

JOINT STATEMENT: EDENTO ADDO & NATURE'S VALLEY TRUST

June 2017

In the wake of the devastating fires in and around Plettenberg Bay, there has been widespread response to the plight of the regions wildlife, particularly the birds, baboons and antelope. While concern for animals is always welcome and under the circumstances understandable, Eden to Addo and Nature's Valley Trust cautions the community against embarking on random and ill-considered artificial feeding initiatives.

After consultation with various expert authorities and agencies, we ask that the following be noted:

- 1) In general, we caution against the notion that Humankind should as a matter of course involve itself in solving complex disturbances to the natural world. The ecological records clearly show that nature is perfectly adept at recovering on its own - human meddling has a tendency to be an impulsive and short-term response with little to no thought of longer term consequences.
- 2) Wild animals are immensely resilient and adaptable and have evolved ways of coping with natural disasters such as fire. Birds and baboons in particular will readily move away to return once areas are recovering. These events also act as natural population and disease controls and are integral to the natural cycles. Animals also adapt diets to cope with such circumstances.
- 3) The basis for starting any feeding initiative should be based on a thorough scientific assessment after the collation of all available information. The number of birds, baboon troops and antelope, their ranges, feeding habits and numbers affected for example would be vital information to have. And in the rare case that such programmes are required, these should be informed and driven by experts in the field.
- 4) Any initiative that is not necessary or done on a random and unsustainable basis will in all likelihood be causing more harm than good. It may create dependency concerns and can result in a change of natural ranging and feeding patterns. And using incorrect food types may cause harm through disease and digestive issues, and feeding sites can become points of predation.
- 5) However, urban gardens close to badly burnt areas can become refuges or corridors for certain species. Supplementing food in these circumstances should be done under expert opinion, and we urge mimicking natural foods by using seeds, fruit and water for example. For input in this regard, please contact Nature's Valley Trust: info@naturesvalleytrust.co.za

- 6) Feeding primates is an immensely complex issue and if at all possible, should be avoided. If baboons have taken to raiding homes and gardens, then all attempts should be made to deal with this issue at point of conflict. Opening feeding points will simply give them an additional feeding site without solving the conflict.
- 7) To make a meaningful long term contribution, we suggest residents embark on alien vegetation clearing programmes. Species such as pine and wattle played a significant role in spreading the fires and currently, the Garden Route faces very serious ecosystem and biodiversity challenges because of the alien invasion. In addition, we suggest planting indigenous species that will attract birds and other wild species.
- 8) We also believe that this fire provides an opportunity to educate kids and the wider community about the nature of fires along the Garden Route and how to become fire wise.

For more information on being fire wise, alien vegetation clearing, research on feeding birds and baboons and more, please visit the Eden to Addo Library: <http://edentoaddo.co.za/library/> and the Nature's Valley Trust website: <http://www.naturesvalleytrust.co.za/>

NVT Programme Director:

Dr. Mark Brown

Eden to Addo Corridor Initiative CEO:

Joan Berning

