

Quarterly Update - Q1 2024

# Protea Fund

Veritas Core Equity  
with Fixed Income

31 March 2024



# Protea Fund – Veritas Core Equity with Fixed Income

## Performance

	Q1 2024	Last 12 months	Last 3 years	Last 5 years	Since 31 Dec 2018 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Protea Fund - Veritas CEFI (Acc)<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>23.6%</b>	<b>51.7%</b>	<b>60.6%</b>
UK CPI +3% <sup>3</sup>	0.8%	5.6%	30.2%	39.6%	40.3%
UK CPI <sup>3</sup>	0.1%	2.6%	20.9%	23.6%	23.5%
Peer Group <sup>4</sup>	4.0%	9.3%	9.2%	24.5%	32.7%
MSCI AC World Equity Index (£) <sup>5</sup>	9.1%	20.5%	33.6%	73.1%	89.8%
FTSE All-Share Index (£) <sup>5</sup>	3.6%	8.4%	26.1%	30.3%	42.6%
Inv. Grade Corporate Bonds (1-10Y) <sup>5</sup>	0.7%	7.7%	-3.5%	4.3%	7.4%

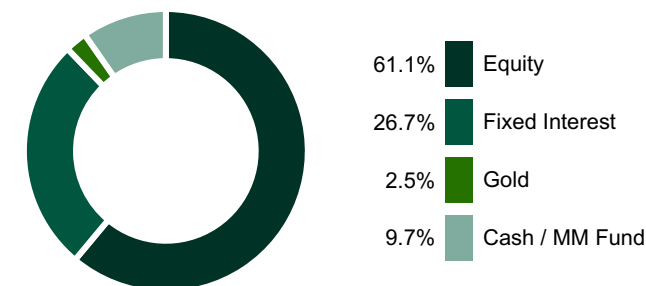
## Investment Mandate

<b>Objective</b>	To protect our clients' assets and grow them well above inflation over the long-term
<b>Risk Profile</b>	Medium risk with a strategic asset allocation of 65% in equities and 35% in cash/bonds

## Equity sectors

	% Weight	Names
Health Care	14.8%	Align Technology, Intuitive Surgical, Lab Corp, Roche, Sonova, Thermo Fisher Scientific, UnitedHealth Group
Information Technology	14.0%	Accenture, Adobe, Amphenol, Intuit, Microsoft, Synopsys
Financials	10.7%	Fiserv, London Stock Exchange Group, Marsh & McLennan, Mastercard
Industrials	8.4%	Automatic Data Processing, Broadridge Financial Solutions, Bunzl, Experian, Kuehne + Nagel International
Consumer Discretionary	7.4%	Amazon, Next, Nike, Tractor Supply
Materials	2.9%	Avery Dennison, DSM-Firmenich
Communication Services	1.5%	Alphabet
Consumer Staples	1.2%	Kerry Group

## Asset Allocation (% of Portfolio)



## Morningstar Sustainability Rating™



Fund Performance figures are in Sterling, total returns with net dividends reinvested.<sup>1</sup>Performance since month of inception. <sup>2</sup>Protea Fund returns are net of all fees and costs. <sup>3</sup>The UK CPI figures are the most recent available numbers. <sup>4</sup>The ARC £ Steady Growth Index initial estimates are subject to revision. <sup>5</sup>All Indices are gross of fees. Where shown Inv. Grade Corporate Bonds (1-10Y) refers to BofA ML index. Source: Pictet, Bloomberg, Factset. All figures are unaudited and subject to change. Totals may not add precisely due to rounding.

The Protea Fund – Veritas Core Equity with Fixed Income is rated out of 7,408 funds within its global category. Data is as at 31 March 2024.

# Quarterly Update

## Investment commentary

The fund has started 2024 on a positive footing, returning 4.0% over the quarter.

The overriding objective of the fund is to achieve a return ahead of inflation on a long-term view. To do this, we look to invest in companies that are well-placed to benefit from multi-year structural growth trends. These high quality and innovative companies can often be disruptors within their field. As long-term investors, a big part of our job is to scan the horizon to see who will disrupt the disruptors. To this end, our investment colleagues, Arthur and James, spent a week in China to see first-hand how the economy is evolving.

The scale and speed of development in certain industries was staggering and left us with plenty to ponder – especially how secure are our companies' competitive advantages and moats? It became clear that electromobility and the energy transition are key pillars of growth for the Chinese economy.

Chinese car company BYD is now the world's largest manufacturer of electric vehicles, producing 62% more cars in 2023 compared to 2022 and 12 times more cars than 2018. China is expanding its rail network by the equivalent of HS2 Phase 1 every month. Of particular note, was that these rapid expansions were being achieved via domestic progress. When you build that much, that rapidly, you can move up the curve very quickly. These advancements are supported by a growing Chinese semi-conductor market, and with an emerging competitor – both funded and subsidised by the Chinese state – we decided to sell **Infineon**. Looking forward, its moat and right-to-win look far less certain.

We regularly talk about being long-term holders of our companies to take advantage of structural growth tailwinds. As a house, we first purchased **Amphenol** in 2019 to benefit from global growth in connected devices. Since then the stock has delivered a total return of c. 200% as we have seen a 110% increase in the number of devices globally to 16.7 billion; this is forecast to grow to 30 billion by 2027. There is plenty of runway for growth for the next five years.

Central bankers have so far trodden a fine line on interest rates and with the “immaculate disinflation” becoming a distinct possibility, the expectation of interest rate cuts have been both delayed and reduced. This environment has enabled us to continue to purchase high-quality fixed income securities yielding 4-5% when existing bonds mature, as well as buying index-linked gilts locking in a yield to maturity above inflation.

This is the first quarterly update under our new name: Meridiem Investment Management. Whilst there may be a new name above the door, inside the approach remains the same as it has been since the fund's inception over five years ago. We continue to hunt for high quality companies that can benefit from structural growth and deliver on our real return objective. We look for predictable and resilient growth and we are confident that our in-depth research and focused portfolio allows us to take advantage of opportunities when they arise.

## Top of the class

**Tractor Supply** results reinforced our view that the company is performing exceptionally well operationally as they reported expanding margins against the backdrop of high inflation and slower revenue growth. The market reacted well to this confirmation after a weak 2023 for the shares. Further support came from management's positive outlook on the opportunity to continue to find productivity and efficiency gains.

## You there at the back!

**Kuehne + Nagel International** reported results below expectations in Q1 as the shipping industry continues to normalise following the supernormal profits achieved during the Covid-19 pandemic. This resulted in a sell-off in the shares, after a very strong 2023. However, the business continues to reap the benefits of its eTouch initiative.

# Quarterly Update

With global supply chains realigning, for example due to geopolitics or re-shoring, Kuehne + Nagel International should be a long-term beneficiary as they profit from the complexity of logistics and transportation networks.

## Portfolio activity – Main Transactions

As patient investors, we are more than happy to hold on to cash until we see compelling opportunities. This is the case with the proceeds from **Infineon** while we conclude work on existing companies' moats and new ideas.

Mindful of valuation after very strong performance since our initial purchase in Q4 2022, we trimmed our holding in **Adobe**. Following a meeting with **London Stock Exchange Group's** leadership team, we added to the holding. We were reassured by management's strategy to capture the long-term opportunity for the business using their unrivalled data assets to capitalise on the digitisation trends within financial services.

## Portfolio activity – Engagement

It would be easy, especially with the rise of digital communication, to assume that everything can be done on a screen from our office on the Southbank. Whilst that may be helpful for some meetings, nothing can replicate getting out and seeing our companies in person and in their environment. This quarter, some of the team spent the day with **Next** management at their head offices in Leicester. It was a hugely valuable meeting with insight from the CEO, Finance Director and Head of Code of Practice.

The clothing industry is a complex web of companies across a global supply chain. Achieving a level playing field is hard and we discussed this with their Head of Code of Practice. He explained how paying all workers in their supply chain the living wage would raise their costs by 25-30% and be potentially ruinous for the business commercially if its competitors did not follow suit. Raising wages but going out of business would not be a sensible strategy.

However, if the rules are applied universally, Next will argue for higher pay for workers. During negotiations between unions and government over minimum wage in Bangladesh, Next sided with the workers and pushed for a higher wage increase than the rest of the industry. The workers achieved a 56% increase in pay which has raised Next's costs but they are supportive of this as it applies across the industry. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and this insight was a helpful reminder of the nuance around these topics. Having a culture of partnership with our companies allows us to really get under the bonnet and understand the rationale for their decisions.

## Top 10 Equity Holdings

Holding	% Weight
Thermo Fisher Scientific	3.1
Fiserv	3.0
Mastercard	2.9
UnitedHealth Group	2.8
Microsoft	2.8
Marsh & McLennan	2.7
Amphenol	2.7
Tractor Supply	2.6
Intuitive Surgical	2.6
Accenture	2.6
Top 10 Equity Total	<b>27.8</b>

# Important Information

Fund manager	Meridiem Investment Management Ltd
Ongoing charges	0.80%
Inception date	14th December 2018
Fund size	GBP 502.5m
Pricing	Daily
Base currency	GBP
Fund type	UCITS
Structure	SICAV
Domicile	Luxembourg
Tax status	UK Reporting Fund
SFDR classification	Article 8
Custodian bank	Pictet & Cie (Europe) SA
Dividend paid	January / July
Previous dividend rate (July 2023 / January 2024)	GBP 0.81/ 0.81
ISIN (Dis/Acc)	LU1883344829 / LU1883345123

## Morningstar Data

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## Risk Warnings

Past performance should not be seen as an indication of future performance.

The value of investments and the income from them may fluctuate and are not guaranteed. Investors may not get back the whole amount they have invested.

Changes in rates of exchange between currencies may cause the value of investments to diminish or to increase.

The views expressed are the author's own and do not constitute investment advice. Reliance should not be placed on the views and information in this document when taking individual investment and/or strategic decisions. Opinions, estimates, forecasts, projections and statements of financial market trends are based on market conditions at the date of the publication, constitute our judgment and are subject to change without notice. There can be no guarantee they will be met. This is a marketing communication according to ESMA guidelines. For more information please refer to our fund library on our website.

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