

PROGRAMME



South African Botany

The primary aim of a botanic garden, as opposed to a park, is to provide practical acquaintance with the plant world.

- Donal McCracken on Botanic Gardens

(McCRACKEN & EILEEN 1988:1)

South Africa has nine national botanical gardens spread across five provinces (Free State, Hantam, Harold Porter, Karoo Desert, Kirstenbosch, Lowveld, KwaZulu-Natal, Pretoria and Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens). These gardens aim to create an awareness of the local vegetation in South Africa. The formation of The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in September 2004 proclaimed the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) and is the managing body of the nine national botanical gardens. SANBI's main focus is to document, study and conserve indigenous South African plants (WILLIS, C.K. & MORKELE, A.T. 2007:2).

EARLY BEGINNINGS:

1. CAPE COLONY:

The mother of South African gardens (the Gardens in Cape Town) was planted a mere 23 days after Jan Van Riebeeck landed at Table Bay in 1652. Originally laid out under master gardener Hendrick Hendricxen Boom, it served different functions at times. Its present layout is the result of Simon van der Stel's 1676 proposal to enclose the company gardens for recreational purposes. The first botanical garden in South Africa was started by the 19th century British settlement (in the Cape of Good Hope) with the establishment of the National Botanic Gardens of South Africa at Kirstenbosch in 1913 (McCRACKEN & EILEEN 1988:ix).

2. TRANSVAAL REPUBLIC:

In 1873, under president Francois Burgers, the Zuid Afriaanse Republiek (Z.A.R) established a botanical committee in Pretoria. John Hunter McLea (appointed as state botanist) established the Transvaal botanical gardens on a 5ha. plot in the centre of Pretoria. The intention behind the 1874 garden was to represent flora of the four hemispheres (the two Boer republics and the two British colonies). The scheme never materialised as a result of the steady financial decline in the Republic (McCRACKEN & EILEEN 1988:111).

After the British annexation of Z.A.R in 1877, Theophilus Shepstone created a new "model farm and botanical gardens" three kilometers outside Pretoria. The 200 ha. plot served as an education facility for farmers. The scheme came to a halt at the end of the British annexation in 1881. The old botanic gardens in Pretoria deteriorated to little more than an open space (IBID).

In 1886 Melrose House was built, overlooking the derelict site. The restoration of the old botanic garden was redesigned in 1890, but it became little more than an attractive public park (IBID). In 1958, 68 years after Burger's Park, Pretoria's National Botanical Garden was established on a 76 ha plot 8km to the east of Pretoria's city centre. (http://www.sanbi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1).

3. RIVALRY FROM THE HIGHVELD:

In 1898 the South African Republic appointed Mrs. Pott-Leendertz, a trained pharmacist and botanist, as curator of the new Transvaal Museum. Between 1901 and 1904 Mrs. Pott-Leendertz began to build up a collection for the Transvaal Museum Herbarium. In 1913 I.B Pole Evans amalgamated two strands of botanical enterprises (the National Herbarium and plant pathology) as part of the Department of Agriculture. The Division of Botany and Plant Pathology was based at House Vrede on the Western slope of the Union Buildings (McCRACKEN & EILEEN 1988:111).

By 1913 the botanical garden of Durban was dilapidated. A state decision was made to move the National Herbarium to Pole Evens's new division at House Vrede (the new Botanical Gardens at Kirstenbosch did not have herbarium at the time). Pole Evens's department grew following the establishment of a small botanical garden on the premises. The department's main focus was to survey botanical specimens in South Africa. In the 1940's the botanical garden at House Vrede expanded, the garden was developed in conjunction with the University of Pretoria (McCRACKEN & EILEEN 1988:111).

By 1958 the modified farmhouse at House Vrede (occupied by Pole Evans) could no longer cope with the expanding collections of plant specimens. The National Herbarium was relocated in 1975 to Pretoria's National Botanical Garden (RONG & BAXTER 2006:3). Although the department moved from the Union Buildings the 1940 idea to keep the botanical garden as part of the National Herbarium remained (http://www.sanbi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1).

Brief

THE 10th SANBI GARDEN:

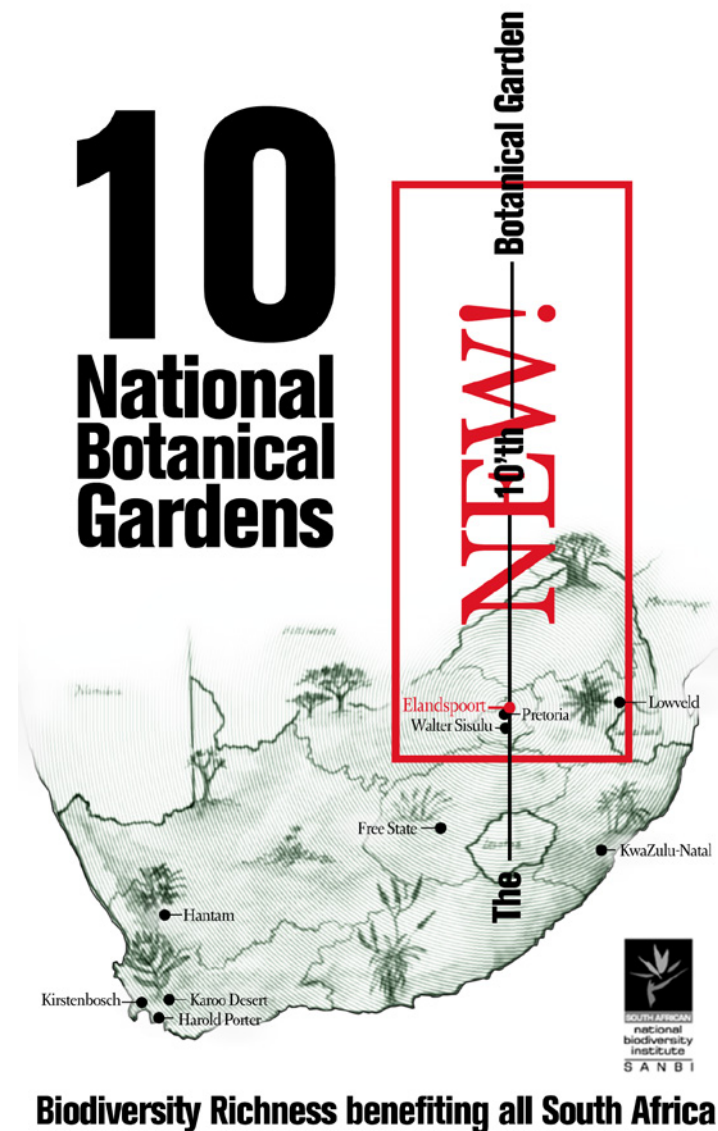
The National Botanic Gardens of South Africa started to extend its activities outside the Cape Province in 1967. The programme of expansion was to provide sites where South Africa flora could be cultivated. To make botanic gardens accessible to as many people as possible, the various botanic gardens are situated near large educational centers. A new garden was founded on the site of the Union Buildings. It's function is to be part of the National Botanical Gardens, serving as an outpost garden in conjunction with Pretoria's National Botanical Garden.

PROGRAMME:

The new SANBI garden is comparatively small and will function as advertisement garden for tourists and visitors at the Union Buildings Estate. The programme of botany is informed by the site history (1914-1975). The 1.3 ha garden will exhibit the diversity of South African biota.

The garden will employ the following staff members:

- One curator, to manage the garden and staff compliment.
- Two horticulturists.
- One admin officer, handling all the administration, staff records and secretarial work.
- An office receptionist dealing with all the telephone calls and bookings for the guided tours.
- Plant records clerk to keep the records for all accessioned plants grown in the Garden.
- An interpretation officer to interpret the garden and produce story boards and pamphlets on the garden.
- Marketing/PR officer, that would market both gardens as tourist destinations.
- Two full time registered guides.
- One qualified building/infrastructure maintenance person.
- One tractor/vehicle driver, one groundsman/gardener per 0,5ha of high maintenance section.



Biodiversity Richness benefiting all South Africa

Fig_67: Elandsport Botanical Garden.