

Harmony Flats Nature Reserve



Harmony Flats Nature Reserve, on the Cape Flats between Strand and Gordon's Bay, is one of the City of Cape Town's 24 nature reserves.

The nearly 220 different plant species found in this small 9 hectare nature reserve belong to a **vegetation type** called Lourensford alluvium fynbos. Like many other plant species in Cape Town, Lourensford alluvium fynbos is **critically endangered**. In spring, the pretty **indigenous** flowering plants, such as daisies, orchids, bulbs and blouoog-kalossies (scientists call them *Ixia versicolor*), turn Harmony Flats into a treasure chest of colour. But treasures need special protection. That is why we must do everything we can to protect these plants. If we let them disappear – and many of them are on the brink of it – they will be gone forever.

That is why the communities living around Harmony Flats Nature Reserve must become involved – after all, the reserve and the treasures it contains belong to each and every one of us. We must all protect it, and may all enjoy it. Joining conservation efforts offers you an unique opportunity to help protect a community treasure, while also getting the chance to enjoy nature.

The wonders of wetlands

- Harmony Flats is a seasonal wetland. This means that it is wet during the rainy season, and dry during summer.
- Wetlands are important for many reasons: They help prevent flooding, control the water running from the city's drain systems, and remove pollutants from river water.
- Wetlands are home to many of Cape Town's birds, amphibians, mammals and reptiles – most of them indigenous.
- As the city has become bigger and bigger, unfortunately most seasonal wetlands in Cape Town have been changed into permanent vleis. These vleis are popular areas for fishing, boating and other water sports.
- Many indigenous species that live and breed in seasonal wetlands however cannot survive in permanent vleis. These species need the specific conditions that only wetlands offer; if these conditions change, **invasive alien species** often take over and cause the indigenous species to disappear.
- Wetlands are also very vulnerable to pollution and eutrophication. Eutrophication is when there are too many nutrients in the water, which leaves too little oxygen for fish and plant life to survive. This could also make the water unsafe for people to use. Eutrophication is for example caused by water running from farming areas, as this water often contains the nutrient-rich fertilisers that farmers use.



Why are nature reserves and other natural open spaces important?

- Previous generations have left us many unique natural and cultural treasures – nature reserves help us conserve that heritage.
- Cape Town's natural beauty and unique **biodiversity** attract many tourists that come here to experience the city's natural areas.
- Urban open spaces are places where we can learn about nature, and just relax.
- The natural areas in and around the city become part of the life and identity of the people of Cape Town; they are part of what we call 'home'.
- Green urban areas are very important for our health and well-being. Plants, **wetlands** and soil naturally filter out certain **pollutants** to make the city cleaner and healthier. Such services provided by natural systems are called **ecosystem** services.
- The benefits of well-managed public open spaces are not limited to the spaces themselves. Nearby houses and other property are in demand; local communities live in greater harmony; and crime is reduced in the surrounding areas.
- Plants can store carbon. Carbon is one part of carbon dioxide, the gas that comes from vehicle exhausts, factories, heating and cooling of our homes, and even our own breathing. This gas is a major cause of **global warming** and **climate change**. However, by absorbing carbon, plants and trees reduce the amounts of carbon dioxide that go into the atmosphere, and can therefore help prevent global warming.



Learn the lingo

- **biodiversity** – the variety of different forms of life, like humans, plants and animals, and the way they live together, plus all natural systems through which they survive
- **climate change** – the disruption of weather patterns due to global warming
- **corridors** – special strips of land
- **critically endangered** – animals or plants that need urgent conservation and protection to prevent them from disappearing forever
- **ecosystem** – all forms of life and the environment, working together as systems in nature
- **global warming** – worldwide rise in the earth's temperature due to gas build-up
- **heritage** – cultural, natural and other treasures passed on by previous generations
- **indigenous** – animals and plants that naturally belong in an area
- **invasive alien species** – plants and animal types that do not naturally belong in an area, but take over the living space of indigenous species
- **pollutants** – harmful substances that make air, water and soil impure
- **vegetation type** – a grouping of plants of similar structure that grow together as they prefer the same type of environment
- **wetlands** – areas controlled and shaped by water

The Biodiversity Network

The Biodiversity Network is the conservation plan for the Cape Town area. As the local government for the area, one of the City of Cape Town's responsibilities is to protect the biodiversity found here. The Biodiversity Network tells us how many natural areas we have left which we must protect as our contribution to the country's conservation targets. Besides the City of Cape Town's 24 nature reserves, the Network also includes other areas with important biodiversity, as well as **corridors** that link the biodiversity sites. These corridors form passages along which plant and animal types can spread so that they are not found in one spot only, but over as wide an area as possible. The Biodiversity Network also tells planners and builders which areas with special plants and animals they must avoid when they further expand and build the city.

Cape Town nature reserves

- Blaauwberg Conservation Area
- Mamre Nature Garden
- Atlantis Dunefields & Silwerstroom Conservation Areas
- Rietvlei Wetland Reserve
- Zoarvlei Wetlands
- Raapenberg Bird Sanctuary
- Rondebosch Common
- Kenilworth Racecourse Conservation Area
- Rondevlei Nature Reserve
- Zeekoevlei Nature Reserve
- Zandvlei Estuary Nature Reserve
- Edith Stephens Wetland Park
- Wolfgat Nature Reserve
- Macassar Dunes Conservation Area
- Tygerberg Nature Reserve
- Durbanville Nature Reserve
- Uitkamp Wetlands
- Bracken Nature Reserve
- Helderberg Nature Reserve
- Silwerboomkloof Nature Reserve
- Lourens River Protected Natural Environments
- Dick Dent Bird Sanctuary
- Harmony Flats Nature Reserve
- Kogelberg Nature Reserve

On this map, you can see where and how Harmony Flats Nature Reserve fits in with the other City of Cape Town reserves.



The future of Harmony Flats

The conservation team at Harmony Flats wants to make the reserve as beautiful as it once was so that everyone can enjoy it. This work has already started, and with a little help from you and your friends, we can turn Harmony Flats into your new favourite place. Help us by:

- learning about the reserve, and visiting it for fun and to relax;
- telling your friends and family about the nature reserve;
- never littering or dumping rubbish in the reserve;
- never starting a fire in the reserve, and reporting fires to the conservation team or the Fire Department; and
- joining the Harmony Flats Working Group.

The City of Cape Town has a booklet that shows its 24 nature reserves, and tells you everything you need to know about each of them.

For more information, or to download this booklet, go to www.capetown.gov.za/environment.

CONTACT INFORMATION

CONSERVATION TEAM: 021 514 4189
 or harmonyflatsnr@capetown.gov.za
 FIRE DEPARTMENT: 021 590 1900
 EMERGENCY SERVICES: 021 480 7700



CITY OF CAPE TOWN | ISIXEKO SASEKAPA | STAD KAAPSTAD

THIS CITY WORKS FOR YOU



Harmony Flats Nature Reserve Corridors

Birds of Harmony Flats



Even though Harmony Flats is a small reserve, and is surrounded by many people and houses, some fascinating birds still choose to live here. This makes every bird you see here even more special, and makes it even more important that you help protect the environment. If you find bird-nests or young birds that seem abandoned, please leave them alone and walk away quickly. The mother is probably hiding nearby, keeping a close look on her young ones, and if you disturb them, she may abandon them completely.

If you want to learn more about the birds of Harmony Flats and other areas, there are many bird clubs and groups you can join. They do bird counts, go on outings, and arrange other exciting activities. It is important to know what birds, and how many of them, can be found in Harmony Flats – we use the information to make sure that the nature reserve stays healthy.

Some of the beautiful birds that can be found in Harmony Flats:

Karoo prinia, Karoolangstertjie, *Prinia maculosa*
This bird is endemic to South Africa and the southern part of Namibia. It uses grass to build its oval-shaped nest in shrubs or bushes. It gets up to 15 cm in length, has short rounded wings, and a short black bill. The head is brown with a white eyebrow, and the lower parts of the face and throat are white with dark stripes. It is yellowish white or yellow, with black stripes below. The Karoo prinia is one of the most common bush birds in the Western Cape.

Clapper lark, Kaapse klappertjie, *Mirafra apiata*
This bird is only found in Southern Africa. It feeds on the ground, and eats seeds and many different kinds of insects. The clapper lark builds its nest on the ground with fine grass and roots. It places the nest under a bush to protect the young from predators, and lays 2–5 green-coloured eggs. Its head is chestnut, and the bill is brown. It has pink legs, brown eyes, and a brown back.



John Graham

Orange-throated longclaw, oranjekeelkalkoentjie, *Macronyx capensis*
The orange-throated longclaw is endemic to Southern Africa. This bird looks for food on the ground, and mainly eats insects. The orange-throated longclaw builds its nest under bushes for protection, and lays 1–4 cream-coloured eggs at a time. This bird has an olive-coloured head and a black bill, and gets its name from its orange throat. Its eyes and legs are brown, and the back is grey/brown.



Zitting cisticola, landeryklopplopie, *Cisticola juncidis*
The zitting cisticola can be found in many parts of the world. It is a small bird, only 10 cm long, which feeds mainly on small insects. It ties leaves together with spider webs and grass to make a cup-shaped nest deep in the grass, where it lays 3–6 eggs. It also uses tied-together leaves and grasses to cover the nest. The zitting cisticola gets its name from its call, which sounds like 'zit-zit-zit-zit'. This bird is brown, with black streaks on top, and a whitish colour below, and has a broad, white-tipped and flicking tail.

Pied crow, witsorskraai, *Corvus albus*
The pied crow is found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, and is common in the Western Cape. It is an omnivore, and therefore feeds on insects, small reptiles, small mammals, young birds and eggs, grain, fruit and any scraps of food. In city areas, this bird usually lives near humans, and is often confused with house crows, which are an invasive alien species. Pied crows are found in parks, empty buildings, and gardens. The pied crow lays 1–7 green-coloured eggs, and is monogamous. It is about 50 cm long, and is black in colour, except for a large white area starting from the shoulders, and covering the breast.



The house crow – an invasive alien

The house crow (*Corvus splendens*) is an invasive alien species, and is a threat to other species and their habitats. This bird travels on ships, spreading all over the world. It first appeared in Africa in the late 1800s, and in Cape Town in the 1980s. The house crow is aggressive, and eats almost everything: insects, bird's eggs, food scraps, seeds, etc. The house crow is a danger to our health, as it often carries diseases such as salmonella, cholera, entamoeba, dysentery and typhoid. Its wings and tail as well as its forehead, crown, throat and upper breast are all glossy black. Its neck and lower breast are light grey-brown. The main difference between the house crow and the larger pied crow is the pied crow's large white area from its shoulders to the lower breast.



Trevor Hardaker



Black-headed heron, swartkopreier, *Ardea melonacephala*
Unlike most other herons, the black-headed heron does not prefer wetlands. It likes open grasslands, farmlands and forest areas, and is found throughout sub-Saharan Africa. It will eat almost any animal it can catch and swallow, like insects, rodents, birds, frogs and reptiles. The black-headed heron builds its nest in trees, on cliffs or in reed patches for protection. It is about 90 cm long, and its head, throat, bill and legs are black. It has yellow eyes, and a brown back.

Cattle egret, veereier, *Bubuculus ibis*
The cattle egret is found in wetlands, riverine forests and moist grasslands in Africa and parts of Asia and Australia. It rests around vleis, but can be found feeding in farmlands, grasslands and open savannas during the day. The cattle egret builds its nest high up in trees, where it lays 2–6 blue-green eggs. It has a white head, back and throat, black legs, red eyes, and a yellow bill, which turns orange-red when it is breeding.



Blacksmith lapwing, bontkiewiet, *Vanellus armatus*
The blacksmith lapwing is found throughout Southern and Eastern Africa. They prefer muddy or grassy wetlands – even small pools and puddles – and can get very aggressive if other birds from the same species try to share their habitat. They feed on insects, worms and other small invertebrates that live in water and on land. The blacksmith lapwing has clear patterns in black, grey and white, and red eyes. It gets its name from its call, which sounds like the strike of a blacksmith's hammer.



Crowned plover, kroonkiewiet, *Vanellus coronatus*
This bird is found in Eastern and Southern Africa. It prefers short and dry grasslands, and feeds on insects that live in such areas. It also likes open spaces and large lawns. The crowned plover is noisy, and can be aggressive towards other plovers when building its nests. It is brown, with white below, and gets its name from its black crown with a white halo on it.



White-rumped swift, witkruiswindswael, *Apus coffer*
During summer, the white-rumped swift can be seen throughout Southern Africa. They spend most of their lives in the air, feeding on insects as they fly. These birds have very short legs that they use to cling onto upright surfaces, and almost never settle on the ground. In fact, many white-rumped swifts cannot take off from the ground. They usually stay in swallows' nests, but also nest in cracks and holes in buildings and cliffs. They cover the nest with feathers and saliva (spittle) before laying their eggs, usually 1 or 2 at a time. The white-rumped swift has a short forked tail and long wings, and flies very fast. It has dark colours, except for its lighter-coloured throat and narrow white rump.



Learn the lingo

- **endemic** – found nowhere else in the world
- **habitat** – space where plants and animals live and breed
- **invasive alien species** – plants and animal types that do not naturally belong in an area, but take over the living space of species that do naturally belong there
- **invertebrates** – animals with no backbone
- **monogamous** – animals finding and breeding with one partner only, either for their whole lives, or for the breeding season
- **omnivore** – a living creature that eats both plants and meat
- **predators** – wild animals living by killing and eating other animals
- **riverine** – next to or in relation to a river
- **savannas** – open flat stretches of grassy land found in warm parts of the world
- **sub-Saharan Africa** – African countries south of the Sahara Desert

For more information, go to www.capetown.gov.za/environment.
CONTACT INFORMATION
CONSERVATION TEAM: 021 514 4189
or harmonyflatsnr@capetown.gov.za
FIRE DEPARTMENT: 021 590 1900
EMERGENCY SERVICES: 021 480 7700



Creatures of Harmony Flats



Mole snake, molslang, *Pseudapsis cana*
This snake is common to Southern Africa. Like all other indigenous reptiles in the region, the mole snake is listed as a protected species under the **Western Cape Nature Conservation Act**. Mole snakes are very shy and **not venomous**. They prefer burrowing and looking for food underground. They eat rats, moles and lizards, as well as small birds and their eggs. Most adult mole snakes are black, but the young ones can vary in colour. Mole snakes often get killed by cars on the road – this usually happens during their breeding season in spring, when they appear above ground more often.



Spotted skaapsteker, gevlekte skaapsteker, *Psammophylax rhombeatus*
This harmless snake is common in the Western Cape, and is often found in moist areas. It is not really dangerous, because its venom is quite weak. Even though the snake is often found in sheep kraals, its venom cannot kill sheep. It eats lizards, frogs and small **rodents**. It has rows of dark brown spots on the olive-brown background of its head and body. Its belly is bluish-grey, and some even have orange or red spots on the sides of the belly and neck.

Keep our animals safe

- Birds and reptiles become extinct when they lose their habitat.
- If Harmony Flats loses its butterflies, seeds, flowers or any other part of its biodiversity, many of the birds and reptiles will have no food or nesting material.
- Birds and reptiles also prefer to eat and breed in indigenous gardens and reserves. That is why it is so important to protect our indigenous flora and fauna.
- Frequent fires are a main threat to the animals living in Harmony Flats, and contribute to their extinction. Never start fires – and report any fire you see.
- Dogs are not allowed in the nature reserve, as they disturb the wildlife, and sometimes even destroy rare and endangered plant species.
- Littering and other pollution is another threat to the animals of Harmony Flats. Animals can injure themselves on sharp objects, like broken glass and scrap metal, and dangerous substances can harm and even kill plants and animals.

Learn the lingo

- **biodiversity** – the variety of different forms of life, like humans, plants and animals, and the way they live together, plus all natural systems through which they survive
- **caterpillars** – small, wormlike creature (the larva of the butterfly) that feeds on plant leaves
- **digest** – changed into a form that so the body can absorb the nutrients
- **ecosystem** – all forms of life and the environment, working together as systems in nature
- **endemic** – found nowhere else in the world
- **extinct** – no longer existing
- **faeces** – solid waste passed from the body through the bowel
- **flora and fauna** – plant and animal life
- **fossil** – remains of an animal or plant of long ago that have been preserved in rock or ice
- **habitat** – space where plants and animals live and breed
- **indigenous** – plants and animals that naturally belong in an area
- **invasive alien vegetation** – plants and animal types that do not naturally belong in an area, but take over the living space of indigenous species
- **predators** – animals that live by killing and eating other animals
- **rodents** – small plant-eating animals with strong sharp teeth
- **scute** – a shield-like plate protecting a turtle/tortoise
- **venomous** – poisonous
- **Western Cape Nature Conservation Act** – law by which the government of the province manages nature conservation

The rich plant life in Harmony Flats Nature Reserve attracts many different reptiles and insects. Some of them may be very small and even difficult to spot, but they are still important for the **biodiversity** of the reserve. Every living creature in the reserve is part of the **ecosystem** and together they keep Harmony Flats healthy. Healthy, **indigenous** plants and animals also help the reserve survive drought, wind and fire.

What to do with snakes?

When you see a snake in the veld, leave it alone. Most snakes are harmless to people, and the few that are venomous will only bite if they feel threatened. Most people that get bitten by snakes have frightened, disturbed or even tried to kill the snake. In that case the snake will fight back. Snakes eat many rats, mice and other pests, and are therefore good to have around gardens and residential areas.



Common slug-eater, tabakrolletjie/gewone slakvreter, *Duberia lutrix*
This snake is harmless. They have no venom, and they do not bite – not even when they feel threatened. As its name shows, it eats slugs and snails, which makes it a garden's best friend. These snakes prefer to stay in damp areas where slugs and snails are found. The common slug-eater is a small brown snake with grey sides. A thin black line separates the sides and back, while another black line separates the sides and the white edges of the belly. The middle of the belly is usually a yellowish-brown colour. Its Afrikaans name, 'tabakrolletjie' (tobacco roll), comes from the slug-eater's habit of rolling up tightly and hiding its head when it feels threatened.



Geometric tortoise, suurpootjieskilpad, *Psammobates geometricus*
The geometric tortoise prefers the Southwestern Cape's alluvium fynbos and renosterveld areas. They have a yellow head, neck and limbs, and the top of their scutes are raised like tents. Each scute also has a yellow star on a brown or black background. These sensitive animals need specific food and living conditions. They are seriously threatened by **invasive alien vegetation**, fires and changes to their **habitat**. Many years ago, the Harmony Flats area was home to a group of rare geometric tortoises. Unfortunately, the geometric tortoise is now **extinct** here, mostly because of people's interference and frequent fires.

Tortoise tales

South Africa, especially the Cape, has the most tortoise species in the world. Of the 40 tortoise species that exist, 12 are found in South Africa, and 6 of these are endemic to the Western Cape. This is because of the various habitats that are found here.

Tortoises have been around since the time of dinosaurs. **Fossil** records show that tortoises have not changed much in the past 200 million years! All South African tortoise species are protected by law. This means that you cannot collect, keep, sell or remove any tortoises from their habitat, and that they must be left alone. If you find a tortoise in danger, please contact your nearest nature conservation office.

Tortoises have no teeth, but they use their sharp-edged, horny beaks to tear and chew food. They mostly eat plants, but sometimes also nibble on bones, snails, insects and **faeces**. Tortoise droppings often have seeds in them, as tortoises do not completely **digest** their food. This helps to spread seeds and create new plant life.

The tortoise's shell is made out of keratin, the same material as your finger nails. This means that tortoises can feel your touch on their shell, and therefore it is better to leave them alone.

Padlopers

Padloper tortoises are endemic to Southern Africa. The four types of padlopers found in the Western Cape are the smallest tortoises around; they never really grow longer than 15 cm. They have flat shells, and their scutes do not have knobs. The parrot-beaked tortoise of Harmony Flats belongs to this species. The other three padlopers are the Karoo padloper, the Greater padloper and the Southern speckled padloper.

If padlopers accidentally end up on their backside, they can quickly turn themselves over again because of their strong legs and light weight. Other tortoises usually cannot do this, and could even die if they are left lying in the sun and heat.

Parrot-beaked tortoise, gewone padloper, *Homopus areolatus*

This tortoise is **endemic** to South Africa, and eats grasses, herbs and shrubs. They are good climbers, and easily walk up steep slopes. The parrot-beaked tortoise is small in size, usually no more than 10 cm long, with a hooked beak like a parrot's, four claws on each of the front and back feet, and an olive-coloured shell with reddish-brown centres to the **scute**. Parrot-beaked tortoises mate and lay their eggs (2–4 eggs each year) in spring and early summer, and the eggs hatch when the first winter rains fall. Fires, pet dogs and illegal collectors are big threats to these tortoises.



Painted lady, sondagsrokkie, *Vanessa cardui*
This is one of the most widespread butterflies in the world, and it is found on all continents except South America and Australasia. It occurs in all parts of South Africa, including most suburban gardens. Its wings are orange and brown on the upper side, with duller shades of brown and grey at the bottom. The front edge of the forewing is black, with a white bar and small white spots. When the painted lady is sitting down with its wings folded together, you can see four small eyespots on the back wing. These eyespots are there to scare predators away.



Common African monarch, melkboskoeënapper, *Danaus chrysippus*
This butterfly species, which has been around for thousands of years, has a substance in its body that makes **predators** vomit when they eat it, and most predators therefore avoid it. This substance comes from the food plants that the **caterpillars** feed on. People say that is why the common African monarch is such a slow flyer – it does not have to fly away from predators. It has a wingspan of 7–8 cm. The body is black with white spots, and the wings are yellowish-brown, with a white band on the black tips. From December to late May, these butterflies can be seen everywhere in the Cape Peninsula, but can also be found at other times.



Silver-bottom brown, silwerbruin, *Pseudonympha magus*
This butterfly is endemic to Southern Africa. It likes open grassy spaces and damp areas, and the Cape Flats is one of its favourite spots. It has a wingspan of 4–4.5 cm, and a pale silver-grey back wing that looks silvery white when it flies. It flies slowly over grassy patches, and settles on flowers or on the ground to feed. It can be seen throughout the summer months.

For more information, go to www.capetown.gov.za/environment.

CONTACT INFORMATION

CONSERVATION TEAM: 021 514 4189
or harmonyflatsnr@capetown.gov.za
FIRE DEPARTMENT: 021 590 1900
EMERGENCY SERVICES: 021 480 7700



CITY OF CAPE TOWN | ISIXEKO SASEKAPA | STAD KAAPSTAD

THIS CITY WORKS FOR YOU