



*Editor - Iona Everett*

**Newsletter**

**August 2015**

# Chairman's Chat

*by EJ (Robby) Robertson*

*NCOA Chairman 2015*

Safe access to Noetzie remains a priority issue. Currently there are two matters being played out.

- On the one hand the NCOA has been engaging with the Knysna Municipality regarding the access by way of Rexford and the Pezula Estate. This matter is reported on more fully by Julie Gosling elsewhere in this newsletter.
- Secondly, it is of interest to record that SANRAL, who is the road authority for the N2, recently invited engineering consultants to submit tenders for the design and contract supervision of the upgrading of the Noetzie Road intersection with the N2. It is my understanding that SANRAL are adopting a traffic circle solution which would remove the present stop controls. There are definite safety advantages in this for Noetzie residents and visitors. Exactly what will be the situation with the first 500 m of the Noetzie road is unclear at this time, and as you know, this is the responsibility of the Knysna Municipality.

Your Committee will be keeping a watching eye on these developments.

# Researching the Noetzie estuary

*By Demi Rodrigues*

*This is a report which comes from the very kind and generous offer by Aubrey Wynne-Jones to support students to do their studies at Noetzie with a Noetzie bursary. This is intended to collect environmental data for the Noetzie data-bank. To this effect, it has been stipulated that the students keep their documents open and longitudinal, which is a great idea.*

Recently, I was granted the opportunity to compile a research project in collaboration with SANParks and the Noetzie Conservancy to complete my 4th year studies. I am currently studying at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in George. The project entails identifying the various fish species that occupy the Noetzie estuary and their size range (how big they are), in order to describe the overall fish community between two sampling periods (summer and winter).



Various methods were implemented in the estuary to obtain the necessary data for the project, including a 30 m seine net (trek net), hand held scoop netting, one set gill net and three fyke nets. The use of different gear types is important to sample the entire fish community and to get a better description of the size classes. All fish were identified, measured and then immediately released.

← Seine net

For the study we divided the estuary into three broad sections – the lower, middle and upper reaches. Seine netting occurred at five sites in each of the sections. Scoop netting sites were also chosen in each of the sections. Due to the shallow depth of the estuary in the upper reaches we were only able to use the gill net in the lower and middle sections

with each setting left undisturbed for approximately an hour, but not less. The last sampling method implemented in the estuary is the setting of the fyke nets which are set in the late evening and left overnight. Fyke nets play an important role in the data collection as the nets capture a variety of

species that move throughout the levels of the estuary. However due to their mechanism of keeping fish trapped for an extended period of time, fish become easy targets for predators such as otters. Therefore, the fyke nets set in the Noetzie estuary were reinforced with plastic otter guards that prevented the otters from entering the nets. Fyke nets were collected in the early hours of the next morning when all fish were recorded. Records contain species and length from the tip of the nose to the fork indent of the tail (done with all methods).



← White Steenbras

The results thus far look very interesting due to the sample number of White Steenbras caught during both sampling trips. The White Steenbras is an important endemic species, very reliant on estuaries as they are used as safe grounds for nursing. Other interesting findings include that of the longfin eels which were caught in the overnight fyke nets. Longfin eels spend the

majority of their lifecycle in fresh, slow flowing water and are believed to relocate to the open ocean for spawning. They are rather difficult to measure due to their long muscular and slime covered bodies. The table below indicates the species we sampled in the Noetzie estuary.

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common name</u>	<u>Also known as</u>
<i>Lichia amia</i>	Garrick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leervis</li> <li>• Leerie</li> </ul>
<i>Rhabdosargus holubi</i>	Cape stumpnose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kaapse stompneus</li> </ul>
<i>Lithognathus lithognathus</i>	White steenbras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pignose grunter</li> <li>• Wit steenbras</li> </ul>
<i>Gilchristella aestuaria</i>	Estuarine round herring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gilchristella</li> </ul>
Mugilidae	Mullet	
<i>Solea bleekeri</i>	Blackhand sole	
<i>Psammogobius knysnaensis</i>	Sand goby	
<i>Glossogobius callidus</i>	River goby	
<i>Anguilla mossambica</i>	Longfin eel	
<i>Monodactylus falciformis</i>	Cape moony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oval moony</li> </ul>
<i>Gambusia affinis</i>	Mosquito fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guppy</li> </ul>

The last sampling of the Noetzie estuary took place on the 2nd and 3rd of June, with all the data collected. The data now needs to undergo processing followed by the final write up of the project. Thanks to the Noetzie Conservancy (in particular Wendy Dewberry) and SANParks for the opportunity to do this project and thanks also to my fellow students for assisting with field work.

# News from NCOA Treasurer

*By Margi Dane*

## Subscriptions

Sincere thanks to all members who have paid subs for the current financial year. With the exception of 8 erven, all subscriptions have been paid to date.

The subscriptions collected by the NCOA are primarily used for:

1. the reimbursement of consultants employed from time to time
2. the reimbursement of contractors employed to do repair works that are the responsibility of the NCOA
3. the reimbursement of contractors employed to do repair works that NCOA regards as the responsibility of others, but these persons are not doing their duty and that dangerous conditions have developed
4. a "war-chest" to be used in the event that legal action is taken against the NCOA or legal action is taken by the NCOA
5. operating costs such as water testing, phone calls, printing, photocopying etc

## NCOA Constitution amendments

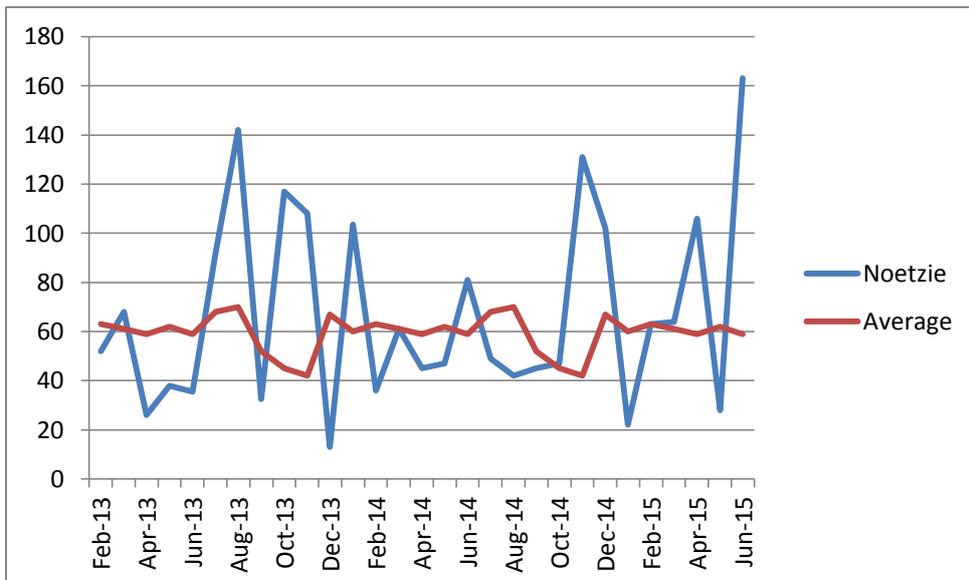
At the 2014 AGM held on 29 December 2014 a concern was raised about the Voting Rights of Ordinary Members, as was recorded in Item 9, third bullet of the minutes.

The committee has addressed this concern and others

1. The Voting Rights of Ordinary Members have been defined as for voting purposes, the number of Ordinary Members shall not exceed 50% of the Owner Members. Ordinary Members shall have the right to vote on all issues at an AGM or other general meeting, other than issues relating to changing of the Constitution.
2. References to the Knoetzie Property Owners' Association have been removed except where it is stated that the NCOA is the direct successor of the former Knoetzie Property Owners' Association.
3. Presentation of the Annual Financial Statements reviewed by a suitably qualified person appointed by the Executive Committee.
4. Other minor changes have been included to clarify various issues.

It is intended that this draft amended Constitution will be circulated to all the Owner Members in advance so that the amended Constitution that will be presented to the AGM in December 2015, can be approved.

# Rainfall Graph



## Peeps into the Past

*by Chris Everett*

### Fire

Fire – a primeval force that is immensely beneficial or totally terrifying. The ancients Greeks thought that it was one of the basic elements that constituted all matter, the others being earth, water, air and æther. This concept dates from pre-Socratic times and persisted throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.

A recent example in its terrifying form was the huge fire in the Cape Peninsula in March this year – which I could see from my desk, creeping over the hillside above us. As devastating as these are, regular fires every fifteen years or so are critical to the rebirth of fynbos-dominated ecosystems, and are essential for maintaining the ecosystem. Fynbos habitats have been burning frequently for between 3- and 5-million years, as long as fynbos has been around and the native plants and animals from these systems are in fact well adapted to these regular fires. If they couldn't handle it, there wouldn't be any left.

In the 55 years that I have been coming to Noetzie, there have been two major fires, as well as a number of smaller ones. The one of course was the destruction of the van Gend / Taylor house, which proved how resistant the dense evergreen forests are to fire and the other was on the headland to the right (west side) of the Noetzie Road.

That was in December 1979 when there was a huge fire on the headland – well before Aubrey Wynne-Jones' or Julie Gosling's houses had been built and before Geo. Parkes planted it with pines. It was thus a huge expanse of coastal fynbos, often covered in watsonias.



*Left – The Headland*

*Below – The fire - a screen grab from an old 8 mm movie.*

The fire started in the Noetzie parking lot - probably from a picnicker's braai-fire and spread rapidly into the old fynbos, fanned by a strong south-easter.

All of Noetzie turned out to fight the fire together with Geo. Parkes and Sons' fire tender and others from Forestry. At one stage it looked as if it might leap the road

and come down the hill into the river stands. The blaze continued for three days, flaring up in unexpected places and the ground was too hot to walk on comfortably for days. The fire was finally extinguished and a day or two later some most welcome showers finally damped down the smouldering remains, but there was fortunately no serious damage.



This was certainly not the case in the Great Fire of February 1869, which very probably reached Noetzie. It is the first fire to have been officially classed as a National Disaster and was the most extensive fire ever recorded in South Africa. Good veld and fynbos growth stimulated by a higher than normal rainy season in 1866, which was followed by another wet season in 1868, had produced an abundance of burning material that was then dried out by a hot summer. Bush fires had started all over the area during several weeks of exceptionally hot weather. That reached its climax on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1869 with a scorching dry northerly Berg wind and very high temperatures that reached 34°C at 08:00 and 45°C by 10:00 at Humansdorp. The fires that had broken out travelled rapidly and were carried large distances to start new fires. They swept through a tract of country some 640 km long and up to 240 km wide through the mountains, gorges and lower coastal plateaux. From Riversdale in the west to Uitenhage in the east, the land was ablaze, causing loss of life and much damage to property.

The belt of dense forests along the upper coastal platform was largely unaffected by the Great Fire, for fire seldom penetrates deep into moist forest. However most of the dry coastal forest, wooded valleys and isolated mountain forests were destroyed beyond recognition. In the Humansdorp and Tsitzikamma districts alone, 20 homesteads were burned to the ground and 27 persons died.

The fire swept through the Langkloof and over the mountains, then through the forests down to the sea – ashes and burning debris were apparently blown far out to sea, fanned by a gale force northerly wind and it spread with terrifying speed, annihilating everything in its path. The town of George narrowly escaped as the wind changed direction.

One branch of the fire swept down a gorge and raced through the hills towards Knysna. Then, by a miracle, the wind changed and thus saved the town from certain destruction. The Barringtons of Portland Manor and the Darnells of Westford escaped with their lives, but lost everything they owned.

A contemporary account by Bryan Darnell, owner of Westford on the Knysna River, conveys the horror :

*As the morning advanced, darker and darker grew the smoke and brighter the glare of the fire, whilst the thermometer rose higher every minute. The wind too increased rapidly in violence...But presently, above the smoke I saw the liquid fire pouring over the great wooded kranztes and below them in the fields a great stream of fire surging along in the dry grass with incredible rapidity. Then I knew that all was up with Westford, and rushing into my house, got out my household, who stood ready. I directed my wife...to fly with them into the garden & into the dam...Instantaneously the whole of the buildings on the place were alight, and at the same time fire appeared all around us...I have lost everything.*

After many days the wind veered to the south and then south-east and soaking rains that lasted until the next afternoon fell and extinguished the fires. Ironically this opening up of the landscape provided road-builder Thomas Bain and his team with the perfect opportunity to plot a suitable route of 185 km connecting Port Elizabeth with Plettenberg Bay, Knysna and George, via a new coastal road which included the Storms River, Grootrivier and Blaauwkrantz passes and circumvented the arduous journey over the Outeniqua Mountains via the Langkloof.

# NCOA Municipal Matters

*By Julie Gosling:*

## Hlalani Development

Construction has begun on the upgrading and formalisation of the Hlalani informal settlement along the first stretch of the Noetzie Road. The development will include 272 houses and two churches, with access to the N2 via the Noetzie Road. In normal circumstances this site, part of which was originally a municipal dump, would not have been considered for development because it is situated on relatively steep slopes. The decision to develop was made on the grounds that Hlalani has been an established community for many years. The area drains into the Bigai River, which drains into the Knysna estuary, and to the east into the Noetzie River. The council is putting in storm water drains and sewerage infrastructure.

## **New municipal manager**

Grant Easton, who was Chief Financial Officer of Knysna Municipality, has been appointed Municipal Manager. He replaces Lauren Waring, who resigned from office last year. Easton had been acting Municipal Manager for some time.

## **Proposed municipal court**

Municipal Manager Grant Easton has applied to the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development to establish a municipal court for the Knysna area. Easton said this would enable the council to act faster on certain matters, particularly traffic offences and by-law infringements. Easton said: "Enforcing by-laws has been problematic in the past as we have no legal capacity to punish offenders. This court will change that."

## **New municipal wards**

The municipality has adjusted the ward boundaries as was legally required by the Municipal Demarcation Board according to the Municipal Structures Act. This requires that the number of voters in each ward may not vary by more than 15% from the norm. The norm is determined by dividing the number of registered voters by the number of wards in a municipality. The relevance of this to Noetzie residents is that Noetzie now falls into ward 11. It used to fall into ward 3. Ward 11 is a massive area on the eastern and northern boundary of the Knysna municipality. Ward 3 is now the smallest ward in area, but is densely populated. It now has 3052 registered voters, all from Dam se Bos. Ward 11 comprises the remainder of the old ward 3, and a small section of Hornlee. The total number of registered voters in ward 11 is 3164. Seven of these are registered as Noetzie voters.

## **Access Road via Rexford & Pezula to Noetzie Road**

The deed of sale for Pezula would appear to be subject to a road expropriation condition that dates back to 1998 and pre-dates the development of Pezula Private Estate. The NCOA brought this to the attention of the Knysna Municipality in June 2014. Since then there has been a "ping-pong" discussion between the Municipality and the NCOA for well over a year. The Municipality has commissioned two legal opinions on the matter, the latest in June this year from a senior counsel. To the NCOA, the matter is straightforward, the road exists, it is a declared public road, but it has been closed to the public by Pezula. It seems clear that this road must be re-opened to the public.

In essence the Knysna Municipality expropriated the road from George Parkes and Sons, an area of 15 400 square metres, in 1998. Prior to this, the link was originally George Parkes' forestry road when the company owned the pine plantations along the Noetzie Road. It is probably reasonable to surmise that the expropriation related to the development of the Sparrebosch Township, and the need to ensure a public road link from the Noetzie Road, though what is now Pezula, Sparrebosch and Rexford to George Rex Drive, George Rex Drive being the main road between the Knysna Heads and the town of Knysna.

It would seem that with the development of the Pezula Private Estate, sight was lost of this expropriation, and that a servitude right-of-way was registered in favour of the Knysna Municipality that follows roughly the alignment of the expropriated road. The Municipality is currently in the process of trying to unravel the legality of the right-of-way, and will then need to advise the NCOA by way of a response to our letter querying the status of the road.

## **Sale of Noetzie properties**

1. Erf 84: This plot on the eastern side of the Old Wagon Road has been sold to a Knysna resident.

2. Old Pezula Castle, erf 34, and the plot east of Cockroft's house, erf 32, (Cockroft's was formerly the Knarr's, and before that the Yellow Cottage), have been consolidated into one plot, now called erf 101. It now belongs to Dominic Gwyn-Jones. There are plans to restore and renovate the old Pezula Castle. These still have to be considered by Heritage Western Cape. Architect Doc Lawson, who has been coming to Noetzie since the 1960s, is the architect who hopes to restore the old place to its former glory.

As some may know, Pezula Castle was built in the 1930s by Herbert Henderson, father of Alan and Ian Henderson, who lived in Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia. During World War II Henderson gave the use of this castle to the Royal Air Force to be used for a rest centre for members of the air training scheme. Henderson financed the centre. RAF members came down to stay for two weeks at a time during the war years. Rex and Katie Metelerkamp's visitors' book records many of the young men who stayed there.

It was later sold to Sir Garfield Todd, former Prime Minister of Rhodesia. When Todd was placed under house arrest by the Rhodesian authorities, the Hendersons bought it back. It was sold in the early part of this century to Chesterfield Groups Holding, along with Montrose Castle and erf 84 and 32.

## The Cape Genet

*By Iona Everett*

On several occasions while sitting on our stoep at Noetzie I have seen the genet silently foraging along the edges of the grass. I know that a genet lived for some time in the roof of the Bond-Smith's house but is no longer there. People frequently leave bones out for them and watch in the hope of seeing the genet come and eat the free meal.

The Cape genet, (*Genetta genatta*), also known as the South African large-spotted genet, is a small carnivore endemic to South Africa. Like other genets, it is nocturnal and mostly arboreal, preferring to live in the riparian zones of forests, as long as these are not marshy areas. Cape genets are distributed from the Western Cape of South Africa to KwaZulu-Natal, south of 32°S, and to the Lesotho border. They live in moist environments near streams, rivers and standing water, in lowland and mountain fynbos, where vegetation cover is high. They are the most widely distributed and common carnivores in KwaZulu-Natal.





The Cape genet is a slender cat-like animal, their size varies between species from 40.9 to 60 cm in head-to-body length with 40 to 47 cm long tails. They have a long body, ash grey to yellowish-grey fur with brown rust-coloured irregular spots and a black stripe along the spine. Its muzzle is white, and it has white spots below the eye, with grey ears and a banded black and white tail, with a black tip. Some individuals living in areas with more than 375 mm annual precipitation are darker than individuals from drier areas. They have large ears, a pointed muzzle and partly retractile claws. They have large eyes with elliptical pupils; the iris is about the colour of the fur. They

can move their eyes within their sockets to a limited extent, and move their heads to focus on moving objects. Their ears have a fine layer of hair inside and outside. They can move the ear about 80° from pointing forward to the side, and also from an erect position to pointing downwards. Their wet nose is important for both sensing smell and touch. They differ from other genets by a short dorsal crest and poorly spotted hind legs, which are dark at the back.

Cape genets have been recorded as solitary, and become active after dark. During the day they rest in large trees, rock overhangs and caves. They are both terrestrial and arboreal, but hunt and feed on the ground. Combining speed and stealth, they dash forward in an elusive fashion, broken up by short pauses. They hiss and growl in stressful situations. Olfactory communication is most likely very important in the life of Cape genets, their social environment and life cycle. When walking on branches, they stay low and laterally swing their legs out so that any misstep is easily correctable. They mark by depositing a secretion from the anal sac. It is unknown whether they are territorial. They use latrine sites to defecate.



Cape genets feed mostly on rodents such as African vlei rats, rock rats, mice and birds. Seeds, leaves and grass were also found in their stomachs, as well as beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, locusts and termites. They find most of their prey in low bushes and leaf litter, including African climbing mice, multimammate mice and African dormice. They are considered to be opportunistic omnivores, since they also catch and feed on insects, spiders, scorpions, and scavenge fish on the beach. Eating grass may aid digestion, dislodge hair in the intestines, induce vomiting to get rid of ingested toxins, relieve throat inflammation and stomach irritation. Birds appear to not be prevalent as part of their diet.



Cape genets apparently mate during the warm summer months. Pregnant females were observed in September to November. They have an average of two young weighing 70 g at birth. Gestation periods last about 70 days. Females make nests in hollow trees, in holes or among boulders. The young open their eyes ten days after birth, their canine teeth

break through at the age of four weeks, they are weaned at about 2.5 months and hunt on their own when about seven months old.

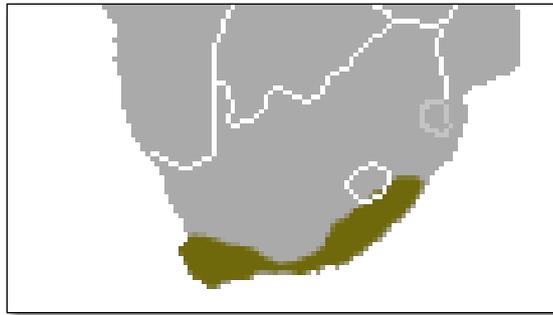


←Skins of *G. genetta* and *G. tigrina*

Cape genets have been recorded in dozens of protected areas. Outside reserves they are unprotected, and are not listed in the South African Red Data Book nor any CITES appendices. There are no major threats to the Cape Genet. They are sometimes killed by farmers in retaliation for predation on small domestic stock and poultry, which could have an affect on numbers in some areas. Cape genets are one of the genet species kept as exotic pets.



*Distribution map*



## Finally

We hope the information contained in this Newsletter and the others sent out during the year is of interest and value to all homeowners, particularly those who only visit for short periods of the year. We believe that progress is being made on a number of fronts in our efforts to improve service delivery, enhance the quality of the urban environment and help uphold the value of owner's investment in Noetzie. We would like to thank all those who support the NCOA and its activities.

Particular thanks are due to the committed homeowners who volunteer their time and efforts to assist in various ways, all helping to make Noetzie a special place and a destination worth looking forward to when holidays come around.

The Committee of the NCOA would like to thank their families whose support is enormous and without whom the NCOA would be unable to function to the benefit of all owners.