



Quarterly Newsletter - March 2021 - Volume 4

Understanding integrated Veld fire Management

It is summer 2021, the height of the fire season in the Western Cape. We are all ready and good to go - we have the tools and people to put the wet stuff on the red stuff. But not so fast...Most folks consider veld fire management to be the crews, the helicopters, fire engines and our hero's putting out the fire, but this is only one element of a series of activities that facilitate good and safe veld fire management practices.

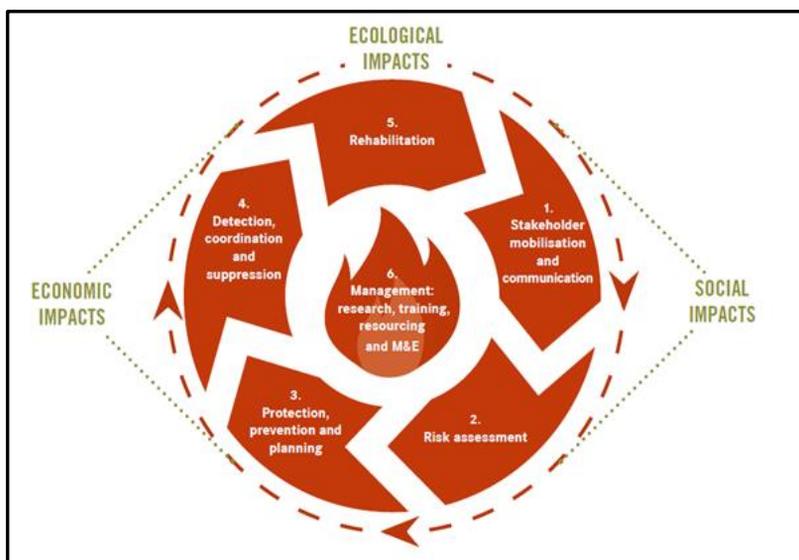


WOF helicopter. Image supplied Corlie Hugo.

For authorities, landowners and land managers there is much, much more. Worldwide the best approach is integrated veld fire management. So, what is integrated veld fire management?

It is defined as a series of actions that includes:

Risk assessments, fire awareness activities, fire prevention activities, prescribed burning, resource sharing and co-ordination, for detection, fire suppression, fire damage rehabilitation and research to create a sustainable and well-balanced environment, reduce unwanted fire damage, and promote the beneficial use of fire. That is quite a mouthful but it looks like this:



KOGELBERG BIOSPHERE RESERVE COMPANY

THE CAPE FLORAL KINGDOM'S MODEL FOR A SUSTAINABLE LIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL



A clear and shared understanding of Integrated Fire Management is key to the success of engaging all stakeholders involved in fire management and therefore successfully managing veld fires.

A key element in the height of fire season is early detection, reporting and rapid reaction.

The most efficient way of early detection in the KBR environment is reporting by landowners and the public. All members of the public are encouraged to report fires immediately.



Veld fire in fynbos. Images supplied by Corlie Hugo.

Landowners are legally required to report a fire on their property and inform their neighbours and authorities if a fire starts on their property.

The Western Cape Disaster Management Centre encourages the use of the national emergency numbers, however the Overberg district municipality emergency number can also be used in the KBR area.

Landowners should have the tools and staff to suppress a fire on their property according to the National Veld and Forest fire legislation and should make all effort to contain the fire immediately.

The quicker we react the smaller the fire the less the risk and the better for all.

On detection of fire immediately report it to one of the following numbers:

National Emergency number From cell Phone	112
National Emergency Number From landline	10177
Overberg District Municipality Emergencies	0284251690
Overstrand Local Municipality	028 3122400

As 2021 progresses we will be addressing each aspect of Integrated Veld fire management. The focus will be on what landowners can do to implement integrated veld fire management in the build-up to the next fire season.

The Cape Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion pumilum*)

The Cape dwarf chameleon is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red data list and is endemic to the Western Cape region of South Africa. They are found in a variety of habitats including fynbos, renosterveld, thicket and riparian vegetation. Chameleons are unique in the sense that they they possess the ability to alter their colouration according to their mood as well as to blend into the environment around them. This ability as well as their adept skill at staying very still and being very stealthy on plants are their way of avoiding predators.



Chameleon hiding in vegetation. Image supplied by Catherine Kuhn.

Chameleons have an ecologically important role in keeping insect populations, such as flies, in check. They are therefore handy to have in your garden. There are many ways you can make your gardens more chameleon friendly and they are known to thrive in gardens with indigenous fynbos plants such as proteas, restio and Cape honeysuckle, to name a few.

There are quite a few threats to this species including habitat loss through urbanisation and fragmentation. Too frequent and large-scale fires are a major threat in natural areas, as well as predation by domestic cats, hadida's and crows in the urban areas. Due to these threats, they are sadly becoming increasingly more isolated.

Be on the lookout for chameleons in your garden and remember to search for them on the leaves and branches when trimming hedges, trees or plants. Make sure to safely relocate them to another plant.



Chameleon holding onto reed. Image supplied by Catherine Kuhn..

Youth for the Environment awareness work in Grabouw

Youth for the Environment (Y4Enviro) is a non-profit organisation that recognises a need to connect communities and young people to the environment through environmental awareness and education. We also strive to develop a new breed of leaders who are passionate about the environment whilst driving forward the principles of understanding the values of sustainable practice.



Group of children hiking in Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve. Image supplied by Catherine Kuhn.



The benefits of healthy natural areas are essential in maintaining a healthy environment for humans. The programme seeks to educate youth about protecting nature by focusing on biological health benefits and ecologically sustainable practices as well as opportunities for job creation through eco-tourism. Socio-economic problems are influencing other anthropogenic issues such as urban-sprawl and over-population which in turn can lead to other challenges such as crime and pollution. Grabouw town, being located close to natural areas is a prime hotspot for illegal activities that harm wildlife.

Through monitoring and evaluation as well as surveys, we can make insightful recommendations and decisions regarding the focus of our education and awareness programmes. From work already conducted, we can see that participants have experienced a positive change in mindset regarding the way they view wildlife and understand biodiversity concepts. In conclusion, we note that effective and ongoing awareness programmes are necessary to capacitate mindset change.

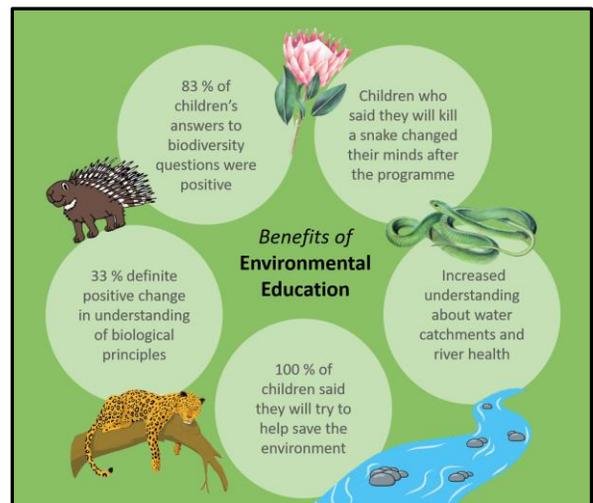


Holiday program at Monteith Trust. Image supplied by Catherine Kuhn.

Our programme works primarily with the youth of Grabouw as well as prominent community members and other stakeholders such as the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, the farming Community and CapeNature. The project strives to instil a love for the environment through ecological surveys, awareness, and environmental education activities. We recently conducted a holiday programme with the Monteith Trust Aftercare School where we introduced participants to the concepts of Reduce – Reuse and Recycle.

We ran a mini-SASS activity to instil an understanding about river and water quality and how pollution negatively affects our health as well as critical ecosystems. We also took the learners to Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve where they were taught about biodiversity in fynbos ecosystems.

To achieve actual changes in behaviour, environmental benefits need to correlate with benefits to the individuals affected by the socio-economic issues. We would like to continue our work in the area and encourage other stakeholders to engage in our programmes with a goal to develop, inspire and capacitate the inhabitants of Grabouw and surrounding areas.



Results of one of the surveys. Image supplied by Catherine Kuhn.

Think conservation rather than exploitation!

Our economic growth is embedded on resources that the environment provides. As a result, our dependency on these environmental resources has caused several environmental problems with potentially catastrophic or detrimental consequences for life on earth. This means that at some point in the future we may not have a home to inhabit. One of the main influencing factors is our attitudes towards nature and our natural environment.



Leucadendron species. Images supplied by Corlie Hugo.

Is it safe for us to say we are the authors of the unpleasant and devastating environmental challenges we are facing today? If yes, it simply means that one must do something to bring about change. I am sure that you are asking yourself the question “what can I do?” This part is the most difficult, however, you can start by maintaining and restoring ecosystem functions in your community, private land, or farm.

We need to think stewardship rather than exploitation! The future of this world depends on us the present generation to ensure that future generations have a place in this world. We can all contribute by turning our gardens into biodiversity reservoirs by implementing the following:

- Grow as many indigenous plants as possible; plants evolved in partnership with the invertebrates which form the basis of the food pyramid for birds and other larger creatures.
- Never use insecticides or pesticides that destroy invertebrates and micro-organisms that feed birds and other wildlife.
- Allow leaf-litter to accumulate; this provides a refuge for invertebrates and retains soil moisture.
- Do not over-illuminate your property after dark. Bright lights lure and kill nocturnal insects. We do need some lights for security but the idea is to keep it to a minimum.
- A natural water feature will provide habitat for dragonflies and other aquatic wildlife.



Cape river frog. Images supplied by Corlie Hugo.

- Create as many micro-habitats as possible in your garden, such as rotting logs, rockeries, earth banks and stone walls.
- Place a floating log or other object in your swimming pool to reduce numbers of drowned insects, reptiles and other wildlife; always put swimming pool lights off when not necessary.

Plant some attractive flowers to encourage bees, butterflies and other wildlife into the garden. Bees are vital to the eco system.

Collect the rainwater from your downpipes when the downpours inevitably start. In the days to come, the water collected can then be used to care for your plants, conserving water but still giving your shrubbery the refreshing drink it needs after a sunny day. While conserving water, try to avoid using the hose and sprinklers and invest in a trusty old watering can.

With a bit of luck, your garden will soon be frequented by a host of friendly animals looking to explore and possibly even hunker down to stay a while. Take it to the next level by installing shelters where your friendly visitors can get settled. From butterfly to hedgehog houses there's an abundance of options to help make garden wildlife feel more comfortable and you can even make your own from scrap materials. Just be sure to position shelters for nocturnal or more timid animals in a quiet, secluded spot in the garden, somewhere out of the wind and direct sunlight to create a relaxing, restful environment.



“Bug hotel” for insects. Image supplied by Corlie Hugo..

For more information:

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