

## **Botanical Education Trust Report**

Thanks to our many donors, large and small, the **Botanical Education Trust** was able to make awards this year to six of the thirteen excellent applicants. The record total amount of R173 855 was funded entirely by income derived from the permanently invested donations. This illustrates how your support will help conserve our indigenous flora in perpetuity!

In addition to the grants, a substantial contribution was made to the production costs of the soon-to-be-released book *The Complete Guide to Indigenous Garden Plants of South Africa* by Elsa Pooley, Geoff Nichols and Andrew Hankey. This amazing publication is sure to be the apogee of indigenous gardening books!

Award recipients represent a variety of institutions from across the country, and it is very positive that two are promising young botanists.

Registered for an MSc degree at Stellenbosch University, Tallulah Glasby is studying biocrusts. Composed of entangled soil grains and microorganisms, these form layers on the soil surface improving stability, nutrient cycling, and water retention. The findings will help understand factors supporting native plants in nutrient-poor soils, such as in the Greater Cape Floristic Region, and will be relevant to conservation efforts aimed at preserving these fragile ecosystems.

Also busy with her MSc, Victoria Roetger of Wits University is working in the Drakensberg Mountains, a centre for both species' diversity and endemism. She is studying plant-pollinator interactions, which are crucial for maintaining ecosystems and biodiversity, and are expected to change with increasing temperatures due to global climate change.



Two promising young botanists Tallulah Glasby (left) and Victoria Roetger (right)

Willem Froneman, also of Wits University, received a further grant for his project entitled '*Barleria* in South Africa: Waterwise, Sun-loving, Beautiful and Prickly'. The resulting book will include an up-to-date revision of the genus, detailed descriptions, distribution maps and a painting of every species to facilitate

identification. It will also cover horticultural aspects of this charismatic group of plants.

Citizen science is revolutionising certain aspects of biology by greatly increasing observations. Thousands of records of butterflies, interacting with flowers, provide a rich new source of information on species likely to be butterfly pollinated. Prof Craig Peter of Rhodes University aims to “ground truth” the relative importance of butterflies in pollinating the nectar plants thus identified.

Mr Pieter Bester of the South African Biodiversity Institute will undertake a much-needed taxonomic revision of the genus *Nemesia*. Of the nearly 80 *Nemesia* species currently recognized, around 10% have a significant threat status, one is extinct while for 13% the available data is insufficient to determine the conservation status. The revision will guide future conservation and management strategies.

Since 1978 Hillcrest Conservancy has been protecting vital remnants of natural grasslands and wild flowers within the urban environment; one area has not been disturbed since 1878. They have had an area declared part of the Durban Metropolitan Open Space System. Their relatively small award will enable them to erect educational signage to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands, grasslands and the associated natural flora.

Finally, we thank Dr Neil Crouch and Ms Zaitoon Rabaney who have stepped down as Trustees after many years of dedicated voluntary service. Botanists Prof Steve Johnson and Dr Wynston Woodenburg are welcomed as new Trustees.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information on the Botanical Education Trust by e-mail at [charlesbotha@gmail.com](mailto:charlesbotha@gmail.com) or on 083 7777 078.

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