KORSMAN CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2020

LOCKDOWN EDITION

The COVID-19 crisis and lockdown has prevented us holding any work parties or members walks. We report on topical events in the Sanctuary, such as lockdown eating, delivering food parcels, and a report on a lockdown-breaker.

Lockdown Eating
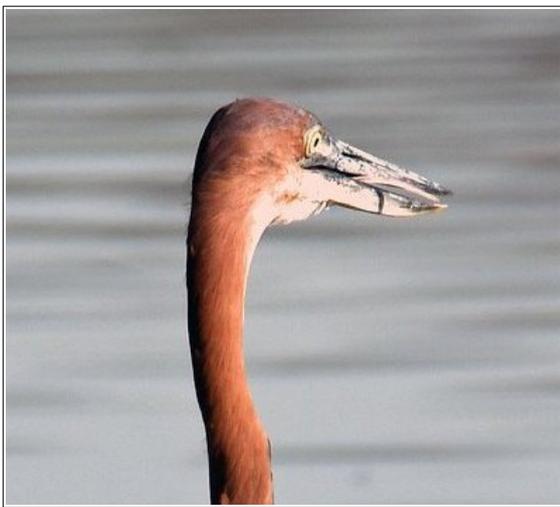
Goli licks his lips! Split-second capture of the tongue by Eugene Liebenberg.

Goli Junior and catch stare it out

This banded orb-web spider pre-stocked her larder with a grasshopper for breakfast.

Fly snack for a dragonfly, the arch predators of the insect world.

The story of Rory, the teenage runaway

One day a teenager called Rory, who lived in the Korsman Sanctuary, found out by accident something his parents had been keeping from him all his short life – he was called a House Snake! He was quite devastated by the news; the lockdown had kept him in, so this only served to exacerbate the feeling of confinement that he already had in abundance. He decided to flee the coop, so to speak, and seek out new territory more appropriate to his destiny.

Accordingly, one bright sunny morning, while his parents were home-schooling his little sister, he slid away through the yellowing grassland and the confining boundary of the sanctuary into the wide unknown….. he had noticed some enormous structures out there, and snippets overheard from avian residents had led him to believe that these could be what he was looking for – houses! And so the adventure began…

On his way to the nearest house, he had just slithered onto some weird surface he'd never encountered before - hot, hard, grey and unpleasant to the touch – when suddenly, from above, a patrolling Southern Fiscal shrike spotted him breaking the lockdown terms and raised the alarm. Dive-bombing Rory and causing him to coil up in terror, the Fiscal carried out his duties with due diligence.

The story takes a twist – a fortunate one for Rory, that day. The dive-bombing activity was noticed by an IDOP* on his way to the shops on his bicycle. As Rory was in some danger from passing traffic, the IDOP rescued him and took him home, to check with the resident expert on what the best plan would be for his future. Rory arrived safely, was promptly identified, and the decision was made to repatriate him to his place of origin.

Another twist here – Rory managed to escape from the box he'd been placed in and slithered off into the garden… however, the diligent IDOP once again came to the rescue, and found Rory hiding under a pot-plant!

And so the rebellious teenager's odyssey ended – back to the pan he went, away from the terror-filled environment of vicious domestic pets, repticidal home-owners and weedeater-wielding horticultural assistants, to a life (hopefully) of bliss amongst the denizens of our wonderful Sanctuary.

Author: Anonymous

*Impecunious Decrepit Old Pensioner

Aurora House Snakes are harmless constrictors that live in grassland, often near water. They eat small rodents, frogs and lizards. Adults average 60cm and young "Rory" measured about 25cm.

Delivering Food Parcels (for herons)

Frank and Alison Bainbridge rescued several African Clawed frogs while cleaning a body of water in their garden and brought them to join the ecosystem (either up or down the food chain).

NB. Released on the opposite side of the Pan to Rory.

Staying In... the nest

Two Goliath Heron pairs have been seen together in nests and we are watching eagerly to see if both pairs breed. At this stage, we think that the pair occupying sedges near Walsh Rd (visible from the Little Library) is a new pair who arrived together at Korsman.

The other pair, in a nest at the end of the walkway at Divot St, is probably our original Goli couple as the juveniles from last year are still in their company. Mrs G paid a visit but at time of writing has not settled here for this season's nesting.

Goliath herons are territorial and usually only allow a second bird in to their turf while breeding, which will make this unusual if both pairs nest. Liz and Steve Schultz saw Goliaths flying in circles in the vicinity of the new arrival's nest. This may have been a territorial defence by Goli trying to chase the interlopers. We are monitoring developments.

Lockdown Reading: History of the Korsman Animals

Many Benoni residents still fondly remember the game that were present at Korsman for decades. Korsman was fenced in the 1950s, a project initiated by town councillor Nic Korsman (of the ice cream family) to protect the birdlife which were often killed by dogs.

The first animals were introduced in 1956: blesbok, duiker, springbok and steenbok. Ostriches were introduced in 1959.

Right: Looking towards Kilfenora Rd.

In 1966, three zebras were presented to Korsman by Morris Nestadt, a well-known civic leader. In 1967, he offered to donate two giraffes, but the Council refused the offer, to Mr Nestadt's dismay.

The zebras were removed in 1968 after they started killing newly born blesbok.
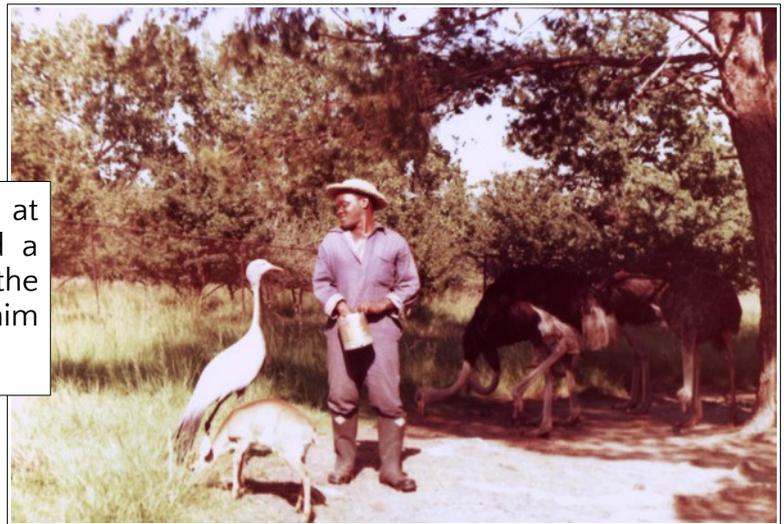
The Council caretaker, Enoch Masuku, worked at the Sanctuary for over 20 years. Enoch had a special relationship with the birds, especially the female Blue crane, Anna, who would follow him around the Sanctuary.

So why were they removed?
There were problems with the animals for many years. As early as 1968, Nature Conservation department was concerned about overcrowding, which led to overgrazing. Feed had to be brought in from then on.
Being in an urban area made things tragically worse – animals and ostriches were poached or stolen and dogs got into the Sanctuary and killed animals. The last ostrich had to be put down after being severely injured on a car part which had been thrown over the fence.
In 1996, the Pan water level was so high that that animals developed hoof rot, so some animals were sold and the remainder taken to a reserve in Nigel.

Want to know more about Korsman history?
There are [three pages on our website](#), and a Dropbox folder with historic photographs and press clippings. Please contact me to send you the link.
Got any historic photos, even just with the Pan in the background? I would love to scan them for our collection.