



**WILDFIRE 2011**  
The 5th International Wildland Fire Conference

**CONFERENCE NEWS**

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**WOOSH:** In a spectacular display of precision flying a Working on Fire fixed wing Dromader bomber drops a load of water during a controlled burn in the Pilanesberg Game Reserve while a Working on Fire Hot Shot ground team beats back flames. The fire display was co-ordinated for the benefit of Wildfire 2011 Conference delegates. *Photograph by Bruce Sutherland.*

## Korea here we come

by Carol Campbell

**The 6th International Wildfire Conference will take place in Korea, probably at the end of May 2015, Eunsung Oh from the Korea Forest Service confirmed yesterday.**

The 12-member Republic of Korea delegation, led by Younghyo Ha, deputy minister of the Korea Forest Service, has spent the week at Sun City gathering information to

establish what will work best for their event in four years time. "Korea experiences about 450 wildfires a year," said Oh. "Our natural forests have been badly damaged and we cannot afford to ignore wildfires." Oh explained that 40 years of Japanese occupation from 1910, followed by World War Two and then the Korean War had decimated the indigenous landscape which was only now being restored.

"South Africa has a beautiful, unspoilt landscape which must be preserved and cherished," she said. The damage to Korea's forests has impacted not only on botanical biodiversity but also pushed the tiger to the brink of extinction. South Korea is home to a wide variety of birds such as the Baikal teal, which was once endangered but whose population numbers are now increasing. A fifth of South Korea's mammals are forest-dwelling bats. These include the kobayashi bat and the brown long-eared bat.

## Conference Accord

**International co-operation and a strengthening of wildland fire science and management skills are key to stemming the escalation of wildland fire, according to an "accord" drawn up by the 5th International Wildfire conference.** The "accord" comes after almost 500 wildfire experts from 61 countries met at Sun City near Johannesburg in South Africa this week for

the 5th International Wildfire Conference. The conference produced the document following exhaustive regional discussions in which the delegates pledged to work together in taking steps to control the growing phenomenon of wildfire in their communities and across the world. In the accord they appealed to the global community to confront an issue that was affecting all humankind.



## Accolades for SA wildfire conference

**Wildfire 2011 has been a resounding success with international delegates all agreeing the aerial display followed by the braai in the Piliang Game Reserve yesterday was the highlight of the week.**

Dale Dague, chair of the International Liaison Committee, said the aerial fire fighting display was an eye-opener for many people who saw fixed wing bombers, helicopters with bambi buckets and spotter planes in action for the first time.

"It was very well co-ordinated and most educational," said Dague.

This was supported by Silvia Kloster from the Max Planck Institute of Meteorology in Germany, whose work focuses on

global fire computer modelling.

"It was fascinating to see something I work on every day on computer, play out in practise," she said.

Joaquin Ramirez from the company Tecnosylva in Spain said, the organisation of the Piliang display had been "perfect".

"This is going to be a tough act for Korea to follow," he said. "I really enjoyed the week."

Natasha Ribeiro from Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique said, watching Working on Fire in action had been spectacular.

"This is a programme we need in Mozambique. The discipline, the co-ordination and the underlying motive of poverty relief, is exactly what we need for our youth."

Both Ramirez and Kloster complimented the Wildfire Conference on the social networking sites saying they had enjoyed the Facebook and Twitter updates.

"These are great resources for future conferences and should be utilised by the Korean team," said Ramirez.

The delegates also enjoyed the daily newspaper saying it kept them up to date on the programme and was a valuable resource to take home.

**WATER ON THE SMOKE:** An FFA Aviation helicopter, branded in the Working on Fire colours drops a bambi load of water on the flames at a demonstration burn at Piliang Game Reserve yesterday.



## Wildland fire fighters attend special parade

**Nine hundred wildland fire fighters, who have completed an intensive pre-fire season training camp, will attend a passing out parade at Sun City today.**

The wildland fire fighters underwent their refresher training at the Mogwase Stadium, close to the Piliang Game Reserve in Northwest Province, this week.

The wildland fire fighters are members of the South African government's Working on Fire (WoF) programme. Their training coincided with the Wildfire Conference.

The WoF programme is implemented by the FFA Group

Thirty-eight Hot Shot teams from all over South Africa attended the camp. "This was the biggest training camp in the history of Working on Fire," said Pieter van der Merwe, Managing Director of FFA Operations.

"The training camp was an enormous success, and the delegates from the conference, who saw the Hot Shot teams in action yesterday, were very impressed by the wildland fire



**HEAT:** Wildland fire fighters are taught how to run through fire as part of their training

fighters fitness, discipline and dedication."

The WoF Programme funded by the South African government, is one of the country's most successful poverty alleviation, job creation and community

upliftment initiatives.

Through the programme young men and women are recruited and trained as skilled wildland fire fighters to be deployed throughout the country to reduce the personal and economic harm caused

by unwanted wildfire.

There are currently more than 3 000 wildland fire fighters in the programme deployed at more than 100 WoF bases across length and breadth of South Africa.

## Hot test for Argentinian backpack

**A bright red fire retardant backpack, made in Argentina, was tested by Working on Fire's Hotshot crews at the fire demonstration in the Piliang Game Reserve yesterday.**

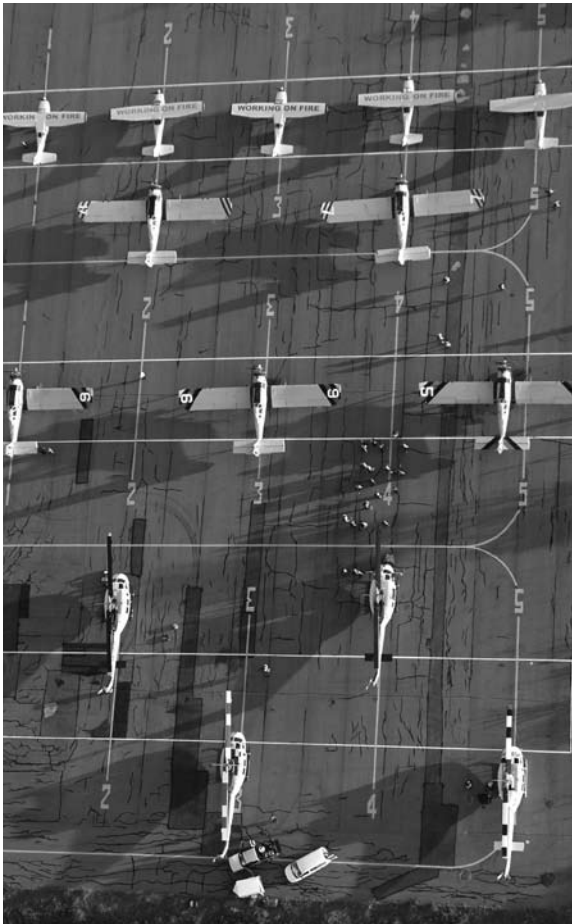
Luthfia Cader, head of Working on Fire's advocacy department, said the backpack was being considered by the Working on Fire programme for its wildland fire fighters.

It is manufactured by fire fighting equipment specialists, Inforest, in Cordoba, Argentina, and comprises a double-layered bag with a 22-litre collapsible tank, made of PVC, inside. The tank can be replaced if it ruptures. Attached to the tank is a hose with a hand-pump which can spray water up to 12 metres in a straight jet or three metres in a fog jet.

"This is a good quality product that we can afford," said Cader. "We are very interested to see how it performs under South African conditions."



**SPECTACULAR:** The global wildland fire fighting community were treated to a impressive display of flames, planes and yellow-shirted wildland fire fighters when South Africa's Working on Fire Programme, supported by the FFA's Aviation wing showed off their prowess, at the Wildfire Conference in the Pilanesberg Game Reserve yesterday. Delegates were transported to the country's third largest game reserve early Thursday for the day-long wildfire display. This included eight Working on Fire Hotshot teams dousing a roaring blaze, followed by a skydivers demonstration. In the afternoon, FFA Aviation showed their skills during an aerial fire-bombing display. The 30 plus pilots in the aerial teams are all highly skilled, many working in the crop-spraying industry out-of-season. The aircraft on display at yesterday's event included Cessna spotter planes, Dromader fixed-wing bombers and Huey helicopters. In the evening the South Africans did what they do best and hosted a braai in the reserve introducing their international guests to "tjoppies, boerwors and local brewed beer!" with the call of hyenas in the distance.



**A PATTERN OF PLANES:** The FFA Aviation's fire fighting aircraft lining up for yesterday's air show.

## South Africa's premier game park

Fire is as much a part of Kruger National Park as the birds and the animals and the wonderful landscape vistas. Because of this, experimental block-burning began in the mid-1950s and since then research and management plans have been changed and are constantly under revision in the park that has become South Africa's tourist gem.

At almost 19 000 square kilometres, Kruger (as it is known colloquially) is one of the largest game reserves on the African continent, 360 kilometres long and 65 kilometres wide.

The southern area that was first called 'Government Wildlife Park' and then Sabi Game Park was proclaimed in March 1898 by Paul Kruger, then president of the Transvaal Republic. The motion to found this reserve was passed by one vote in the republic's Volksraad – assembly. In 1926 the adjacent Shingwedzi Game Reserve to the north was



**ZEBRA:** one of the many mammal species of the Kruger National Park.

joined with Sabi to form the Kruger National Park.

In 2002, Kruger, Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, and Limpopo National Park in Mozambique were incorporated into the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

Some 517 species of birds are found in Kruger, 253 species are residents while 117 are non-breeding migrants and there are 147 nomadic species.

Apart from the Big Five, Kruger boasts more mammal species than any other African reserve (147 species), as well as 114 species of reptile, with the crocodile population totalling 3 000 individuals.

While crocodiles might be

the major predators of the rivers and dams that are home to 50 fish species, a Zambezi shark was caught at the confluence of the Limpopo and Luvuvhu rivers in 1950 – some 400 kilometres from the coast.

Perhaps the park's most controversial conservation programme relates to elephants. Culling was stopped in 1989 in favour of translocating family groups but the population continued to increase to 11 672 individuals in 2009. It is estimated that the park can only sustain 8 000 elephants.

Although Kruger remains an awe-inspiring tourist destination it is not without its conservation problems, be those about elephants, the endangered African Wild Dog, pollution of the rivers or fire management.

## Sights of wonder

South Africa has seven World Heritage Sites:



**CRADLE OF HUMANKIND:** The entrance to the Maropeng visitor's centre

### The Cradle of Humankind

Comprised of sites not far from Sun City at Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, and Kromdraai, the 'cradle' contains hominid remains, thousands of fossils of animal, Stone Age artefacts and other tools.

### The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park

Situated on the KwaZulu/Natal coast this park, contains five distinct eco systems and boasts

a diversity of plant life, animals and bird species.

### Robben Island

Only a short boat trip from Cape Town's V&A Waterfront, the island has a long history as a site of incarceration for political prisoners and at one period housed a leper colony. The most famous of the political prisoners to be held on the island was former president Nelson Mandela.

### Ukhahlamba/Drakensberg Park

The outstanding natural beauty of the mountain range from which the park takes its name, also contains evidence of early human life in the region and magnificent Bushman paintings.

### Mapungubwe, Limpopo

This Iron Age site was the



**ROBBEN ISLAND:** The notorious prison island in Table Bay was the jail where Nelson Mandela spent most of his imprisonment.

centre of the largest kingdom in southern Africa, trading gold and ivory with the East. It is to be found in the north of, and adjacent to, the Kruger Park.

### Cape Floral Kingdom

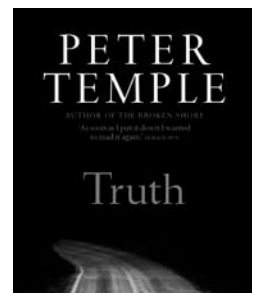
Known colloquially as fynbos, this plant kingdom is endemic to the Cape Peninsula and environs. It is the smallest but most

diverse of the world's six floral kingdoms and is under constant threat from development.

### Vredefort Dome

This site is a large crater with a radius of 190 kilometres, the result of an impact by a giant meteor some two billion years ago. It is 120km south-west of Johannesburg.

## Book Review



The devastating fires that raged across parts of Australia in 2009 are the backdrop to Peter Temple's compelling crime thriller, Truth, for which he won the Miles Franklin Literary Award. The 'Stay or Go' fire policy becomes a point of considerable tension in the novel. Temple (a former South African) is one of Australia's pre-eminent crime fiction authors. The book is available in South African bookshops.

Photographs from MediaClub South Africa