



MEDIA RELEASE

Celebrating World Wetlands Day: Zandvlei leads the way for the City

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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This Tuesday 02 February is World Wetlands Day - a time to focus on the conservation of these crucial yet vulnerable ecosystems. Successful elimination of the alien water hyacinth in the Zandvlei Wetlands, which border on Muizenberg, Marina da Gama and Lakeside in Cape Town has led the City of Cape Town to implement similar conservation strategies at waterways across the city.



CAPTION: Alien weeds clog parts of the Westlake River (L). Yellow billed ducks swim through a cleared part of the Keyzers River (R). Photos: Gavin Lawson [High resolution images available on request]

The Zandvlei area is known mostly as a water recreation zone for those sailing yachts and paddling in canoes. Conserving the natural habitat of fish and birds and ensuring good water quality, however, is not only vital for the ecosystem, but also necessary to reduce flood risk and ensure its continued use as a recreational area.

The Westlake Wetlands Project, in partnership with Peninsula Beverages (PenBev - the local bottler and distributor of The Coca-Cola Company products in the Western and Northern Cape) since 2009, has led the way in clearing the water hyacinth from these wetlands, with spin-off benefits for the rest of the city's rivers and water systems.

John Fowkes, Project Coordinator for the Zandvlei Trust's Westlake Wetlands Project explains that fish cannot survive in water that has a 'carpet' of weeds covering it, reducing sunlight and oxygen dissolved in the water. "When the fish go, the birds that live on the fish go as well. It has a dramatic impact on the ecosystem if you don't keep water open and flowing," he says.

In addition to manual clearing of the invasive water hyacinth, the Zandvlei Trust introduced a floating boom mechanism, made of 2 litre plastic cold drink bottles placed in a netting sleeve. The boom holds the weeds back from spreading into open water. The Black River was also 'choked' with hyacinth and the City used the boom idea to help control this pest says Fowkes. "Nowadays you'll see flamingos returning to the Black River. The initiative that PenBev helped us to introduce has spread far and wide. The City is using similar methods to those we introduced in Zandvlei's Westlake wetlands," says Fowkes.

Denise Behrens, Corporate Communication Manager at PenBev says, "We are really proud that this initiative that we started sponsoring seven years ago has been so successful that the City has adopted the same methods elsewhere in Cape Town. The greater impact it has had on water quality and wildlife in the City is really inspiring."

The City Alien Species Unit also introduced several insects into the area that eat hyacinth plants. These are known as biocontrol agents and are now used across Cape Town. Unfortunately since the waterways have been cleared, other weeds have taken the hyacinth's place. The City's Kader Asmal Integrated Catchment Management Project is now removing alien weeds like Water Lettuce, Parrot's Feather, Kariba Weed and Yellow Mexican Water Lily. A research project to identify and resolve the siltation and pollution problems in the Zandvlei Wetlands is also underway.

For more information about Peninsula Beverages, visit www.penbev.co.za or contact 021 936 5500. PenBev is also on Facebook www.facebook.com/PenBev.

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Note to editors: World Wetlands Day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 02 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Since 1997, the Ramsar Secretariat helps raise public awareness about the importance and value of wetlands.