

**Annual report August 2024 of the
Melville Koppies Management Committee
the operating arm of the 'Friends of Melville Koppies'**

General

The **Annual general Meeting** will be held at the Lecture Hut, Melville Koppies, on the 24th August 2024 at 2pm. The guest speaker will be Karen Dunn, speaking on an environmentally important topic of 'Solitary bees'.

Rainfall figures from July 2021 to June 2024

July 2021-June 2022	July 2022-June 2023	July 2023-June 2024
970mm	827mm	664mm

Snow fell on the 10th July 2023.

Joburg Roads Agency repainted the pedestrian crossing and approach lines on Judith Road. It's a pity that many motorists don't seem to know what the painted stripes mean and do not slow down at all, even when groups of children are waiting to cross.

Conservation

After many years of dedicated conservation, alien invasive weeds and trees are largely under control. During the winter months, removal of bush encroachment of alien and indigenous bushes and trees has restored sections of our Highveld Grassland Biome to its natural sweeping swathes of grasses. One dense patch of Kraal spike thorn, concealing traces of early farmers' stonewalling, is gradually being controlled and in a few years will be grassland again. Our hardworking conservation team, often helped by Madodana Ncube, will continue the relentless onslaught against invasive plants brought in by the wind and birds from neighbouring properties.

We did controlled fire programmes on MK Central in June 2023, including the annual demonstration burn for grassland expert, Prof Sally Archibald's Wits 3rd year students. We keep detailed records of controlled burns so that blocks are burnt in a rotational pattern and also burnt depending on the fire load. In October 2023 there were uncontrolled fires on MK Central and over the whole of MK East. In March 2024, City Power cut 40m wide firebreaks under the pylons and overhead cables on the Koppies.

The *Protea caffra* trees have been attacked by Psyllid insect infestations which are killing the trees. Wits and UJ have been involved in monitoring the situation.

Organised volunteer Saturday morning work parties have been introduced.

The CREASS team, a general maintenance team for Melville and surrounds, funded by the Melville Security Initiative and benefactors, has helped with cutting big alien trees, cutting the grass on pavements, replacing stolen fence slats and security issues.

Publicity

Publicity is also an ongoing relentless task, essential to keep people aware of the treasure we have in the middle of Joburg. We are continually competing against the many places of interest and other hiking trails in and around Joburg. The website is regularly updated as needed. Our regular posts on Facebook, Instagram, in community newspapers, plus other special articles in free publicity opportunities are important to keep the public and schools aware of what we offer – hikes, walks, guided tours, poetry sessions, treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, Easter Sunday egg hunt, opportunities for birding, photography, research, fieldwork, school tours and observing the monthly bird ringing.

The average reach for our Facebook page is around 1 200 hits. But a photo of volunteer Imogen Preston with a tree popper reached 32 600 people and a photo of orange Proteas had 14 600 views.

In September 2023 we won the GOSHA (Golden Shield Heritage Award SA) for Melville Koppies as a 'Preferred Heritage Destination'. This came with a R30 000 prize which was a huge boost to our finances and public profile.

We were fortunate to have Pieter Dirk Uys and fellow thespian Lynne Maree as guest speakers at the AGM last year. Their combined reminiscences were highly entertaining and of course also helped with publicity for Melville Koppies. The Melville Residents' Association (MRA) helps with positive publicity for MK.

Visitors to Melville Koppies

Our visitors continue to be our major source of income.

Number of recorded visitors on Melville Koppies Central 2019-2024

July 2019-March 2020	July 2020-June 2021	July 2021-June 2022	July 2022-June 2023	July 2023-June 2024	
Covid	1892	1465	1297	1258	Sundays
Closed April, May, June	290 Masks!!	1088	740	1121	Booked groups
1670	2182	2553	2037	2379	totals

Before Covid, we had popular group guided tours and group hikes. The Koppies were closed to the public for April, May and June of 2020. When some restrictions were lifted, masks were still compulsory. People flocked to the Koppies where they could enjoy walks on their own but with masks. However, it still meant that guided group tours and hikes with masks were difficult, so we discontinued these until all restrictions were lifted.

Enabling visitors to self-guide themselves on Sunday mornings on the Koppies continues to bring in a steady stream of visitors on almost all Sundays. We currently have 20 annual season ticket holders. We restarted the Sunday 8km group hikes in September 2023. These attract many hikers and new younger helpers.

Both universities (Wits and UJ) continue to use Melville Koppies for field work exercises especially botany and geology. Schools (largely private schools) that can afford the bus fare and have no

intense bureaucratic hoops to jump through, continue to do Koppie tours which enhance the educational experience of learners. The R50 donation to the Koppies is the smallest outlay for them.

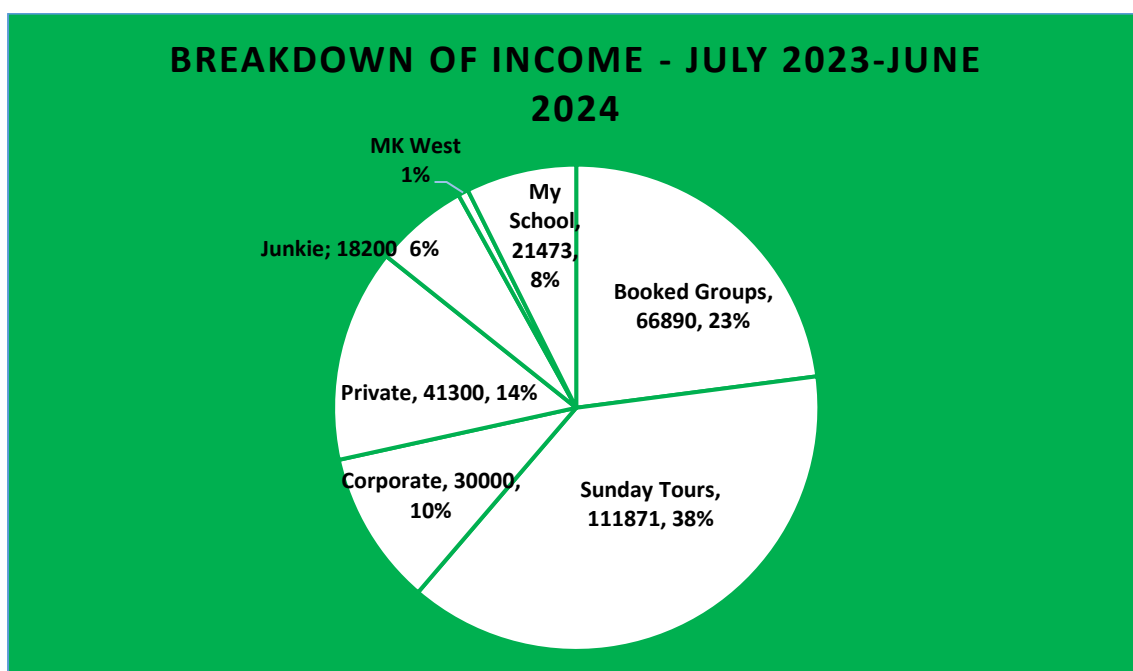
Security

The Koppies are in the middle of Joburg so security of visitors is always a priority. On Sundays, in addition to the two JCPZ guards, we employ one MK conservation worker and one Beagle guard. A huge thank you to the Melville Security Initiative (MSI) which since June 2024, is funding the Beagle guard. Theft of anything moveable or made of metal continues, particularly the palisade fence slats adjacent to Beyers Naude. All the old water pipes, and some new ones, have been dug up and stolen so that there is only one source of water left at the Lecture Hut. The dustbin and cistern at the reception hut have also been stolen. Perpetrators traverse the Koppies at night and rob neighbouring properties, but it is up to the residents to secure their premises adequately.

Finance

The detailed financials will be reviewed at the AGM on the 24th August 2024 at 2pm. They can be reviewed after this on request.

Income of R291,724 was received from Sunday visitors, booked midweek groups, our valued regular and special private donators, JUNKIE Charity shop contributions, and MySchool contributions from Woolworths' purchases. More than 60% of all income is derived from visitors to MK Central and MK West. Income from My School was at 8% and Junkie at 6% of all income. The pie chart below gives an overall picture of the income breakdown.



Expenditure was R295 115; expenditure on labour represented 84% of this. The second highest expenditure of R 33 721 was on security, representing 11% of all expenditure. The balance of 5% of expenditure was for website hosting, insurance, printing, extra security, maintenance materials and bank charges.

Investment from savings is not included here.

JCPZ matters

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ) funds two 24/7 security guards for Melville Koppies Central. They also employ a contractor to cut trails and firebreaks on MK Central and East. Two smashed divisions of Judith Road fencing have had wonky temporary repairs done.

JCPZ and Melville Koppies West

JCPZ looks after MK West where the increasing number of homeless people living there is a problem. The blue ceramic heritage plaque which had been put up very high on the rock wall of the cave on MK West, has sadly been vandalised. It seems a waste of money to replace it while security on the West is a problem.

Fortunately, residents do some urgently needed conservation and assist with security for the community-organised monthly walks.

Conclusion

We said farewell to Tony Nunes who has retired to Stilbaai with his wife Jeria. For many years, Tony and his son Neilen have maintained and built new essential fixed structures on the Koppies. Both men are perfectionists, reliable and a fast workers. We will miss Tony very much. Thank you for your huge contribution. We look forward to Neilen continuing his father's role.

Sarah Charlton has joined the committee and has already been a very active and welcome member.

We were invited to enter the Eco-logic awards in the Eco-community category, with prize giving on the 30th October 2024. One of the requirements of the entry is for references to substantiate our claims of community involvement and interest. The email references we received are a total inspiration to all of us who care for the Koppies. So many community members and organisations use and value the treasure of Melville Koppies. We have a dedicated committee that always gives 100% of their time, commitment and expertise. Thank you to the Emmarentia Ridge residents for their annual gifts for the conservation team. Thank you all for all you do for the Koppies and its visitors.

Wendy Carstens and Jenny Grice

July 2024

The Melville Koppies Management Committee in alphabetical order

Alison Wilson	Guide, Sunday reception, MK East walks, 8km hike guide
Barbara Shaw	Website, Sunday reception, proof-reader
Best Ndlovu	Conservation, security
Chrissie Carey	MK East caretaker of the Puma Garage area
Clement Ndlovu	Conservation, security
Danyle Nunes	24/7 on Security, 8km hike leader, head of CREASS and hands-on worker, fire warden
Elsje Bonthuys	Conservation, Sunday reception, guide, volunteer work party organiser
Jenny Grice	Guide, Public relations, admin, Sunday reception, 8km hike organiser and guide, bank signatory
Joseph Kasonga	Conservation

Lis Jones	Finance, bank signatory
Lucky Mdluli	Conservation, security
MA Farquharson	MK East publicity
Sarah Charlton	Conservation, hike leader
Tam Scheidegger	Guide, bank signatory, plant disease researcher
Tony Lelliott	MK West hike organiser, guide, 8km hike leader
Vaughan Russell	Financial accountant
Wendy Carstens	Chair, guide, public relations, treasurer, Sunday reception, admin, bank signatory
David Carstens is not a MKMC member but is a regular Sunday and school guide	