

The Cederberg Wilderness lies some 250km north of Cape Town, stretching from the Middelberg Pass at Citrusdal to north of the Pakhuis Pass at Clanwilliam and encompassing some 71 000ha of rugged, mountainous terrain. It is renowned for its spectacular landscapes and rock formations as well as the increasingly rare Clanwilliam cedar tree, from which it got its name.

Geologically, the Cederberg is part of the Cape Fold Belt and consists mainly of Table Mountain sandstone. Weathered sandstone formations, most notably the Wolfberg Arch and the Maltese Cross, are typical of the Cederberg.

History

San and Khoi people inhabited the Cederberg area from earliest times. European settlers began stock farming here in the early eighteenth century and from 1903 to 1973, exploitation of natural products was rampant. Large amounts of cedarwood, rooibos tea, buchu and rockwood bark were harvested. Fires added to the destruction and cedar trees are now on the brink of extinction.

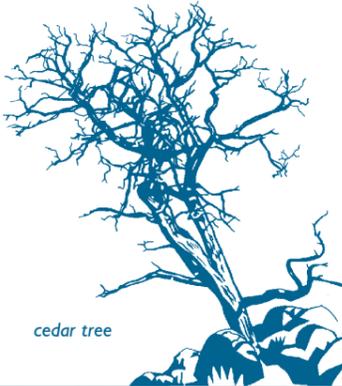
The Cederberg was proclaimed a wilderness in 1973 and received World Heritage status in 2004. The 12 000ha Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve, obtained in 1995 with the assistance of the World Wide Fund for Nature (SA), is situated on the drier eastern boundary of the Cederberg mountains. It is managed as an integral component of the Greater Cederberg Conservation Area.

Climate

Winters in the Cederberg are cold and wet while summers are warm and dry. Most rain falls between May and September and it often snows on the higher parts. In winter, night temperatures drop sharply and heavy frost may occur, while in summer temperatures reach as high as 40°C. Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve is located in arid to semi-arid zones, with its eastern slopes generally drier than those at high altitude or facing west.

Vegetation

Vegetation in the Cederberg is predominantly mountain fynbos. The lower slopes support protea, silky cone-bush, sand olive and



cedar tree

Clanwilliam daisies, with wild olives and mountain maytenus on the rocky outcrops. Waboom veld also occurs at this lower altitude. The eye-catching purple-blue ridderspoor, rooibos tea and buchu grow against the lower cliffs while higher up one finds fynbos restio veld, with red disas along streams on the plateau.

The Clanwilliam cedar grows in rocky areas at altitudes of more than 1 000m above sea level. In the wetter ravines, red and white alder, yellowwood, hard-pear and Cape beech occur, while wild olive, silky bark and spoonwood prefer dryer kloofs. The endemic snow protea is perhaps the most attractive plant on the highest peaks - it is very scarce and only found at a few sites in the wilderness.

Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve falls in a transitional zone between the fynbos and succulent Karoo vegetation types. The drier conditions and fine-grained clay soils of the western slopes of the reserve also support central mountain renosterveld, which is dominated by members of the asteraceae family. Growing on more fertile soils than fynbos, renosterveld is believed to have once supported herds of large game and predators such as lion.

Animals

Baboons, dassies, grey rhebok, klipspringers, duiker and grysbok are fairly common in the Cederberg. Porcupine, honeybadger, Cape clawless otter and aardvark also occur although they are seldom seen. The leopard is the Cederberg's largest predator and is fairly common although very shy. Smaller mammals include African wild cat, lynx, bat-eared fox, aardwolf and Cape fox. The small grey mongoose and striped polecat are often seen. Various interesting rodents occur, including the spectacled dormouse.



Aardwolf

More than 100 bird species occur here, with black eagle, rock kestrel and jackal buzzard being the most common raptors. About 16 snake species are found in the Cederberg, the most common being berg adder, puff adder and Cape cobra. The armadillo lizard is one of the endemic reptiles found here.

Conservation

Clanwilliam cedar tree numbers are declining despite past protection efforts. They are being cultivated in a nursery at

Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve and, each year, volunteers assist in the planting of seedlings at suitable places within the area.

The Cederberg Wilderness forms the core of a leopard management area established in 1988. This area includes private land and is managed in collaboration with the landowners. The aim of the initiative is to promote the existence of leopards by minimising conflict between stock farming and nature conservation, and to look at other means of managing so-called problem leopards.

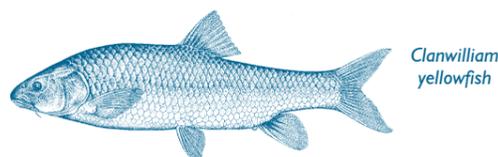
Local landowners have joined CapeNature in setting up five conservancies bordering the wilderness. Together they comprise about 492 000ha of private and state land.

River management

The Cederberg Mountains form the main catchment area for the Olifants-Doorn River System - home to the richest variety of endemic fish species south of the Zambezi. These fish occur nowhere else except in the Olifants and Doorn Rivers or their tributaries.

Habitat degradation is so severe that the eight species of fish endemic to the Olifants-Doorn River System all face extinction. Fish inhabiting the lower, unprotected reaches of system are particularly at risk. These include the Clanwilliam yellowfish, three species of redbin minnow and two species of mountain catlets. The conservancies assist in improving the management of rivers on private land.

Unfortunately, it is also a river system under threat from human activities and infestation by alien fauna and flora species. Excessive extraction of water, excavations in the river bed, damming, pesticide pollution, the presence of alien fish, like bass, and infestation by



Clanwilliam yellowfish

invasive plants, such as black wattle and blue gum, have contributed to a dramatic decline in the quality of the riverine environment.

Activities

The solitude and wild grandeur of the Cederberg Wilderness offers unsurpassed opportunities for recreation. Activities such as hiking and traditional rock climbing are permitted as long as rock surfaces remain undamaged. Management paths and hiking trails criss-cross the wilderness and hikers may explore at random. A 1:50 000 topographical map is available from the CapeNature office at Algeria.



www.capenature.co.za

Rock art

The Cederberg features hundreds of rocky overhangs and caves with fine examples of rock art. The most famous of these are the elephant paintings at the Stadsaal Caves on the Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve. These paintings vary in age between 300 and 6 000 years and are very sensitive to damage. They are an integral part of the Cederberg's value and visitors are encouraged to discover them on their own. Rock art is protected by the National Heritage Resources Act no.25 of 1999 and vandals who deface rock paintings face severe penalties.



Elephant paintings at Stadsaal Caves

Facilities

The peaceful atmosphere of the Algeria campsite has broad appeal. Here, 48 sites are situated along the banks of the Rondegat River. The more basic Kliphuis campsite is located on the Pakhuis Pass on the flower route to Biedouw Valley and Wupperthal. This campsite has 10 spots under shady trees along the Kliphuis River. Algeria also offers seven chalets, ranging from fully-equipped to comfortable, basic accommodation, all close to the Rondegat River and its swimming holes.



The wilderness is divided into utilisation zones, which helps to maintain the unspoilt atmosphere and limit the impact of visitors. Groups are limited to a minimum of three and a maximum of 12 persons per group. Visitors are urged to book well in advance to avoid disappointment.

Access

The bridge crossing the Olifants River at Kriedouwkrans, between Citrusdal and Clanwilliam, sometimes floods during winter. There are alternative routes to Algeria via Citrusdal and Clanwilliam - contact the Algeria office for a road condition report before departing.

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

All persons entering this conservation area and using its facilities, do so entirely at their own risk. The Western Cape Nature Conservation Board and/or its employees and/or agents and/or its successors in title shall not be liable for any damage, loss, theft, injury, accident or death suffered by any person, howsoever caused.

Right of Admission Reserved.

ENQUIRIES

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CEDERBERG WILDERNESS

LEGEND

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PLEASE NOTE: A detailed hiking map is available for sale at the reserve office.

