

## Reaching out

The Koeberg Visitors Centre staff started the year with a buzz of activity. The popular Back to School Programme was once again presented on 13 and 14 January 2020. The aim of the programme is to provide Koeberg parents the opportunity to show their children where they work and to stock up on information for upcoming school projects. The Back to School Programme consists of a fun, but informative introduction to Eskom and Koeberg, and the role Koeberg plays in the national grid.

On 7 January 2020 the Koeberg Visitors Centre team visited Maitland Library to take part in their holiday programme. The group of around 70 youngsters were educated about electricity safety.

On 23 January 2020, the Visitors Centre staff took to the road to visit !Khwattu San Centre and the West Coast Fossil Park to network with the two centres and personally invite them to visit Koeberg Visitors Centre. !Khwattu and the Fossil Park are situated along the same route running up the West Coast (R27) and it would therefore be beneficial to all three centres to work together to promote each other.

On Monday 3 February 2020, the Visitors Centre staff headed to Palmiet Power Station and also visited Grabouw High School to educate around 100 grade 8 and 9 learners about Eskom, Koeberg and Palmiet Power Stations.

## Wetlands and biodiversity



*Black-winged Stilt*

**World Wetlands Day** is celebrated on **2 February** every year to raise global awareness about the importance of wetlands, not only for us as humans, but for our planet as well!

This year's theme is **Wetlands and Biodiversity**, an opportunity to highlight wetland biodiversity, its status, why it matters and how to promote actions to reverse its loss.

**What is a wetland?** Wetlands are areas that are flooded/saturated with water - permanently or seasonally. There are inland wetlands which include marshes, ponds, lakes, rivers, flood plains and swamps. Man-made wetlands include salt pans and fish ponds. Coastal wetlands include estuaries, lagoons and coral reefs, to name a few.

At Koeberg Nature Reserve, there are two coastal wetlands and several small, seasonal wetlands. They play a very important ecological role. Wetlands provide shelter and breeding sites for semi-aquatic animals and many bird species. They are good seasonal food sources and provide fresh drinking water, especially during winter months. Wetlands are extremely important and sensitive habitats. They are good indicators of the health of an ecosystem and they support biodiversity, something that is essential to protect for future generations.



*One of Koeberg's seasonal wetlands*



# Ticked off

# Gemsbok

Koeberg Nature Reserve is home to three endemic tortoise species: Angulate tortoise (*Chersina angulate*), Parrot-beaked Padloper (*Homopus areolatus*) and the **endangered** Geometric tortoise (*Psammobates geometricus*).

The Conservation Department also looks after eight Leopard tortoises (*Geochelone pardalis*) that have been found in the reserve through the years. They do not naturally occur in this part of the country and must have been released in the reserve by people.

On 13 January 2020, one of the female Leopard tortoises escaped from her enclosure where she was being treated for an airway infection. Luckily she was found on the same day, only 150m away. She was scheduled for her weekly injection of antibiotics. It was then that staff noted six South African Tortoise Ticks (*Amblyomma marmoreum*) on the soft part of her tail and around her anus. The ticks were removed, the injection given, and she was returned to her enclosure.

One of ticks was a real whopper - almost the size of a 20c coin! The ticks found on her were the South African Tortoise Tick. All the life stages of these ticks can occur on all tortoises, but specifically Leopard tortoises.



The different life stages of the tortoise tick

This tick is a three-host tick - they will live out their lives on three different animals, and can be attached to tortoises for two to seven weeks, perhaps even longer. Adult ticks rarely parasitise livestock, and ticks in immature stages mostly occur

on carnivores, antelope, scrub hare and ground dwelling birds such as Helmeted Guineafowl. Adult ticks occur mainly in summer, while larvae mainly occur from autumn to spring and nymphs form spring to summer.

Stefan Oosthuizen, one of the Nature Conservation students, completing his practical year, with the Leopard tortoise.



Koeberg Nature Reserve has a herd of around 20 to 25 gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*). Although you are unlikely to ever see them - they spend up to 60% of the day inactive, hiding in the shade to avoid overheating.

The average shoulder height of a gemsbok is 1,2 metres and they can weigh up to 240kg. Both males and females have the characteristic long, straight horns.

Gemsbok are specifically adapted to live in arid areas and can survive on very little water. They are mainly grazers but will dig for roots, bulbs and tubers. One of their favourite sources of water is tsama melons (*Citrullus lanatus*) and gemsbok cucumbers (*Acanthosicyons naudianus*).

They usually live in herds of up to 12 and the leader of the herd, a territorial male, will guard his domain by marking the boundaries with piles of dung.

Gemsbok did not historically occur in the Western Cape, their natural range is further north in arid areas such as open grassland, Kalahari duneland and bush savanna. Koeberg's herd was introduced some decades ago.

Koeberg's shy gemsbok caught on a camera trap in the reserve.



A new edition to the herd - a young gemsbok

