

CAPE TOWN'S UNIQUE BIODIVERSITY HOW YOU CAN HELP

9. We need your help!

Our ecosystems and plant and animal species are under dire threat. Although conservation authorities are responsible for protecting our ecosystems and species, there are insufficient resources to meet the urgent conservation needs in the city – it is everyone's responsibility to protect our biodiversity.

We have only ten years to ensure that a sustainable system of conservation areas is in place before the last natural areas on the Cape Flats are lost, but the situation is not hopeless. We can still meet many of our goals, and stem the tide of extinction and habitat destruction. And we need help from the people of Cape Town.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS OF WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Combat urban sprawl: The biggest threat to our biodiversity is urban sprawl. Urban sprawl must be converted to densification. Urban spatial plans should strike a balance between the loss of threatened veld types and urban development. The demand for housing is severe, but it should not be at the expense of threatened natural ecosystems.

You can put pressure on local government to support densification and minimise sprawl. We need affordable public transport, efficient services, and the best utilisation of our rates and taxes. But we also need more green spaces and nature reserves: Green areas are very important for human well-being.

Our coastal belt is highly threatened by people's desire to live close to the beach and sea. However, we need a buffer of up to 2 km between the sea and any development to mitigate the effects of potential sea-level rise and storm surge. Natural processes should therefore, be incorporated into future planning.

Use your democratic right to comment on spatial development plans for the city. Vote for councillors with sound environmental and conservation ethic and policies! Speak to your councillor, and ask for planning that cares for the environment.

Push for more nature reserves: Our conservation areas are far too small, and sometimes also in the wrong places. We need bigger reserves, as small reserves cannot conserve ecosystems. Many species can only be conserved in larger nature reserves, as they require fire, pollinators and other conditions that are not met outside their natural ecosystem. For endemic species (those found in Cape Town only) to continue to exist, we have to save enough space in the city.

The areas identified in the Biodiversity Network as the last suitable remnants of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, as well as other threatened veld types, must be zoned and conserved.

You can put pressure on politicians to ensure that potential reserves are proclaimed and given conservation status. The implementation of the Biodiversity Network is a priority as well, so get your councillor to check on its progress. Are all the priority areas in your ward adequately conserved?

Help to look after our nature reserves: A nature reserve that is not properly managed will not conserve ecosystems or species. Alien species must be controlled; natural fire regimes must be maintained; paths and roads need to be carefully managed to prevent erosion; sewage spills and dumping must be contained and cleaned up, and water tables must be monitored and conserved.

Become a Friend. Many nature reserves have volunteers in 'Friends groups', or in the case of Table Mountain National Park 'Honorary Rangers', who help with reserve management and maintenance. These groups help with fence patrols, path maintenance, visitor education and control, trouble-shooting and administrative duties. Some reserves have shops, museums and herbaria, live animal displays and visitor centres, which all need to be staffed. They also produce newsletters, and keep record of unusual animal visitors, plant displays and weather events, and help promote diverse and fun activities in the reserves.

Act against invasive alien species: Invasive alien plant and animal species are the second-biggest threat to our biodiversity. Alien species can cause our indigenous species to become extinct; they can alter ecosystem services; they use lots of water, make fires more intense, and transform ecosystems to species-poor areas with 'bushes of evil'.

Help fight invasive aliens. In many reserves, volunteers are the first defence against aliens. There are many hack groups who clear aliens. They pick seedlings and pull saplings of alien plants, and they hack shrubs and saw trees. Join an alien-clearing group or a Friends group of a reserve near you.

Help with restoration: Degraded areas need to be restored by having invasive alien species removed and natural fire regimes and plant and animal communities re-established. Although this is a very specialised task, volunteers can be very useful. Get involved through a Friends group who specialises in search and rescue operations.

Record and monitor threatened and rare species: All reserves and many public areas need to ensure that their species do not become further threatened or extinct. There are so many species in the city, that conservation officials need help from volunteers. Data from monitoring is used to inform reserve managers of urgent action that needs to be taken.

If you are able to recognise birds and plants, or keen to learn more about them, you could be of great help. Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers (CREW) monitors rare species, and targets areas that are not yet in the conservation network, so that we know where rare species occur. Many Friends groups also have monitoring programmes, like bird lists, regular animal counts, and detailed population records of more threatened species. There is an urgent need for more hands on the ground.



Search and rescue, and genetic banks: Threatened species must be rescued from extinction. This must be done locally in nature reserves – species cannot just be moved, as they need their unique natural environment to survive. As a last resort, species can be removed and conserved in botanical gardens, zoos and private collections. Unfortunately, this causes species to lose their ability to survive in the wild. Species are also linked to each other, so if one is removed, others may be lost. This is a costly and extreme requirement for species that have had their entire habitat destroyed. However, Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden and the Millennium Seed Bank have a plant rescue programme that saves plants, bulks them up, and reintroduces them into the wild before they become extinct. Some nature reserves also have rescue programmes, often run by Friends groups.

Offer your help. Collect seeds and cuttings from threatened species; germinate seeds and grow seedlings, and then restore them in their natural habitats. The Botanical Society of South Africa runs volunteer groups at Kirstenbosch, which assist the horticulturists in propagating plants. Contact your local nature reserve's Friends group, and see what programmes they offer. Volunteers are often also needed to help reintroducing game and smaller animals into nature reserves.

Maintain biodiversity in your garden: Some animal species are perfectly at home in urban environments. Many birds (such as the Robin-chat, Bulbul and Thrush), frogs (Western Leopard Toad, Rain Frog), reptiles (Cape Skink, Slug-eater, Cape Dwarf Chameleon) thrive in gardens. You can make your garden animal-friendly:

- Use as little pesticides as possible (or even better, encourage animal bio-controls, for example antlions for the control of aphids, or predatory snails, glow-worms or slug-eaters to control snails),
- Keep a compost heap and recycle kitchen waste,
- Maintaining a pond for fish and frogs or rockery for lizards and geckos,
- Have local indigenous shrub and herb beds rather than concrete or lawns, providing safer homes for more species,
- Have porous walls (such as palisade fences) to allow animals to move between gardens.

These are just a few suggestions – there are many books and websites explaining how to attract butterflies, birds and other animals to your garden. If you are really keen, you could try to attract rare and threatened species as well. You should also plant indigenous plants to help conserve water and attract animals, and also help to propagate threatened plant species. There are many groups you can join, such as the Botanical Society of South Africa, the Cape Bird Club and the Herpetological Society, which will all introduce you to people who share your interests.



Learn more about our unique biodiversity: It is important that you discover how our natural ecosystems work, and how the local web of life functions. In ignorance, many well-meaning people go about inappropriate activities, and many conservation activities that were thought to be good a few years ago, have turned out to have the opposite effect. Most Friends groups have regular meetings to discuss urgent needs, and organize interesting presentations and educational activities. Join your local Friends group to gain insight in their programmes.

Some groups, such as the Botanical Society and the Cape Bird Club, regularly present courses on identification, ecology, or the propagation of special species. The University of Cape Town and some schools also often cover these topics in their summer- and winter-school programmes.

Spread the message: Many City reserves, CapeNature, Table Mountain National Park and the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden offer outreach- and environmental education programmes as part of their functions.

Community involvement: Keep an eye out and report illegal dumping, hunting, poaching and other unlawful activities that damage the natural environment. Remember, you are our ears and eyes in your local natural areas. Here are some useful numbers:

- Environmental Crime Hotline 0800 205 005 (dumping, poaching, picking, squatting)
- Table Mountain Control Centre 021 957 4700
- Water pollution: 0800 225 669
- Air pollution 021 930 4821

You can also get involved with local initiatives organised by the City, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or other conservation organisations that work with greening the city, planting trees, recycling and establishing school gardens.

Many specialist groups focus on species, or groups of species. For instance, Western Leopard Toad rescue teams work during rainy weather in late July/early August when the species breeds and thousands of toads migrate to and from their mating pools.

Web resources

Botanical Society of South Africa
www.botanicalsociety.org.za

CapeNature
www.capenature.org.za

Cape Bird Club
www.capebirdclub.org.za

Cape Town Green Map
www.capetowngreenmap.co.za

City of Cape Town Nature Reserves
www.capetown.gov.za/naturereserves

Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers (CREW)
 See SANBI's website.

Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden
 See SANBI's website.

Recycling in Cape Town
 Solid Waste education materials - City of Cape Town

SANBI
www.sanbi.org

SANParks
www.sanparks.org

SA Reptiles
www.sareptiles.co.za/forum

School Gardens
www.ecoliteracy.org

South African Biodiversity Database
www.biodiversity.co.za

Table Mountain National Park
www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain

WESSA
www.wessa.org.za

Western Leopard Toad
www.leopardtoad.co.za

