Dunefields

Private Nature Reserve

Nature News

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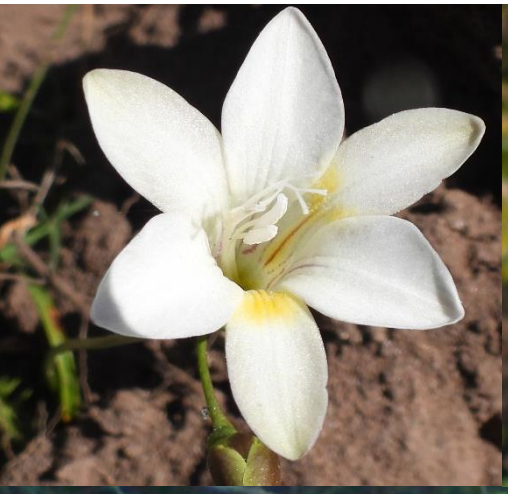

What happened at Dunefields?

These sunsets never get old. Hiking this trail gives us the feeling that we are on our way to the mountains where the sun goes down.

Our oldest chicken Dolorous is still thriving amongst the younger hens. She remains the wisest and is the leader of the flock.

This Little egret was found struggling to get out of a nearby lake. With showing symptoms of trauma to the head, we took it to the veterinary clinic for treatment and hopefully it will make a good recovery.

This is Christo's amazing new addition in the garden – our own grapes. With time, as the plant becomes more lush it will make a nice canopy under which we will enter the garden with the overhanging vines.

We went down the frontal dune-edge to explore the plant diversity. Here, the plants grow right on the front of the dune facing all the strong winds coming from the ocean. Their

strategy consists of staying small, low and having their roots secured.

This is a small over hang on the dune edge. Fossilised sand and wind erosion created a nicely sheltered site for a Large spotted genet, who lives in this cave.

Collecting woodchips from the sawmill has become a weekly task to cover our roads with. Our new trailer allows us to collect a great amount at once.

We had 3 in-person sightings of this wild animal species in 3 weeks along Protea Avenue. What a privilege to have seen it so regularly this month. Can you guess what species it was standing in the road? Find the answer at the end of this newsletter.

In our laboratory we analysed an owl regurgitation pellet that we found in the veld. Looking at the pattern of the prey's hair found in the pellet, we can conclude that it fed on five different rodent species of which three can be seen here. This is the perfect reminder of why not to use rodent poison, as it will just end up poisoning the owls too.

We did a beach patrol along the Dunefields coastline to search for any stranded animals needing assistance. Instead, we found this deceased African penguin which we scanned using our microchip scanner. It turns out that this young penguin was previously admitted to a nearby rehabilitation centre but sadly died one month after being released. Microchip scanners bring about great new insight when retrapping this critically endangered species.

While doing the beach patrol we found egg cases of three elasmobranch (shark and ray) species. From the left we found an egg case of a Brown shyshark, a Pufadder shyshark, and a Twineye skate. The shysharks lay eggs that attach to reef structures with the tendrils on both ends of the egg, and the skate lays eggs onto the sea floor where the horns on both ends are used to anchor it into the sand.

This peanut-looking ball is actually a pellet from a White-necked raven. They regurtitate the seeds, hair and bones that are indigestible. The ravens are important seed dispersers in the landscape, as seen by the amount of seeds regurgitated.

We are very excited to have gotten test results back from the laboratory that showed that this sample being collected was from a male leopard visiting Dunefields. It is super exciting to know that our conservation efforts are also impacting this vulnerable species.

We put a small water bowl on the ground mainly for the spurfowls that do not drink from the elevated bird bath. Interestingly, the mammals are also making use of this bowl on the ground especially since this year has been so dry.

Who calls Dunefields home?

This is a Catagonium moss species. Mosses are plants that photosynthesise (hence their green colour) but they lack certain components like flowers. It is extremely soft, almost like a furry blanket covering the tree.

This is also a moss species called Arcolejeunea. Mosses can come in various forms and can easily be confused with lichens but lichens are not nearly as soft.

This is an example of a lichen. Lichens are a partnership between a fungus and algae or cyanobacteria. The fungus provides structure and absorbs water and nutrients, while the algae or cyanobacteria photosynthesises whereby producing carbohydrates.

This is also a type of lichen, which almost looks like the tree is covered in white paint. This is called a Whitewash lichen. They are much flatter and can cover large areas of a tree.

This is also a lichen called the Hair lichen. Many lichens are very slow growing, only to increase in size by 1mm per year. Some can grow faster but will be dependent on the moisture, humidity, temperature and nutrient availability.

This flowering plant referred to as a Blue Afrikaner is part of the Iris family and is native to the Western Cape.

The Green wood orchid is always a pleasure to see. They produce nectar in the evenings attracting hawkmoths to pollinate the flowers.

This is one of the plant species that grows right on the front of the dune edge, staying small and flat onto the surface. This species is called a Hedgehog lily.

We have sighted the Leopard tortoise again. It is seldom that we manage to see the tortoises roaming around, so we are always delighted to spend time with them when we get the chance.

The Giant African land snails have started to move around after our (limited) spring rains. To prevent drying out through their permeable skin, these snails mainly come out both during periods of rain and at night.

**It was a caracal standing in the road near the Main House.