



The Rooikat

A newsletter produced by the Friends of Vrolijkheid

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In This Issue:

The New-look <i>Rooikat</i>	page 1	Outings & Events	page 4
Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition	page 2	Rescued Leopard Finds New Home	page 5
Besoek aan Addo	page 2	Feedback on Groot Toren	page 6
Long Ago in England	page 3	Weather Stats	page 6
Lizard Tidbits	page 3	Birding in McGregor	page 6

The New-look *Rooikat* – by Barbara Jacobs

The editor, creator, designer, compiler, printer and distribution manager of *The Rooikat* has set up home in Swellendam, leaving us with a very large gap to fill. While we wish Dave and Barbara Harding a very happy time in their new town we also miss Dave's commitment and contribution as a member of the Friends of Vrolijkheid Committee. Not only did he quietly get on with producing our fabulous newsletter but he also filled the position of Chairman.

Well. As they say. Stuff happens. What also happens is the opportunity for a change of format and we really hope that you like how the new newsletter looks and that you find it useful for keeping you up to date with events as we plan them. ♦



Dave and Barbara at their new home in Swellendam

Membership subscriptions are due in June annually. For those monies outstanding, please contact a committee member or pay your subs into the following account:

Name: Vriende van Vrolijkheid
 Bank: FNB Robertson
 Account No. 6204 5219 286

Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition – by Marilyn Poole

"Revisited" is the title of a slide show and talk being given by Viv James on Friday, September 12 at 7 p.m. It has been arranged as a fundraising event by Friends of C.A.R.E. (McGregor Animal Welfare) and will be held in the hall at Vrolijkheid by kind permission of Piet van.Zyl.

Viv's father, Reginald James, fresh from Cambridge University, joined Sir Ernest Shackleton's "Imperial Transantarctic Expedition" as a physicist at the last minute in 1914. On their way south their ship, the *Endurance*, was trapped in the Weddell Sea ice for nine months. Eventually, towards summer, she was crushed by shifting pack ice and sank, leaving Shackleton's party of 28 men living in tents on the ice for another six months. They continued their 2,000 km drift until breaking ice allowed them to launch their lifeboats. Six gruelling days later, they reached Elephant Island. Here they camped for nearly five months under terrible conditions while Shackleton sailed 1,200 km across the Drake Passage in one of the open boats to get help. All survived, although many were later to die in WWI.

This January Viv sailed from the Falkland Islands to the Antarctic Peninsula on *HMS Endurance* as a guest of the Royal Navy, and despite bad conditions was able to land at Cape Wild on Elephant Island, where the party had been marooned. Viv will talk about his trip, combined with references to his father's notes, diaries and photographs, and will show his own photographs of the voyage. These include his own landing on Elephant Island and shots of the present day *Endurance* at work in the Antarctic.

Tickets are R30 and can be reserved by phoning Marilyn Poole on 023 625-1306, or purchased at the door. ◊

Besoek aan Addo – deur Piet van Zyl

Ek en my gesin het van 2 tot 6 Julie 2008 in die Addo Olifant Nasionale Park naby Port Elizabeth besoek en ons het dit weereens baie geniet soos die vorige keer, 'n paar jaar gelede! Ons het 'n groot verskeidenheid diere gesien soos onder andere baie koedoes, rooiharteeeste, baie vlakvarke, volstruise, ystervark, hiëna, buffels, rooijakkals, bak-oor-jakkals, baie voëls, en natuurlik baie olifante. Olifante bly maar interessante diere om dop te hou veral as daar kleintjies in die trop is!

Ons het ook 'n heerlike ondervinding met Addo se leeus gehad. Op die Donderdag, het ons gehoor die leeus in in die omgewing van Zuurkop maar ons kon hulle nie vind nie. Die volgende oggend 07:00, toe die ruskamp se hekke oopmaak, het ons uitgery om na die leeus te gaan soek. Ons het drie van hulle op Zuurkop gekry waar hulle aan 'n rooiharteebes karkas gelê en vreet het – een jong mannetjie, een jong wyfie en 'n ouer wyfie met 'n halsband om die nek.



Hulle moes die prooi slegs enkele ure vroeër gevang het want die karkas was nog taamlik volledig. Later die oggend was die leeus blykbaar dik gevreet en het die res van die dag in die son gaan lê en slaap. Dit alles het sowat 10-15 tree van die pad af gebeur en dit was lekker om dop te hou. Daar was natuurlik heelwat motors en almal het fotos geneem!

Ons het een van die park se personeel gevra en hy het ons vertel dat die wyfie met die halsband die moeder van die twee jong leeus was en dat die mannetjie ook gewoonlik saam met hulle loop. Dié was heeldag glad nie te sien nie. Laat die middag het die leeus weer aan die karkas begin vreet maar teen toemaaktyd moes ons maar sorg dat ons in die ruskamp kom.

[Jong mannetjie-leeu by Addo Nasionale Park](#)



Leeu met karkas

Die volgende oggend, Saterdag, is ons weer vroeg uit en het die leeus steeds in die omgewing van die karkas aangetref. Hierdie keer was die groot maanhaar mannetjie by en die karkas was so-te-sê opgevreet behalwe vir vel en been en skedel. Naby die karkas het 'n dooie rooijakkals gelê wat dit seker gedurende die nag te na aan die karkas gewaag het en deur een van die leeus gevang en doodgebyt is. Die leeus het weer heeldag lui-lekker in die omgewing van die karkas deurgebring en weer vir baie geleenthede vir fotos neem gesorg.

Addo is beslis 'n besoek werd met sy interessante plantegroei. In die ruskamp is die Discovery Trail vir besoekers en is ook toeganklik vir blinde mense en rystoele. Daar is ook 'n watergat wat snags verlig word sodat die besoekers die diere kan dophou wat snags kom water drink. ♡

Did you know ... by Dr Ernst Baard

Did you know that ...

- ❖ The lizard group comprises monitors, agamas, chameleons, lacertids, amphibaenids, cordylids, plated lizards, skinks and geckos? Monitors (water and rock monitors or leguans) are the largest lizards in South Africa?
- ❖ There are 338 kinds of lizards in South Africa?
- ❖ Australia and South Africa have the greatest lizard variety in the world?
- ❖ Lizards appear to be limited to their particular ranges by substrate, that is, soil type or rock type, rather than by climate?
- ❖ Geological processes during the earth's history have therefore played a major role in the distribution patterns of lizards?
- ❖ Many, but not all, lizards have well-developed limbs and in some species the limbs are greatly reduced or have been lost altogether, probably mostly as adaptation to a burrowing or "grass-swimming" lifestyle?
- ❖ Most lizards have moveable eyelids, that is, they can close their eyes, but snake-eyed skinks and nearly all geckos have transparent eyelids?
- ❖ Most lizards can shed their tails easily when attacked by a predator, and grow it back relatively quickly, but agamas, chameleons and monitors can't shed their tails and cannot regenerate them, once lost?
- ❖ No South African lizard is venomous?
- ❖ Most South African lizards are insectivorous, but some, like monitors, are generalist carnivores; and some, like the flat, plated and crag lizards, do include plant material in their diet?
- ❖ Most South African lizards are egg-layers, but some skinks, the girdled lizards and chameleons give birth to live young?
- ❖ Some girdled lizard species, like the armadillo lizard, are gregarious and live in family groups?

A guy walks into a bar, as he sits down on a stool he notices there's a lizard telling jokes on the stage. The guy says to the barman "What's with the lizard?" The barman replies, "Oh, he's the stand-up chameleon!" ♡

500 YEARS AGO IN ENGLAND - a contribution from Dave Harding

After consuming a bucket or two of vibrant brew they called aul, or ale, the Vikings would head fearlessly into battle, often without armour or even shirts. In fact, the term "berserk" means "bare shirt" in Norse, and eventually took on the meaning of their wild battles.

Boardwalk Birdhide Project

The committee will be launching several fundraisers for the boardwalk project at Vrolijkheid during the forthcoming months. We trust these events will be well supported and enjoyed by all. The first will be a raffle (with some **very** nice prizes) and a surprise event is in the pipeline. Watch this space ...

“There’s no such thing as poor weather, just soft people.” (Bill Bowerman, Nike Founder)
Go out and play! Here’s how:

EVENTS & OUTINGS

August

22nd: Dassieshoek Trail. Slightly strenuous 21 km route. Contact Frances before 13 August to confirm. Meet at old MPO (McGregor Post Office) at 08.00 or (Robertson post office) at 08.30. Fuel costs to be shared

30th: Bird Club outing. Meet at Vrolijkheid at 08.00 or 07.30 at RPO

31st: Family Braai. Meet at Vrolijkheid from 11.00 onwards

September

11th: Groot Toren excursion. Cost: R10 for members and R20 for non-members. There is place for 30 persons only. Meet at the Groot Toren campsite at 09.00. Book your seat with Piet van Zyl

14th-16th: Hike to Thomas Hut above Worcester. Two nights will be spent on mountain in order to explore surrounding area. Numbers limited. Bring along clothing and equipment for all weathers. Confirm with Frances

27th: Bird Club outing to the dams at Nuy

October

Talk at Vrolijkheid by Christ Maartens on the Cape Leopard Project. Date to be confirmed.

19th-22nd: Hike in the Groot Winterhoek Wilderness Area. Tentative dates to be confirmed as the area is currently closed. R85 per person. Discount for Wildcard holders. To be booked and paid for in advance through CapeNature. Facilities are very basic. Hikes are long but not particularly demanding, with spectacular scenery. For more information contact Frances

25th: Bird Club outing to Agulhas

November

29th: Bird Club outing to Dassieshoek

Leopard Saved from Trap Set for Porcupines – by Corné Claassen, Manager: Langeberg Karoo Conservation Services

I received a call from a farmer in the McGregor area on the morning of Monday 2 June, reporting that one of his labourers had discovered a very unhappy adult leopard caught in a trap cage, which had been set for porcupines which were causing damage to a pumpkin crop.



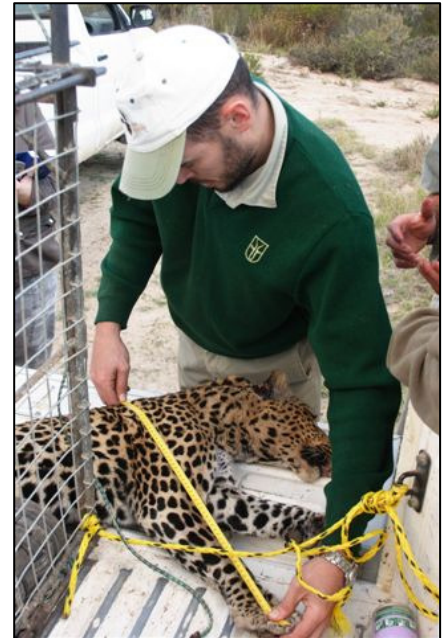
No vet was available on such short notice to assist with the tranquilizing of the cat. The caged leopard was located in a kloof without any vehicular access. Another problem was the cage itself, which was not designed to safely contain a predator as large as a leopard (which becomes very dangerous when trapped), and was also in a very poor condition! Fortunately the friendly staff at Sanbona Wildlife Reserve immediately agreed to assist in the rescue operation. On arrival at the farm, Paul Vorster (of Sanbona) and I proceeded up the kloof to where the farm labourer had indicated the location of the trapped animal to be. The kloof had fairly steep banks, thus providing limited access to the cage, but fortunately we saw a ledge right above the cage, onto which we climbed as it provided an ideal opportunity for a good shot with the tranquilizer gun.

The darted male leopard in a trap cage set for porcupines

I provided back-up with the .308 while Paul aimed for a good shot. The leopard was pacing around in the confines of the small trap cage, trying its best to get out and direct its anger at us. The dart hit home with the second shot, and within five minutes the leopard was fast asleep! On closer examination, we found it was a healthy male of 35 kg. The necessary measurements, as well as an ear clipping (for genetic studies) were taken, after removal from the trap cage. The farmer was unwilling to have the leopard released on his farm, as he had previously experienced stock losses.

The leopard was later successfully released in appropriate habitat within the Western Cape. ♦

Corné takes the leopard's measurements before transporting the big cat to a new home



committee *noun* [a] group of people appointed to perform a specified service or function (Collins English Dictionary)

Treasurer & Newsletter	Barbara Jacobs	023 625 1484
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Guest Speakers & Outings	Piet van Zyl	023 625 1621
Secretary & Garden	Ann van der Riet	023 626 3888
Walks & Rambles, & Garden	Frances Doering	023 625 1449
Newsletter	Alison Downie	023 625 1469

Frolic at Groot Toren: Friday 25 July – by Frances Doering

It was a perfect morning for walking – sunny with a cool breeze. Eight of us climbed up the 4x4 track to the attractive thatched stone chalet at Groot Toren, enjoying the wonderful views of the surrounding mountains and the great variety of restios and proteaceae along the way, including what appeared to be the rare and endangered *Serruria williamsii* which occurs in this area, and another, the mouse (rodent) protea *Protea humiflora* which grows on the Krantz in McGregor. We noticed a number of healthy specimens of the latter.

We all agreed that we could not have found a better way to spend our morning. Many thanks to Marinda for allowing us to hike on her property without payment of the normal fee.

This was an exploratory outing to assess the walk which is comparatively easy. We took about two hours to reach the hut. There are many other walks which we can take in the vicinity, and we look forward to being in these beautiful mountains again. ◊

Weather Statistics for July

Rainfall (statistics since 1968)				Temperatures for July (statistics since 1995)	
Totals		Max./Min. Recordings for July			
July	42 mm.			No minimum available	
2008 (to date)	122 mm.	Maximum	2 mm. (1974)	Maximum	26,1 ° C
2007	315 mm.	Minimum	72 mm. (2003)	Average Minimum	3,3 ° C
2006	335 mm.			Average Maximum	19,3 ° C
2005	239 mm.				
2004	282 mm.				

Birding in McGregor: Chapter 3 – by our longstanding “Friend of Vrolykheid”

“What do you know about bird calls?” Anthony asked me. “Practically nothing,” I said. “I’ve never gotten around to buying a tape or CD of bird call recordings. I might recognise a crow or hadeda or even a guineafowl perhaps, but why do you ask?”

“Well,” said Anthony, “you know I go swimming at the dam most mornings and a few days ago I got there just before sunrise, in fact it was still half dark – avoiding curious eyes, you know – ladies with their dogs and so ... don’t want to be accused of flashing, you know. Anyway, there I was, *kaalgat*, just getting into the water and suddenly there was this strange, rather unearthly sound. At first I thought it might be some sort of bird but when the sound repeated itself it sounded as if a wind was setting up vibrations in the telephone wires – a sort of humming.”

“Hell!” I said. “Are you sure it sounded like a bird? Of course you never know. I mean, I’m new to the birding world but already I’ve come up against some peculiar things. You never know with birds.” “A most peculiar sound,” Anthony continued, “it starts off very softly, like a huge aircraft, a 747 or something, flying over so high that you can’t see it but you just hear a faint humming and you begin to pick up a vibration in the air. Then it gets louder and it begins to sound like someone is strumming a telephone wire, or wind on telephone wires perhaps, except that there wasn’t any wind, not a breeze. The surface of the dam was like a mirror. Then again it sounded like someone was playing a musical saw – you know how you used to get musical saw artists when we were kids, playing at funfairs or outside some pub? And the thing is that you simply cannot determine where the sound is coming from. One moment it’s in front of you, then it’s behind you, then to the left, then to the right – it sort of seems to fill the air. It’s a spooky sound and kind of instinctively urges you to find its source to explain it. When I thought it might be the telephone wires I tried to follow the lines where they run through those bluegums, to see whether a branch happened to be rubbing over a wire but, as I said, there wasn’t a breath of wind. And in any case it’s not easy to follow a telephone line through the bush when you haven’t any clothes on. And when you’re finally standing under the telephone wires the sound seems to be louder on the other side of the dam, away from the lines. I’ve heard it twice now. It seems to occur only in the early

mornings, then it stops. “Of course I don’t know if it’s going to happen again tomorrow but I’d like you to hear it. You should try and be there early, say around six tomorrow, or even earlier if you can because it seems to stop well before the sun comes up.

“I promise you, you don’t have to swim,” he added. As you can imagine, afire with my newfound birding enthusiasm, the next morning in the half dark I was there. Quietly we sat on a rock enjoying, despite the cold, the first suggestions, through the crisp, cool air, of the razor-sharp outline of the Langeberg to the east, becoming clearer and sharper against the rosy-ing sky. With bated breath we listened – every rustle of leaves, every sigh of a breeze in the reeds, might turn into the faint humming which would herald the whining vibrations of the telephone lines, the musical saw or, goodness knows, the unearthly cries of a mystical bird. A thin layer of mist lay over the surface of the dam and overflowed into the valley below us.

There it was! The faint humming. Instinctively I looked up, searching the sky for the telltale flashing pinpoint lights of an aircraft – nothing. The sound got louder. Indeed it did sound as if it might be the telephone lines, or fence lines even – some taut steel wire being strummed. But not a staccato strumming – a long, swelling, vibrating sound. Indeed, somewhat like a musical saw but less harsh. There was no wind. The sound was continuous; it did not come in short bursts and it was impossible to say where exactly it came from. The low mists in the valley below us limited our vision and enhanced the eeriness of the sound.

Later in the day, back home again, I mentioned the mystery to Gerrit. He goes fishing at the dam from time to time, sometimes through the night if the fish are biting and if he can make his halfjack last long enough to ward off the cold. “*Ja nee,*” said Gerrit. He couldn’t exactly recall hearing the sound himself but various people in the village had warned him against spending the whole night at the dam. “*Hulle sê dit spook daar.*” Ghosts! “*Daar’s mense wat alreeds snaakse geluide behoer het – soos huil or snik.*” Strange sounds like crying or sobbing. “*Weet meneer, hier het in die ou dae altyd ‘n huisie gestaan, daar anderkant die water, daar waar die bloekom boom gestaan het. Daar was ‘n huisie gewees. Die fondasies is seker nog daar; ons moet eendag gaan kyk. En ek het gehoor, toe ek nog ‘n kind was, dat die man wat daar gewoon het, vermoor was. Miskien dwaal sy gees nog hier rond.*”

That same day I happened to be at Jane and Ian Banks to drop off some indigenous seeds which Jane wanted to try and germinate in her greenhouse, and I mentioned the morning’s curious adventure. Ian’s son-in-law, Christopher, who is an Anglican priest, was visiting and there was another McGregorite by the name of Patrick. They all took great interest in the phenomenon. “There are a lot of supernatural phenomena in and around McGregor,” said Patrick, who seemed to have a distinct leaning towards the esoteric and the supernatural. “Under certain atmospheric conditions, certain people pick can pick up sounds and vibrations emanating from the lines of force or lines of high magnetism in the earth’s crust – ley lines for example, and there is a concentration of ley lines here in McGregor.” Christopher, as one would expect from a man of the cloth, pooh-poohed this idea totally. “There has to be a natural explanation,” he exclaimed.

“No, no,” said Patrick, “you can’t dismiss these manifestations of higher forces out of hand. Strange sounds have been heard around Stonehenge sites – also to do with rocks – dolmens. If you read Credo Mutwa you will see that he makes a big thing of earth sounds. There are certain rocks which, because of their shape or mineralogical composition, pick up and transmit sounds that might normally not be audible to the human ear. There are villages in Africa that have sacred rocks of this nature which can foretell events like droughts or floods. You must have heard of the “singing rocks”. I’ve just read a book which tells us how the early Egyptians had rocks set up in their temples which were tuned into vibrations from the major stars and constellations. Hadn’t Molly, God bless her soul, mentioned when she was still alive, strange humming sounds and vibrations in connection with that flying saucer experience of hers?”

This was obviously too much for Christopher, who, while open-minded, was not willing to be bamboozled. “There has to be a perfectly natural explanation,” he said again. “In fact, I am going to investigate this thing myself – I want to get to the bottom of this. Tomorrow I’m going to have a look.”

When I got home, still with bird calls on my mind and wanting it to be a bird, I thought I would just go through the bird book to see if by chance I could, under the description of “voice” of certain birds, find some indication, some clue as to what bird might produce a humming, vibrating, whining sound. I soon discovered that the words used to describe bird calls alone would fill a dictionary. There were words like harsh squawks and squeals, bubbling sounds, nasal croacks, rasping sounds, guttural sounds,

piping calls, mewing calls, clattering of bills, metallic clicking sounds, purring sounds, whistling, ascending or descending ringing, raucous chattering – and these were only a small sample. So that approach wasn't going to help me.

The next morning when I woke up and saw the half light of dawn beginning to light up the sky outside, I suddenly remembered the mystery of the strange sound and wondered if indeed Christopher had found the energy to get up early enough to go to the dam. Perhaps I should have offered to go with him – possibly I could still join him if he was there. Quickly I slipped on some clothes and a warm jersey and drove along the dark and deserted streets to the dam. He wasn't there. On the way back I thought I would just pass by the Banks to see if anyone was up and about, and who did I see but Christopher determinedly striding down Mill Street. He was barely recognizable, still in his pyjamas with a heavy overcoat and his feet in large, fur-lined slippers. Together we arrived at the home of the Banks where a few lit-up windows indicated some early morning activity. "And!? Did you hear the noise?" Jane asked eagerly as we walked in. "I heard the sound," said Christopher, "and I can tell you one thing: it's not spiritual! And now I'm going back to bed."



Well, despite his denunciation, the story of the strange noise rapidly spread through the village, to be added to McGregor's stock of myths and legends as "the Mystery of the McGregor Phantom". Ironically, or deservedly perhaps, it was Jane and Ian who ultimately provided the solution to the problem. Discussing the matter with a friend who happened to be more of a birding expert than us locals, the friend asked, "Are there any marshes or swamps around that dam? Because if so I might know what it is. There is a bird known as the Ethiopian Snipe that frequents marches and which, during the breeding season, makes this strange strumming noise – something to do with the wind and tail feathers." We looked it up in Jane's book and there it was: *Ethiopean Snipe. Breeding birds make resonant drumming sound during aerial display. This sound is produced by air vibrating the outer tail feathers during dives and can be mimicked by sticking these two feathers into a cork attached to a length of string and whirling this around.*

So it was a bird call after all. Can you believe it? After all this speculation and mystification and talk of supernatural phenomena it was, after all, a bird. Amazing. Once again truth proved to be stranger than fiction. ♡

The Culprit: Ethiopian Snipe

Photo with permission from Callie de Wet ©

Visit his gallery at www.pbase.com/calliedewet

*"Let no one say and say it to your shame,
That there was beauty here until you came"*

- Rudyard Kipling