Dear Hamerkop beneficiaries,

Our fourth newsletter this year!

WEEDING – as most beneficiaries do want to enjoy Hamerkop and not really spent time on removing declared alien invasive plants, Steve and I visited Hamerkop for two days during one of the times that the beneficiaries were unable to take their week (21 & 22 September 2016) and brought two strong workers with us from Johannesburg to seriously get down to the task at hand

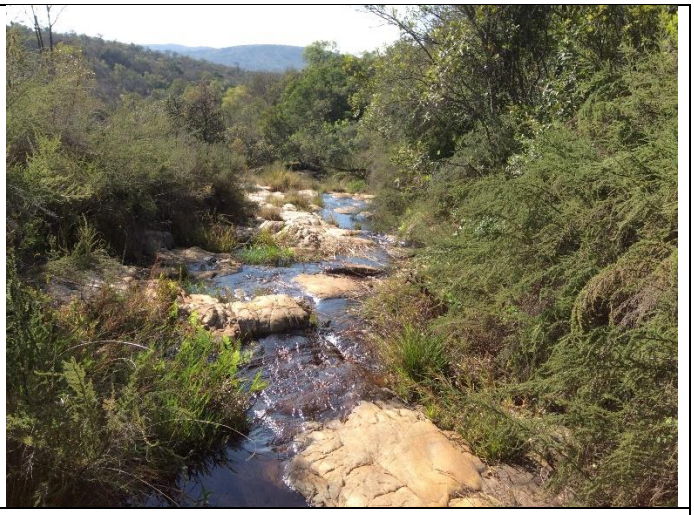
We spent the two days removing Pampas grass (*Cortaderia jubata*) and Crofton Weed (*Agaratina adenophora*) –both declared category 1b plants i.e. they must be removed by law.

It is when one sees infestations of these declared weeds choking the river system that one realises the importance of early intervention!

First day - what a huge task!	Below dam wall
Pampas grass unfortunately mostly having already seeded, with its roots well entrenched between the rocks, sucking up our precious water	Next morning, beautiful clear view of dam wall with Pampas grass all having been cleared. The remaining clumps of grass at the dam wall is *Setaria megaphylla*, which is indigenous, palatable grass

However, looking further down stream, there is still quite a lot of pampas grass, which will need to be cleared at anothert time

The next day the workers worked upstream towards Cilliers house



Afternoon picture - View of Rotsboom kloof above the dam, looking down. Lots of Pampas grass was cleared from this area

Steve & I worked in Hamerkop kloof on one big Pampas at the bottom of the kloof and then on big infestations of Crofton Weed upstream. Unfortunately there is still lots which we didn't have time to dig out. This is actually the responsibility of the Cilliers as all this Crofton weed is on their property, unfortunately all the seeds wash down into our property making it our problem too.

Crofton weed is easy to recognise when flowering.
It has lots of white pompom flowers, triangular leaves, reddish stems, and when breaking branches and leaves, it produces an unpleasant smell

Steve was unable to get hold of Jacques Cilliers while we were at Hamerkop – we did want to make Jacques aware of all the Pampas grass, Crofton weed and bramble on his property and had hoped that he would assist us with the invasive hacking. Steve did eventually get through to Jacques after we were back from Hamerkop. Jacques told Steve that he has had many burglaries, is very worried about having people on his property who he doesn't know – luckily it was only Steve and I who had been working on his property ☺! – he should showed little interest in the invasive weeds on his land

SIGHTINGS

At our one evening in Hamerkop I got a glimpse of four or five bushbabies about to get out above the outside light above the passage door to go on their nocturnal foraging – it is always such a treat to see them!

A solifugid (sunspider) on the path on the way to Grootkloof. Isn't he/ she a beauty ☺?
Solifugids, according to Jonathan Leeming, authority on scorpions and spiders, are totally harmless to humans, they have no venom glands and no pincers. They do have big chelicerae (mouthparts used for chewing) and like to eat Parktown prawns and ants

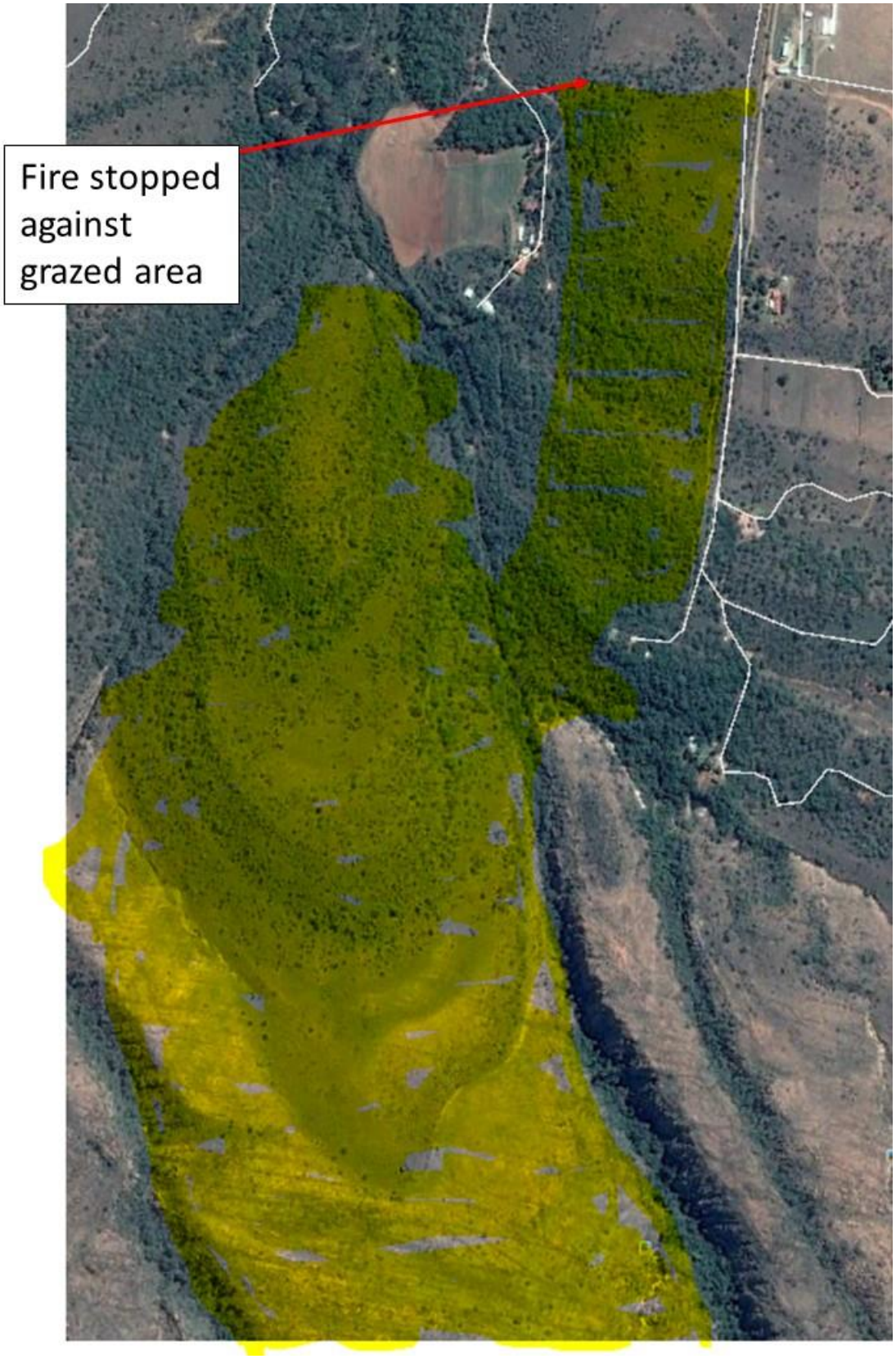
FIRE - 28th September Steve received a message on his cell from Reginah (via Joseph's cell) that there had been a fire at Hamerkop, that Joseph and her had organised transport to move their things out. Luckily the fire missed their cottage and the main house and annex, everything was alright.

We could not get hold of Reginah nor Joseph on their cells. This is an ongoing problem!

The van der Wiels came out to Hamerkop that following weekend. Reon marked on Google earth the extent of the fire as shown below

Please see below Reon's map with Steve's labelling indicating the extent of the fire at Hamerkop. On the north the fire extended as far as the servitude and to our road or the border of the Cillier's property on the east. The fire came within 70m of the house on the North West and South. Into the mountains the fire burnt the whole ridge between Hamerkop and Woodpecker gorge, as far up the ridge as can be seen from the house. The area highlighted in yellow on the map was burnt.

Shaded and annotated Google earth view



A more extensive view

View Southwest from house

Pictures above and below taken by Michelle van der Wiel – labels inserted by Steve

Very scary!

WOOD - I don't know how much it helped that we had cleared a lot of dead wood away from the house on previous visits. Thank you to anyone else who has also cleared dead wood.

Joseph and Reginah have quite a lot of dead wood near their cottage. Steve and I have separately asked them to move it away from their cottage in the past. Melissa van der Wiel expressed her concern that there still is lots of dead wood near their cottage.

NO HOT WATER – Melissa in their week beginning October, told me that there was no hot water at Hamerkop. Eventually the cause of the problem appeared to be an airlock in the water system, which came right after a while by running water out of all the taps.

It can be assumed that, at the time of the approaching fire, that Joseph and Reginah used lots of water to wet the area around their cottage, probably emptying the water tank in the process, with the subsequent hot water problem experienced by the van der Wiels.

WATER LEAK - Melissa noticed a water leak on the pipe from the tank to the reservoir and that the water was running out only when the pump was on - lots of water was leaking out! Some of us have noticed this, but have not paid much attention as the water does not run out of the broken pipe when the pump is off. Reon looked into the problem but was unable to solve it. Steve has made contact with two local plumber/ electricians who can come out when there is a beneficiary available to show him where the problem is. Please contact Steve if you are going to be at Hamerkop and will be available to attend to the plumber coming to sort out the problem?

DOMESTIC THINGS - Hamerkop has been provided with two new fans and a new microwave, thank you Claudine!

The old microwave is in the jail, any suggestions what to do with it?

Melissa kindly drew up an inventory of cutlery and crockery (excluding glasses) in the kitchen. We need more knives, forks, teaspoons. It would be good to have a matching set, actually two sets of six of each, as our present cutlery collection is rather mixed ☺! We need a knife sharpener as knives are blunt. Our new bodum has been cracked and has been replaced by Michelle van der Wiel, who has, since then, donated a full 8 cup (!) coffee machine to Hamerkop

Cotton dishcloths I will get, no problem.

Please folks, when you break something, do try and replace it? Also let our Domestic subcommittee know? Our present Domestic subcommittee is Gail, Claudine and myself – any other volunteers are very welcome!

GENERAL MAINTENANCE -. We are looking forward to Noel Modes who has offered his repair and maintenance skills on what need to be done on the Hamerkop house and surrounds, in week 46 this year

Please let Claudine and me know of anything you would like mentioned in our newsletter and particularly of work done, work that needs to be done?

Enjoy this beautiful place, look after it and protect it from water hungry neighbour(s), encroaching water hungry alien invasives plants, keep an eye on neighbouring "development" (Swanepoel's activities and our neighbouring Sparkling Waters Hotel being broken down and replaced by something much bigger and "better") and whatever else?

Warm regards,

Karin Spottiswoode with input from Claudine Bennett