

Spekboom – the miracle plant

Spekboom is an amazing plant. Where it covers an area it allows other native plants to return to the landscape and improve biodiversity. Local scientist Dr Steve du Toit, who heads up the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (Wessa) office in George, is involved in a project using the spekboom to help restore degraded land in the Gouritz area.

He explained, “The plant also pulls carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and reduces the greenhouse gas problem. Wessa is involved (as partners) in a campaign by the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (GCBR) in trying to fix the many hectares that have been degraded.

With funding from the European Union, a project is underway to plant the spekboom back into the landscape.

The ‘Jobs for Carbon Project’ is being implemented through a collaboration between the GCBR, Wessa and Rhodes University.

According to Dr Du Toit, “The goal is to return barren, brown landscapes to a lush, green state. Healthy spekboom can restore the functioning of many different ecosystems. River systems start working more effectively because water can infiltrate in the soil faster.

He added, “We want the system to become a sponge again, able to absorb the water and slowly release it into the rivers instead of flash floods and erosion. And the employment created in a new ‘restoration economy’ can improve income of poor rural families and, at the same time, replenish the natural capital for their children and their children’s children.”

Botanists first documented the spekboom about 400 years ago as one of the most common plants in the Cape landscape. Unfortunately, large areas of spekboomveld have become badly degraded in the past century due to unsustainable human practices.



Wessa's Dr Steve du Toit is involved in revegetating the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve. He is standing in the middle of a spekboom field together with Anneliese Schutte-Vlok, who heads the CapeNature Oudtshoorn branch. This wonder-plant is excellent for stimulating the regrowth and revegetation of overgrazed farmlands and other degraded area.