



BERGRIVIER MUNICIPALITY BIODIVERSITY REPORT | 2010



ENHANCING URBAN NATURE THROUGH A GLOBAL NETWORK OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Berg River Municipality (BRM) is situated within the jurisdictional district of the West Coast District Municipality and covers an area of 4 407 km² and is home to an estimated 55 999 primarily rural people, many of them poor and unskilled. The biodiversity features within the BRM are of global conservation significance and the Groot Winterhoek Wilderness which is a Cape Floral Region World Heritage Site. The environment has been occupied by hominins and later by humans for at least 1 million years and has a rich archaeological heritage. Commercial agriculture dominates and is the primary economic activity and driver of habitat transformation and loss of biodiversity. However eco-tourism is recognised as the most important economic driver in increasing revenue for the municipality and as a means of delivering livelihood benefit to the rural community.

The BRM is part of the Cape Floristic Region (CFR), the only floristic region in the world to occur wholly within the borders of a single country and is one of the 34 globally identified biodiversity hotspots. It is home to 9000 plant species, 70% of which are unique to the floral kingdom. The municipality is characterised by a great diversity of soils, altitudinal and rainfall gradients and as a result is home to an astonishing variety of life. Twenty one vegetation types occur within the BRM, one of which, Piketberg Sandstone Fynbos, is endemic to the municipality. The lowland areas and associated vegetation types have been heavily impacted by human occupation and activity. The result has been that they are some of the most threatened ecosystems in the South Africa and require concerted effort if they are to be conserved. The BRM is also home to a large variety of vertebrates and invertebrates. The larger ungulates are however now locally extinct.

The Verlorenvlei Riedfin is unique to that river system and the Sout River has its own species of Galaxia. Particularly important is the 9000 km² Berg River catchment that feeds the Berg River Estuary which is regarded as the 3rd most important estuary in South Africa and the catchment of the Verlorenvlei Wetland which is a RAMSAR site. The hotter drier predictions of climate change for the West Coast could have far reaching impacts on these systems in future. There is a great diversity of wetland habitats throughout the BRM all of which are under threat to a greater or lesser degree, once again the lowland systems in particular are highly threatened.

Terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems have been identified as Critical Biodiversity Areas and Critical Ecological Support Areas in the BRM. It is of utmost importance that these areas are conserved and that the desired management objective for these areas are met by the administrators of the BRM. Great strides have already been taken in conserving the rich biodiversity heritage of the BRM with 48 727 ha's formally conserved in Provincial Nature

Reserves and in stewardship agreements and a further 46 073 ha's committed to conservation on a voluntary basis.

The BRM recognises that the well-being of every human population in the world is fundamentally and directly dependent on ecosystem services. The development of a dedicated strategy for biodiversity conservation in the BRM is a key challenge that must be addressed. The BRM realises that it is not alone in this endeavour but that a significant opportunity exists to partner and work with the many projects, civil society and institutional structures, industry initiatives, NGO's and government departments and agencies that are actively engaged in addressing the challenges to biodiversity conservation and sustainability within the municipal boundaries.

Through this collaboration the municipality aims to achieve its mission of delivering cost-effective, sustainable services with a well represented army of employees who are motivated to stimulate local economic development as well as environmentally sensitive development through transparent decision making based on sound management principles within the ambit of unique character and cultural, historical heritage.