

Discussion between Agriculture and Conservation is encouraged here

In August 2008, Oudtshoorn will play host to a contingent of scientists, conservationists and interested individuals, when the Interfaces 2008 congress takes place. The theme for this year is “Linkages across biomes” and is focused on environmental issues within the Fynbos and Karoo biomes.

This will be the first time that the Fynbos Forum (FF) and the Arid Zone Ecology Forum (AZEF) will be combined. The two forums, which take place annually, are usually held separately and in areas where the research takes place.

The FF deals with environmental issues in the Cape Floristic Region or Fynbos biome as it is most commonly known, while AZEF deals with issues in the arid regions such as the Succulent Karoo.

Due to the Cape Floristic Region and the Succulent Karoo both overlapping in Oudtshoorn, it serves as the perfect venue for this momentous occasion.

Oudtshoorn is home to the Swartberge – one of eight World Heritage Sites in South Africa – and is also identified as a biodiversity hotspot due to three threatened biomes falling within the area. Various farming practices take place in this area, which include ostrich, game and sheep farming.

Due to the increased use of the sustainable farming practices and maintaining natural resources, the eco and agri-tourism industry has grown substantially. This has also sparked on calls to deal with issues related to sustainable production, economic gain and how man and nature can live in harmony.

While it has been said that there is a huge gap between agriculture and the conservation sector, numerous initiatives have proven that the gap is not that big with the two working together to implement successful projects. Examples of these are the Blue Crane Project, the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative, and CapeNature’s Stewardship Project- where private property can be registered as conservation areas.

Land users have also started looking at not only sustaining their land but also conserving it. In the long term, the wellbeing and sustainability of farming depends on the land users’ power to act as stewards of their land and natural resources.

At Interfaces 2008 there will be talks about the relationship between conservation and utilization of natural resources in this context. Local land owners and researchers working in the area will be able to share their opinions and thoughts on how these issues can be dealt with.

These discussions will take place on August 5, 2008. A programme has been developed where two speakers with conservation backgrounds will be giving presentations. Two local farmers will be sharing their experiences of how they managed to make a success of their farming practices by using environmentally friendly guidelines. Discussions will also take place with regards to conservation and prevention of natural resources and how this delicate balance can be maintained. Farmers will also be able to ask researchers and nature conservationists questions, and in return they can hear about farmers' experiences in the area.

This opportunity is not limited to the conservation and agriculture sectors, and anyone who is interested can attend. We hope that discussions, lessons sharing and knowledge exchanges will take place.

For catering purposes could you please confirm your attendance by contacting Yvette Lötter before August 1, on 044 272 4480 or bio2@saobc.co.za.

For more information on "Interfaces 2008" please visit the website: <http://www.botanicalsociety.org.za/interfaces2008>