Dunefields

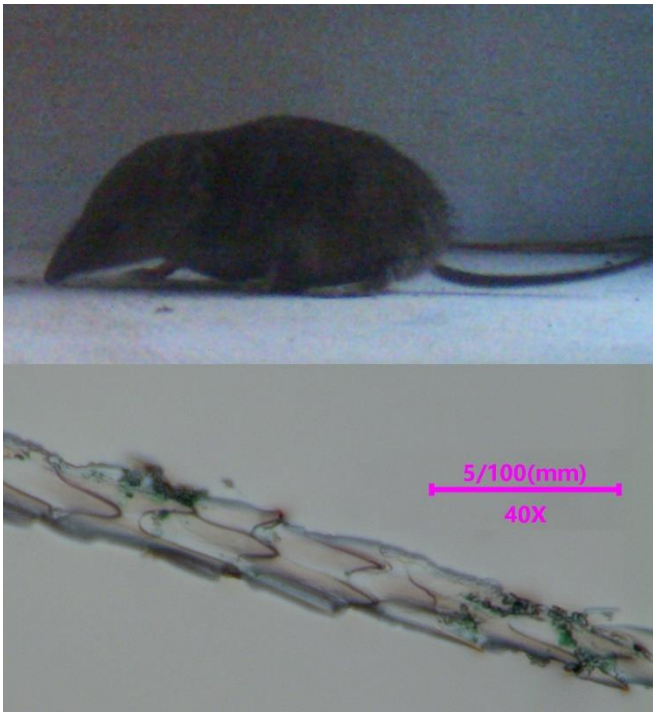
Private Nature Reserve

# Nature News

## August 2025

## What happened at Dunefields?

This is the third consecutive month that we have recorded a new caracal individual (based on spots on the right cheek). We are happy to know that Dunefields' conservation efforts impact multiple caracals on the dunes.




As part of the diet study in our laboratory, we investigate the patterns of the hair of prey species that we find in the caracal scat. We recently found that the caracals have also been preying on the Greater red musk shrew.

From our camertap-trap photograph of this shrew species it is clear that it has a destinctively long and pointed snout.

Dunefields is home to one of South Africa's most beautiful snakes, the Spotted harlequin snake. This is an adult snake, not a juvenile despite its relatively short body of 40cm. It is mildly venomous and feeds on small skinks and lizards.

The staff have been working hard on the upgrades to the vegetable garden. In these new beds we have better control on the moisture and nutrient content, making it more

functional. And, these beds are mole-proof meaning that we can look forward to nice and big potatoes. To top it all off, it brought about a beautiful aestetic too.

The conservation team of Grootbos Private Nature Reserve was in Wilderness for a scientific conference when they stopped by Dunefields. We hiked Paradise Trail along the coast and had a great exchange of knowledge and stories about lichens, caracals, aardvark and our amazingly unique vegetation on the dunes.

Zanri was invited as the guest speaker at the Talk Of The Town evening in Knysna. With her presentation she showed the intiricate beauty of the gannets and the deep care that these life-time breeders have for one another.

After a stormy evening this tired, young Cape cormorant was rescued on a road far from any beaches and lakes. With prior permission we gave the cormorant the option to stay in the box or enter the water in a quiet spot, and the cormorant happily leaped into the water.

Tiaan rescued this juvenile Cape cormorant that he witnessed being thrown around by the breaking waves. We stabilized this young bird, and we are glad to play a part in giving this endangered species a second chance at life.

## Who calls Dunefields home?

The Candlewood tree is in fruit. This is a beautiful sight to see how many insects and birds are being attracted to these trees. This is one of our protected species of trees in South Africa, and we can certainly see the important role that it plays in the ecosystem.

We observed two pairs of Rock martins collecting mud from our wetland. They collect the mud to build their nest with. Photographed here is one pair of martins while they were taking a break from this tedious task.

Can you tell which wild animal species has this white stripe on its back? After giving it some thought, find the answer at the end of this newsletter.

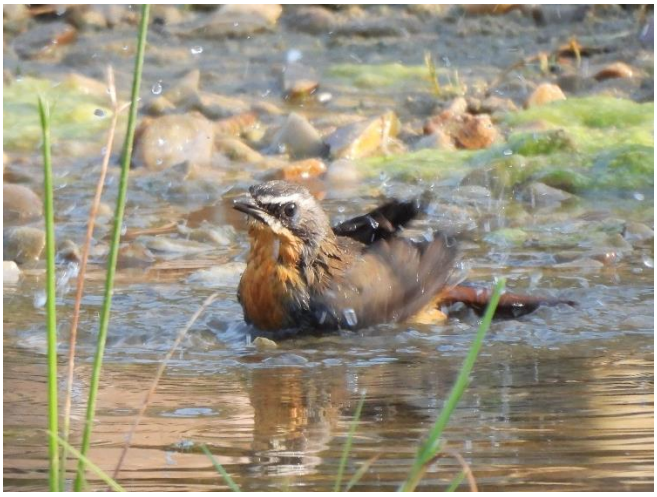
Although the lifeless remnants of certain plants still remain in the landscape as a reminder of the cold winter, the temperatures have now started to rise. The approaching new season also came with the beautiful decoration of flowers, especially pink and purple ones as seen on the front page.

Lichens have three main growth forms, with this one called fruticose. Lichens are fungi and algae that work together to absorb nutrients from the air, thus also a sign of clean air.

A Cape wagtail is not always associated with water, especially also because it does not have webbed feet but this individual looked very comfortable in the water while searching for insects.

It seems like the wetland is being enjoyed by many different species, not just birds as this bushbuck ewe was seen walking through the water.

This is one of the bushbuck this month that went down for a nap in front of a camera trap. This ram was sleeping in the milkwood forest along the dune slope.



This might just be a bird bathing in the warm morning sun but this photograph tells a story beyond a bath. It shows joy, freedom, and appreciation for natural resources that is being conserved for future generations to come. This is something that has been lost in many areas of South Africa hence it makes us so happy to see the animals protected here in their natural habitats.

Tambourine doves are a special affair but very rare to observe. We were delighted to see it recorded on a camera trap deep in the forest as it was walking among the leaf litter on the game trail.

It is always amazing seeing the ewes wandering about in the safety of the rams. The ewes lack horns so they immediately feel a bit safer when in the company of a ram.

The fruiting trees in our vegetable garden have started to bloom again. Now they are just waiting to be pollinated before producing the yummy fruits that we have had the privilege of enjoying every year.

This is a Struthiola plant in flower, in English it is called “the lady that passes by in the night”. This is because of its lovely fragrance it produces at night time to attract moths for pollination.

This Albuca flower is part of a plant that stands at just 20cm tall on the sand dune. In English it is called “the soldier in a box” because of its long slender leaves bundled together tightly resembling a soldier’s uniform. The entire plants emerges from a bulb underground, and this flower hangs upside down, producing a sweet fragrance.

** The animal with the white stripe on the back was a bushbuck ram.