

## **Melville Koppies Management Committee** **Annual report 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

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### **Introduction**

Another year has flown by with successes to keep us all motivated. Fortunately the problems have not been insurmountable except for some on Melville Koppies West. These have been put aside till we have resources to deal with them or when the Council provides assistance.

### **1. Conservation**

The regular programme of **weeding** over several years has decimated the seed banks of black jacks and khaki bos on MK Central and MK East. However, wind and bird-introduced seeds are a continual challenge. The prime evil over the past year has been *Conyza bonariensis* blown in from the pavements of Joburg. Kikuyu grass from neighbouring properties and pavements has been an alien invader since 1959. The rainfall in 2007 was 726mm and in subsequent years has been over 1000mm which has encouraged weeds. The Conservation Team (CT) (Clement Ndlovu, Lucky Mdluli, Best Ndlovu, Joseph Kasonga and Denis Nyirenda (sponsored by Gillian Godsell) in full-time and part-time capacities)) weeded into late autumn again this year.

The display of spring/summer flowers in 2011/12 was phenomenal. The number of flowers and the richness of the colours were quite awesome. Each Protea tree had at least 100 blooms.

Long grass on the **trails** on MK Central has been cut at regular intervals by a contractor employed by Bishop Ngobeli of Johannesburg City Parks (JCP). The MK Conservation Team has repaired many erosion bars on the trails. The markers at the intersection of paths of MK Central have been replaced and a new trail map showing paths and contours is available. Discreet information plaques, made and donated by Debbi van Rensburg of Cape Gate, have been put at several noteworthy sites on MK Central. Very little work has been done on MK West over the past year because there was so much to do on MK Central and MK East. However, the trail that we take on the monthly walk on MK West is always cleaned and weeded prior to the walk.

Various **volunteer groups** have helped with sporadic sweeps of litter and broken glass on MK West.

As usual, uncontrolled winter **fires** have swept through most of MK West and half of MK East. The pyromaniac who plagued the Koppies for seven years seems to have disappeared so controlled patch burning throughout the year has been necessary in large sections of MK Central where the dense grass load was moribund. The perimeter fences were protected by firebreaks.

The few **structures** we have on MK Central are well maintained thanks to the input of Tony Nunes. He has provided new toilet seats, a mirror, designer dustbin lids, a designer security/storage tube for the stretcher, lintels for erosion bars, designer grass beaters and trimmed or welded metal things as needed. Repairs and additions are all done in double-quick time!

The furnace glass, smashed by vandals, was replaced by Sue and Buddy Vaughan. David Carstens and the CT paved the furnace surrounds with pavers donated by Ronet Martens and other materials donated by Tony Nunes. David Hirsch has used his bakkie for many transport jobs for the Koppies. George Hofmeyr also helped move material with his trailer.

When the huge *Acacia karroo* tree at the Kafue Road entrance fell down, it left a bare open space. It seemed a perfect spot for a **demonstration Bushman hut**. The CT were excited at the challenge and built a beautiful hut using invasive hybrid *Celtis sinensis* saplings for the framework and *Hyparrhenia hirta* for the thatching - before the controlled burning. The neighbour's bland blue wall behind the hut has been painted with a selection of Bushman paintings.

## **2. Environmental education**

### **2.1. Open Sundays**

Guided tours led by highly experienced guides are offered on four Sundays a month, alternating between mornings and afternoons. Attendance is unpredictable as these tours are not pre-booked. A total of 724 people attended the Sunday Open Days.

### **2.2. Special courses**

The monthly special courses comprised geology (Alan Naismith), indigenous landscaping (Anton Comrie), flowers x 3 courses (Wendy Carstens and Carol Knoll), trees x 4 courses (Tim Conradie), grasses (Norman Baines), fungi (Prof. van Warmelo), insects (Bernice Aspoas), photography (Don Gair) and an Artists' morning when people could paint, sketch, photograph or just meditate. John Freer, Anthony Paton and John Cartwright took turns in leading birding walks every month, except for the winter months of June, July and August. A total of 287 people attended the special courses. Numbers are limited to between 10 and 20 people on these special courses.

### **2.3. Schools**

We started to promote school tours from 2009 and the number of schools coming on tours has steadily increased. A total of 915 pupils visited over the past year with the size of groups ranging from 10 to 60 pupils. Most of the schools come back for repeat visits – an encouraging indication that the tours are educational and fun, thanks to the calibre of the guides. We cater for pupils from pre-primary to matric level.

## 2.4. Universities and research

Students doing research and fieldwork from both the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Johannesburg are regular visitors. A research project on forensic entomology was completed this year. Visual Arts, Architecture, Zoology, Botany, History, Travel and Tourism, Geography, Geology and Environmental Science lecturers bring their students to Melville Koppies. Volunteer Peter Johnson is continuing with research on flowering times (and conservation) at the Koppies. Gail Schaum and her team from the Witwatersrand Bird Club ring birds at Melville Koppies every month. Ringing was started in 1972 by Ken Newman and has continued since then

## 2.5. Other groups

A wide variety of groups come on booked tours. Groups included the monthly hike on MK West, university groups, Gardens of the Golden City open weekend, corporate tours, garden clubs, hiking clubs, University of the Third Age hikers, Jolly Dogs club on MK West, tourism students, field guide students, archaeology clubs, brownies, cubs, scouts, Miss Earth finalists, Eco clubs, Green Peace group, students doing community service, SAPs/CSS thank you party, gym group from the Joburg Country Club, Delta Environmental groups, hiking groups, senior citizens hiking clubs, University residence students, Brixton Recreation Centre outings and a few special birthday tours. A total of 2146 people came on such visits.

The **total number** of recorded visitors for the past year was **4072**. This excludes the hundreds of people who worship on MK West and the walkers on MK East. David Dickinson leads walks on MK West every Sunday and George and Heike Hofmeyr lead walks every weekday on MK East. MK East is becoming a popular venue for walkers with socialised dogs.

## 3. Public relations

This is a relentless exercise necessary to keep people aware of *Melville Koppies – Joburg's Best Bush Stop*. Lis Jones' regular diary updates in the Caxton Community newspapers and Saturday Star have a good readership. Wendy Carstens sends Melville Koppies information, edited by Lis Jones, to a variety of media – newspapers, magazines, schools, websites, residents' newsletters and radio. Newsletters are emailed to the 1700 database every month. There is no budget for advertising so ingenious angles need to be constantly devised for free publicity. The website [www.mk.org.za](http://www.mk.org.za) created by Norman Baines is an invaluable source of information. The new facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/melvillekoppies> is a fun photographic record of current activities at Melville Koppies. Seven CDs made by Wendy Carstens about Melville Koppies (Overview, Flowers, Fauna, Trees and Shrubs, Archaeology and History, Geology and Environmental Management) are available. These are a record of Melville Koppies and proceeds from sales are used for maintenance of Melville Koppies.

## 4. Security

There were **no reported incidents** on MK over the past year. However, we do group walks on MK Central to ensure the continued safety of this very wooded section. Visitors who walk on the other sections are advised about security measures when they phone.

There is a continual influx of **vagrants** on MK West. JCP rangers conduct occasional patrols to remove them and the CT cleans up the mess. Much of the fencing between MK West and West Park Cemetery has been stolen.

In October 2011, we had a very disturbing involvement with **rogue police** who abducted CT workers Clement Ndlovu and Lucky Mdluli. The police tore up their ID books, took their cell phones, threw them into a pickup van with 14 other men and locked them in a small cell with 30 other assumed illegal immigrants at Joburg Central without booking them. Nobody knew where they were for three days. They were told that they would be released if they had money for a bribe. Home affairs officials eventually ratified the status of our two workers and they were released. Col Haripershed from Joburg Central was contacted about this but the men did not press charges as they were scared of victimisation.

In August 2011, Lucky Mdluli needed urgent medical help because of acute anaemia. After six abortive attempts for treatment at the **Helen Joseph Hospital**, he was treated privately and the cost of the treatment was donated by well-wishers.

### **5. African Independent Churches (AIC)**

The number of people who worship on MK West seems to have increased. The worshippers are encouraged to use the concrete circles to prevent damage to the environment. David Hirsch and David Dickinson work regularly with church members to promote sustainable worship on the Koppies. The damage to trees seems less but the litter problem has not been reduced.

### **6. Finance and Management**

The detailed audited financials, prepared by Vaughan Russell, will be available at the AGM. Expenses of R124 700 were covered and a surplus was made. Income was boosted by private donations of R34 600. New sources of income last year included proceeds of R17 000 from JUNKIE charity shop sales and R10 700 from sales of CDs which both contributed to the surplus. The remaining income was from guided tours and group visits. Conservation labour accounted for 87% of our costs.

We do not have office overheads as the whole committee operates and communicates regularly and as needed from our own homes – thanks to the electronic age. In addition we have a monthly committee meeting at the Lecture Hut. Expenses are kept low thanks to the input by volunteers of their time, expertise, use of own cars, petrol, computers, stationery, catering, phones and operating an efficient 24/7 call centre.

### **7. Conclusion**

The varied contribution of so many people from the community collectively sustains our efforts at preserving Melville Koppies for posterity. I would like to thank the committee members for their support and encouragement, the guiding team for their expert input and the donors who keep us in the black. The Conservation Team members have a love for the Koppies and are a pleasure to work with. My husband, David, a ‘coerced volunteer’ needs a special mention for his invaluable support and his many-faceted role at the Koppies.

*Wendy Carstens*

*Chairman*

**8. Addendum**

<b>GUIDES</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>CASH DONORS</b>
		Charlton, Sarah
	Aspoas, Bernice	Barker, Walter
	Carstens, Wendy	DeVilliers, Michelle
Aspoas, Bernice	Cartwright, John	De Wet, Sandra
Baines, Norman	Hirsch, David	Doyle, Brian
Carstens, David	Hofmeyr, George	Freer, John
Carstens, Wendy	Jones, Lis	Godsell, Gillian
Freer, John	Mdluli, Lucky	Hammond-Tooke, M
Gair, Don	Ndlovu, Clement	Hewlett, Cecily
Green, Chris	Nunes, Tony	Hill, Cavan
Hammond-Tooke, Margaret	Rose, Cynthia	Hossack, Colin
Hompes, Maggie	Russell, Vaughan	Ingram, Boris
Jones, Lis	Cllr Richards, Pat	Johnston, Gordon
Lamprecht, Ann		Jones, Alan
Nunes, Tony		Lamprecht, Ann
Paton, Anthony		Ludlow, Anna
Pavaricini, Tendo		Maree, Lynne
Poulsom, Suzi		Nunes, Tony
Rose, Cynthia		Roodepoort hiking club
		Rose, Cynthia
		Vermeulen, Phillip
		Wixley, Tom