as homes for the guards of convicts held in the George IV battery on the beachfront. Gerald and Robert Wesson, who were “islanders” as small boys, recalled their mother having to remove her shoes and stockings when the bridge to the mainland was flooded and she needed provisions from the local store. They fished, canoed and swam in the river: “It was so clear you could see the bottom.”

Within living memory fish were caught from the grounds of Klein Zoar, which in those days was cut off from Paardeneiland by a stretch of water.

## BOARD THE BUS!

**A**t the end of February 2011 Brooklyn and Paardeneiland should have better public transport, courtesy of the MyCiTi bus service whose Bayside-CBD trunk service is scheduled to be operational by then.

The route skirts the western side of Zoarvlei, bringing the added benefit of raising awareness of the wetland among people living beyond our area. The red bus lane already has a lot of recreational cyclists passing through the area at weekends (**right**).

Catch the bus at one of six stations on the bus

lane – off its intersections with Paarden Eiland Road, Neptune Street, Section Street, Vrystaat Road, Milner Road and Boundary Road. The stations will be decorated with artworks, which will be a visual bonus for the area.



## SPOT THE BIRDS!

Ronel Scheffer goes bird-counting with Frank Wygold



The top count was 150 species in the days when Cape Bird Club carried out bird counts on Zoarvlei (they stopped in 2003). On one I attended, spotters were rewarded with a dozen Ethiopian Snipes, an interesting mottled brown bird with a bill twice as long as its head.

These days only a Cwac (Co-ordinated Waterbird Count) is done and there's a perception not much is happening birdwise on our vlei. Yet on a recent Sunday morning when Frank and I went to check out the situation, we logged 40 species in just 90 minutes!

The total would've been even higher if the "red masked weaver" I was excited about hadn't turned out to be a plastic bag and the bobbing brown bottle Frank called had indeed been a blacknecked grebe.

The tally included the usual ducks, pigeons, gulls and starlings but also the European swallow, Alpine swift, reed warbler, yellowbacked widow and red bishop, purple gallinule, shoveller and dikkop.

Our three locations were the footbridge in Wemyss Street, behind Bayview soccer club and opposite the Gray Street container yard.

At the footbridge we were welcomed by a very laid-back pair of banded martins, who have a nest under the bridge. Reed cormorants seem plentiful because we spotted one at all three sites. As we packed up opposite Klein Zoar a tiny pintailed wydah, sporting an extra-long tail, waved us off.

Clearly you won't be disappointed going bird-watching on Zoarvlei!



From top: Frank Wygold. A reed cormorant shows off the Gray Street containers and a banded martin at the Wemyss Street footbridge.  
Right: Newly created shallows to attract waders.



### CALL TO INDUSTRIALISTS From page 4

A concerted joint awareness campaign could prevent the gradual disappearance of this unique habitat – and provide a relaxing green area for staff lunch breaks.

The Paarden Eiland City Improvement District is committed to improving the state of the wetlands by assisting the Friends in their challenging tasks.

We appeal to industrialists to

help save our wetlands from further degradation by supporting this initiative. Your contribution, in cash or kind, will benefit many more beyond the borders of Paardeneiland.



## MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VLEI

Lannice Wouldidge stepped it out for you

**D**o you live in Brooklyn, Ysterplaat or Rugby? Or work in Paardeneiland and need time out? Then explore Zoarvlei right on your doorstep. It's an oasis of greenery, birdlife and tranquil vlei waters between the hubbub of industrial Paardeneiland and frenetic Koeberg Road.

You can walk, jog or cycle or enjoy lunch beside the water. The new galvanised steel benches on the east and west banks are far more comfortable than they seem at first sight. Although the paths round the vlei are overgrown in certain areas, if you have an exploratory streak, or need exercise, you won't have much trouble in getting around.

The distance around Zoar Park, from Boundary Road to Section Street and including the wetland/vlei area, is about 7 km.

**NORTHERN WATER BODY** Entrance in Donegal Road at the northern end via a tarred path, or at the cul-de-sac at the southern end, where a laterite path leads to the water's edge. Coot and various ducks rule here, but if you're lucky you'll also see heron. There's a useful bird watching mound.

Head north past the back of the Portuguese and Italian Clubs (this area is dirty and overgrown and the bridge across to Milner Road on the Paardeneiland side has been vandalised). You emerge near the popular weekend flea-market on Marine Drive:

Neighbourhood kids take advantage of the vlei, where wild flowers were spectacular this year.

make it a pit-stop for a bite or bargain.

Going is easier, though littered, along the path behind the factories to the MyCiTi bus station, and the footbridge across the vlei leads to a path to the bird mound where you started. The round trip is about 2,5 km.

**SOUTHERN WATER BODY** Entrance in Forri-don Street next to Good Hope Flats. The path is hard gravel and suitable for cycling, jogging and strolling. A grey heron keeps watch here and the lush lobelia-covered wetlands spread out to an extent not guessed at from one street away. The path leads to the Salt River Canal. Retrace your steps or take Gray Street on the western side of Zoar Park, over a wooden bridge and onto the flat and easy red bus lane. The round trip, which passes Bayview soccer clubhouse and the cottage Klein Zoar is about 2,5 km. Though the path to the south is overgrown, the view of Table Mountain is spectacular.

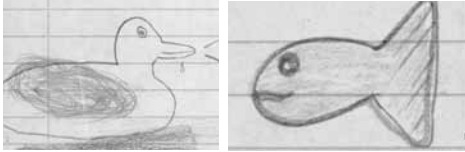
The Friends hope to raise funds to clear the paths. They would like to see cycle/obstacle-course events for the local community become a reality to promote sport in a nature environment.



## KIDS' VIEWS

We asked the children who help clean up Zoarvlei to write an essay for Vlei Time, explaining why they spend Saturday mornings with the Vleipaddas cleaning team and what they feel they were achieving. Read the (unedited) best essays

### My time at the zoar vlei by Yusuf Galant



I love cleaning up at the vlei. I know for a fact the animals loves us even bird, mole, lizzards, fish because we helped them clean ther and our environment.

I had a lovely experianc cleaning up the zoar vlei. I made some new friends and we court fish under the brigd and in the river. And we met a lovely old man called uncle frank but this is not our uncle we just say uncle to show some respect to him.

I also met the best lady in the world. I can't get to her name but she's old and weres round glasses I love her cause she helps me through thick and thine. I know she cheats some times she gives me the best prize. And then there's aunt renal hou I also love a lot caus without her the would be no cleang.



Some of the regular Vleipaddas with teacher Louise du Plessis of Ysterplaat Primary. Paddas face piles of litter (right) on their twice-monthly clean-ups.



Our ward councillor Bernadette le Roux hands Yusuf a book on birds with a CD of bird calls for his winning entry that came straight from the heart. Runner-up Thando earned a book on birds of prey.

### How it feels like to work at the wetlands (Paardeneiland) by Thando Janda

Working at the wetlands feels I am do my part for my community. Every second week we go cleaning up. We have a group that we call the vlei paddas.

Cliening up at the vlei makes you feel scared and happy. Once we walk past we got to see plants that we don't know about. Every second week we come again to clean but everything is just worsor than last week. It feels uslas to work there but we try to tell people not to letter.

The most mess comes from the people who live next to the vlei. The paper and plastic get stuck against the plants and it makes them suferceat.

Cleaning at the vlei mean that I preventing plants from die and making my community a cleaner place. That's what it feel like and mean to clean at the wetland or vlei.



## CATFISH MENACE

Gail Kirkwood stalks the intruder

When wetlands conservation vigilante Frank Wygold first noticed a catfish in the Zoarvlei area, he took a photograph of it. He also began to worry.

The catfish may be a staple fish dish in North Africa, Asia and both the Americas (served crumbed, baked or fried), but it is known as “the pig of the fish world” because it eats just about anything that moves. That was why Frank was so concerned. Catfish are hardy, able to walk on their fins when threatened, and difficult to eradicate.

In spite of Frank’s efforts to thin the growing population – he dispatched some 200 with a spade! – the catfish began to decimate the common platanna, which is the backbone of the food chain in our wetlands.

Normally, platannas lay 15 000 eggs at intervals between early summer and late spring. Not in the year of the catfish invasion. That year there were no platanna tadpoles; nothing for the dabchicks, reed cormorants or heron to feed on. The birds caught on pretty quickly, and soon found other places to dine.

To ease the food shortage, Frank increased the



The predator, the munch-all catfish (*Siluriformes*), and its victim: the platanna (*Xenopus gilli*)

numbers of mosquitofish in the vlei. This is helping to re-establish the platanna, especially in the bulrushes and kikuyu areas of the shallows, where catfish can’t swim freely.

Judging by the encouraging bird count (see Spot the Birds, page 4), he has stalled the catfish take-over, though there are some hunter-killer packs still floating around.

**ED’S NOTE** *Moral of the story: check with Frank before you dump a foreign species into Zoarvlei!*

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## WHAT’S GROWING

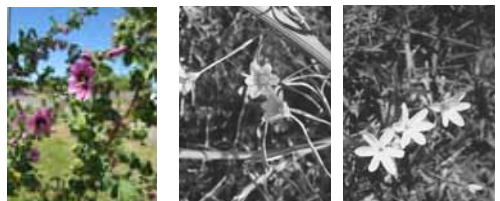
It was a good year for spring flowers on Zoarvlei, with arum lilies blooming in abundance near the water, north to south.

In the past, studies recorded more than 80 plant species in the wetland – grasses, reeds, forbs (herbaceous flowering plants), shrubs, rushes, sedges, trees and climbers. Most gardeners will recognise the asparagus types and geranium, pelargonium and lobelia species on the vlei.

In the water, apart from the invasive hyacinths, you’ll mainly find two species: the azolla freshwater fern which turns a pinky-red and the blue-green parrot’s feather. Azolla, also known as duckweed, is regarded as an ecological trailblazer. It suppresses weeds, adds nitrogen to the system and helps the growth of other species.

Parrot’s feather, a native of the Amazon River and found nearly worldwide, is invasive, shades out naturally occurring algae and clogs up waterways. Not easy to get rid of because herbicides can’t penetrate its waxy skin and cutting can promote its spread.

Flowering plants growing on the vlei include those shown (below). Look out for them on walks. If you see them, you’ll now know what they are!



Pelargonium (purple), groottulip (peach), witklossie

## JOIN NOW!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

### Friends of the Paarden Eiland Wetlands

Name .....

Address .....

.....

..... Postal code .....

Tel .....

E-mail .....

Signed ..... Date .....

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## OUR CAPE SAND FROG

The frog on our logo is the medium sized, mottled and rather toad-like Cape sand frog, found in flat, low-lying sandy areas in coastal lowlands. Fingers are not webbed, but toes have some webbing and a hard ridge on the heel of each hind foot helps dig it into the ground. Burrowing rapidly, the frog spends a large portion of its time underground. Its call is distinctive: a series of short, ringing notes at about 10 a second, mostly heard in early summer.



■ **Did you know** that frogs shed their skin once a week and then eat it?

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Friends of the Paardeneiland Wetlands

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