Newsletter

April 2026

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Dear Members,

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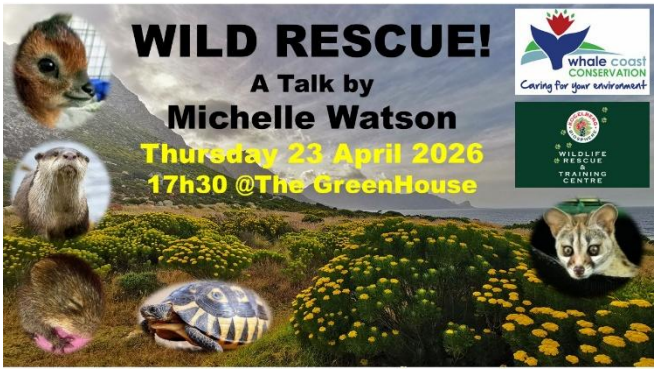
Wild Rescue

Join us for an inspiring talk by Michelle Watson of the Kogelberg Biosphere Wildlife Rescue Centre, who will share stories from the front lines of wildlife rehabilitation in our region. Working in one of South Africa's most biodiverse landscapes, Michelle and her team respond to injured, orphaned and displaced animals, offering them a second chance in the wild.

Michelle Watson is a certified wildlife rehabilitator and one of the first South Africans accredited by the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council.

No animal is considered too small or insignificant to deserve care. From mice and goslings, to snakes and porcupines, all animals have a place at the Centre to recover. But a key focus for the Centre is providing a place of care for injured blue cranes. Our national birds are frequently affected by human activities – from fences to baling twine and powerlines. That's why the Centre can now serve as a rescue centre for orphaned or injured cranes, before releasing them back into the wild.

In this engaging presentation, Michelle will highlight the challenges facing local wildlife, the vital role of rescue and rehabilitation, and how communities can make a difference. Expect fascinating insights, moving encounters, and a deeper appreciation of our wild neighbours.



Diarise Thursday 23 April at 17h30.

Insights from Mike Bruton's talk

Mike Bruton's talk was a story of man's evolution in response to changing environments. The ability to control fire was the breakthrough to developing a bigger brain. Food, especially meat, could be cooked to provide the energy for powering a bigger brain. As climate warmed, San people could move south to the Cape coast, where shellfish further boosted brain development.

One aspect of greater intelligence was the development of art. I will confine my report-back to that topic.

In the Cederberg Mountains, under sandstone overhangs shaped by wind and time, images painted thousands of years ago still enchant us.

These images are not simply ancient decoration. According to Mike, they are evidence of one of the most important developments in human history: the emergence of fully modern creativity.

We often treat creativity as something optional — a pleasant extra to real life. But what if imagination was one of the key survival tools that allowed our species to thrive?

Bruton places San rock art within a much deeper story about the evolution of the human mind. The ability to think symbolically — to imagine unseen worlds, to tell stories, to share complex beliefs — strengthened early communities and helped them make sense of their environment. Symbolic thinking binds groups together. It transmits knowledge. It gives meaning to uncertainty.

The Western Cape holds some of the clearest evidence of this mental leap. In the Cederberg and other mountain ranges, San artists painted antelope with remarkable anatomical precision and fluid movement. Human figures bend forward in trance postures. Some merge with animal forms. These are not simple hunting sketches; they are layered, metaphorical images.

Research by archaeologist David Lewis-Williams suggests that many of these paintings emerged from trance experiences during communal healing dances. Shamans described entering spirit realms, transforming into animals, and harnessing supernatural power. The rock surfaces became canvases for translating powerful internal visions into shared, visible form.

Even more remarkably, the cognitive foundations for such creativity reach far back in time. At coastal sites such as Pinnacle Point near Mossel Bay and Blombos cave near Stilbaai, archaeologists have found evidence of pigment use and symbolic behaviour dating back more than 160,000 years. By the time the Cederberg paintings were created, the human imagination was already deeply developed.

Seen through this lens, San art is not “primitive” — it is profoundly sophisticated. It reflects abstraction, emotional depth, ecological knowledge and spiritual insight. It tells us that long before written language, humans in southern Africa were thinking metaphorically, reflecting on unseen forces, and expressing complex ideas visually.

In other words, they were thinking very much like us.

During Q&A Mike voiced the opinion that cats are the smartest pet animals, having all their needs met with minimum effort! He asked the resident eco-cat for his opinion.

WCC Chair, Pat Miller, thanked Mike Bruton for a brilliant, thought-provoking talk.

Comment on application for expanded paragliding launch site

Whale Coast Conservation strongly objects to the proposed expansion and formalisation of the paragliding launch and landing sites on Farm 585 Hemel and Aarde.

The primary concern is that the development should be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The current exemption appears to be based on incomplete or incorrect information, as the total area of disturbance exceeds regulatory thresholds, occurs within a Critical Biodiversity Area, and is close to a watercourse.

WCC finds no convincing justification for enlarging the existing launch site, which already meets recommended guidelines. The proposed

expansion would result in further loss of endangered Overberg Sandstone Fynbos.

The proposal is also inconsistent with key planning frameworks, including the Overstrand Spatial Development Framework (2020) and the Western Cape Rural Land Use Planning Guidelines (2019), both of which prioritise conservation and restrict development in sensitive areas.

Additional concerns include: Inadequate and potentially harmful rehabilitation proposals; increased erosion and flooding risk; significant ecological damage to the proposed 7,000 m^2 landing site, which supports high biodiversity, including rare species.

Overall, the application is considered poorly motivated and environmentally insensitive, with insufficient regard for the ecological significance of the site. The proposal should be rejected.

Plant Science with Applewood Primary

Eleven learners came to the Greenhouse to gain practical knowledge about plants, and particular fynbos plants.

A walk on the Whale Coast Nature Reserve illustrated how removal of invasive alien plants can allow fynbos to re-establish – especially restios, the definitive plants of the fynbos. They could clearly see the flowering male plants with pollen being dispersed by the wind.

The learners were determined to eradicate all aliens on sight and were astounded by the monster root systems which allowed them to compete so successfully with the fynbos.

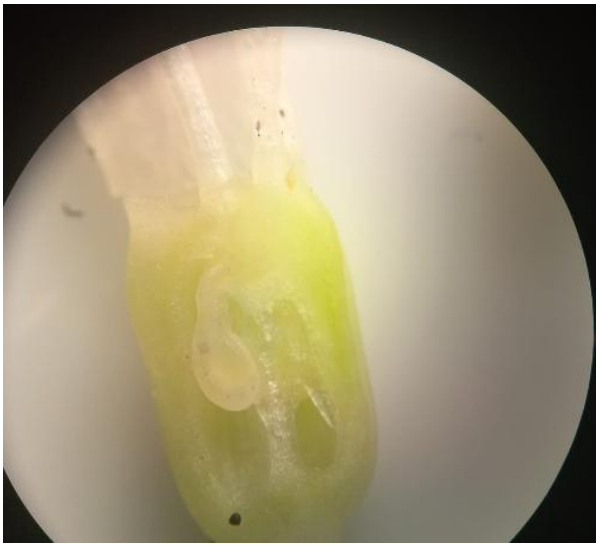
Back indoors, Sheraine van Wyk introduced the learners to the basic structure of flowers. She showed them the male and the female structures and how fertilisation occurs through pollen transfer. She explained why flowers need to be fertilised in order to produce seeds.

They used as examples the 4 major plant groups in fynbos: restios (the groups that defines fynbos), proteas, Ericas and geophytes (bulbs).

They could try to correlate the flower structures with their pollinators.

The learners consolidated what they learned in theory by looking at the fine structures of various flowers through microscopes.

Anthers with yellow pollen could clearly be seen.



And the female ovule too.

Both learners and teachers were most appreciative of the brilliant workshop put together by WCC staff.

Fire Expos!

In March WCC took their Expo on Fire to 2 schools in Gansbaai – Primer and Laerskool. In discussions with the learners, the educators teased out various causes of fires, both the good and the

bad of fynbos fires and the way invasive alien vegetation fuels devastating fires. It is imperative that children understand the causes of runaway wildfires, that they understand the negative consequences to both animals and people and that they take responsibility for their actions.

They discussed the reasons for the increased fire damage we now see – including the 30,30,30 rule – over 30 degrees, wind more than 30 km/hr and humidity below 30% = fire. They also explored the reasons why fires jump long distances and how we can safeguard our homes and other structures.

Educators also talked about the cost of fires and asked learners how they think the money could be used more productively if not for firefighting.

A total of 69 Grade 6 learners at Gansbaai Primêr and 50 Grade 6 learners at Laerskool Gansbaai attended the expo, which was funded by the AVI Community Trust.

Hermanus High Gr 10 Plant Science Workshop

A report on this workshop will be included in our May newsletter.

We thank our sponsors

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