

## Meet Report: MCSA-CT – AGT Hut Hack, September 2024

By Jess Verheul and Michael Huermann

After our first attempt to hold a hut hack on Women's Day was thoroughly washed out by one of those big cold fronts that hammered us this winter with driving rains, we were delighted when this second round was far more successful!

A lively crew of 16 MCSA-CT members, spanning ages from 10 to 60+ (three generations, no less), gathered for the weekend work meet from 20-22 September, 2024.

Most of us arrived on Friday night, in a cold wild SE wind. But the chill was quickly dispelled by a communal meal offered by Michael, and plenty of good conversation, as we all settled in for the weekend ahead.

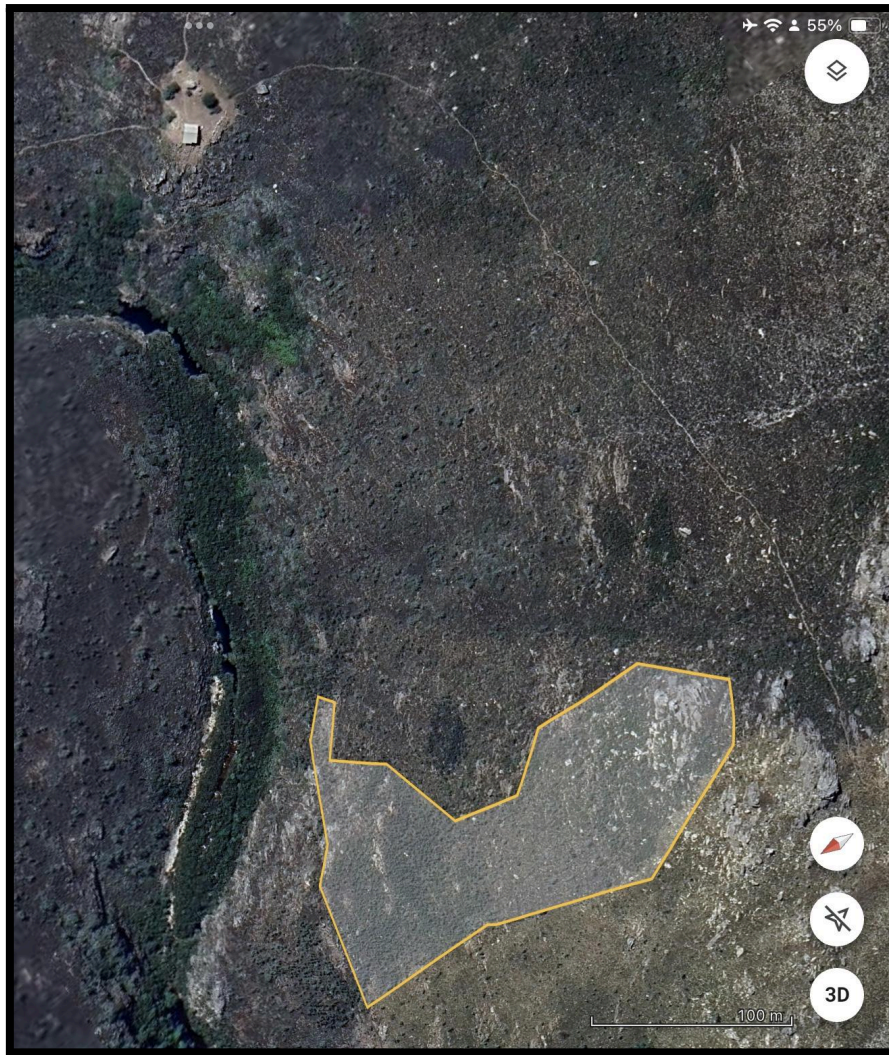
Saturday morning kicked off with Pierre giving the new members a crash course on hut etiquette, Michael sharing on the *Why, Where & How* of the clearing, and Jess leading a safety talk, reminding us not to throw ourselves into the bushes without some safety basics in mind.

Armed with this knowledge (and our sharp saws), we ventured out to battle a dense stand of Hakea on the southern slopes of the Elandspad River, just downstream of the hut. By the end of the day, we had taken down over 1500 trees!

Saturday night was filled with plenty of laughter, shared stories, and a few well-deserved pats on the back, as newer members reflected on just how fulfilling the day's work had been.

Sunday morning saw a handful of die-hard workers squeezing in a bit more hacking while others packed up and headed home, buoyed by the good work accomplished over the weekend.

By the time we left, we had cleared an impressive 1.3 hectares seen in Img 1. below



Img 1: area cleared on 21-22 Sept 2024: MCSA - CT AGT Hut.

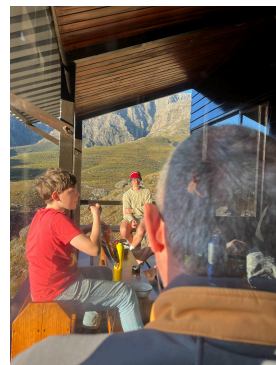
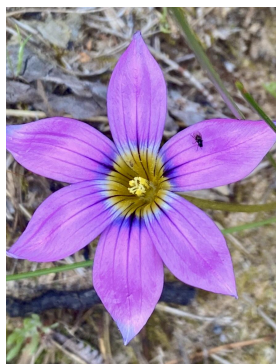
A huge win for the team, although the site will need some future attention, to keep plucking out lots of seedlings to avoid those *Hakea* from making a comeback. More good news is that, thanks to two wet winters, the *Gumnosis fungus* is spreading and giving the *Hakea* a really hard time. The slopes north of the hut are similarly infected, and need our attention but until then at least we are getting help from the naturally occurring bio-control as well.

Removing invasive *Silky Hakea* is no small task, but it's absolutely essential for protecting the delicate Fynbos biome. This invasive species loves to hog all the water, sunlight, and space, leaving our native plants high and dry. Plus, it adds fuel to the fire (literally) by increasing wildfire risk. But thanks to teamwork like this, we're keeping these invaders at bay and helping restore the landscape.

There are plenty more hacks ahead, and we hope to see even more members roll up their sleeves and join the fun as we continue to safeguard biodiversity and protect our precious wilderness!

*See some photos and maps of the area cleared below as well as information on Hakea Sp below.*







## **Hakea gibbosa**

rock hakea

PROTEACEAE

**Description:** Much-branched, prickly and hairy shrub or tree to 4 m high; young twigs and branches markedly hairy. **Leaves:** Greyish green, at first densely hairy becoming ~ hairless, needle-shaped, up to 8 cm long, sharp-pointed. **Flowers:** Deep cream, small, in leaf axils, Jun–Sep. **Fruits:** Grey, woody follicles,  $\pm 3.5 \times 3$  cm, with 2 sharp apical horns, surface rough and thick; 1 or 2 together, splitting into 2 equal valves, each containing 1 winged seed. **Cultivated for:** Hedging; provides firewood. **Invades:** Mountain fynbos. **Origin:** SE Australia.












## **Hakea sericea**

silky hakea

PROTEACEAE















**Description:** Much-branched, very prickly shrub or tree to 5 m high; young twigs covered in short, fine hairs; older stems hairless. **Leaves:** Dark green to grey-green, hairless, needle-shaped, up to 4 cm long, sharp-pointed. **Flowers:** Cream, small, in leaf axils, Jun–Sep. **Fruits:** Woody follicles,  $\pm 3 \times 2.5$  cm, with 2 apical horns, purplish brown with paler markings, turning grey, surface thick and wrinkled; splitting into 2 equal valves, each containing 1 winged seed. **Cultivated for:** Hedging, dune reclamation, ornament. **Invades:** Mountain fynbos. **Origin:** SE Australia.



 <b>Gummosis fungus</b>	 <b>Seed weevil</b>	 <b>Stem-boring beetle</b>
 <p>Gum oozing from stem</p>	 <p>Husks of undeveloped fruit on tree</p>	 <p>Frass at base of stems</p>
 <b>Seed moth</b>	 <b>Bud weevil</b>	 <b>Leaf weevil</b>
<p>No visible signs. Harvest mature fruit, allow to open, and examine for seed eaten by larvae.</p>	<p>No visible signs. Beat trees – as for collecting adult.</p>	<p>No visible signs. Beat trees – as for collecting adult.</p>

Signs of presence of each biological control agent that can be seen in the field.



Silky hakea	Rock hakea	Sweet hakea	Willow hakea
			
	 × ½ life size 	 × ¼ life size 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ leaves needle like</li> <li>▶ ≤40 × 1mm</li> <li>▶ smooth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ leaves needle like</li> <li>▶ ≤80 × 1mm</li> <li>▶ shortly hairy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ leaves divided into paired needles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ leaf like</li> </ul>
			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 25–30 × 20–25mm</li> <li>▶ round with 2 horns at apex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 30 × 35mm (broader than long)</li> <li>▶ round with 2 horns at apex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 25 × 20mm</li> <li>▶ oval with dark markings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ 20 × 15mm</li> <li>▶ oval with prominent warts</li> </ul>

Comparison of the invasive hakea species in South Africa.