



# Media Release

**19 February 2014**

## **For Immediate Release**

### **INFORMATION SHARING ON WETLANDS AND INVASIVE WEED CONTROL AT THE COLBYN VALLEY WETLAND**

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC), in partnership with the Water Research Commission (WRC), Centre for Wetland Research and Training (WETREST), Friends of Colbyn Valley, South African Wetlands Society and City of Tshwane celebrated World Wetlands Day 2014 at the Colbyn Valley Wetland in Pretoria on 15 February 2014.

The theme and slogan for the 2014 World Wetlands Day is '*Wetlands and Agriculture: Partners for Growth*,' placing a focus on the need for the wetland, water and agricultural sectors to work together for the best shared outcomes.

The ARC wanted to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands by promoting interdisciplinary discussions on key wetlands issues. Various information sharing events that ranged from a two-day "Back to Basics" Wetland Course and a wetland talk and pompom weed control exercise at the Colbyn Valley Wetland took place.

The wetlands course and the information sharing event at the Colbyn Valley were a huge success. The Back to Basics course was well attended by government officials, students and consultants. The event focused more on school learners and comprised mostly youth from organizations such as the Voortrekkers and Scouts as well as learners from schools in the area who were accompanied by their parents. Members of the general public who read about the event in the press also attended.

In keeping with the theme for this year's wetland celebrations, Ms Althea Grundling a Senior Researcher from the ARC-Institute for Soil, Climate and Water said: "The various policies and legislation on wetlands and agriculture established in the last decade or two are considered as movements in the right direction. However, gaps exist that are not addressed in legislation such as the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (CARA) regarding communally owned land, non-point source pollution, as well as the protection of the total water system. Recommendations from a discussion paper on wetlands in agriculture suggest the appointment of a legal advisor or interdepartmental body on which national, provincial and local departments need to serve. A Memorandum of Agreement should be established between different departments to define their role and responsibilities and a wetland policy should be developed that can be used by all." Future workshops are planned with the WRC to identify research needs in terms of wetlands in Agriculture.

South Africa is the third richest country in the world in terms of biodiversity and has over 120 000 wetlands, covering about 7% of the country's land area. A total of 20 sites are designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), with a surface area of 553 178 hectares. Wetlands provide significant economic, social and cultural benefits. They are important for primary products such as pastures and support recreational and tourist activities and are also important sites for biodiversity. They help reduce the impacts of storm damage and flooding, maintain good water quality in rivers, recharge groundwater and store carbon. However, the pompom weed is a threat to this biodiversity as it invades natural grasslands, open savanna and even temporary and seasonal wetland areas.

Pompom weed is rapidly becoming the most serious threat to the conservation of grasslands in South Africa. Infestations become conspicuous when the plants are in flower between December and March, transforming the veld from green to pink. The plant initially establishes itself in disturbed sites such as roadsides. This weed displaces native species, reducing both the biological diversity and carrying capacity of rangelands.

The Colbyn Valley land was donated to the Tshwane Municipality by the University of Pretoria and is in the process of being declared a nature reserve. The Colbyn Valley is both a wetland and a peatland. The wetland is vulnerable to a number of impacts due to its urban location, but remains a valuable biodiversity and water resource. The Colbyn Valley Wetland has recently received much attention in the press due to concerns over greater storm water flow from increased development in Hatfield and the proposed park-and-ride facility mentioned in the Hatfield Spatial Development Framework.

On 15 February 2014 a short introduction to the Colbyn Valley Wetland was given by Mr Philip Calinikos (Friends of the Colbyn Valley). Mr Piet-Louis Grundling (WETREST) explained the role and importance of wetlands. Ms Hildegard Klein (ARC-PPRI) gave a presentation on the pompom weed that has invaded the wetland and how it can be controlled. In an interesting and entertaining way Mr Grundling, a renowned wetland expert, shared his knowledge about wetlands in the field where everyone learned about soils, plants, birds, etc. that are found in the Colbyn Valley Wetland. Everyone was eager to participate in the biocontrol release after they were shown how to tie a twig – received overnight by courier from the ARC's offices in Cedara – with hundreds of thrips (the insect used for biocontrol) to a pompom stem. The reason why the pompom weed has to be uprooted meticulously was clearly explained by Ms Klein before participants got the opportunity to dig out plants. The 118 pompom weeds removed in the approximately 20 minutes available in the field may seem small but, taking into account that each pompom plant can give rise to 1 000 in the next season, it is noteworthy!

A bring-and-braai was followed by the afternoon session where the learners worked in groups to demonstrate their newly gained knowledge and built models of the wetland in a light-hearted but competitive way.

The participants were pleasantly surprised to learn about the research on wetlands and invasive weeds done by the ARC and the good attendance at this event clearly demonstrated the need for such information-sharing sessions.

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**Notes to the Editors**

**About the Agricultural Research Council**

The Agricultural Research Council, a schedule 3A public entity, established in 1990 through the Agricultural Research Act 86 of 1990 (as amended by Act 27 of 2001) is a premier science institution that conducts research with partners, develops human capital and foster innovation in support of the agricultural sector. Its core mandate as defined in the Act is to act as the principal agricultural research institution in South Africa so as to conduct research, drive research and development, drive technology development and the transfer (dissemination) of information in order to: Promote agriculture and related industries; Contribute to a better quality of life; Facilitate/ensure natural resource conservation; and Alleviate poverty. It provides diagnostic, laboratory, analytical, agricultural engineering services, post-harvest technology development, agrochemical evaluation, consultation and advisory services, food processing technology services as well as various surveys and training interventions. For more information visit the ARC website at: [www.arc.agric.za](http://www.arc.agric.za) or call 012 427 9700.

The Agricultural Research Council Footprint

