

PLAISIR DE MERLE GAINS MEMBERSHIP OF BIODIVERSITY AND WINE INITIATIVE

Plaisir de Merle, the historic wine farm in Simondium, has been granted membership of the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI) in recognition of its efforts to re-establish the natural habitat on large areas of the 985 ha farm of which almost 400 ha are planted to vines.

The BWI is a pioneering partnership between the local wine industry and the conservation sector aimed at minimising any further loss to the highly threatened Cape Floral Kingdom (CFK), the smallest but also the richest plant kingdom on earth. Some 90% of local wine production occurs within the CFK.

To become a member of the BWI, producers have to incorporate biodiversity best practices in their farming operations, enhancing the suitability of vineyards as habitat for biodiversity through eco-sensitive measures and reducing the negative impact of farming practices on the surrounding natural habitat.

Efforts to rehabilitate fynbos on the farm were begun 15 years ago through the ongoing removal of invasive alien vegetation, mainly hakea. Seven years ago, this programme was extended to also include other aliens such as black wattle and pine trees.

The farm was divided into sections and a proper rehabilitation programme with time lines instituted, with the worst alien infestations receiving highest priority. To date about R130 000 has been spent on rehabilitating the land, funded from the income derived from a large commercial pine plantation on the farm. Where the trees have been harvested, fynbos has been re-established with many wild olive trees also making their appearance.

It will take another four years before the last trees remaining in the 18 ha plantation are harvested. The final section of the former forest will then be rehabilitated to fynbos.

The farm, stretching from the Simonsberg escarpment virtually to the Berg River down in the valley, supports a rich biodiversity of animal and plant life while the two rivers flowing through the land also harbour indigenous fish species.

The fynbos high up on the Simonsberg abounds in protea species while indigenous trees and thicket cover the ravines, providing a habitat for the extensive wildlife that ranges from various buck and porcupines to leopards and lynxes. Waterfowl are plentiful as are guinea fowl and pheasants while fish eagles and black eagles are frequent visitors.

Three other Cape Legends wineries have applied for BWI championship status. They are Papkuilsfontein near Darling, where the Tukululu range of wines is produced, Lomond near Gansbaai, which recently launched its first two single-vineyard wines and Theuniskraal in Tulbagh.

Ends

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