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FOLEY PLUNGES SOIL EROSION INTO THE SPOTLIGHT
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YOUNG GOLFER FLIES HIGH IN HIS CHOSEN SPORT
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NEW LOOK, SAME GREAT AUTODEALER
- SEE INSERT

It's a hoot to care for owls

Robyn Kirk

robynk@caxton.co.za

A pearl-spotted owl named Finnick is the latest addition to the HeronBridge College owl release programme, having arrived at the school in mid-February for some tender loving care.

The school in Nietgedacht began caring for owls in need in October 2014 as part of the eco-schools programme, which is run by the Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa throughout the country and aims to create awareness and encourage environmental sustainability in schools and surrounding communities.

"To earn our platinum one award [as part of the programme], we launched a project called Wild HeronBridge in 2014 to focus on the incredible environment that surrounds the school," explained Charlotte Biesman-Simons, librarian for the preparatory school.

"And as part of that, we along with EcoSolutions erected an owl pen on the grounds to care for owls before they are eventually released."

The owls come from wildlife rescue organisations across Johannesburg who need a soft release back into the wild, meaning that after living in an enclosure for a few weeks, the door to their home is left open for them to go free, but food is still left out for them nearby for about a week or so afterwards in case they struggle to find their own. They then travel further and live independently in the wild.

Finnick was rescued by the Johannesburg

Wildlife Hospital, and it is believed he is between eight and 10 weeks old and had fallen out of his nest. He has been at HeronBridge for over a week now and will hopefully be freed in about two week's time.

Biesman-Simons said, "Twice a day Finnick is fed a chick by either myself or another staff member, and the schoolkids are encouraged to have supervised interactions with him."

"This project is important because it is a natural, poison-free solution to a rodent problem and is also a chance to appreciate the creatures which we share our environment with."

"I also work with the estate and cleaning staff [at HeronBridge] to dispel and debunk myths around owls held by people in the community. Now a number of staff members love caring for owls too!"

Power Ndlovu, a maintenance worker for the school who has been involved in the programme said, "I like the owls, they are definitely doing their job. When I first

started working here, there were too many rodents, but now their are fewer."

Finnick, named in honour of a character from *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, is the 11th owl cared for by the school so far.

In 2014 there were two spotted eagle owls (Theodore and Anabel), in March 2015 there were two barn owls (Errol and Pigwidgeon) and in November 2015 there was one eagle owl (Einstein). In September 2016, two wild spotted eagle owls (Haley and Comet) were bred successfully in the school's clock tower without human intervention and finally in November last year a southern white-faced owl named Diana had her turn.



EXCLUSIVE TO PRINT

Finnick is named after a character from the Hunger Games series written by Suzanne Collins. INSET Alyssa McCallum, James Lubbe, Charlotte and Jessica Biesman-Simons with McKenzie Brunsdn stand in front of the special owl enclosure on HeronBridge College grounds. Photo: Robyn Kirk

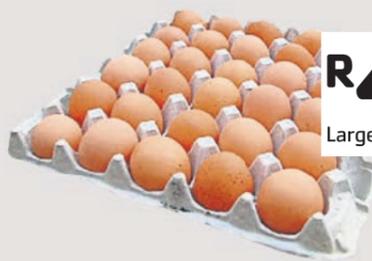
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