



VOGELGAT NEWS



Welcome

The past few months have certainly been peculiar! But every cloud has a silver lining; the lockdown has meant that the reserve had a well-deserved break from human activity. Various sightings over the past few months – including a number of leopard sightings – demonstrate the value of this break to both the fauna and flora.

As we enjoy getting back to nature after being cooped up in our homes for so long, let's reflect on and be mindful of our purpose for walking in Vogelgat. This includes considering our group sizes, given the impact of a bigger group on both our own walking experience and the reserve.

Take time to listen to the plaintive cry of the Jackal Buzzard – just like the call of a jackal – or the 'quark' of a frog while hiking along the mountain streams.

Looking forward to seeing you in the mountains soon!

Giorgio

Member feedback

We'd love to hear your views as a member of Vogelgat – please take a few minutes to complete this short survey: <https://forms.gle/VCtsFrP8aR6jXH7e9>

If any of your immediate family uses the reserve on your permit, we'd also value their feedback so please forward this survey on to them to complete. Thank you!

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Special sightings

We've been lucky enough to have some very photogenic animals pose at our camera traps over the past year.

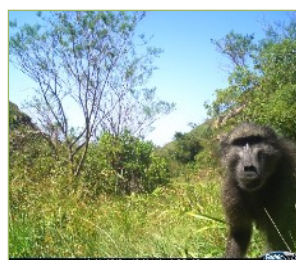
Probably one of the most unbelievable and well-timed photo captures was of a Martial Eagle, the largest eagle in Africa, swooping down and killing a Cape Grysbok! The eagle's right talons embedded into the heart at ten times the strength of a human.

The same camera captured a young female leopard two months later.

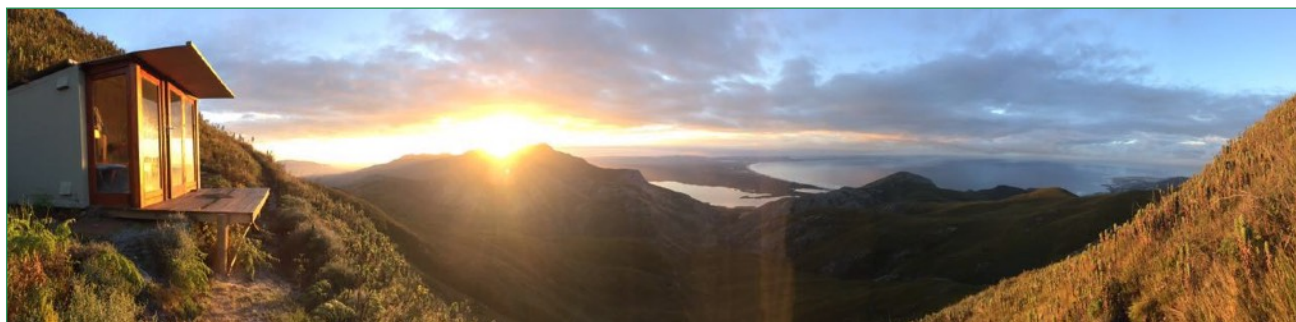


Our newest addition

The Black Eagle chick was seen early this season on 24 August, and we predicted that at the time the chick was two weeks old. Thanks to Chanan Weis for these amazing photographs of the adults visiting the chick.



Take note: we have a new hut booking process



The refurbished huts are often in high demand over the weekends and holiday periods. To ensure that we are being fair to all our members, we have introduced new rules around hut bookings.

- A permit holder may only have **three active bookings at one time**. (i.e. if you book one night, you have two spare nights left to book). Once you have used one of your bookings/the date of that booking has passed, you are free to book another.
- If there is a particular/special date that you want to book in the next year, you are encouraged to book that in advance – being aware that this will count as one of your active bookings.
- ‘Last minute bookings’ (i.e. made within a few days of the stay) will not influence your active bookings.
- If you do not show up for your booking and have not notified us of your need to cancel, you will be asked to pay a R100 cancellation fee.

Due to Covid-19 and the need to ensure the safety of our members, we are currently working on a ‘one stay per hut per weekend’ policy, and we will not be taking any mid-week bookings until further notice. We also ask that members take responsibility for cleaning and sanitising the huts before and after use.

New accommodation at Diepgat



We are very grateful to the Hauman family for allowing our members to use their six-bed hut just on the other side of our northern boundary. We helped to refurbish the hut and it's great!

Diepgat Hut is a three-hour hike from Vogelgat Base Camp and has a refreshing pool to splash in. There are three new rough hiking trails that lead to the hut; please contact Giorgio for a map of the area.

To book the hut (it's R100 per person per night) please contact Lourika Hauman on 079 288 3443 or lourikavane@hotmail.com.

Introducing Watson Mountain Rescue

Although incidents on the mountain are rare, we have sadly lost two people in the reserve during the last year. Our thoughts continue to be with their friends and families.



David Watson passed away suddenly while walking at the top of Maanschynkop in August 2019. The Watson Mountain Rescue, a registered NPO, was established in his memory. They are set up to be a first response unit when a hiker or hikers go missing or are injured in the Hermanus mountain ranges. The team is made up of medical personnel plus a team to evacuate the patient as speedily as possible. They operate within the rules of Wilderness Search and Rescue (WSAR), and work as a support team with WSAR and the Overstrand Search and Rescue units.

Members of the Watson Mountain Rescue team were the first to respond to the incident a few weeks ago when Gavin Turner, a Hermanus resident, slipped and fell to his untimely death while photographing the Black Eagles. We are very grateful for their support during this difficult event.

The rescue team is looking for donations to support their purchase of emergency and rescue equipment. Contributions can be directed to FNB Hermanus Acc: 62843880643.

For more information, please contact Francois Gildenhuys on 082 055 9009.

How our 'spots' got their names

While walking the reserve, it can be easy to pass by many of the named spots with little more than a casual thought about how they came to get their names. Here's the history for a few them.

Buys Se Huys: named after Pieter Buys who worked on the reserve for 25 years. He single-handedly built 35km of path using a bush pick.

Chockstone Camp: found tucked along the river in the main kloof. It's a small level spot used by the men working on the water pipeline that supplied early Voëlklip with water.

Irene's Rest: Irene, a friend of Doc Williams. Came to walk in Vogelgat, got as far as the top of the Zig Zag and sat down before going back down. She never came up again!

Lex's Gully: in memory of Lex Miller, a good friend of Doc Williams who found the gully and led a party up it in 1960 to Maanschynkop.

Sheiling Hut: was the original shepherds' hut prior to the establishment of the reserve.

Xmas Camp: Ion and Sheila Williams spent Christmas night here sleeping in their Land Rover.

Did you know?

Chicks of birds that nest within 10 metres of a well-used path fledge at a lower weight than the chicks of birds that nest 50 metres away from a path.

When we disturb a klipspringer while walking, it could run up to 300 metres away through fright. That equates to two hours of eating – and an upset energy budget for the day.

The Western Cape is more botanically diverse than the Amazon. Much of the fynbos found in the region is extremely rare; 1,700 fynbos plants are threatened with extinction. We all have a role to play in protecting and preserving it.

Protecting a pristine place: meet our trustees

Vogelgat as we know it has now been around for just over half a century – Dr Ion Williams (Doc) bought the land in 1969, and it was proclaimed a private nature reserve in 1974.

Doc's vision was for the Vogelgat Nature Reserve "... to be preserved for the enlightenment and enjoyment of coming generations... The land within its boundaries be regarded as sacrosanct, a homage to nature, where all pest vegetation will be consistently eradicated to enable the plant life to propagate and develop to its full potential. All animal, bird, reptile and insect life shall be treated with respect and never destroyed. It is beneficial to the preservation of the Reserve that as little human pressure be impacted on the Reserve."

The Vogelgat board of trustees is responsible for upholding this vision – we hear from them about their experiences in the reserve and their hopes for its future.



Mari Fouche

Mari moved to Hermanus from Gauteng in 1980. She met Dr Williams through the Hermanus Botanical Society, and was recruited by him to serve as the Vogelgat warden.

"I spent 17 wonderful years there, watching it grow, walking its beautiful paths, working with the students and Pieter Buys, and learning to know the many, caring members."

Mari became a trustee at the same time as Dave Morrison, when Dr Williams first formed the Trust. She describes Dr Williams as a man of tremendous insight in conserving the fynbos and developing a herbarium for future generations.

"Vogelgat is a special place, lovingly developed by Dr Williams, the workers, and many members and friends. As you walk in admiration on its paths and stay over in the huts – all so well maintained by Giorgio – remember that it is a privilege to be in one of the finest nature reserves in South Africa."



Treat it with the greatest respect and take home many happy memories. We live in precarious times and have to guard the precious remaining stretches of our magnificent and unique fynbos."

"There are more plant species between Hermanus and Caledon than in the whole of the British Isles. So it's a very special area and it needs to be protected. I'd love for Vogelgat to remain pristine forever and for us to stay true to Doc's vision, and for it to be somewhere we can go to simply appreciate nature."



Dave Morrison

Dave, who studied agriculture at Elsenburg, used to spend his student weekends walking the mountains behind his parents' Voëlkliip holiday home. One day he 'trespassed' onto Vogelgat land without realising it, and bumped into Doc Williams.

"Doc said I was welcome to walk in the reserve provided I became a member," Dave explains. "The next weekend, when I turned up with my R12 for the permit, Doc offered me a choice of either paying for a permit or doing some work for the reserve. The rest is history."

Although it was very hard work, Dave had a lot of fun helping Doc Williams over the years to remove alien vegetation, restore the fynbos, construct the original huts, and build many of the trails and routes that we have the privilege of walking today.

Dave of course knows the reserve incredibly well and loves all of it, but some of his favourite parts include Birdseye and the view across to the Main Falls, walking from Quark to the Shieling, and the valley between Quark and Sip.

Antony Van Hoogstraten

Antony (Hoogie) grew up in Hout Bay, and was first introduced to the area now known as Vogelgat in 1958 when he visited as a boy scout. He explains that he was a regular attendee at the Annual Hermanus Camp (AHC) and that these trips led to his great love of Hermanus and the Overberg.

Antony became a Vogelgat permit holder in the early 1970s and Doc invited him to become a trustee in 1996.

“Vogelgat has a range of very pleasing attributes, such as the fauna and flora, the climate, and its proximity to the sea and the lagoon,” says Antony. “It is also an important part of a chain of nature reserves and conservancies which help protect our small, but incredibly rich, bio-diverse floral kingdom.”

Alongside his commitment to Vogelgat, Antony is a committee member of the Hermanus Botanical Society and a member of the Fernkloof Advisory Board. He has also been chair of the Annual Hermanus Camp (AHC) for the past 25 years.

“My hopes are that Vogelgat will remain a nature reserve where people come second.



It is every permit holder, shareholder and trustee's responsibility to continue to uphold the reserve's code of ethics left for us by Dr Williams.”

“We are all very privileged and lucky to be able to walk in the reserve and enjoy everything it has to offer. When walking there, we have to walk quietly and carefully, and be mindful of the plants and animals. We must always remember that Vogelgat is first and foremost a conservation area.

It is essential that we keep the balance right between human activity and the preservation of the other animals and flora in the reserve.”



Guy Musson

Guy was born in Hermanus and has been walking in Vogelgat his whole life: “My mom was up in the mountains while pregnant with me!”

Guy studied conservation, and then journalism (majoring in zoology and botany), and worked at Vogelgat as a student in the 1980s. He explains that, as a student, he didn't fully appreciate how far ahead of the times Dr Williams was, in terms of conservation.

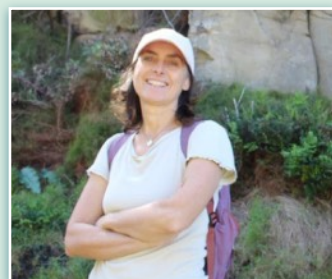
“Vogelgat must be one of the few places in the fynbos where you can walk and not see any alien plants, and that's thanks to Doc's foresight. We need to ensure that legacy continues into the future.”

“Vogelgat,” Guy says, “is a place of healing for many people. It's peaceful and safe, and we need to keep it that way.” He loves staying at Beacon hut, watching the sunset and sunrise, and not seeing another human being. He was invited to join the board of trustees in August 2020.

Sandy Van Hoogstraten

Sandy has been walking in Vogelgat her whole life, and feels honoured to have been invited to join the board of trustees this year.

Sandy is passionate about clearing invasive alien vegetation to restore fynbos areas to their pristine character. She and her husband run a project that clears invasives from the Devil's Peak, Chapman's Peak, Camps Bay and The Glen areas of Table Mountain. One of her intentions is to help expand the alien-free buffer area around Vogelgat, particularly by clearing



the land around the Kleinrivier lagoon and by protecting Fernkloof Nature Reserve from development and alien encroachment.

And, while Sandy knows how important it is to keep the balance right between using the reserve and not abusing it – unsurprisingly, she agrees with her father’s sentiment that Vogelgat is a place where the natural world comes first – she would also love to see more local children be able to walk there. “It’s so important for kids to be able to experience the natural beauty around us,” she explains. “The more we appreciate nature, the more we will want to conserve it.”

“Humanity has reached a stage where conserving and protecting is a greater gift to future generations than building and developing.

Vogelgat is priceless, and we are all so lucky to be able to play our part in conserving it and the surrounding reserves.”



James Williams (right), son of founder Ion “Doc” Williams and chairman of Vogelgat Nature Reserve PTY Ltd. A Hermanus resident, he followed in his father’s footsteps and is also a civil engineer.

Ion Williams (left), Dr Williams’ grandson, and a civil engineer by profession, has recently joined Vogelgat’s board of trustees.



Thanks to Judes and Carly of Makovo Service Design for helping us put the newsletter together and designing the member survey, and for working through the hut booking process and system with us.

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