

Haenertsburg grassland declared nature reserve

FANTASTIC news is that in March this year, Limpopo MEC Seaparo Sekoati declared the Haenertsburg grassland a ***fully-fledged nature reserve***, recognised by the province as such and subject to LEDET legal protection. We were delighted with this good news after a 10-year battle, and everyone involved should be heartily congratulated. This means that any ecological infringements on the Townlands grassland will now be prosecuted by LEDET themselves. Even better, FroHG was asked to submit a formal application to LEDET to be assigned the Management Authority of the reserve. We are currently awaiting the final documents in order to be assigned this authority. This step will be followed by publication in the Government Gazette, which will complete the process of the declaration.

Also, at the end of last year FroHG amended its constitution in preparation for its registration with SARS as a non-profit organisation and a public benefit organisation. We are only a volunteer group funded by goodwill and donations, so we need this amendment in order to raise enough money to look after the new reserve.

In the meantime the Haenertsburg grasslands, also known as the Woodbush Granite Grasslands (WGG), are critically endangered and on the verge of becoming extinct. You may ask what is so special about our grasslands? Well, they are distinctly different owing to their geology, soils, elevation, topography and rainfall. As a result, they differ markedly in terms of the plant and animal species they support. Incredibly, about 100 years ago, 288 km² of WGG existed, stretching from the lower slopes of our beloved Iron Crown all the way down to Duiwelskloof. Now less than 5% of this remains in small, isolated patches. So we need all the help and publicity we can get.

A highlight of the past 8 months was the avifaunal study conducted by ecologist Joe Grosel on the Townlands and on the Ebenezer peninsula. 12 bird species of conservation importance including the Cape vulture, Secretary bird, Southern bald ibis, African grass owl and Cape parrot were identified. The bird list is available on request to FroHG members and will also be posted on the website shortly. We are also talking to Eskom in order to get bird protectors installed along the grassland power lines. The Blue swallow and Southern ground hornbill are now sadly considered extinct in the area, but there is hope that red-winged francolin may be located again.