

## **Annual report of the Melville Koppies Management Committee July 2022 – June 2023**

### **The current Melville Koppies Management Committee (MKMC)**

Wendy Carstens (WC) chair, Jenny Grice (JG), Barbara Shaw (BS), Alison Wilson (AW), Tam Scheidegger (TS), Danyle Nunes (DN), Tony Nunes (TN), Vaughan Russell (VR), Tony Lelliott (TL), Lis Jones (LJ), and Chrissie Carey (CC). Cllr Bridget Steer is ex officio member. Guide Alan Cawood resigned during the year. MA Farquharson (MA) and Elsje Bonthuys (EB) joined the committee as 'Front of House' volunteers during the year. Non-committee volunteer, David Carstens is a regular Sunday and midweek guide and a valuable adviser/sounding board on all Koppies matters.

### **General**

We had two welcome improvements to the Furnace area. Caiti Gower designed a crisp new Modern History board to replace the old sun-blackened one. Riaan van Rensburg donated two polywood benches in memory of his grandfather, Cllr Sporie van Rensburg, who promoted the nature reserve status of Melville Koppies in the City of Johannesburg Council in 1959. We had two plaques made for the benches.

### **Conservation**

Conservation of Melville Koppies Central and East absorbs most of our income and time. Our full-time conservation team (dates when they started with us - Lucky Mdluli 2003, Clement Ndlovu 2008 and Best Ndlovu 2013 with part timer Joseph Kasonga 2005) is supervised by WC. TS does regular conservation stints. JG donates the services of her gardener, Madodana Ncube, and Sinead Mountjoy helps WC occasionally on Mondays. EB is a compulsive weeder who dons overalls on Sunday mornings and pursues weeds in the grasslands around the reception hut.

TS is pursuing an infestation of a psyllid insect that is killing the Protea trees. She has test-sprayed some infected trees, involved Wits' Donald McCallum and students and encouraged volunteer helpers for spraying. A recent uncontrolled fire may have killed the insects on the trees in its path.

Because of extensive soft-soaking rains, the growth of annual weeds has been continuous. There were too many weeds to take to the dumps, so piles have been made for spot burning. We are currently busy with perennials such as Bugweed, Lantana, Mothcatcher, Jerusalem berry, Canary Creeper, etc. Their seeds have been brought in by birds and the wind from neighbouring properties, e.g. Melville Koppies West, green spaces between Rustenburg Road and Barry Hertzog Drive, Parkview Golf Course, Marks Park Sports Club and some neighbouring houses.

CC keeps the Puma Garage entrance area to Melville Koppies East litter free. She has inspired the Mandela precinct to maintain their pavement opposite the Koppies. DN cut the long kikuyu grass on the Koppies' pavement.

The conservation team was issued with new overalls in October and Gabriel Gibbon printed 'Melville Koppies' on the jackets.

### **FIRE**

Continual soft soaking rains, damp soil, green grass and strong winds have made it difficult to burn firebreaks. However, we managed to burn the grasses around the lecture hut area on a windy morning as a precaution against later uncontrolled fires.

An extensive uncontrolled fire crept up from the western boundary along a valley on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June. This area was last burnt in 2013. The fire load is big because of last season's rains.

## Publicity

JG and WC send regular tidbits and photos to community papers, Facebook, Instagram and publications/journalists with an environmental bias. This has to be done relentlessly to encourage visitors. BS updates the website with current information as necessary.

JG and AW loaned the deposit for 100 buffs. These are attractive heritage souvenirs of Melville Koppies @ R100 each. When sales have covered the two deposits, income from the sales will be reflected in next year's finances. Sales are a bit slow.

## Number of visitors - total 2037

The number of Sunday visitors is down, perhaps due to the downturn in the economy. We hosted a special 'Gardens of the Golden City' weekend at the end of October. Several of our season ticket holders are regular visitors (R500pp for a year). Thanks to the Sunday Reception Hut team for the efficient and charming welcome visitors receive, even in freezing weather. BS has been a stalwart at the reception desk since we started the new arrangement during Covid in 2020.

Total Sunday visitors = 1297

Booked school visits included Pridwin, Kingsmead, Kairos School of Inquiry, Montessori and the German School. Research and fieldwork groups were an Archaeology Heritage mapping group from Zimbabwe and Botswana and SA, Geology App group, 1<sup>st</sup> Year Wits Geology students and the regular Bird ringers from the Witwatersrand Bird Club. Turner and Townsend brought a team building group. Cubs from Greenside and the German School had a fun hike and guided tour.

WC, JG, TS and David Carstens are the school guides.

Total of booked groups= 740

## Finance

We had difficulty in raising the R22 000pm needed. The slight increase in entry fees - R90pp, R50 U 18, R100pp for booked tours didn't cover costs because of the lower attendance. This necessitated a transfer of R57 000 from savings to cover the shortfall.

We have given our conservation team a much needed increase, so we need to raise even more this year.

Our YOCO card machine means less cash is handled on Sundays – a good safety precaution.

We adjusted the four signatories needed for special transactions at Nedbank to WC, JG, TS and LJ. This was because of the resignations of George Hofmeyr and Cynthia Rose who both left Melville. Nedbank upgraded its security measures so the 4 signatories spent time at the bank sorting out a new password and FICA requirements.

A huge thank you to our regular donors (see below) who contributed R35 240.00. We would like very much to expand the number of regular donors!

Income from MySchool was R16 188.00. If you don't have a card, please google and sign up for MySchoolMyVillageMyPlanet card with '*Friends of Melville Koppies*' as the beneficiary.

Michelle de Villiers of JUNKIE Charity Store is a star donor. Since Michelle started her shop in November 2011, she has raised a total of R335 635 for the Koppies from the sale of preloved goods. Please note that she has relocated JUNKIE to 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Linden.

Many thanks to accountant VR for doing our annual finances, year after year, and for dealing with NPO, PBO and income tax requirements.

### **Security**

Security will always be a problem as Melville Koppies lies in a hot spot. DN regularly fixes broken/stolen/loose slats which are a sneaky access for trespassers, escaping thieves and potential squatters. The JCPZ guards caught a trespasser with housebreaking tools. He was arrested by Parkview police. TS and neighbour Cavan Hill set up a camera and caught a perp removing a dead guinea fowl from one of his many snares. The JCPZ guards and our conservation team were taken on a walk-about to see the forested areas where many snares are set. Perps have dug up and stolen water pipes throughout the reserve. Some of these older pipes were probably laid by the Geldenhuys brothers to irrigate their fields north of the Koppies with water from the Westdene Spruit. Other newer pipes, carrying municipal water, were dug up and stolen. These supplied the Reception Hut toilet and big and small pools. The only remaining water source at the Koppies is at the Lecture Hut.

Protecting Sunday visitors from potential harm costs us R800 per Sunday. Clement Ndlovu and a Beagle Security guard are always on duty in the river area, the Achilles heel.

There were two reported incidents of people being robbed by men with knives on Melville Koppies East.

### **Melville Koppies West**

TL and David Dickinson do regular monthly walks with dogs on Melville Koppies West. The R40pp donations are banked with the MKMC for any expenses that the MK West team may need.

### **JCPZ (Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo)**

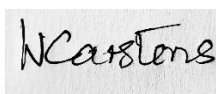
Since January, JCPZ has assisted with insourced 2 day and 2 night guards for MK Central. The uniformed guards are fit and able to do patrols. JCPZ cut the trails, 5m firebreak perimeters and cut down some large fallen trees on Central and East. Two divisions of fencing in Judith Road were smashed on the 24<sup>th</sup> June. JCPZ has logged the incident and responded that it will be fixed in the new financial year starting 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023.

### **Conclusion**

It is always a pleasure working with our very special volunteer team of committee members and guides. Our Conservation Team members are always cheerful, dedicated and hard-working. How fortunate we are to be able continue with this haven despite all the pressures we are facing in SA today. A very big thank you to all who make this possible.

### **Regular donors in alphabetical order**

A.Barret, Adam Capper, Carl Carey, Cavan Hill, Chrissie Carey, Colleen Campher, Elsje Bonthuys, Gillian Godsell, Hanneke Spiess, Josie and Carl, Lynne Maree.



Wendy Carstens

MKMC chairman