Botanical Education Trust Report to the BotSoc KZN Coastal AGM 2026

2025 Awards by the Botanical Education Trust

The Trustees of the **Botanical Education Trust** had to dig deep this year to make awards to nine of the fifteen applications received. Thanks to our donors, large and small, the Trust was able to award a record amount of R229 620. This is funded entirely by income derived from the permanently invested donations which emphasizes how your contributions help to conserve our precious indigenous flora in perpetuity!

Many of our provinces are represented in this year's exciting range of projects.

Currently found in just one small population in Limpopo province, *Brackenridgea zanguebarica* (Yellow Peeling Plane) is critically endangered being highly sought-after for its traditional medicinal and cultural magical uses. Mpendulo Gabayi, who is registered for an MSc in Horticulture at UNISA, will work on the propagation of this difficult-to-cultivate tree.

Roughly 80%-90% of our wild flowering plants depend on insects for pollination and thus survival. Katherine Venter, while registering for an MSc in Nature Conservation at Nelson Mandela University, will work in the Succulent Karoo, Western Cape, to determine whether farmed honeybees pose a threat to wild pollinator densities.

Some regions of the hugely diverse flora of South Africa remain understudied, often due to inaccessibility. The Low Free State – KwaZulu-Natal Escarpment, a key component of the grassland biome, is such an area. Arni Le Roux, an MSc student at University of the Free State, is tackling the problem of this lack of critical floristic data which hampers conservation.

Khahliso Lefatsa, of the Myezo Sustainable Development Alliance, has been raising and planting indigenous plants in the Mbekweni Township in Paarl, Western Cape, since 2023. Following a very positive community response, he will establish a community-based fynbos conservation nursery. Stellenbosch University Botanical Garden will provide guidance for this project, which will serve as a conservation hub and educational platform.

In the Kei Mouth, Eastern Cape, is our furthest south naturally-seeded mangrove forest which is under threat from severe grazing pressure. Dr Deborah Robertson-Andersson of Kei Mouth WESSA Green Coast Site will install fencing along vulnerable mud banks. Cattle owners, local schools and community groups in ecological awareness programmes will be involved in the fencing initiative.

Flowering gerbera daisies, which include the Barberton Daisy and the endangered Hilton Daisy, are seen in the grasslands and savannah of South

Africa. Dr Isabel Johnson (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Delia Oosthuizen (Mountainlands Nature Reserve Herbarium, Mpumalanga) have both received funds to study different aspects of the unsatisfactory taxonomy of this complex group.

Pieter Winter, of the South African National Botanical Institute (SANBI) in Cape Town, has received funding to undertake a taxonomic revision of *Heliophila*. This group, comprising 106 species and represented across nearly every southern African biome, is ideal for investigating the evolution of our plant communities and the unique ecological processes that have shaped our flora.

Another taxonomist, and previous awardee, Dr Hester Steyn (SANBI, Pretoria) will continue her work on the taxonomic revision of the *Cyphia digitata* complex providing essential insights into species boundaries which will enhance conservation efforts.

Finally, we thank our long-serving Treasurer, Neil Gerber, who has stepped down and welcome Charles Reid, an eminent Durban Chartered Accountant. Prof Steve Johnson and Dr Wynston Woodenberg have joined our botanists Prof Braam van Wyk and Prof Glynis Goodman-Cron. The Trust is indeed fortunate that such highly qualified persons are prepared to serve as Trustees in a voluntary capacity!

All past awards, and much more about the Trust, can be viewed at our website https://botanicaleducationtrust.org.za

The deadline for the next applications is 30th September 2026.

Charles Botha
(Chair of Trustees)