



Melville Koppies Management Committee (MKMC)

Annual report for the financial year 1st August 2024 to 30th June 2025

This has been another busy, fruitful year for the volunteer MKMC which is responsible for the iconic Melville Koppies, in a Joint-venture relationship with Johannesburg City Parks (JPCZ)

Committee members and other volunteers give much of their time and energy to the Koppies. Instead of including names in the middle of the report, I have added an addendum at the end in a tribute to their contributions.

Conservation

The aim of our responsible conservation is to maintain the last remnants of the endangered Highveld Grassland Biome at Melville Koppies. Conservation includes conserving and protecting the heritage of surviving fauna and traces of past people who once lived here. This is to ensure the Koppies' survival for current and future generations.

Conservation of the grasslands means constant eradication of intruding alien species and bush encroachment. We have a fire management programme but sometimes uncontrolled fires set by careless trespassers, sweep across the Koppies. Conservation is done by a full-time conservation team, funded entirely by donations from the public. Volunteer conservationists work alone or join weeding work parties on Sundays.

The past year has been a huge challenge because of the high rainfall see (table below) and the resultant explosion of weed seed banks and the huge grass load. The highly invasive *Campuloclinium macrocephalum* (Pompom weed) is a new problem which is being monitored closely.

Rain fall stats for Melville Koppies (The average for the area is 750mm pa.)

Year: 2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 till June
mm: 1046	732	1072	567	725	736

Once the sewage leaks into the Westdene Spruit were fixed, volunteers cleaned the spruit of debris and litter.

Publicity and events

Constant positive publicity is needed to encourage people to visit the Koppies. All free publicity avenues are sought as we have no budget for publicity. Besides regular FB and Instagram posts, we have produced new brochures for schools and B&Bs, sharkfin banners for display, website updates, community newsletters, videos and media alert contacts.

Volunteer guides are on duty for all events. Events include the regular Sunday morning sessions, the end-of the month 8km group hike, once a month story and poetry sessions, bird ringing on the second Saturday of the month, birding tours, school and university tours, private midweek tours, specialist tours, team building outings. More environmentally friendly events are planned for the next year!

Research and fieldwork and projects

Melville Koppies is ideal for research and fieldwork because it is so close to Wits and UJ. This aspect enhances the unique value of the Koppies. It is also a prime natural resource for students hypothetical design projects.

Number of visitors

The total number of recorded visitors on Melville Koppies Central was 2554; 1261 on Sundays and 1293 booked groups. There were some very cold and wet Sundays when few people visited. The high cost of bus transport deters many schools from educational tours. The costs per pupil is R50 and the guides are volunteers, so those costs are not a factor. In comparison, numbers for the past 7 financial years were;

2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020 (Covid)	2019
2554	2379	2037	2553	2182	1670	2901

Fencing

Theft of palisade fencing is a continual nightmare. Replacement is dependent on volunteers and community funding. JCPZ has replaced some stolen/smashed fence divisions with odd shorter palisade sections. Clearvu fencing would be a welcome solution.

Security

The JCPZ insourced guards were removed and replaced by outsourced VAST security on 1st August. Two caged security dogs were part of the new security. The dogs were removed in September 2024 due to agitation from the MKMC, residents and with the aid of Delta Park users.

A new trail was opened on the wooded west-facing slope to aid patrolling and detection of snares.

On Sunday mornings, as a precaution, security is increased with a MKMC-funded guard and a Beagle guard sponsored by the Melville Security initiative. One of the guards from Vast Security also sits at the gate on Judith Road while we are open.

Melville Koppies West (under JCPZ maintenance)

Thanks to the volunteer-organised Saturday monthly walk and work parties, Melville Koppies West is still a community asset. The work parties are trying to clear some of the ridges of alien plants. However, the explosion of bugweed and mothcatcher creepers, particularly along the Beyers Naude fence, is embarrassing. Their seeds are continually blown/brought by birds, into Melville Koppies Central

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ)

JCPZ continues to provide 24-hour security for Melville Koppies Central – four outsourced VAST day and two night guards. Grass on trails, perimeters and stretches under pylons has been cut. Trees on the boundaries were trimmed to aid security. Follow-up with herbicide is needed on these stumps. The MKMC conservation team skoffed a demonstration section of the Judith Road pavement from Orange Road to the reception hut entrance, and a JCPZ outsourced team did the rest of the Judith Road gutter down to Beyers Naude Drive. A leaking toilet at the lecture hut was fixed by a JCPZ plumber. The leaking Friede Fountain was damaged in his attempt to fix it. It is still leaking.

Conclusion

The year has ended on a very sad note.

Bernice Aspoas, retired guide and enthusiastic specialist entomologist, died peacefully aged 94. Bernice led a rich, adventurous life.

Three other long-serving volunteers (over 15 years) passed away in June/early July. A tribute to these special octogenarian men:

Vaughan Russell, committee member who did the accounts meticulously for many years.

David Carstens, knowledgeable and entertaining Sunday guide and midweek school and booked group guide.

Tony Nunes, committee member 'Mr Fixit' perfectionist who maintained fixed structures. Tony retired last year to Stilbaai. His son Neilen, Tony's right hand man, has done most of the 'fixing' and improving at the Koppies.

The table below is a tribute to the people who have done so much for the Koppies. I thank them for all their support, guidance and encouragement since I got involved in 1997. It's been a very fulfilling journey for me. My best wishes to the new committee for all the challenges they will meet and rewards they will earn.

Wendy Carstens. Chairman 2001 to 2025

Alphabetical list of people and their contributions to Melville Koppies (CM = committee member)

Alison Wilson	CM Multi-tasking as Front of House, guide, Melville Koppies east walk leader and now taking the portfolio of finance.
Anthony Paton	The Bird Man - Bird atlasser, guide, guide trainer since 2005
Arjen Van Zwieten	Bird ringer, and guide, especially if geology is required. Always willing to help out if he is available.
Aubrey Moloto	A Melville Resident promoting the Koppies and Melville in his 'snapson7th' newsblog
Barbara Shaw	CM Our webmaster and Front of House manager. Come rain, hail or shine Barbara is there to welcome visitors.
Caiti Gower	Regular enthusiastic walker (with Jared and Randall), and season ticket holder who willingly does any artwork we need, such as new notice board, banners and letter heads.
Chrissie Carey	CM (resigned) Chrissie kept the far eastern approaches to Melville Koppies litter free – a continual problem. Enjoy your retirement at Darrenwood Chrissie.

Conservation Team	And most important, the meticulous care of the Koppies by the hardworking fulltime conservation Team of Clement Nkomazana, Lucky Mdluli and Best Ndlovu, plus part time Joseph Kasonga. The team is funded entirely by donations from the public.
Craig Nattrass	Monthly bird ringing co-ordinator. Craig and his team ensure the research value of the Koppies.
Danny Nunes	CM Danny is 'Mr Fixit', willing to help wherever he can, at all hours, at the Koppies and in Melville alone or with his CREASS team. He has many challenges, such as continual fencing theft of old and new slats.
David Carstens	(deceased) When he retired, he became a 'co-erced guide' by his wife Wendy. His depth of knowledge and love of teaching, made him an excellent guide.
David Dickinson	Guardian of Melville Koppies West. Caring for the safety and security of organised groups. Organising /joining work parties to eradicate some of the large alien infestations.
Elsje Bonthuys	CM Passionate inspirational leader of the 'War on Weeds' contingent, Front of House helper, legal adviser, and monthly financial contributor.
Floyd Nyai and Siphelele Mbangata	His enthusiastic band of volunteers from Hlanzekile River and ocean cleaning, plus Siphelele Mbangata Wits APEs team did a major cleanup of the very polluted Westdene Spruit.
Jenny Grice	CM From volunteering to be a guide, Jenny has got involved in all aspects of the Koppies and we welcome her unanimously as the new chair
Lis Jones	CM (resigned) Recently retired from the committee due to family commitments. Lis was a conservationist, newsletter editor for ten years, Front of House helper and one of the four bank signatories. Thanks so much for your support and willing help.
MA Farquharson	CM MK East walk organiser, controller of 9 th Ave gate locking control
Marné Marais	CM Willing to undertake any task, full of ideas and sound advice, and a regular financial supporter
Merle Grace	The wonderful storyteller charming all with her heritage tales every 2 nd Sunday of the month since March 2025
Michelle De Villiers	The obliging, cheerful owner of JUNKIE charity store. Proceeds from sales of pre-loved goods earmarked for Melville Koppies have been a consistent financial boon for the Koppies. Thank you Michelle.
MK East users	You make our conservation efforts worthwhile!
Monthly donors	Your contributions are all noted and really appreciated
Rabbie Serumula	After a visit to the Koppies and appreciating their healing aura, Rabbie did appropriate poetry sessions on the second Sunday of every month for 2024. Thank you for all the valuable sessions you gave us.
Sarah Charlton	CM Multi-tasking and helping wherever needed. Part of the 'War on Weeds' group.
School guides	Thanks to Wendy Carstens, David Carstens, Jenny Grice, Tam Scheidegger, Felicity Kitchin, Annie Eckhart, for your environmental education of many kids
Siphelele Mbangata	A MKMC volunteer and Witsie working on water quality and cleaning the Westdene Spruit of litter.
Sunday 8km group hike helpers	Thanks to Tony Cross, Musarrat Safi, Tom Warren, Karabo Maila, Jade Bronstein-Brenner, Siphelele Mbangata, Sarah Charlton, Merle Grace, Danny Nunes
Sunday War on weeders	Amanda Williamson, Annetjie Stroud, Gill King, Jennifer Malec, Natasha Erlank, Sarah Charlton, Tam Scheidegger
Tam Scheidegger	CM Guide, researcher, passionate conservationist with a broad understanding of conservation.
Tony Lelliott	CM MK West representative, birding guide, organiser of monthly walk with dogs on the West, Google and TripAdvisor and MySchool monitor
Vaughan Russell	CM (deceased) Long Long-standing member Vaughan did our accounts pro bono with competence and grace.

Wendy Carstens	CM The Koppies have been her inspiration and love since 1997. It's time to hand over management to a very competent committee. As a committee member, she will still enjoy doing conservation, guiding, PR and helping where necessary
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