

CO-EXISTING WITH NATURE IN A SUSTAINABLE AND BUSH-FRIENDLY MANNER

A GPNR forum on guidelines relating to the interaction between humans and the natural environment

This month we deal with another frequently asked question pertaining to living in the bush in a responsible manner.

GUIDELINE 3

IS IT ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE TO COLLECT FIRE WOOD FROM ONE'S OWN PROPERTY?

When we're at Grietjie, what can be nicer than sitting around the fire with friends and family? But, where do we find our wood? Some feel that collecting wood from their properties in moderation is acceptable, while others believe it should not be done at all. Much depends on the circumstances. There is, for example, a big difference between a busy lodge that constantly gathers wood for its guests and an owner who gathers a little now and again. Availability might also play a role, such as the fact that under present conditions we seem to have a great deal of dead wood lying around.

Whatever one decides, be responsible, and do not rob nature of the important organic recycling that should be taking place.

Please leave enough wood to break down and rejuvenate the soils which so desperately need the extra nutrients, and enough wood to encourage seedbeds which allow grasses and new trees to establish themselves.

Also leave sufficient wood to provide food and homes for the many animals who rely on this resource, and be especially mindful not to disturb existing nests of spiders, insects and other animals.

The following are important points to remember:

- **Never** cut down living trees to make firewood. Take only moderate amounts from trees that have died due to natural circumstances.
- **Various tree species are protected** in terms of the **National Forests Act** of 1998. Protected trees may not be cut, disturbed, damaged, destroyed and their products

may not be possessed, collected, removed, transported, exported, donated, purchased or sold – except under a license granted by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. Examples of protected trees include Apple leaf, Baobab, Bushveld saffron, Camel thorn, Leadwood, Marula and Pod Mahogany.

- Contravention in terms of the above legislation is regarded as a first category offence that may result in a person, who is found guilty, to be sentenced to a fine or imprisonment for a period up to three years, or to both a fine and imprisonment.
- No wood is allowed to leave Grietjie, unless a permit is issued by the committee.
- No person is allowed to collect wood from neighbouring properties unless specifically permitted by the owner to do so.
- Entering someone else's property to collect wood without permission contravenes section 1 of the **Trespass Act** 6 of 1959. This is a criminal offence and a person found guilty could be liable to a fine, imprisonment, or both.

Lastly, it is vitally important that owners and residents educate and monitor their staff and visitors. Please advise them:

- To collect wood sparingly.
- Not to interfere with the wood of protected species.
- Not to interfere with trunks/branches containing nests of animals.
- **Never** to enter another owner's property to collect wood.

Compiled by Liz Lewis

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