

## *Book review*

### Multidisciplinary perspectives on Cape Town's rivers and wetland heritage

Cate Brown and Rembu Magoba (eds.) *Rivers and Wetlands of Cape Town: Caring for our rich aquatic heritage* (Water Research Commission, Report No TT 376/08, February 2009). Pp. 377

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With this initiative the Water Research Commission has published a magnum opus aimed at providing a fresh perspective on rivers and river management in Cape Town. The writers present all the major catchments feeding False Bay and Table Bay. They deal with the history of the catchments, changes that have occurred, and the reasons for those changes.

The book is a true transdisciplinary effort; it has 28 writers from the fields of civil engineering, freshwater ecology, fluvial geomorphology, zoology, aquatic ecology, botanical ecology, estuarine ecology, botany, marine science, hydrodynamics, ichthyology, ecological assessment, environmental science, obstetrics and gynaecology, town and regional planning, geology, herpetology, marine biology, environmental management, water resource management, and behavioural biology. The scope of fields is very impressive and for obvious reasons natural sciences are very prominently represented. If one wants to complain it could have been more clear which part was written by whom and if it would have been good also to have a professional history researcher in the team.

After the introduction, in Chapter 2 the physical environment and the geological history of the Cape Peninsula are presented. Chapter 3 considers rivers as ecological systems. This chapter deals with different zones of river continuum, vegetation, animals and biodiversity. These two chapters set a background for the next 18 chapters dealing with more specific areas.

Chapters 4-7 deal more or less with Cape Town. Chapter 4 goes briefly through the history of the area before European settlement and the development of a drainage system under Dutch and British rule. Chapter 5 deals mainly with the development of water supply schemes to Cape Town from Table Mountain schemes to the latest Berg River scheme. Chapter 6 considers the effects of urbanisation on the rivers and wetlands and Chapter 7 tells us about rivers of the City Bowl. Most of the two historical chapters are apparently based on Tony Murray's unpublished text "Much water under many bridges" and one just hopes that Mr. Murray would be able to publish this text at some point of time in the future.

After Cape Town, the next 12 chapters go through the main catchments areas, namely the Liesbeek Valley, the Elsieskraal River and the Black River, Paarden Eiland and the Salt River Lagoon, the Diep

River, Zeekoevlei, Zandvlei, the Hout Bay River, the rivers of the Southern Peninsula, the Noordhoek Wetlands, the Kuils River, the Eerste River, and the Lourens River. These chapters are the meat of this book. The reader is nearly overwhelmed by the information in these chapters. The history and development of every river area was meticulously recorded and even very small tributaries feature in the narrative. Current conditions of the rivers, wetlands and estuaries are presented as well as the threats they are facing with the rapid urbanisation.

Chapter 20 is about the economics of the rehabilitation of rivers and wetlands. The last chapter looks to the future. These two chapters are important parts of this book telling the reader what can be done to save these important areas and what will be the cost of saving them. After the main text there are still three appendixes, first two are listing frogs and waterbirds living in the area and the third all the relevant Cape Town City Council guidelines, policies and by-laws.

As a history researcher you could complain about too few references in this book, especially in the parts dealing with the history of Cape Town, but considering the scope of the book, this is a minor matter. The book is full of informative maps and charts and it lavishly illustrated with beautiful photos in nearly every page. This book is necessary reading for everyone who is interested in the Cape Peninsula, its nature and its history. I also hope that this book is a start for similar publications of various other aquatic environments of South Africa.

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