

## Melville Koppies Management Committee (MKMC) Annual report 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013

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### Introduction

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

### 1. Conservation

The regular programme of **weeding** continues. New weeds that have become a problem to control are *Schurhria bipinnata* (Klein Khakibos), *Verbena aristigera*, *Stoebe vulgaris* (Bankrotbos) and *Portulaca oleracea*. Patches of invasive Kikuyu grass persist around the boundaries of the whole reserve. Even invasive indigenous *Sarcostemma viminalis* (Milky rope) *Lopholaena coriifolia* (Fluffy seed bush) and *Gymnosporia polyacantha* (Kraal spike thorn) have to be controlled. The field of *Chlorophytum bowkerii* lilies that appeared after eradicating a trial patch of Kraal thorn was a stunning surprise. Brand's Tree Felling was employed to cut down and poison the stumps of some of the hybrid Celtis that had invaded parts of MK Central and MK East. The Conservation Team (Clement Ndlovu, Lucky Mdluli, Best Ndlovu with Joseph Kasonga, part-time), led by Wendy Carstens, weeded into late autumn again this year. They were helped by regular volunteers Peter Johnson and Ozma Mcithwa. Jarrod Levenstein, Dianna and Amelia Coogan, and Cheyenne Holloway also did stints. David Hirsch worked with AIC members on MK West doing trail maintenance.

Long grass on the **trails** of MK Central has been cut at regular intervals by a contractor employed by Bishop Ngobeli of Johannesburg City Parks (JCP). The trail used on the monthly walk on MK West is always cleaned and weeded prior to the walk. Strips of discarded carpet underfelt have been laid on several badly eroded paths to prevent soil erosion. The experiment seems to be working.

This winter most of MK West was burnt in uncontrolled **veld fires**. Controlled patch burning was done on MK Central to remove moribund material and control bush encroachment. JCP contractors cut firebreaks along some of the perimeter fencing. Much of the fencing between MK West and West Park cemetery has been stolen making firebreaks to protect that fencing unnecessary.

The man-made **structures** we have on MK Central are well maintained thanks to the input of **Tony Nunes**. Whenever Tony sees a problem, e.g. the furnace roof that needed replacing and extending, a leaking tap, broken slats in the fencing, missing toilet seats, leaking toilets, cracked mirrors, cracked roof tiles, etc he immediately and efficiently fixes the problem at his own expense.

## **2. Environmental education**

### **2.1. Sunday guided tours/hikes/ dog walks**

Over the last six months of 2012, guided tours were held on the first four Sundays of every month with a hike whenever a fifth Sunday occurred. As the hikes proved so popular, the programme was changed in 2013 to guided tours on the first three Sundays (totalling 41 such tours during the financial year) and a hike on the fourth Sunday (totalling 9 hikes). The fifth Sunday was excluded from the programme. There were 12 Saturday walks with dogs on Melville Koppies West.

### **2.2. Special courses**

The 7 monthly special courses comprised two on Geology (Prof. Kim Ncube-Hein and Alan Naismith), Flowers (Wendy Carstens), Archaeology and History (Wendy and David Carstens) and grasses (Frits van Oudtshoorn). Ecology with Ivan Ginsberg was cancelled because of poor response. John Freer and Anthony Paton took turns in leading birding walks from July to November. This year we discontinued special courses as attendance kept diminishing, perhaps because the market was saturated as other organisations are now also offering similar courses. For the foreseeable future, special courses will be arranged only for group requests.

### **2.3. Schools**

Since we started promoting school tours in 2009, the number of schools attending has steadily increased. Many of the schools are repeat visits – an encouraging indication that the tours are educational and fun, thanks to the calibre of our guides and our unique classroom. We cater for pupils from pre-primary to matric level. Delta Environmental Centre and JCP occasionally bring school groups to Melville Koppies as well. A total of 32 school groups visited Melville Koppies.

### **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 total of 12 groups of students and lecturers visited the Koppies, their area of study embracing the Visual Arts, Architecture, Zoology, Botany, History, Travel and Tourism, Geography, Geology and Environmental Science. Prof. Kim Ncube-Hein introduced first year geology students to MK West, right at the beginning of the academic year, to the rigors of fieldwork. Architectural students had to design ‘green’ hypothetical buildings for Melville Koppies. Prof. Marcus Byrne from the University of the

Witwatersrand conducted an experiment on dung beetles at Melville Koppies. He put little booties on their front feet to gauge the effect of heat on the time they spent pushing a dung ball. Ninety Grade 1s from Parkview Junior happened to be at the Koppies at the same time. Marcus entranced them with an impromptu talk on dung beetles. 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. A Grey Hornbill has been seen several times on MK Central.

## 2.5. Other groups

41 other diverse groups booked special tours and hikes. All such booked tours were environmentally sustainable with responsible people in attendance.

The **overall total** of recorded visitors for the past financial year was **4297 from 154 groups**.

**Unrecorded visitors** include the hundreds of people who worship on Melville Koppies West, the Sunday walkers on Melville Koppies West. with David Dickinson and Tendo Pavaracini, the weekday walkers on Melville Koppies East with George and Heike Hofmeyr. Melville Koppies East is a very popular venue for locals with socialised dogs.

## 2.6. Guides

Guides are an extremely valuable resource for Melville Koppies. Their knowledge of and enthusiasm for nature that they share with visitors is insurance for the future of our green spaces. In alphabetical order, volunteer guides over the past year were: **Alexander**, Denise; **Aspoas**, Bernice; **Baines**, Norman; **Carstens**, David; **Carstens**, Wendy; **Gair**, Don; **Green**, Chris; **Hammond-Tooke**, Margaret; **Hompes**, Maggie; **Hugo**, Jackie; **Hofmeyr**, Heike; **Freer**, John; **Johnson**, Cally; **Jones**, Lis; **Kyriacou**, Xenia; **Mbere**, Nomsa; **Nunes**, Tony; **Paton**, Anthony; **Rose**, Cynthia; **Wilson**, Alison.

Losing reliable, knowledgeable guides is always a setback for Melville Koppies. This year we sadly bade farewell to two such valuable volunteers

**John Freer has resigned as a guide** owing to his recent relocation to a Douglasdale retirement complex, inconveniently far away. John's love affair with Melville Koppies began in 1959 when he produced the first bird list for the Koppies. He was a guide and committee member of the volunteer Johannesburg Council for Natural History (JCNH), which managed the Koppies in an advisory capacity with Johannesburg Parks from 1959 to 1993. John was chairman of this committee from 1980 till 1993. During this period, he was instrumental, with John Ledger and the JCNH, in setting up Klipriviersberg as a nature reserve. He also tried, unsuccessfully, to do the same for the Northcliff Ridge by working with Northcliff Rotary. He liaised with Dr Pat Condy, Director of Parks, to set up the volunteer Melville Koppies Management Committee in a Joint-Venture relationship with Parks in 1992. Since then, John has continued to share his vast knowledge of all aspects of the Reserve, including its birdlife on guided tours with countless visitors. We wish John and his wife Pam a well-earned retirement.

**Norman Baines has resigned as a guide earlier this year.** Norman's involvement with the Koppies began as a volunteer work party member in the mid 1990s, leading these work parties until they were discontinued due to lack of support. His talents were even better used when he began guiding, and in his creation and maintenance of the website [www.mk.org.za](http://www.mk.org.za). Norman has contributed significantly to all aspects of management of the Koppies. His weekly column, '*View from the Koppies*', in the local Northcliff and Melville Times was a vehicle for his keen sense of humour and writing ability. Visitors will miss his very special approach to the Koppies and his passion for our indigenous veld grasses.

### 3. Public relations

We have no budget for marketing so ingenuity is needed to keep people aware of Melville Koppies for environmentally sustainable activities. Lis Jones' regular diary updates in the Caxton Community newspapers and Saturday Star are important avenues. Whenever a potential slot emerges, Melville Koppies information is sent to a variety of media– newspapers, magazines, schools, websites, and residents' newsletters by Wendy Carstens. Various radio stations, particularly Radio Today, give Melville Koppies much airtime in live interviews. A new opportunity arose when Wendy and David Carstens were invited to give power point lectures to members of DART (Decorative Arts Society). Newsletters are emailed every month to a database of over 2000 subscribers. The website [www.mk.org.za](http://www.mk.org.za) created by Norman Baines is an invaluable source of information. The facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/melvillekoppies> is a fun photographic record of current activities at Melville Koppies. Cynthia Rose has set up a Melville Koppies twitter account., the handle is @MelvilleKoppies. Eight CDs made by Wendy Carstens (Overview, Flowers, Fauna, Trees and Shrubs, Archaeology and History, Geology, Environmental Management and Ecology) provide a photographic record with captions about Melville Koppies. Proceeds from sales are used for the maintenance of Melville Koppies.

David Hirsch maintains the relationship of the MKMC with the African Independent Churches (AIC) who worship on Melville Koppies West. He works with church leaders to try and promote sustainable worship on the Koppies by members of the registered church circles and casual groups. He and David Dickinson also organise some security patrols on Melville Koppies West.

### 4. Security

There were **no reported crime incidents** on Melville Koppies over the past year. Walking only in volunteer-led groups ensures the safety of visitors on MK Central, particularly in the wooded sections. Visitors to the two open sections (MK East and MK West) are advised to walk in groups and leave all valuables at home.

There is a continual influx of **vagrants** on MK West. JCP rangers conduct occasional patrols to remove them and the Conservation Team cleans up the mess. Goods from smash-and-grab incidents in Beyers Naude Drive are frequently found on MK West.

Mabotwane Security replaced the Freedom Fighters Security Company in February. JCP funds their provision of security of one day and one night guard for the archaeological site on MK Central.

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

The number of people who worship on MK West has increased and so has the litter. Worshippers are encouraged to use the concrete circles to prevent damage to the environment but many people still worship on the ridges and stay over at night. David Hirsch and David Dickinson work regularly with church members to promote sustainable worship on the Koppies. JCP has been asked to erect signage relating to permissible/non-permissible activities, at all the entrances which have no signage. This has been promised in the next financial year.

## **6. Finance and Management**

The detailed audited financials, prepared by Vaughan Russell, will be available at the AGM.

**Income** was generated from volunteer-led guided tours, hikes and group visits (53%); private donations (25%); proceeds from sales of donated goods to JUNKIE charity shop (17%); sales of CDs, calendars and booklets (5%). MySchoolMyVillage MyPlanet member contributions are not noteworthy yet as initial set-up costs still have to be recovered by the organisation.

**Expenditure.** Conservation labour accounted for 87% of our costs. Printing, some security, insurance, maintenance materials and website hosting are other costs. Expenditure on catering is minimal. We do not have office overheads as the whole committee operates and communicates regularly and as needed from their own homes – thanks to the electronic age while our monthly committee meetings are held alfresco at the Lecture Hut. Other expenses are kept low thanks to the input by volunteers of their time, expertise, use of own cars, petrol, computers, stationery, catering, phones and the operation of an efficient 24/7 call centre.

### **6.1. Committee members**

**Carstens**, Wendy (chairman); **Hofmeyr**, George; **Jones**, Lis; **Nunes**, Tony; **Rose**, Cynthia; **Russell**, Vaughan; **Aspoas**, Bernice; **Hirsch**, David; **Coogan**, Lori; **Cartwright**, John; and Conservation Team members **Mdluli**, Lucky and **Ndlovu**, Clement. Plus Cllr **Richards**, Pat, ex officio.

### **6.2 Private donors**

Cash donations, monthly or once-off, from private individuals are a valuable source of funding for the continued maintenance of Melville Koppies. Not everyone who enjoys the Koppies has time to spare doing volunteer work, so a donation in lieu of time is much appreciated and needed. Please see point 8, Addendum, below for the names of donors over the past financial year.

## **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 involvement, support and encouragement; the guiding team for their expert input; and the donors who help to keep us in the black. The hard-working 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 unstinting and unflagging support and his many-faceted role at the Koppies.

*Wendy Carstens*

*Chairman*

## 8. Addendum

<b>Private cash donors</b>
Betty, Dave
Charlton, Sarah
De Wet, Sandra
DeVilliers, Michelle
Dickinson, David
Farquharson, M.A.
Freer, John
Godsell, Gillian
Hammond-Tooke, Margaret
Hewlett, Cecily
Hill, Cavan
Hinton, Terry
Hossack, Colin
Ingram, Boris
Johnston, Gordon
Jones, Alan
Lamprecht, Ann
Ludlow, Anna
Maloon, Seymour
Maree, Lynne
Moolman, T
Nunes, Tony
Pope, Noel and Viv
Rose, Cynthia
Smart, Barbara
Van der Merwe, Frans and Carin
Webster, Meagan
Wixley, Tom