

BCA Focus

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Blaauwberg
Conservation Area

Butterflies and bugs abound in the BCA

Nathan Meyers, IT/Environmental Consultant, TECH-TOKKIE

The BCA has been the subject of much examination in the past few months due to the fact that it is a newly-managed conservation area, and thus, relatively little is known about the plants and animals found there.

As part of this biodiversity catalogue, a comprehensive insect survey is being conducted to establish what the area supports, as well as to determine what the current status of the insect fauna is (e.g. which pollinators are present, and which are not). Because insect life is so diverse in both its habits and its appearance, one cannot do a study based on observation alone. For a complete study (such as the one at the BCA) to be successful, it is necessary to collect specimens and set them in standard positions used by museums and universities, allowing observation of, for example, wing venation, during the complex process of identification.

Many people believe that creating a general collection is of no scientific value, as one ends up with vast amounts of specimens that eventually need to be sorted through; quite a task when one considers that most of the specimens will be rather insignificantly coloured and small. I believe however, that we cannot just assume which species would be regarded as scientifically significant, and which not. Therefore, the collection currently being assembled at the BCA contains specimens relating to insects in a general sense, i.e. members of any order, family, or genus. This reference collection will be accessible by any member of the public or scientific fraternity.

Recently, a butterfly specimen, *Eurema brigitta* (Broad-bordered Grass Yellow), was found fluttering on the slopes of Blaauwberg Hill. This is quite a significant find as the only other known record of this species within the Western Cape dates back to 1971, near the Picketberg.



A Longhorn Beetle (family Cerambycidae) found at the BCA.

How this butterfly ended up hundreds of kilometres from its known distribution range remains unknown, but the fact remains that so many other species of insects, not only butterflies, could be well out of their known ranges of distribution.

Surely an area as large, and as ecologically diverse as the BCA, ought to have many rare and interesting specimens that will put it on the entomology map!

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BCA Vision

To conserve, protect and enhance the unique natural, historical and cultural resources of the area for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations.

To find out more about this unique area, please visit

www.bca.org.za

The heroes of Blaauwberg

Willem Steenkamp

Who were the heroes of the Battle of Blaauwberg, the bicentenary of which falls on 8 January 2006, just 16 months from now? It's a sure bet that no Capetonian will be able to answer that question, because the Battle of Blaauwberg has been allowed to vanish into such obscurity that at most we have a vague recollection that this was when the Cape became a British colony. Were there, in fact, any heroes that day?

The answer is yes, there *were* heroes at Blaauwberg, probably the most important battle ever fought in Southern Africa because of its long-term consequences.

In brief, the battle took place because the British, who were mid-way through their long, fierce struggle with France, saw possession of the Cape – then controlled by the revolutionary French-leaning Batavian Republic which had been proclaimed in the Netherlands – as a commercial and strategic necessity.

As early as 1795 Sir Francis Baring, chairman of the English East India Company, had pointed out to the then Secretary of State for War, Henry Dundas, that the Cape “commands the passage to and from India as effectively as Gibraltar does the Mediterranean”. Equally trenchantly, Dundas's own Under-Secretary noted that although the Cape was “a feather in the hands of the Dutch” it would become “a sword in the hands of France”.

So early in January 1806 a massive British invasion fleet of more than 60 men-of-war and transports anchored in Table Bay during a howling south-easter, waited for it to abate somewhat and then sent about 5 000 soldiers, sailors and marines wading ashore at Losperd's Bay, today's Melkbosch.

The British set off for the Blaauwberg while Lieutenant-General Jan Willem Janssens, Governor of the Cape, did the same from the opposite direction with his small scratch force of about 2 000. The British reached the heights first, and on the morning of 8 January battle commenced on the Cape Town side of the mountain.

Within a matter of hours it was over: vastly outnumbered and failed by his best regiment, Janssens withdrew towards the Hottentots Holland mountains and the British were preparing to march on Cape Town. A turning-point had been reached in the history of Southern and Central Africa, although no-one realised the extent of it.

To know who the heroes of Blaauwberg were, it is necessary to know who fought there on the Batavian side. Janssens had five groups of professional soldiers: the 5th Battalion of the Regiment Waldeck, a mercenary unit in Batavian service; the 9th Battalion of the Batavian Rifles; the 22 Regiment of Foot, a Batavian infantry unit; a small group of Batavian dragoons (mounted riflemen); and a detachment of Batavian artillery under a Lieutenant Pellegrini.

He also had something over 200 French marines and sailors who happened to be available at the Cape, plus a contingent of locally born men made up the Hottentot Light Infantry, a full-time regiment, and two part-time volunteer units, the light dragoons from Swellendam and the Javanese Artillery Corps, recruited from the sizeable population of freed slaves at the Cape.

The villains of the piece were the Waldeckers. Janssens

had expected much of them; but they were the only one of his units not to cheer him enthusiastically before the battle, and they cut and ran almost immediately. This caused the Dutch battle-line to crumble, with units withdrawing because their flanks were exposed.

And the heroes? The French were heroes: they held out for as long as possible and then withdrew after suffering heavily. So were Pellegrini's horse artillerymen, who fought to the bitter end and only withdrew when Janssens personally ordered them. So were the three units of Cape men, who stood and fought to the last moments, and paid the price.

What they bought with their blood was a breathing-space that enabled Janssens to withdraw with the rest of his army and his slow-moving supply wagons. As a result there was no unconditional winner-takes-all surrender, but a carefully negotiated treaty of capitulation that benefitted the people of the Cape.

The motivation of the Frenchmen and the Batavian artillerymen are obvious enough, but what of the local men? They had very little in common as regards material things or even religion. But one has to look beneath the surface.

For one thing, all or most were born and bred at the Cape, and all spoke the language that would later be called Afrikaans. Then again, their status had changed. For more than 150 years they had not had what we would regard as citizenship of anywhere. But the Dutch East India Company was long gone, and since early 1803 they had been citizens of the Batavian Republic, which was no mere token status.

In less than three years Janssens and Commissioner-General A J de Mist had wrought great changes at the Cape according to the tenets of the Batavian Republic, which modelled itself on the egalitarian ideals of the French. To mention only two, they had forbidden the importation of slaves and planned to emancipate all those in bondage, and had extended official recognition and protection to all faiths, including Islam (which under the DEIC had been tolerated but not officially recognised).

It might not be going too far to say that the Cape men were fighting for a vision of a better future, knowing that the British were the mortal enemies of the ideals of both the French and Batavian Republics. Right or wrong? Well, it appears very likely that if the Batavian rule had not ended in January 1806 the Cape's slaves would all have been freed two decades before it actually happened.

It stands to reason that we should honour Janssens and De Mist, two great reformers, especially by the standards of those times. It stands just as much to reason that we should honour the Swellendam light dragoons, the Hottentot Light Infantry and the Javanese Artillery Corps, who laid down their lives not just for the ideals of the Batavian Republic but also to allow a negotiated capitulation. Not to mention the Frenchmen and Batavian gunners.

But we don't. There is no memorial to them anywhere in Cape Town, no wreaths are laid to their memory, nobody – and this is the ultimate insult – even remembers what they did or where they are buried. The heroes of Blaauwberg deserve better.

Helicopter drops into training session

Patrick Dowling, WESSA Western Cape

It is a churlish teacher that keeps the class in when life offers a more interesting lesson. That is why on 24 August the 15 BCA workers and trainer were happy to abandon the scheduled session on water temperature measurement in favour of an impromptu lifesaving course, involving a helicopter from emergency services, volunteer drowning victims and a camera crew to capture it all for posterity. This all took place in the picnic area next to the BCA EE Centre.

The helicopter pilots were obviously all used to "Passopikoppie" behaviour from bystanders and very politely explained the purpose of the exercise to the BCA team, warning them to hold onto their hats which could get sucked up by the rotors and cause a real disaster.

This noisy and practical demonstration, taking place in one of the most photogenic locations in South Africa, covered all aspects of sea rescue with rubberducks, 4x4s (legally deployed) and winches in operation. Support teams were co-ordinated by radio on the ground.

It was a fine, clear day, with only a small swell washing onto the magnificent Blaauwberg beach, great for filming, rescuing and observing. Spare a thought though for those involved in real life or death situations with storm winds, giant waves and no admiring crowd.

Though a "crash course" of sorts there were happily no casualties, other than chill for the wetsuited volunteers – which helped make up for the lost lesson on water temperature.

Translating a vision into action through partnerships

Michelle Preen, WESSA Western Cape

There are numerous opportunities for a range of groups and organisations to become involved in the BCA – from using it for recreational and educational purposes to helping provide expertise to enhance and gain further knowledge about this valuable area.

An important aspect of the BCA-CEPF Project is the establishment of partnerships and the facilitation of civil society involvement in the BCA. In early August, a Civil Society Partnership Promotions Event was held at the BCA EE Centre. Various organisations and individuals were invited to attend and learn more about the BCA as well as explore the wealth of opportunities it has to offer. After an enlightening visual presentation on the BCA by Cliff Dorse, BCA reserve manager, representatives of the groups that are currently involved gave short talks. The highlight of the day though had to be the presentations given by the BCA workers, most of whom had never spoken in front of an audience before, on the aspects of the BCA that particularly interest them. The day ended with a guided field trip up Blaauwberg Hill and around the reserve.

We look forward to working with those organisations and individuals that have committed themselves to becoming involved in the BCA.



Nokubonga, one of the BCA workers, who gave a talk at the event.

Marine mammals and other interesting oceanic visitors to the BCA

Cliff Dorse, BCA Reserve Manager

All involved here at the BCA share the vision of re-introducing large mammals. It will be a great day when one will be able to view a small herd of Eland feeding on the flower clad slopes of Kleinberg with the classic view of Table Mountain as a backdrop. This day will come! In the meantime, however, one need not despair as several very large and spectacular animals can be seen from the BCA. I am of course talking about the marine mammals! The most commonly seen, besides the ubiquitous Cape Fur Seals, are the impressive Southern Right Whales. Since early June, these whales have been relatively easy to see along the section of coast between Milnerton Lagoon and Melkbosstrand. They are still around and appear to be giving ever better views and coming ever closer to terra firma! In addition, we have also seen a pair of Humpbacked Whales which were quite a bit further out, apparently preferring the deeper water. Pods of Dusky Dolphins, often numbering several hundred individuals, put in irregular appearances. The last, and for me most appealing Cetacean we have seen to date, is the diminutive Heaviside's Dolphin. This dolphin is endemic to the west coast of southern African and is only found close inshore. For those who would like to view some of these spectacular animals you need the combination of a good eye and a nice calm sea. A pair of binoculars and a little patience will also come in handy!

...more overleaf

Not a mammal but with as much appeal was the Green Turtle which was stranded in front of the Derdeesteen parking area. A Blaauwberg resident gave us a call after she came across the animal while walking her dog on 18 August. When we arrived, the young turtle, only slightly larger than a dinner plate, was in a bad state and we feared the worst. On returning the turtle to the water and keeping it submerged for a while, it was suddenly revitalised and started to swim strongly. A local surfer was mobilised to swim out to the backline to release the animal. Most records of this species are from False Bay east and then from Windhoek north so this was a good record for the BCA.



Prioritising alien clearing in the BCA

Adelé Pretorius, BCA Nature Conservator

With the BCA being a start up reserve, there are many conservation issues I could write about. I have decided to focus this article on how we prioritise clearing of alien vegetation within the BCA. With this I hope to spark an interest in the surrounding community into having a look at their own gardens or parks.

Earlier this year, the entire Cape Floral Kingdom (CFK) was declared a National Heritage Site. This is a remarkable achievement for South Africa and has put into context the global importance of what is on our front doorstep (and which is very often ignored). The CFK comprises many different vegetation types. Here at the BCA we conserve renosterveld (of which there is less than 3% of its original extent remaining with less than 1% of that in formal conservation), sand plain fynbos (less than 1.2% remaining) and strandveld or dune thicket.

A friend once told me that the beauty of fynbos lies in its detail. Anyone who has hiked through renosterveld in mid-summer can attest to the fact that it is far from impressive. The veld is dry and dull and there is every probability that you may draw blood from a thorny brush. Come spring and you would not believe it to be the same place. Hundreds of dormant geophytes (flowering plants) make an appearance in all the colours of the rainbow. It is truly a sight to behold!

One of the main threats to these vegetation types is infestation by alien vegetation. Due to years of disturbance, the BCA has more than its fair share of alien vegetation. Therefore, one of our main focal points has been (and still is) to prioritise areas for clearing.



Gavin, a BCA staff member, "attacks" an alien tree.

Alien clearing is prioritised as follows:

1. The lightly infested areas are prioritised. This is primarily to ensure that good condition, natural vegetation is protected and that large areas can be cleared at relatively low cost.
2. Localised areas will be cleared as a priority in order to protect:
 - Populations of rare and endangered plant species. E.g. *Leucadendron levisanus*.
 - Threatened or good remnants of natural vegetation. E.g. isolated fynbos remnants amongst the exotic *Acacias*.
 - Specialised or unique habitats. E.g. Rock outcrops, wet depressions and culturally significant sites.
3. The re-clearing of areas cleared in previous alien clearing projects is a priority. This ensures that the resources invested in the initial clearing are not wasted. Follow up must be done about 6 months after the initial clearing in order to remove coppicing trees and any plants which were missed during the first pass. Annual follow-up of these sites is then essential to ensure all seedlings are removed.
4. Fire breaks must be kept clear. Clearing of these will be done annually prior to the fire season.
5. Clearing will be done in localised areas to enable reserve staff to be more effective during law enforcement operations. People are less inclined to enter an area if it is open and they are more easily observed from the top of the hill. Areas that are prone to illegal dumping are characterised by being heavily infested with exotic vegetation. These areas have been fenced off but if dumping continues then these areas will be cleared in order to improve visibility.

It is a remarkable feeling to walk through an area and discover geophytes that probably haven't flowered in the last few years since all the plant's resources were spent on fighting for survival and space in a sea of exotic *Acacias*. With the aliens gone who knows what plants we will discover at the BCA.

Visit us at the



Gladiolus watsonius, a Red Data species found in the BCA.



WESSA Western Cape and the FoBCA have been given a free stand at the Cape Town Flower Show to promote the BCA. Last year the show attracted 25 000 visitors. This year this spectacular show will cover 3 large halls at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (ICC) and the organisers are hoping to see 40 000 people pass through the doors. A scheduled programme of lectures and demonstrations by South African horticultural experts has been compiled to further enhance the show.

The South African Airways Cape Town Flower is open from 10am until 9pm from Thursday 7 October until Sunday 10 October. Tickets will be available through Computicket or at the door. Entrance fee is R35 for adults while children under 12 years enter free. Thursday is pensioner's day and tickets are R20 each on presentation of a pensioner's card.

More information is available on the Flower Show website
<http://www.capetownflower.com>

Friends of BCA upcoming events

Cindy Welch, Secretary - Friends of BCA

Saturday 2 October 2004: A walk to see the late spring / early summer flowers within the BCA. The walk will be hosted by Adam Harrower, botanist from Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden. It will start at 9am, with the meeting place being the EE Centre at Eerstesteent.

Thursday 21 October 2004: A Marine Week talk will be held by Steve Lambert on Marine Coastal Line Fish. Time - 7:30 for 8pm at the EE Centre at Eerstesteent.

Thursday 25 November: A bird talk will be held by Cliff Dorse to celebrate Big Birding Day. Time - 7:30 for 8pm at the EE Centre at Eerstesteent.

Please contact Cindy Welch on telephone (021) 557 0740 or email goose@capedr.co.za or Louis Raubenmeimer on (021) 554 2221 or email Lraubenh@mweb.co.za to confirm events.

If you would like more information on the BCA or are interested in becoming involved, please contact:

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BCA EE Centre: Nature Conservation staff and bookings
Cliff Dorse & Adelé Pretorius
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bca@sybaweb.co.za

The Friends of BCA are a voluntary group whose mission it is to contribute to seeing that the BCA is protected and utilised to the benefit of the general public, now and for the future. The group is affiliated to WESSA Western Cape.

You are encouraged to join the Friends of BCA and thereby actively participate in the realisation of the BCA vision. A membership application form can be found on the next page.

Please contact Louis Raubenheimer on (021) 554 2221 or 082 651 5437, or email Lraubenh@mweb.co.za

BCA Focus is funded by the international Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). It is distributed free of charge to any organisation or individual interested in the BCA. For any queries relating to this newsletter, please contact Michelle Preen on tel (021) 701 1397 or email info@bca.org.za



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BECOME A FRIEND OF THE BCA ... and help to realise a vision!



FRIENDS OF THE BCA
APPLICATION for MEMBERSHIP

Please support the Friends of the Blaauwberg Conservation Area (FoBCA).
Fill in your details, tick off your membership category and return this notice, together with the appropriate money, to the address:

Friends of the BCA, PO Box 391, Bloubergstrand, 7436
(*cheque to be made out to **Friends of the BCA**)

OR

Direct Deposit in our Bank Account:

Account Name: Friends of the BCA

Account no: 1088046495

NEDBANK – Tableview Branch

AND

fax proof of deposit and completed Membership Application to:

John Bell Fax No:021 554 1739

Year ending 31 March 200..... (our year runs from April to March)

Type of membership applied for: Tick

ORDINARY	R 35.00 pa	_____
FAMILY	R 45.00 pa	_____
CORPORATE	R250.00 pa	_____
LIFE	R200.00	_____

Full name:

Postal Address:

..... (Code).....

Telephone: (H).....(W).....

Fax: E-mail:.....

Particular interest or speciality (if any):.....

SIGNATURE.....DATE.....

Enclosed: R.....

Thank you for your interest - The BCA needs your support