Dear Hamerkop Beneficiaries,

A lot has happened since our last newsletter!!

PUMP HIT BY LIGHTNING

+/- Friday 11th November 2016 - Lightning damaged the pump, so no functioning pump meant no water supply to the Hamerkop main house and to Reginah's cottage. Humphrey Farrer had gone home due to not being well, Noel Modes came to Hamerkop I think Saturday 12th November.

Upset phone call from Reginah – "No water, I can't work under these conditions. I am resigning".

Noel Modes & Steve had both been contacting electricians to try and get the pump motor seen to, not easy as the electricians were busy. Verdict was that a new pump was needed. Reginah apparently got water from the hotel, the Modes' got water from the stream

New pump was installed within a few days.

Regarding fire, see the Appendix at the end of this newsletter for a report on the fire by Hamerkop's Prof Norman Owen-Smith.

RESIGNATION FROM REGINAH

16th November I received two SMSs from Reginah where she had put her resignation in writing.

"Dear hamerkop community please accept this letter as a notice of my resignation from my position as a caretaker of hamerkop. It has been a pleasure working with you as a team over nine years. your sincerely REGINAH MOKWENA.

My last day will be 30/12/16"

NEW CARETAKER & FACTOTEM

Pretty Moyo – our new caretaker	Steve, Ben & Aleck Nyathi working on digging out Pampas grass from around Hamerkop dam last year Aleck is our new factotum-to-be

PRETTY MOYO – Our new caretaker, Pretty Moyo, started at Hamerkop on 19th January. She started with cleaning up her own accommodation, removed lots of old tools, bits of junk out of Reginah's third room, and the stoop area.

Joseph, Reginah's husband, visited us while we were there. He arrived together with Dakalo, his little son, in a car which he had bought for Reginah the previous week! He and Dakalo looked very happy, Joseph told us that he misses Hamerkop, Dakalo does too. Dakalo started playing with his toy broken lawnmower.

Joseph told us that life is good for him. He is working as a cook for prophet Shepheard Bashiri, who has bought and taken over the Sparkling Water Hotel. Joseph works hard, cooking for 1000 people every month, he has been offered a doubling of his salary!

Joseph was so generous in telling Pretty that she could use any of their furniture, pots, pans, whatever she needed. He told us that electricity and water in the cottage were all in working order. Joseph and Pretty exchanged cell numbers, Joseph told her that he and Reginah would help her with anything she needed, he also told her that Hamerkop was a safe place.

On departing Joseph told us that Pretty needs a TV – (there were three broken TV's in their ex-rooms.), Hamerkop being a lonely place, it was one of the reasons why Reginah left us, she was lonely, especially as often beneficiaries do not use their weeks or only use the weekends!

It was very cute on driving away, that Dakalo simply didn't want to stop waving goodbye to us with a big smile on his face!

Pretty and her husband have very few possessions, they are economic refugees from Zimbabwe and for the past few years have been living in a shack in Soweto. Pretty was our once-a week domestic helper for the last two years. Her main job has been with our neighbour who can't afford to employ her on a fulltime basis anymore and asked me to help her find another job.

In the short time we were at Hamerkop (during Duncan & Ashley Barker's week), Pretty cleaned the cottage's (now her) two rooms, put some bedding on the bed, cloth on the table, and her room looked really nice!

Early this week Reginah and Joseph removed their things out of the middle room, also some of their rubbish. In order to move possessions from the middle room, Joseph had to break open the lock of the security door there – somehow that lock had stopped working. Joseph has promised me and Pretty too, that they would come to collect the rest of the rubbish soon.

According to Michelle van der Wiel who is at Hamerkop now, Pretty has done a super job on the Hamerkop house, the kitchen is spotless, sheets and bedding all clean, wow, it was needed!

In the short time that Pretty has been at Hamerkop, beneficiaries have been so kind and generous to her, fantastic!

A second-hand TV from the Cretchleys, we hope to get it to Hamerkop with Reon and Melissa van der Wiel this weekend!

Michelle van der Wiel has just bought Pretty a fridge out of Michelle's own money, Pretty needs a fridge! The ancient one from Hamerkop has long since died and was full of cockroaches! Hopefully Joseph and Reginah have removed it from the premises!

Michelle said that she is donating the fridge to Pretty as she was given a free week stay at Hamerkop by Richard Asman, who was unable to take up his week at Hamerkop this week.

Ashley Barker has bought a First Aid kit for Pretty to use –Pretty will need some coaching on what the contents are all used for.

Duncan Barker has volunteered to contact beneficiaries the week before they are due to come to Hamerkop, to confirm that they are indeed taking up their week, and if not, how the week or the weekday part of the week, can be utilised by other people. We don't want Pretty to leave us because of loneliness – she does say that she likes the quietness of Hamerkop, but being totally alone is indeed lonely.

As part of the Domestic Subcommittee I will be looking after Pretty, so please, let **me** know if there are any issues? She is really sweet, works hard, is very good with children – she knows me and trusts me. I have told her to please let me know if she is unhappy about anything or if she is unsure about anything. I have asked her to put her contract on the noticeboard so that it is clear to the beneficiaries what is expected of her. I will put a summary of her duties on the noticeboard when we are next at Hamerkop.

We appeal to beneficiaries for ideas for keeping the house occupied by responsible people for much closer to 365 nights a year than is currently the case.

If you would like to give Pretty any food when you leave Hamerkop, please show it to her, ask if she would like it and only leave for her what she does want. She must then please take it to her own fridge so that the next beneficiary will have a clean, empty fridge for his/her/ their use.

As shops are not anywhere close, and of course Pretty and Aleck don't have a car, a bicycle (may be two, one for each of them) may be very useful to them. They can ride a bicycle, I did ask. If anyone has a spare bicycle to donate, that would be great!

They need double bed sheets, blankets, towels, dishcloths, any donations would be welcome.

ALECK NYATHI – General factotum

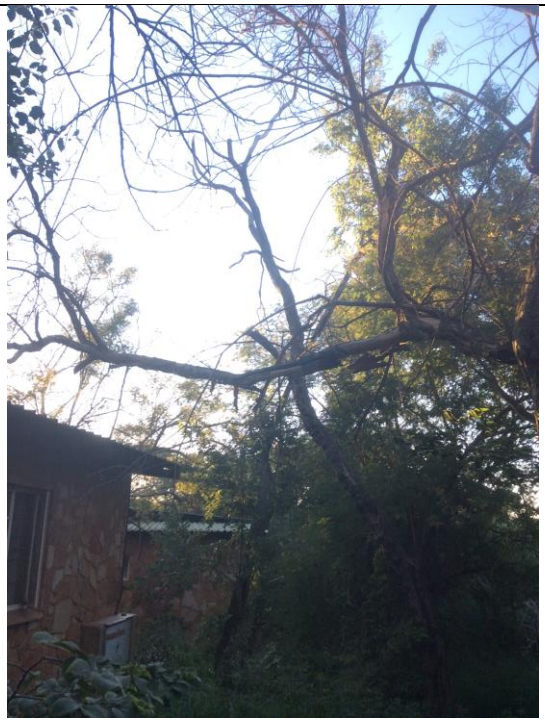
Pretty's husband, Aleck Nyathi, is still in Zimbabwe trying to renew his passport which he had allowed to expire. Once back in SA, he will join Pretty in Hamerkop and work under Gary Cundill, who manages the maintenance at Hamerkop - on the many jobs that are needed to be done. Aleck has various skills - electrical skills, painting, carpentry, building, plumbing - he has given us a good reference of his previous employment. He will be working at Hamerkop three days a week.

He has a contract with the Hamerkop Trust for five months and if all works out well, the contract will be extended, which will require an increase in levies.

The various maintenance jobs at Hamerkop need to be done and many beneficiaries are not able, not willing, not keen to do the various jobs, so a manual worker has therefore become very necessary. It is really much appreciated that Gary has agreed to manage the various projects that need to be done. Gary will need assistance from the various beneficiaries who have the expertise, knowledge, skills on how to do the various projects, please volunteer?

Various jobs would be improvements on Pretty's cottage, improving the Hamerkop access road, removing dead wood away from the house and cottage and more.

Grass in the "middle mannetjie" and on either side of the Hamerkop access road is really high. Slashing or grazing?
The grasses are mainly very palatable – the predominant grass here being *Digitaria eriantha*, a delicious grass if you are a grazer!



There is a need for clearing away dead wood behind and above the annex

BARN DANCE AT HAMERKOP – 16th November 2016, Charlotte Rogers-Luck in Merv & Jean Prior's week.

Reginah brought us extra lighting and joined us with her little son Dakalo, in one of the dances.

We also had a dance session early the following morning

Melissa Rogers and friend Logan ready to dance! Hamerkop is ideal for dancing, the big cement parking area, Charlotte's iPad & small speaker worked well, so did Steve's car CD player for the music

On the left Logan & Beau, in the back ground Jane & Charlotte, in the front Sage & Melissa, on the right Steve & Kayla

SPARKLING WATERS HOTEL – Now a different kind of sparkling ☹

Insert from Steve: As you know, the Sparkling Waters Hotel has been bought by Prophet Shepheard Bashiri. There is now a large tent in the old parking area to the right of the entrance. This tent is on occasion filled with a large number of worshippers (perhaps 1000) and a sound system that fills the valley for many hours. Apparently, the whole matter of the legality of the hotel and the Prophet's activities and plans are under investigation.

Lots of cars, side view of the big tent that was erected at the entrance of the previous Sparkling Waters Hotel

Many people listening to a loud sermon that was audible even from the Hamerkop house Friday 20th January 2017

VARIOUS MAINTENANCE TASKS in and around the house have been done by Noel Modes – in fact, a long list, amongst which are the servicing of the locks of the security gates of the annex. I still had problems with unlocking both the security doors of the annex when we were there end November, but was told by Reginah that some of the keys are simply bad copies and don't work. Her key is apparently fine.

I tested the security gates from the annex with our old Hamerkop security gates key, and yes, it did work on the annex gates

The annex toilet cistern is working again.

DEAD WOOD –The dead tree which had fallen over behind the annex has been sawn into pieces and the biggest pieces have been removed by Paul Venter, also a tree fallen half across the road has been cleared by Paul – thank you Paul! But there are three more biggish dead trees that need attention!

When the Lucks – Jane and Charlotte – and us looked at the bushbabies jumping from the house onto the trees in November, we thought that the branches from the dead tree between the annex and main house were essential for them getting from the house into the trees and back – we named it the

"Bush baby tree" - but this last week we (Barkers, Steve & I) observed the bushbabies from the front stoop, they were jumping from the roof onto live trees near the kitchen, so the dead tree can be removed as it could be a fire and structural hazard – Gary Cundill to decide ☺

SEPTIC TANK

Jane's Artwork ☺!

Please ensure that the septic tank stays functioning the way it should?

Another important septic tank issue I learned, is that toilet detergents do kill the biotic organisms that keep the septic tank functioning , so please do not use toilet detergents, even not Handy Andy, which is what I usually used at home. White Vinegar is really good for cleaning toilets and is recommended for using on Septic Tank toilets. I have asked Pretty to use only vinegar on cleaning the toilets.

SIGHTINGS

Bud of *Haemanthus humilis* on the front stoop, ready to open – this picture was taken in November	Fantastic crop of *Ximenia caffra/* Sour plum on the left and Wild apricot/ *Landolphia capensis/ Ancylobotrys capensis* on right - January 2017

Picking Stamvrug at Cedarberg December 2016

Stamvrug juice – delicious! Cheers ☺!
Wishing you all a happy, healthy & fun 2017

ALIEN INVASIVE PLANTS NEEDING ATTENTION NOW

Ronde klits/ burweed/ *Cyathula uncinulata* – horrible burs – stick onto Tshirts and socks – roundish, soft leaves coming off stems, opposite each other

Chaff flower/ burweed/ Lang klitskafblom/ *Achyranthus aspera*–perennial weed, unwanted plant - has reddish stems, very extensive, rambling, low growing bush with small burs on longish "fingers" (= lang klits = long eggbeater)

Lots found next to road near Pretty's cottage. Weeding tool in "jail" in main house. Pull/ dig out (easy after rain) and leave to rot on the cement slab where we park our cars. Big thank you to anyone who would like to take them out, it is actually quite a rewarding job! Steve took lots of them out behind and around the annex.

Pampas grass in Rotsboom kloof upstream of our little dam – category 1b declared invader – easier to identify with its pink inflorescence

Kind regards,

Karin Spottiswoode - Cell 072-595-6991, tel 011-674-2980 with some help from Steve Spottiswoode

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APPENDIX:

REPORT ON THE FIRE THAT OCCURRED ON HAMERKOP IN LATE 2016

Norman Owen-Smith, 2017-01-02

The fire that burnt much of the Hamerkop property in late 2016 (October) could potentially have been very hot because of the long interval after the previous fire, and hence the amount of dead grass litter that had accumulated. However, my somewhat cursory inspection of the area where the fire had occurred near the house indicated that relatively little damage to the vegetation had occurred. Yes, there are grass tufts that are blackened and dead, but generally these amount to less than 10% of the grass, except in local areas (e.g. inside our northern boundary fence with Visser where a back-burn had evidently been lit to stop the fire spreading beyond our fence). The space opened by the death of these tufts is being colonised by forbs, which will later give way to new grass plants. There has been top-kill of tree saplings, as expected, but in almost all cases these plants were growing back from the base. Some big trees have been toppled, but only because they were old and their trunks rotten.

As emphasised in my previous (2003) report addressing fire policy for Hamerkop, fire is an intrinsic feature of African savannas, lit by humans over perhaps a million years and by lightning where humans were not settled. To achieve the objectives that we want, fire frequency needs to be managed. If fire has been excluded for a long period, the burn that eventually occurs can be especially hot because of the amount of dead vegetation that has accumulated, and thus potentially damaging to plants. Our recent fire was less damaging than I might have expected, I think because the preceding dry summer had produced less grass. Annual burns can also be damaging because plants have less time to recover. However, annual or biennial burns are appropriate if the objective is to open up the tree and shrub cover by killing some of the encroaching woody plants. Anyone visiting Hamerkop repeatedly would have noted how the tree cover has thickened because of the exclusion of fire, especially on the slope below the house. Of course, the effectiveness of a fire in promoting grasses over trees depends also on weather conditions at the time of the burn. Kruger Park is experimenting with fires lit under 30-30-30 conditions (>30°C temperature, >30 km/h wind and <30% relative humidity) in an attempt to reverse the bush encroachment that has occurred there – but these are dangerous to animals and people as well as plants. A safer policy for Hamerkop would be to allow fires more frequently (every 3-5 years, depending on rainfall) rather than risking the occurrence of a very hot burn after fire has been kept out for longer. Furthermore, any risk to the house (low at present) would be reduced if the dead wood that has accumulated around it were removed.