

Boost environmental education

A new facility geared towards education on the environment was officially opened last Friday at the Delvera wine estate on the R44 just outside Stellenbosch.

The new Simonsberg Environmental Education Centre (SEE) aims to formalise access to the Greater Simonsberg Conservancy, a non-profit venture started by 28 different farms in the area to protect endangered species and manage land use in a sustainable manner.

The Cape Winelands District Municipality provided funding of R200 000 for the project. Councillor Kobus du Plessis of the municipality spoke about the importance of education at the opening of the centre. "We cannot afford to put more pressure on the environment," he said. "We need to learn how to live in harmony with our environment. We depend on it for our food, and need to understand the system in which we live."

Several organisations concerned with protecting the environment and creating greater awareness about the importance of biodiversity were also present at the launch. Hank Chalmers of Eagle Encounters showed off some owls, a falcon and a large eagle, much to the excitement of the children at the education centre.

Members of the Cape Leopard Trust and CapeNature were also present to educate visitors about their projects. Arnelle van Noie of CapeNature has high hopes for the initiative, and is working in cooperation with the conserv-



Hank Chalmers from Eagle Encounters educated and entertained school children at the opening of the Simonsberg Environmental Education Centre. Here he is holding Mike (who actually is a female), an adult black eagle. The bird is surprisingly light at just under 3 kg.

PHOTO: GERRIT SCHAAFSMA

ancy to provide environmental education to school children. "We want to plant the seed with children about how important nature is, and how they can get involved in protecting it," said Van Noie.

The centre will be open seven days a week, initially by appoint-

ment only. Weekend workshops will get going in the coming months, and members of the public – particularly schools – are encouraged to book visits in the interim.

Among the facility's offerings are a well-stocked library and periodic displays by eco-friendly

artisans and members of the conservation community.

Themed environmental weeks will commence in 2013, with school groups as their specific focus.

If you'd like to find out more you can point your browser at www.simonsbergconservancy.co.za.