

## MARION MENGELL – A MOTHER AND GIANT IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

The Friends of Nylsvley committee were stunned to hear the news of Marion's passing on 25 July this year. We had all been in touch on WhatsApp just a few hours before she was admitted to hospital. We know that this feeling of disbelief spread widely through the birding and conservation communities: with a variety of responses ranging from *"tragic and so unexpected"*, *"we have lost another giant"*, *"we have lost a mother"* to *"what a loss for conservation, Marion must be recognized for her contribution to conservation"*.



Marion will stay in our memories as a woman who got up and just did what she knew was right. And what she did is significant. Nylsvley Nature Reserve would probably not have been registered as a Ramsar Site were it not for her courage and doggedness in promoting its importance and uniqueness. Marion may have been tall, but she was indeed a giant in conservation, and sits firmly, but unassumingly, on the list with other great conservators/conservationists such as Ian Player, Andrew Zaloumis, John Hanks and Mamphela Ramphele.

Nylsvley and its birds were not Marion's only conservation subjects, she was also very active through the Friends of Smuts, preserving and promoting the Smuts Koppie and Smuts House in Irene. Her knowledge about initiating "Friends of Societies" led to her engaging with other Friends groups under the WESSA umbrella.

It was at Marion's memorial service that we discovered so many other things about her life and causes. She was interested in nature from an early age and was most definitely a habitual volunteer!

Being District Commissioner for the Girl Guides is no small task. This organisation, and Scouts SA, reaches many 1 000's of young people and equips them with important and valuable life skills, including leadership. It is difficult to quantify how many people were influenced by her involvement in the Guiding movement, but it was probably significant. Marion also led in the church, serving as a councillor, participated in Bible study groups and even the church garden club where her conservation ethics resulted in Jojo tanks being purchased to collect rain-water to water the grounds! Not only will the wetlands of Nylsvley be a living legacy of hers, but also the trees in the St Martins church grounds in Irene. We all know that the best time to have planted a tree was 20 years ago, the next best time is now.

Marion leaves behind her husband Ron, son Malcolm, and daughter Katrina and four grandchildren, Cael, Rose, Finn and Kate whom she adored. Her trips to see them always ended with plans for the next trip before the present one ended! She was an excellent mother, both practical and yet firm.

Finding any excuse for a work party, even at her children's birthday parties. Marion's friends of 50 years (former work colleagues) described her as caring, tireless, dedicated, passionate, selfless and uncompromising.



Her planning and practical manner extended also to the more than 30 years she spent working for Nylsvley, where she earned the respect of the Wardens and staff of the reserve. Requests for support were carefully weighed to keep the line distinct between government responsibility, and Friends support. Money for various projects at Nylsvley were funded through the Friends of Nylsvley memberships, donations, and the many, many bird, frog, reptile, etc. courses presented by experts to a wide variety of audiences. Every course was opened and closed with a prayer, the food always healthy, and walks in the reserve were encouraged, followed by a good night's rest and early start. Yes, even course participants older than 50 were brought to heel by our motherly giantess!



Marion has touched so many lives, her memorial was testimony to this as not a seat in the church was empty. We are all saddened by our loss, a memorial paver, another initiative of Marion's, will be placed at the Memorial Garden behind the Bell Tower at Nylsvley. The Friends of Nylsvley committee, and our members, will continue to uphold her legacy.

## MARION MENGELL – A GEAT LOSS TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY



### Tributes given::

Staff at Nylsvley: We have lost a Mother"

Sara Ross: St Martin's Anglican Church warden – known since a brownie of 8 years old. A very special lady who served as an active councillor of the Church

Served on bible group, garden club and ensured conservation practices! (JoJo water tanks etc)

Girl Guides – district commissioner very involved personally and via her children

Nylsvley – she WAS Mrs Nylsvley for over 30 years, organising talks, improvements and volunteers

Friends of Smuts – active supporter of Smuts Koppie and Smuts House and its success

WESSA – active member for 30 years, including her role on the Friends Groups and their support for each other

Agricultural Research Institute in Irene supporter

Family always very important – loved her kids and grandkids – very practical; lover and appreciator of the outdoors



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