



*Sustainably Yours...*

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## BRIDGING THE GAP

A fact of South African society is that communities were separated on the basis of colour and by socio-economic circumstances for 40 years. Even though there are no longer official barriers between different sections of society, it is still difficult to find ways to bridge the gap.

Such an opportunity has been created by Whale Coast Conservation (WCC) in Stanford, a small town in the Western Cape, about 2 hours from Cape Town.

It started around the Mill Stream Improvement Project, funded by the Table Mountain Fund and with support from the Overstrand Municipality and run by WCC's education Manager, Sheraine van Wyk. The Mill Stream originates from a spring called 'Die Oog' (the Eye) on the hill above Stanford. It is still the main water supply of the town. Over the years the Mill Stream was dammed up and the dam and stream became dumping grounds for waste from the surrounding communities. However, ecologically valuable wetlands still remain in the area, and it was deemed worthwhile to assess the ecological health of the stream, the dam and the wetlands.

This goal was achieved through an environmental study, broad consultation with experts, municipal officials, the surrounding communities and involving community volunteers including local school children who learned from experts how to monitor frogs, dragonflies and birds as bio-indicators – all under Sheraine's guidance.

Where problems were identified, the Overstrand Municipality made resources available to address at least some of these problem areas.

Through a Grant-in-Aid, the Overstrand Municipality also funded holiday programmes for senior schools learners where they had the opportunity to connect with nature and adult role models. These holiday programmes were so enthusiastically received that the learners looked for ways of continuing with service to the environment.

Junior Town Councillor, Jordan Linehan, motivated friends to join a service project during their April school holidays to clean up litter along the Mill Stream.



The group of volunteers spent two days cleaning sections of the Mill Stream such as at the Eye and the Willem Appel Dam.





The volunteers, supported by the Botanical Society, collected 64 bags of waste along the Mill Stream!



Along the way they learned about the wetlands and the Mill Stream Improvement Project.

At the Willem Appel dam it was a different story.



Despite their best efforts, the industrious volunteers only managed to clean about a quarter of the distance around the dam.



Thankfully they had the use of some canoes to get onto the dam to collect litter and 8 canoe-fulls of floating algae.



Participants were rewarded for their efforts with a birding boat trip on the Klein River on the River Rat, sponsored by the Stanford Bird Club and Ernie Blommaert.



They sighted many birds: giant kingfisher, pied kingfisher, malachite kingfisher, a couple of jackal buzzards, purple heron, barn swallows and many others.



They enjoyed a really special lunch at Ou Meul restaurant, sponsored by Botanical Society member Barbara Kahn, to end their time together.

The participants in the service project were so enthusiastic about their achievements, the learning experience and camaraderie that they have decided to make this a regular event and perhaps even start a 'Friends of the Mill Stream' group.

However, the real value of this project is in creating an interface between youth and mature, responsible community members. The older volunteers became role models and the young people were able to share what they have experienced through the WCC eco camps, particularly the long term impacts like career and study choices. The adult participants were exposed to the hopes, ambitions and achievements of young people from different, sometimes extremely underprivileged, circumstances. The project became the structure that bridged the gap.

The short term benefit to the environment of clean ups is a bonus.

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