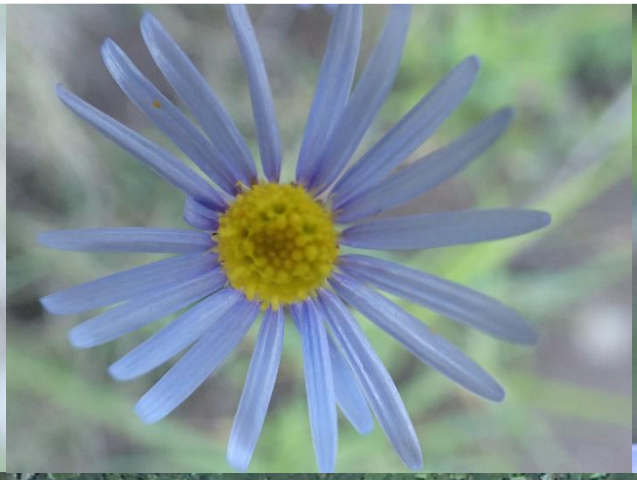
Dunefields

Private Nature Reserve

Nature News

July 2025



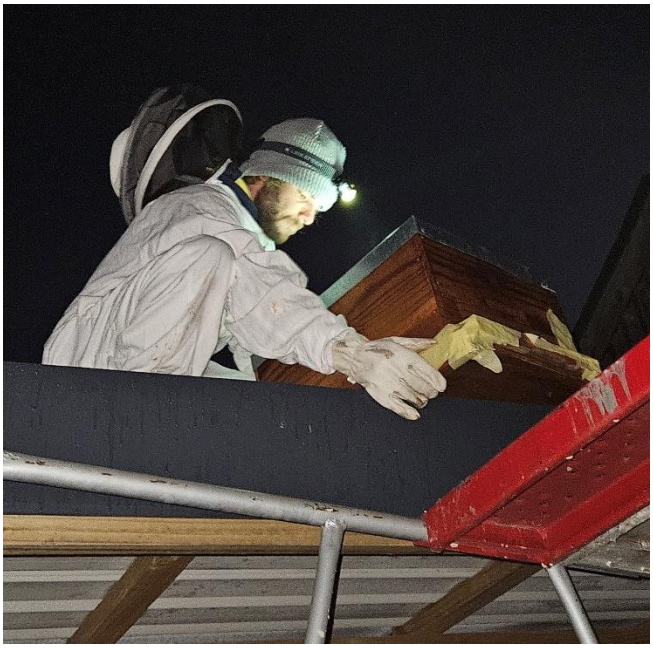
What happened at Dunefields?

This caracal is individually identifiable by the upper two spots and the one lower spot on the cheek. With these photographs taken 20 months apart (and multiple resightings in between as well), it is evident that this individual is a resident at Dunefields and is successful in our area.

While conducting a bee survey, Tiaan spotted this beautiful fynbos plant, and when he came closer he identified it as a new species at Dunefields, Gloomy heath (*Erica glumiflora*). This species is considered vulnerable to extinction, and we are honoured to be protecting its habitat and its pollinators.

Young African penguins are called “blues”, named after their blue-ish colouration at this age. This penguin washed ashore at Victoria Bay and suffered from avian malaria which it got from an infected house mosquito. We managed to stabilize it and gave it another chance at survival.

Here Tiaan is next to a lake, about to release this Cape cormorant. These young birds (dressed in brown plumage as opposed to black adult plumage) often go off course and end up in trouble on busy roads. They then get totally disorientated which is when we as permitted First Responders translocate them to the nearest watersource for release.



Tiaan had to move a beehive from the roof into the veld. This swarm was caught several months ago and is now ready for a new location. This needed to be done at night when all the worker bees were home safely (as opposed to moving the box while half of the swarm is not at home yet). We gently closed the exit of the box so that the bees could not get lost in transit, and we opened the exit the next morning at the new location.

A Cape cormorant, this time an adult, was found in someone's garden where we collected the bird. All our efforts of raising awareness in the last three years has been paying off as the general public knows to phone us in a time of need. Saving one bird at a time.

This juvenile Cape cormorant was brought to us by SANParks for treatment. It is great to work together with other conservation organizations towards a common goal of conserving nature.

The orphaned Red knobbed-coot that we stabilized last month has now made a good recovery at the Hartenbos Animal Hospital. The dear person that initially rescued the chick at this lake kindly offered to collect it at the Hospital in preparation for the release. We met up with them at this lake and gave her and her son the honour of releasing it. It was a beautiful moment to see the chick enjoying the freedom of being back in its natural habitat after so many weeks.

Our staff was casually joined for lunch by this racing pigeon that visited them for multiple days. Until one morning, when we could tell from its injuries that it escaped from the jaws of a predator. After we took it in to the veterinarian for treatment, the bird has found a new home in Wilderness where it will stay if its original owner does not claim it back.

We released another juvenile Cape cormorant after cutting off all the fishing gear that it was entangled in. If this cormorant (a species classified as endangered to extinction) was not rescued from the lake it would have starved to death as it could not fly or swim properly.

Who could have thought that one could get so excited over a pile of poo. Scats tell the tales of the animals roaming our landscape, and we are always excited to find any signs of leopards at Dunefields because they keep on dodging our camera traps. A small sample of the scat has been sent for gender determination and DNA profiling, and the rest of the scat was left in place as a foodsource for the beetles (as seen on the right).

We were invited by CapeNature to share our caracal research with their managers, researchers and rangers. Our caracal research is the first of its kind, and our newly proposed methodology can be used to improve future studies on caracal around the world.

Both Drs Tiaan and Zanri recently presented our research on caracals and gannets at the international conference of the Zoological Society of Southern Africa. Apart from having our work presented, the conference served as a great learning opportunity and brought about new exciting projects that we will soon be implementing at Dunefields.

To prevent soil erosion along the steep sections of Paradise Trail, our staff have been building steps which also eases walking along these sections. The view from here is breathtaking especially with the mountains in the background.

We have been layering more sections of our roads with woodchips which makes for a smoother ride.

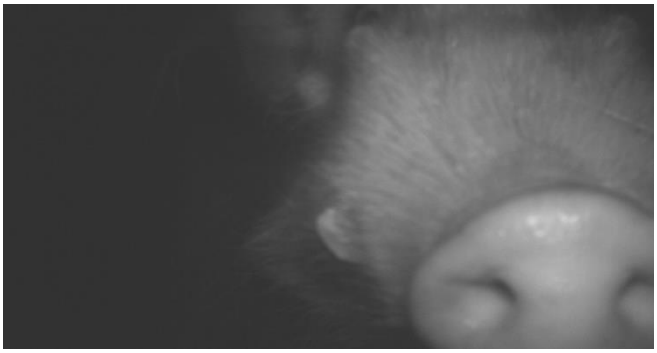
Who calls Dunefields home?

Both these geckos are Marbled leaf-toad geckos. They vary in appearance. Some have a stripe on the back and others have smaller round patterns. We always enjoy seeing them around, and we are thankful to them for catching the little insects around the houses.

This tree often gets decorated by genets, whether it be in the form of claw marks or scented sprays. This genet was standing up against the tree with its hind legs to notify other genets that this territory is occupied.

As the seasons change we get different species of flying insects. This Painted lady butterfly made an appearance at the office one late afternoon.

This Black headed heron made use of the benefit of having long legs by walking into the wetland to catch some food. Its long legs enable it to patrol relatively deep waters without getting its body wet.



Can you tell which wild animal species came up to sniff the camera trap? After giving it some thought, find the answer at the end of this newsletter.

We heard the most beautiful vocalizations outside the office when we quickly rushed to experience the love. It was two Jackal buzzards flying alongside one another at high altitude while loudly calling, strengthening their bond.

This flock of Yellow-billed ducks seemed to be enjoying our wetland at dusk. We cant help but wonder if some of them are those that were released earlier this year after we stabilized a few with botulism.

We have been seeing a great diversity of animals at our wetland this year. This Hammerkop was casually walking past the camera trap.

This might look like some pretty flowers, but it can also be considered as a buffet for our pollinators. This is the beautiful September bush blooming in winter.

Porcupines are very important seed dispersers in the landscape so we are happy to have a healthy population of them at Dunefields.

This caracal looks like he was in a hurry. You might wonder how we know it's a he and not she. Well, if you look closely you will see he has male reproductive organs visible underneath the base of the tail.

** The nosey animal with the big, smooth snout was a bushpig with small tusks starting to show on the side of the face.