

BRENTON BLUE NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2007

To all friends and neighbours of the Brenton Blue butterfly – welcome to your annual newsletter! We can all be proud of our fantastic butterfly reserve – one of only two official ones in South Africa – and we are glad to report that your very own butterfly is surviving and thriving! This newsletter includes some basic facts as well as the latest news on management of the reserve and the research that is taking place.

Proclamation of the Reserve

The Brenton Blue Butterfly Reserve (BBBR) was proclaimed as a Special Nature Reserve by the national government in July 2005, and falls under the control of CapeNature.

The Brenton Blue Trust (BBT)

Established by private individuals and NGO's in 1994, with the principal aim of conserving the Brenton Blue butterfly, the BBT has now achieved its primary objective of having the habitat at Brenton-on-Sea declared as a nature reserve. Its funds are applied to management of the BBBR and research into the butterfly. The BBT's longer-term goals are to establish other breeding colonies of the Brenton Blue at suitable sites, such as Nature's Valley.



Brenton blue female

Management of the BBBR

The BBBR is managed by a committee, whose members are:

Keith Spencer	CapeNature, Goukamma (Chairman)
Allisdair MacDonald	CapeNature, George
Johan Huisamen	CapeNature, Groenvlei
Ernest Pringle	Lepidopterists' Society of Africa (LepSoc)
Lorna Watt	Wildlife and Environment Society of SA (WESSA)
Dave Edge	Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and LepSoc
Brian Young	Local residents' representative
Doris Wakeford-Brown	Greater Knysna Municipality (GKM)

Field Rangers from CapeNature are also invited to attend the committee meetings as observers, to inform and educate them on butterfly conservation issues.

Disturbance or collection of butterflies, plants or any other creatures at the reserve is strictly prohibited, and any such activities should be immediately reported to CapeNature at 044 3830042 or to Dave Edge at 044 3810014. The principal management technique used at the reserve (done in July/ August each year) is the cutting and maintenance of paths to simulate herbivore activities. These paths through the reserve are not intended for human access, except under close supervision, because it is along these paths that the food plant of the Brenton Blue grows, a small legume with pink flowers whose scientific name is *Indigofera erecta*. It is a delicate plant and can easily be damaged by trampling. The population



Indigofera erecta, food plant of the Brenton Blue

of the butterfly remains stable and fluctuates between 120 and 150 adults per brood (there are two main broods per year – in November and in February). Counting of the population for monitoring purposes will take place between 20th October and the end of November. Other recent activities at the reserve have been the refurbishment of the notice board, coating of the reserve boundary fence with Waxol preservative, and taking a set of fixed-point photographs to record vegetation changes.

Local residents (or their guests) who wish to see **their** butterfly are invited to contact Dave Edge on 044 3810014 during the butterfly's flight periods to arrange for a guided tour.

Re-introduction of the Brenton Blue to Nature's Valley

Research continues, with the co-operation of the Nature's Valley Trust, with the intention of re-introducing the Brenton Blue to Nature's Valley. The butterfly used to exist there, but died out in the early 1970's for reasons not entirely clear, but which probably included destruction of some of its habitat for housing developments, and transformation (overgrowth) of the remaining habitat through lack of fires and reduction of grazing and browsing animal activities. Part of the Brenton Blue's original habitat at Nature's Valley is conserved in a Fynbos Reserve (NVFR), and over the past few years this habitat has been restored to what we think is close to its original condition. Re-introduction of the Brenton Blue began in November 2005 and February 2006, by relocation



Nature's Valley Fynbos Reserve

of eggs and caterpillars to the NVFR. Unfortunately no adult Brenton Blue butterflies were detected in November 2006, so it appears that these caterpillars did not survive. It is believed that the absence of the host ant *Camponotus baynei* is the main reason that the caterpillars did not survive. Efforts will now be made to establish a population of this ant at the NVFR. A new threat has now arisen, in that the Bitou Municipality has declared their intention to sell the fynbos reserve to a development group who intends to build a hotel on the site. This unfortunate proposal is being monitored closely and official objections have been registered.

Control of alien vegetation

The management committee actively controls alien vegetation in the reserve. Work has commenced on the eradication of Kikuyu grass on the road verges along Fynbosoord at the bottom and W K Grobler Drive at the top. This will be accomplished by selective spraying of *Roundup* herbicide followed by manual removal of any surviving Kikuyu grass.

Management of Uitzicht 216/81

Uitzicht 216/81 is a public open space owned by the Greater Knysna Municipality (GKM), opposite the BBBR, north of W K Grobler. The land appears to be suitable for expansion of the Brenton Blue population, provided that it can be managed to promote the growth of the food plant *I. erecta*. The management committee has proposed to the GKM that a contract be entered into, giving CapeNature the authority to manage the land on behalf of the GKM.

25 September 2007