



IX Meeting of the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves



Hosted by
the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve
in South Africa

COASTLINES
IN BALANCE

WNICBR Conference | Official GCBR Press Release

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INTERNATIONAL BIOSPHERE RESERVE COMMUNITY MEETS IN HESSEQUA TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND SEEK SOLUTIONS

The World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves
Created in 2009, the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves currently includes more than 80 island or coastal area biosphere reserves, which represents over 10% of the total biosphere reserves worldwide. The Network aims to foster sustainable development in islands and coastal areas and to promote adaptation and mitigation strategies on climate change.

Last week saw an historic event unfold in the life of the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (GCBR) and the Hessequa region, when delegates from 11 nations from all over the globe convened for the 9th annual Meeting of the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves (WNICBR) on the southern cape coast. The event was noteworthy in that it was the first time that the meeting was held on African soil, and the GCBR – a relative newcomer to the WNICBR - had the honour of hosting it.

The event is organised and sponsored by UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), who invites delegates from selected island and coastal Biosphere Reserves from all over the world to take part.

The conference provides the opportunity for the biosphere reserves to share experiences, exchange technical knowledge, strengthen co-operation among partners and advance mutual learning and networking in coastal management.

The theme of this year's conference was *Coastlines in Balance*.

The majority of the thirty-three delegates arrived on Sunday the 15th September to attend the week-long conference held in the Gourikwa Reserve, near Gouritsmond. The group boasted a multitude of ages, cultures and languages – all sharing the single purpose and shared passion for protecting the natural environment.

The format of the event allowed for official proceedings and presentations each morning until lunch time, whereafter the group was taken to various relevant and interesting field activities for the afternoon portion of each day.

The presentations covered a range of topics and addressed various challenges, each having relevance and applicability within the group. For example:

- One study underway is looking at the ecosystem service value of biospheres as a whole, with a specific focus on carbon: utilising biosphere reserves as carbon sinks.
- Other presentations focused on the challenges and opportunities faced by tourism in biosphere reserves, specifically within ecologically sensitive areas.
- The theme of plastic waste appeared in many of the presentations, with many inspiring stories of mitigation actions, including a beach clean-up in Spain that saw 3,000 people clear 8 tons of plastic in one day, and the introduction of a “plastic/waste” museum in the Commander Islands (Russia), where children and the public learn about the true nature of the plastics we use and how they are disposed of (or not).





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- Additionally, themes throughout the presentations included environmental education and community involvement, all with a strong focus on getting the youth involved in biosphere reserve projects.

Guest speakers included Dr Enrico Gennari, Director of Research for Oceans Research and Dr Peter Nilssen, archaeologist and Specialist Heritage Practitioner.

The field activities focused on some of the topics covered during the morning sessions, however the primary focus of the afternoon activities was to showcase the area (Hessequa/ Gouritz region) whilst allowing for the delegates to enjoy some much needed *down time* after the intense morning sessions.

Delegates were treated to site visits on two occasions by Research Fellow for the African Centre for Coastal Paleoscience (ACCP) (Nelson Mandela University) Dr Jan De Vynck, where they learnt about the region's rich history of early human development, as well as some fascinating botanical facts about the region.

The group also enjoyed an excursion to one of the GCBR projects in the area – the Goukou Resilient River Project – where they learnt about the threats of invasive alien plants to biodiversity and water security in South Africa.

One of the highlights of the trip was the excursion to the Garden Route Game Reserve, where some of the delegates had their first ever game drive followed by a true South African braai in the evening!

On their final afternoon, after visiting the historical fish-traps in Stillbay (and for some brave individuals a quick dip in the sea), delegates were treated to the fantastic gin tasting experience at Inverocche – an experience that no doubt only strengthened their appreciation of the fynbos plants that they had learnt about in the week!

By all measures, the week was a great success – much was learnt through the sharing of experiences, and new inter-organisational bonds and collaborations – as well as many friendships - were formed.

The parting words by the WNICBR secretariat were of the highest praise for the organisers, and the atmosphere could be described as one of renewed vigour and enthusiasm for the work at hand – the realisation that we are not alone in conserving the natural world; we are part of a global network that is as strong as it is large, and together we can confidently face the challenges that lie ahead.

A special thank you from GCBR to Hessequa Local Municipality for co-sponsoring the event.

For more information please contact admin@gouritz.com or visit www.gouritz.com



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MENORCA 25 YEARS BIOSPHERE RESERVE



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The delegates pose for a group shot on the coast at Gourikwa Reserve whilst out on a field excursion

Biosphere Reserves / Organisations who attended the IX World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves Conference 2019

No. of Delegates	Name of Biosphere Reserve / Organisation	Country
1	Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve	Australia
1	Guanahacabibes Biosphere Reserve	Cuba
2	UNESCO	France
1	Waddensea of Lower Saxony Biosphere Reserve	Germany
1	Yakushima and Kuchinoerabu Jima Biosphere Reserve	Japan
1	Wetland Korea Institute MAB Korea National Committee	Korea
2	Hallasan Research Institute	Korea
3	Jeju Secretariat of WNICBR	Korea
2	Korea National Park Service	Korea
1	Fuahmulah Nature Park, Fuahmulah City, Ministry of Environment	Maldives
1	Macchabee / Bel Ombre Biosphere Reserve	Mauritius
1	Commander Islands Biosphere Reserve	Russia
5	Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve	South Africa
1	Garden Route Biosphere Reserve	South Africa
1	Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve	South Africa
1	Department of Environmental Affairs	South Africa
1	Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve	South Africa
1	Socio Environmental Observatory of Menorca	Spain
1	National Parks Autonomous Agency (OAPN)	Spain
1	Fuerteventura Biosphere Reserve	Spain
1	Gran Canaria Biosphere Reserve	Spain
2	Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve	Spain
1	Mariñas Coruñesas e Terras do Mandeo Biosphere Reserve	Spain