

President: David Davidson, **Chairman:** Errol Scarr, **Hon Treasurer:** Henry Diesveld, **Secretary:** Glenda Thorpe
Honorary Members: Laurie Powis, Colin Cook, Marianne Alexander, Barbara Hey, Mary Smith, Anne Bean, Adam Harrower, Michael Tuffin

END-OF-YEAR GET-TOGETHER

Monday, 4 December 2017 at 19:00 at The Athenaeum, Newlands.

Our Christmas Party is always a splendid affair and you certainly shouldn't miss it ... the tables are laden with the marvellous dishes you bring, so the choice is invariably very tempting indeed!

There will also be a special raffle with a number of prizes to win. Entry to the Christmas party is only **R10 per person** which includes a raffle ticket, and a chance to win one of the prizes.

As always, the wine and juice are free... a great accompaniment to the meal you will be providing.

Please let me know how many of you will be there and what you would like to bring.

Melanie

082 550 2618 / 021 788 2840 / rsp@telkomsa.net

We will also be announcing the winner of the monthly Plant Table Exhibits. If you remember, a point was awarded for every specimen brought in, with an extra point given to Jenny's monthly choice of an exotic and an indigenous plant. Come along and see if you're a winner.

As a treat, the packets of seeds in the **Seed Swop Box** will be made available for purchase at our Christmas party. A list of the available seeds is attached separately. If you are interested in obtaining some of them, please bring a bit of extra money and you can make a donation – from R5 a packet.

If you've read the books you borrowed earlier this month and would like to return them in exchange for a few more to read over the holidays, the **Library** will be open on the night of the party and Peter will be on duty.

The committee looks forward to seeing you there!

REPORT BACK

Jan Meynell's garden

We had the privilege of visiting this 60-year old garden, the majority of which survives on rain water. Plants closer to the house have recently been watered with borehole water transported in by Jan's daughter who lives close by. Despite the lack of water, the old trees and shrubs were blooming and looked magnificent.



Top row L to R: Our group dwarfed by one of a number of huge *Leucadendron argenteum* (left) and a *Bauhinia* in flower (a tall *Leucospermum reflexum* can be seen to its left in the background), with a row of the signature daisy bushes the gardener propagates; *L. compacta* with *Mimetes* (front); *L. cuneiforme*.

Bottom row L to R: A magnificent *L. glabrum*; *L. heterophyllum*; Hybridised pink *Watsonia*.

November Plant Table:

Jenny's report for this month: We do see a change here on the plant table. New things are appearing and old friends, like the *Euphorbia xanthii*, pop up regularly but more floriferously.

EXOTICS**Wellpoint water:**

- *Acanthus mollis* "Bear's breeches" – propagates from the roots ; very tough, resilient; prevent it from spreading into the green belts etc. Two things to know: it's on the list of alien invasives and you will always know where your snails are.
- *Euphorbia xanthii* "Cherry blossom euphorbia" – from California: tall shrub 4-6m; covered in spring blossom; water wise. Also seen in Prince Albert in full bloom.
- *Duranta erecta* 'Alba'
- *Euphorbia lamii* with fasciated stem (a flattened stem). Many plants develop this fasciation and it's as if the cells have gone berserk and they've multiplied and the tissue has spread laterally; there are also more adventitious buds, more leaves, more flowers and is quite peculiar. Could be caused by a virus or be triggered by an insect.
- *Lavatera clementii rosea* "Tree mallow" – makes a nice big shrub up to 2m in shades of pink.
- *Verbascum* – self-seeds all over the place.
- *Iris foetidissima* – from UK: grows in semi-shade.
- *Rosa Veilchenblau* – is an old-fashioned Rambler; has a very faint perfume at night.

Grey water:

- *Fuchsia* "President Margaret Slater" – needs good soil, shaded spot out of the wind. Feed with more potash they will start pushing into flower.
- *Pelargonium* – this one is not to be found on the mountainside. Very hybridised. We will have to look to these if we want to have drought resistant gardens.

Stored rain water:

- *Nasturtium* – cream coloured;
- *Leptotes bicolor* (orchid) – Brazil: grow all round the world; three species in the genus; found near Rio in 1833.
- *Echeveria purpusorum* – drought tolerant; flowered for the first time in about 8 years.

Only watered when it rains:

- *Dodonaea viscosa purpurea* – grown from a seedling 11 years ago; now 15 – 20 ft high. Wikipedia has a massive amount of information:
Was around in the age of the dinosaurs – distribution from China, Japan, New Zealand right through to Mexico, central America, even Hawaii. In Australia it was used to make beer because they didn't have hops – known as the "hop bush". Drought tolerant. Used as a windbreak and for stabilising sand dunes; medicinal uses for dysentery and digestive disorders; as incense in New Guinea. There is a green form – *D angustifolia* – native to Prince Albert and those arid areas.
It really is a worthwhile small tree or shrub for areas that get NO water.
- *Agonis flexuosa* – Australia: makes a large tree, so not for small gardens.

Pot luck watering:

- *Lotus berthelotti* – Australia: copes with our heat and dryness. Flowers come in shades of red and orange.

INDIGENOUS**Wellpoint water:**

- *Acacia* "Fever tree" – deciduous; feathery leaves; copes with the wind.
- *Hypericum revolutum* "Curry Bush" – a huge group of plants; mainly small shrubs and widely used as garden plants overseas. Occurs along E Cape, KZN, Mpumalanga, Swaziland to tropical Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands. Comes as far west as Riversdale. Seeds freely so could become a problem here in some areas. Try and prevent it from spreading into the wild areas.

Both grey water and rain:

- *Euphorbia bupleurifolia* "pine cone euphorbia" from Eastern Cape – Albany district: yellowish-green flowers similar to Christ thorn plant; water wise.
- *Plectranthus zuluensis* – from E. Cape to KZN and Swaziland: flowers in summer in shade or dappled sun; water wise.
- *Psycotria capensis* – Eastern Cape to Mozambique and Zimbabwe: small tree or 3-8m shrub; trusses of yellow blossom in late winter/early summer in shade or light sun, followed by small red or black fruit; water wise.

Stored rain water:

- *Ledebouria socialis* or *L. maculata* (formerly *Scilla*, then *Drimiopsis*) from summer rainfall area: lovely spotted leaves; grows in shady places along forest margins in Natal, so should need good soil and moist conditions.

JENNY'S CHOICE FOR OCTOBER

EXOTIC

Mel's *Melaleuca alternifolia* – only watered when it rains.

Tea tree oil is extracted from the leaves. The plant is native to Australia. Although it grows wild, it's generally grown for commercial oil extraction purposes.



Wilma's *Gasteria glomorata* "Kouga gasteria" – clump forming cliff dweller; pollinated by sunbirds; water wise.

INDIGENOUS



Top row L to R: *Melaleuca alternifolia* tree in Mel's garden (University Estate); *Dodonaea viscosa purpurea* branch and the tree in the Scarr's garden (Pinelands); *Echeveria purpurorum*. **Above L to R:** *Ledebouria maculata* or *L. socialis* (you decide which); *Euphorbia xanthii* in a Prince Albert garden. **Right:** *Acanthus mollis*. **Below L to R:** *Nasturtium*; hybrid *Pelargonium*; *Rosa* "Veilchenblau"; *Centranthus ruber* "Valerian" – on the list of 10 invasive alien plants that the City's weed group want to concentrate on and have asked for notification if you see it on green belts and spreading where it shouldn't. The white form has a recessive gene so is not as vigorous.



IMPRESSIONS OF OUR TREK INTO THE KAROO – Conclusion

Here are more impressions from members who went on the trip:

Many private gardens were very interesting and attractive. However, for me, the most memorable events were the introductory lecture by Sue Dean, and the opportunity to stroll over the Wolwekraal reserve under her guidance the following day.

Quite apart from being able to enjoy the beautiful colour slides of the flowering plants characteristic of the region, it was fascinating to have the geological, botanical and rainfall areas of South Africa mapped out so clearly in the lecture, and to realise that Prince Albert itself, situated in a narrow strip of the succulent Karoo area, is very close to both a fynbos and a rhenosterveld region (in the high and medium-altitude Swartberg respectively) and is not far from the vast Nama-Karoo biome to the north, where the vegetation is different.

It was fascinating during the Wolwekraal walk to learn that the Swartberg range (acid, poor in nutrients, and supporting fynbos) was formed by subduction so very many hundreds of millions of years earlier than the former inland sea of the Karoo, with its alkaline soils, and no fynbos or bulbous plants, but supporting an extraordinary variety of succulents which have devised such ingenious means of economising on water, thereby surviving in conditions of close to zero rainfall. Darwin is incontrovertible, the key to the understanding of so many things; but sometimes the sheer ingeniousness of nature forces one to have a sneaking respect and sympathy for Aquinas' teleological argument, the argument from design.

The fragility of the semi-desert plant cover is brought home in a striking manner by the barrenness of the archaeological site, which has lost its topsoil to wind erosion, and apparently may never recover. A desolate place where, some hundreds of years ago or more, the hand of man had set foot. (But man was inventive enough, even then, to understand the resistance of composites to cracking. Tiny beads are incorporated in the pottery clay before firing.)

Another high point was the stargazing evening. We were fortunate in having a completely clear sky – and a Karoo sky on a clear night is quite amazing. The 'jewel box' is delightful, the galactic clusters are remarkable, and it was reassuring to have visual confirmation that the rings of Saturn have not been damaged by the recent death plunge through them of the Cassini spacecraft.

Of course we froze, despite all the woollens. *Il faut souffrir pour voyager*. No one can say that he or she was not duly warned. As one approaches Laingsburg, there is a large limestone exhortation on the mountainside, giving practical advice to stargazers: DRA WOL (= wear wool). Ignore it at your peril.

All in all, one is left with a certain sadness that it is possible to study physical science without learning even the most elementary facts about local geology, and the extent to which this determines the regional distribution of flora; and possible to know enough about optics to understand the principles of the Cassegrain reflecting telescope, without ever having previously had the opportunity to use this marvellously compact and powerful instrument, and without ever having gained real familiarity with the major constellations of the southern night sky.

But, on a more cheerful note, even at this late stage it seems possible with expert guidance to fill in some of the gaps in one's patchy education in an enjoyable manner. *Gerald Robertson*

For those members who were willing and able, André Goosen took a small group up a koppie behind the Waterkop Estate (a rather euphemistic name), and we had marvellous views of the town and beyond.

André is a retired teacher and, like so many others that are retired in PA, he is again practising his profession and doing some volunteering teaching extra mathematics at the local Afrikaans School.

One more delightful personality worth mentioning is Ailsa Tudhope who took some of us on the Historical Walk on Sunday late morning as well as the Ghost Walk in the evening. Being an English and History teacher, she conducted those tours in a most charming and professional manner.

Many thanks once again for a hectic but satisfying outing, offering us not only seeing gardens but enjoying a town with an "only in South Africa" experience." *Hannie van Wieringen*

"Of course, mention must be made of the never-to-be-forgotten hill walk which was exhilarating – and hazardous. Nevertheless I am proud to have made it, although beforehand I think André had his doubts when he looked at me." *Josephine Evans*

"We enjoyed our trip to Prince Albert. It was well organized and we would not hesitate participating in another trip with the Horticultural Society.

Prince Albert is like an oasis in the middle of a desert, and it is so encouraging to see the little paradise which has been created in such a desert-like place. On the way to Prince Albert I wondered what there was to see in such hostile surroundings. At a closer look, it was impressive to experience the amazing flora hidden in this desert looking area, and it opened up a new world for me. The gardens we visited had flowers and plants that we had never seen before.

Stargazing is not a new world for us and we always enjoy it. It was a cold evening, but definitely worth it.

The walk around town was interesting and opened up my wish to know more about Prince Albert. We also went on the ghost walk but will have to come back to find the ghosts, as they were apparently out of town. It was the first time I stayed in Prince Albert, and it is not the last.

Prince Albert is a place where we look forward to taking our visitors when they come to South Africa – it is so different and impressive."

Hanne Christensen and Keith Breetzke

While walking through the weathered sandstone and shattered quartzite on the koppie, we found many "new" plants not seen before by our group, such as (top row L to R) *Euphorbia heptagona* (was *E. atrispina*); *Crassula deltoidea*; *Crassula rupestris*; and (bottom row L to R) *Pleiospilos compactus*, Jenny photographing *Aloe striata*; *Aloe striata* flower head.



The only down side to our visit was finding the koppie and surrounds strewn with litter. Judi (right, with Andrew) found a receptacle for the rubbish and the litter collected by everyone filled André's boot.

Hands down, the highlights of the weekend were the Friday night talk and the Saturday afternoon walk with Sue Dean. There seemed not to be an area she could not explain – from geology and fracking to plants and animals. Of course, the hike up the koppie and the garden visits came in a close second.

But, being a weekend, we were not able to see everything Prince Albert had to offer, so a return visit is on the cards for many in our party. Visiting the Museum is top of the list.



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR COMMITTEE

Over the past 3 or 4 years there have been a few changes to the CHS committee. We have also had an influx of new members who perhaps do not know who the members of the committee are, so we will be introducing them to you in the next few issues.

We'll kick off the series by giving you a bit of background as to how our new Chairman and our Speakers Co-ordinator, Errol and Jenny Scarr respectively, came to be in Cape Town and members of the CHS.

Errol Grew up in Port Elizabeth and as his mother was a very keen gardener they supported the shows of the Walmer Horticultural Society with their exhibits. He became a pupil in Port Elizabeth Parks Department and then went overseas to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew where he was accepted as a student in 1964. He graduated with the Kew Diploma with Honours – and a marriage certificate! In 1967 he married Jenny and returned to Port Elizabeth Parks where he worked for a year in Settlers Park, the local Nature Reserve. When they moved to Durban in 1969 he worked in Mitchell Park, which had some of the best bedding displays, as well as the local Zoo. From there he had promotions to Technical & Training Officer, then went down to the beachfront as Deputy Beach Manager before being appointed Deputy Director and then Director: Parks, Recreation & Beaches in 1982. He retained that position until he retired in 2002 – 20 years later.



Jenny says: "I've always been interested in plants and after school I trained for 2 years at a Horticultural College in St Alban's. Before going there I had to work for 2 years in various nurseries where we grew tomatoes, cucumbers, grapes and flower crops in greenhouses then at a tree and shrub nursery and lastly at a rose nursery grafting new roses. Then I

went down to Kew Gardens where I was lucky to be accepted as a student on their 3-year course. It involved a lot of identification of plants – 1 week would be trees, the next week would be alpine and so on. At the end of 2 years I married Errol after being told I couldn't be employed in South Africa in horticulture as a female. However, when we arrived in Port Elizabeth they were very thrilled to get another trained person and moved Errol. I took over the Glasshouse unit.

We were in Port Elizabeth for a year before a holiday in Durban led to our moving to work there. The Parks were of a very high standard and the climate made it look like Kew without the glass. We were there for 33 years and it was difficult for me to work there so I ended up lecturing in Horticulture at both Technikon for 10 years. People like Geoff Nichols and Keith Kirsten were pupils in the Department at that time."

We grew a lot of orchids in our four shade houses on a half acre plot. We were members of three societies and I was Chairperson of the Natal Orchid Society for some years.

When we retired to Port Elizabeth in 2002 we had a two-and-a-half hectare smallholding with orchid shade houses and large areas for vegetables and fruit, keeping the family supplied with tomatoes and strawberries etc. Errol became Chairman of the Eastern Province Orchid Society while we were in PE.

With grandchildren in Cape Town we moved here in 2006 to a small suburban house – quite a transition but we still have orchids, although a lot fewer. We still try to grow some veg but the soil here and the lack of rain make it very difficult. We have enjoyed going out into the Northern Cape to explore the wildflowers and especially bulbs and other geophytes. We are also members of IBSA (Indigenous Bulb Society of South Africa), Cape Orchid Society, the Botanical Society and WESSA (the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa)."

Errol and Jenny became members of the CHS in 2007 and joined the committee in 2010.



ITEMS OF INTEREST

Organic Kitchen Gardens: Portable, ready-to-go, water-wise planters come with a built in reservoir at the base of the planter enabling the veggies to grow with a consistent water supply at their root zone, reducing stress episodes to the plants. Contact Natalie on 072-429-2534 or at natalie@nataliedorward.com. Hart Nursery also has them in stock.

2018 Meetings: To make sure you'll return next year, here are a few of our talks that have been lined up for 2018. They are, of course, subject to change but your monthly CHS News always gives you details of the talks.

- Babylonstoren
- Dartington Hall
- Prince Albert
- Ants



Organic food – scam or not?: You may be interested in reading what this website has to say:

http://www.nationalreview.com/article/452469/organic-food-scams-congress-should-investigate?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NR%20Daily%20Monday%20through%20Friday%202017-10-10&utm_term=NR5PM%20Actives

Photos: Andrew and Glenda Thorpe, Benni Hotz, Susan Armstrong, Wilma Tindall, Errol and Jenny Scarr, Bernice Mallet