

TALES FROM THE WILDFLOWER RESERVE

THE FOVS NEWSLETTER

JULY 2026 EDITION



Friends of Van Stadens

Educate and conserve

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Supervisor's Note

From Siphis Mtengwana



Friends of Van Stadens

Educate and Conserve



Hi everyone,

July gave us the opportunity to celebrate *World Ranger Day* and reflect on what it really takes to conserve a special place like the Wildflower Reserve. It takes an NMBM Ranger and FOVS working side by side. The work is as diverse as the landscape we care for with one moment clearing trails, the next sharing stories with visitors, protecting biodiversity or responding to whatever the day brings.

The work of conservation isn't always made up of big milestones. More often, it's found in the small things. A trail kept open, a seed planted, a habitat restored or a visitor leaving with a new appreciation for nature. Those moments might seem small on their own, but together they shape the future of the Reserve.

It is also a reminder that caring for this special place has never been the job of one person. It takes a community of people showing up, rolling up their sleeves and doing their part. That's what keeps the Reserve thriving, and we are grateful to everyone who helps make it possible.

With warmth,
Siphis 🌿



Call for Artists: Art in the Arboretum

FOVS invites artists to submit work for the inaugural **Art in the Arboretum exhibition**, taking place during the **Van Stadens Flower Festival** on **Sunday, 20 September 2026**.

Set within the Arboretum, the exhibition will feature an indoor gallery in the old nursery building and an open-air sculpture garden.

This year's theme, **Under the Trees**, invites artists to explore our relationship with nature through ideas of community, biodiversity, belonging, heritage and ecology. Artists working in all physical visual media are encouraged to apply, with sculptural works especially welcome.

To find out more and view the full submission guidelines, visit FOVS' website or follow our social media pages. **Submit your application to art@erinsmith.co.za by 24 August 2026.**

What's Been Happening

One of the highlights of July was the opportunity to celebrate Mandela Day by giving back to the wider community.

Together with our partners from NMBM Environmental Management and Working on Fire (WoF), the FOVS team spent the morning at Oosteland Children's Home tending gardens, mowing lawns, planting White Ironwood trees and helping create a welcoming outdoor space for the 104 children who live there.

The day was a wonderful reminder that the partnerships formed through conservation can also make a meaningful difference beyond the Reserve. By working together in the spirit of service, we were proud to honour Madiba's legacy through kindness, compassion and community.



July marked an exciting milestone as we welcomed the next intake of ten new interns to our Conservation Internship Programme (CIP). The initiative, launched by the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber, funded by Hollard Insurance and delivered in partnership with Youth@Work, aims to tackle youth unemployment while strengthening environmental conservation across the Metro.

Over the coming months, the interns will gain practical experience in indigenous plant conservation, trail maintenance, fire management, invasive alien plant control, eco-tourism and environmental education while working alongside the WoF (Van Stadens Base) and NMBM Environmental Management teams.

We are grateful to the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber and its partners for investing in the next generation of environmental custodians. Together, we are creating opportunities for young people while helping to protect and restore the natural heritage of the Wildflower Reserve.



Blooms to look out for



Muraltia squarrosa (hornless purplegorse)



Helichrysum felinum
(Strawberry everlasting)



Felicia amelloides
(Blue Felicia)



Phyllica axillaris
(hardebos)



Disparago tortilis
(tortured desperado)



Vachellia karroo
(Sweet Thorn)

A true pioneer, the Sweet Thorn tree (*Vachellia karroo*) thrives in harsh landscapes, withstands fire, and enriches the soil by fixing nitrogen.

Living up to 40 years, it often signals the presence of underground water.

When wounded, the Sweet Thorn exudes a golden gum—mildly sweet and once prized as “Cape Gum,” it was used in confectionery and adhesives. Next time you visit the Wildflower Reserve, take a walk along the Nymph Trail and see this remarkable tree standing strong, offering shade, and sharing its hidden sweetness.





LAST WORD FROM THE FIELD

In the Wildflower Reserve, every season teaches us something about change. Seeds are scattered, roots grow deeper, flowers bloom for a moment before making way for new life. Nature reminds us that growth often means letting go, even when it is difficult.

This month we celebrated seven remarkable young women as they completed their journey through the **FOVS Conservation Internship Programme (CIP)**.

Over the past 12 months, they have walked the Reserve's trails, cared for indigenous plants, welcomed visitors, developed new skills, and shared in the quiet, meaningful work of conservation. Along the way, they have grown in confidence, resilience and purpose.

As this chapter comes to a close, we are reminded that our role is not to hold on, but to help others grow. Like seeds carried beyond the boundaries of the Reserve, we hope each of these young women leave with something that will take root wherever life leads them next—a love for nature, confidence in their abilities, and the knowledge that they have made a difference.

To these seven remarkable interns, thank you for becoming part of this place, and for allowing this place to become part of you. Although your time at FOVS has come to an end, your footprints remain on these trails, and your story will always be part of the story of this Reserve.

Go well. Grow boldly. Until our paths cross again.



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