

Making your garden **COME ALIVE!**

Environmental Interpretation in Botanical Gardens

Maryke Honig



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The Regional Co-ordinator

Southern African Diversity Network

c/o National Botanical Institute

Private Bag X101

Pretoria

0001 SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: (27) 12/8043200

Fax: (27) 12/8043211

E-mail:ckw@nbii-pre.nbi.ac.za

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PREFACE

Interpretation provides the communication link between a botanical garden and its visitors. Some popular forms of interpretation include guided walks, trail brochures and signs. In addition to its educational function, interpretation can be used to promote your organisation and its activities, thereby gaining public support. It is about connecting with visitors and making the garden come alive.

This book provides practical guidelines on how to develop an interpretation programme in a botanical garden. It aims to enthuse and inspire you to communicate with visitors and make your garden a dynamic and exciting place. The examples in this book illustrate the potential for creative low-budget interpretation. For example, most of the design features seen here can be achieved with a simple scanner or photocopier.

This manual is by no means comprehensive: it is based largely on the experience gained by interpretation staff working in the eight National Botanical Gardens (NBGs) in South Africa. During the past five years we have tried a variety of approaches and techniques, and this manual documents much of what we have learnt. Although the examples used here are specific to botanical gardens, the principles of interpretation are equally applicable to nature reserves, national parks and cultural heritage sites.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to staff at the National Botanical Institute with whom I worked from 1994 to 1999. I was very fortunate to work with talented educators, horticulturists, researchers, artists and designers and thank them for sharing their ideas, skills and expertise. In particular, I would like to thank John Roff for being a constant source of inspiration and new insights on interpretation, and sharing so freely of his interpretive techniques. Thanks to Pitta Joffe, Phillip le Roux, John Roff and Sharon Turner for contributing case histories and slides, which helped to make this book come to life.

I would like to acknowledge the Desert Botanic Garden (Phoenix, USA) as a major source of inspiration and ideas. When I visited this garden in 1997, I was so impressed and excited by what I saw, that I returned to Kirstenbosch with renewed enthusiasm. They have kindly given me permission to include examples of their interpretive materials in this book.

Finally I would like to thank Sam Ham for his excellent book on environmental interpretation (publication details on page 92), which introduced me to the concept of thematic interpretation. Once the penny dropped about the importance of using themes, there was simply no turning back.

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