

THE EXCHANGE OF A LIFETIME:

LOXTON TO KAMIESBERG

Bonnie Schumann,

EWT Drylands Conservation Programme Nama Karoo Coordinator, and
Cobus Theron EWT Drylands Conservation Programme Manager
BonnieS@ewt.org.za and CobusT@ewt.org.za

Gaining knowledge on communal farming

The EWT's Drylands Conservation Programme is based out of Loxton, in the Nama Karoo. We focus on the conservation of Endangered dryland species, and the Critically Endangered Riverine Rabbit (*Bunolagus monticularis*) is the programme's flagship species.

One of our main initiatives is promoting sustainable land management practices in drylands, with a view to conserving habitat and supporting livelihoods. The EWT engages with farmers, including commercial farmers, commonage farmers and land reform beneficiaries, who farm with livestock on properties which are home to Riverine Rabbits. We also work with farmers operating under, often difficult, land tenureship systems, such as commonages, to explore models to find solutions to some of the challenges they face.



The knowledge exchange was deemed a success by Loxton and Kamiesberg farmers

In 2017, the EWT invited Conservation South Africa's Senior Stewardship Coordinator, from their Namaqualand Green Economic Demonstration, to facilitate a participatory needs-assessment workshop with the Krom River land reform farmers. The purpose was to explore the challenges and needs of these farmers. The possibility of a knowledge exchange visit to the Kamiesberg Conservation Stewardship Project was raised at this meeting.

In 2018, Bonnie Schumann, Nama Karoo Coordinator for the EWT Drylands Conservation Programme, approached Conservation South Africa (CSA) regarding the possibility of an exchange visit between our Karoo farmers and their Kamiesberg counterparts. The purpose of the proposed technical knowledge exchange was to facilitate a peer-to-peer learning visit in support of sustainable land management and agricultural-centred livelihoods in the rural Karoo

landscape. The Kamiesberg farmers shared their experiences of establishing organisational structures and the challenges they faced in doing so. The structure under which the Loxton farmers operate is somewhat dysfunctional. Interpersonal conflict amongst the farmers themselves, and a feeling of isolation in terms of support available to them as small-scale farmers, are all challenges they currently face. We hoped that the visit to other farmers, who had found solutions to some of these issues, would be beneficial.

The journey to Kamiesberg was made possible through a collaborative effort between the EWT and the Department of Agriculture: Land Reform and Rural Development (Western- and Northern Cape) and CSA.

The knowledge exchange highlighted the following key lessons:

1. Collaboration is vital and can leverage benefits that working in isolation cannot achieve.
2. Livestock improvement is key to farming efficiency in terms of production.
3. Conservation and agriculture can be successfully integrated through the Contractual Stewardship approach.

Following the visit, emerging farmer, Paul Vorster, said: "I experienced and saw for myself what these farmers have achieved by working together, even though there was conflict, they managed to move forward from strength to strength. I realise now that I had to come here to learn this."

Feedback from both the Loxton group, as well as the stewardship farmers of the Kamiesberg, was that the knowledge exchange was a success and a valuable platform for sharing information. It provided an opportunity for both parties to gain knowledge on communal farming, the benefits and challenges of land reform, as well as the process of farmers organising themselves into formal structures.

The knowledge exchange concept proved to be a valuable tool to amplify the benefits of conservation stewardship and learning from peers about the various conditions of farming and organisational structures. We believe this concept is an important component in changing mindsets towards sustainable land management. Seeing other farmers with similar (or even fewer) resources available, reaping the benefits of sustainable land management, provided our farmers with insight and more importantly, the hope for positive change in the Nama Karoo.

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MEDIKE NATURE RESERVE

ONE YEAR ON

Catherine Vise,

EWT Soutpansberg Protected Area Water Conservation Project Coordinator, and
Oldrich van Schalkwyk,
EWT Soutpansberg Protected Area Manager
catherinev@ewt.org.za and
oldrichvs@ewt.org.za

Medike landscape

It's hard to believe that a year has passed since the EWT took the historic step of purchasing our first ever conservation property, the Medike Nature Reserve in the beautiful and biodiversity-rich Soutpansberg Mountains. This purchase was the initial step in a much bigger journey – the journey towards creating the Soutpansberg Protected Area (SPA).

As we celebrate the anniversary of this purchase, made possible by the generosity of the Roberts family in Australia, we thought it fitting to look back at some of what we have achieved thus far, and what we have planned for the future.

TRAILS

Over the past year, a lot of attention has been paid to opening up trails across the reserve. These trails are predominantly for patrols undertaken by the SPA Rangers, to give them easier access across the reserve. They will also double up as hiking trails, and take in some of the beautiful features we have on Medike, such as a giant Baobab, a fountain and a waterfall. The trails include the Baobab Trail, the Tree Trail, Waterfall Trail, Pipeline Trail, Cave Trail (in progress) and Fountain Trail. In total, we have opened up 15 km of trails throughout the reserve.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Medike has a number of houses as part of its built infrastructure. This includes the Main Farm House, Pioneer's Cottage, The Log Cabin, the Boulder Cottage and a rondavel. Much time has

been spent over the past year performing maintenance tasks on this infrastructure. This includes painting and treating exterior walls of the Log Cabin and Pioneer's Cottage, as well as fixing thatching on the Boulder Cottage. We had a contractor help with the thatching, but as part of this, they also showed our Rangers how to do thatch so that this task could be taken on by the rangers in future.



Medike road maintenance

Other infrastructure development included installing a solar electricity system and Wi-Fi in all the main houses (except the rondavel and Boulder Cottage). This largely improves work and communications from the reserve. We have also spent a lot of time repairing and maintaining fences on the boundary of the reserve. This is in order to keep cattle from the neighbouring Ndouhada property out of the Protected Area. Redundant fences have also been removed from other areas of the reserve, as these pose a threat to wildlife. The reserve now also has new sign boards installed, both directing people to the reserve and notifying them of the rules and regulations of the reserve.