

2015 AGM – Chairman’s Report

It has been another very busy year and whilst we are one of the more active conservancies in KZN I am always cautious not to interpret being busy as also being effective!

As a conservancy our mandate is summarised by our motto

“Protecting nature. Inspiring change”

and whilst we try hard to do justice to this we do need to recognise that as a volunteer organisation we do have limitations.

So within that context let me get the “negatives” out of the way! At last year’s AGM I explained that our role as an environmental watchdog is largely unfulfilled and unfortunately this has not changed. There have been numerous land use changes in Kloof with properties rezoning from residential to office use and despite the relatively depressed home market there are still some housing developments taking place which impact on D’MOSS. Unfortunately we do not have the resources and wherewithal to assess the potential impact of these changes. We should also be more active in monitoring the condition of D’MOSS land as well as promoting and opening up green corridors. The same applies to tracking illegal dumping and other potential environmental crimes. I am sure there are a number of other issues where we are also falling short of our mandate.

Our focus instead has been and continues to be one of raising environmental awareness and educating the public. At the same time we run a limited number of practical, hands on projects which give effect to our commitment to protect the biodiversity of this special place we live in.

Enforcement Project

One area that I can confidently say that we have been effective and where we have made a difference not only in Kloof but in the whole of KZN and dare I say on a national level as well, is in the area of Invasive Alien Species legislation. Our court action against the Minister of Environmental Affairs over her failure to publish the NEMBA Regulations was eventually heard in the Durban High Court in April 2014. The judgement was released in October 2014. In the interim the Minister had published the regulations during August 2014. The court ruling was a clear vindication of the action we took and whilst I am sure that the Minister and the Department of Environmental Affairs will deny that the

court case had any bearing on their progress the feedback we have is very much contrary to that. The impact of the court case has gone far beyond the simple issue of the regulations. It is the first time that a conservancy has taken the state to court and won and the message has been made very clear that the state cannot merely ignore the constitutional rights of its citizens – this seems to be happening across a wide range of constitutional issues and we should feel proud that we were able to stand up and be counted on the environmental front. I believe the judgment holds all spheres of government fully and appropriately accountable to the Constitution and the law for the discharge of their environmental duties

The position on the case is currently as follows: Judge Vahed made five orders in his judgement. These were (in non-legal terminology!):

1. The Minister had acted unlawfully and unconstitutionally in failing to publish the required lists of Invasive Species.
2. The Minister had acted unlawfully and unconstitutionally in failing to publish the required regulations.
3. The Minister and relevant departments were ordered to do all such things and take all such steps as are necessary, and as are within their authority under the law, to ensure that all organs of State in every sphere of Government prepare invasive species monitoring, control and eradication plans for land under their control within a period of six months
4. The Minister was ordered to appoint and mandate, within six months sufficient numbers of Environmental Management Inspectors in relation to Invasive Alien Species in the province of KwaZulu-Natal
5. The Minister was ordered to pay the costs of the case on a punitive scale

The Minister was subsequently given leave to appeal against 2 of the 5 orders namely the orders requiring the Minister to get plans and inspectors in place within 6 months.

We have decided to oppose the appeal in order to ensure that a timescale is set on the Minister for the implementation of plans and the appointment of inspectors.

I would like again as I did last year thank the legal team led by one of our own members Advocate Michael Smithers and Advocate Andreas Coutsoudis and Janice Tooley and her team at Shepstone and Willey.

We currently run a number of projects and I will provide a full list as an attachment to the report. For this evening I will touch on some of the key activities:

The Alien Busters Project

Our goal of making the public spaces in Kloof free of IAPs (large trees excluded) by the end of 2015 is unlikely to be achieved but we are making reasonable progress. Those of you that drive on Bridle Road will have noticed the new signs we have put up to promote this project. We are employing a team for 5 days each month to clear IAPs on the street verges. We are now starting to focus on those invasive species that have been intentionally planted by residents such as sisal. We have had good coverage in the press in regard to the joint venture approach with eThekweni Municipality. Thanks to Lance Rasmussen, Mike Haskins and Barry Lang from Parks Department who are assisting us in this project.

This project also includes our IAP training now being run by Mieke van Tienhoven and Simon Maphumulo – they have already run 3 courses this year including one for UKZN in Pietermaritzburg.

The Msinsi Project – this project has made good progress in the past 12 months and the property is a real treasure trove of biodiversity. We have had exceptional support from EPCPD and their Working on Fire teams who have speeded up the rehabilitation by tackling some of the more heavily infested areas for us and doing the grass burns.

The Memorial Park Project – We have scaled down our involvement here as Parks are managing the vegetation with their own funds. We still co-operate and keep an eye on things and we have contributed towards new wooden picket fencing. Thanks again to Barry Lang of Parks Department for his support.

The M13 Project – Dave Peters our previous chairman stepped down from this project during 2014 and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him again for the many years that he has run this significant project. Unfortunately the vegetation management over the past six months has not been what we would like it to be as there are too many IAPs present. We changed the contractor on 1 May and a new set of goals has been set. We are going to focus on the section between Richmond Road and Pioneer/Village Road with a view to creating a “model” section that we can then replicate on the rest of the M13. We are also in the process of renegotiating the agreement with the KZN Department of Transport.

The Indigenous Open Gardens Event

The Indigenous Open Garden event remains our flagship event particularly in terms of raising awareness on the importance of our biodiversity. The number of people attending is of concern as it has dropped consistently over the past three years. We decided on a theme of “Urbanisation – Responsible Development” and selected Cotswold Downs as an estate which has demonstrated how development can occur and at the same time the environment can be improved. I would like to thank Vic Bonsor the Estate Manager for his courage and commitment to making the event a success. We had over 80 volunteers assisting at Cotswold Downs and this highlights the enthusiasm and spirit of our members and the many organisations that we partner with. At the event we had great co-operation from LepSoc, BirdLife Port Natal, Endangered Wildlife Trust, BotSoc, the Flora and Fauna Publications trust and many more all who gave their time and efforts to assist us.

The decision to use Cotswold Downs was a calculated risk in that we did not present specific stand-alone gardens but highlighted the work done to create an environment where development and nature can co-exist. It may not have been what our traditional “customers” expected but it is our role to lead and be innovative so I believe it was the right thing to do.

Numbers for the garden show continue to drop and we were just over the 1100 mark this year a drop of about 150 from the previous year which in turn had shown a decline on 2013. Despite this decline in numbers the event is still a major “conservation” event and should continue.

Back-to-Nature Series Events

Our Back-to-Nature series of events aimed at young families with primary school children continued over the past 12 months with a Butterfly Day, a Bird Day and a Frog Day. We also had a groundbreaking event in this series when we brought uShaka marine World to Kloof. Again these events are a practical demonstration of our commitment to the joint venture approach which has been working well.

Unfortunately we have not had the resources to reactivate our Eco-club for school learners. It is an area that we could really be doing a lot more but we need some volunteers to tackle this task!

Molweni River Health Schools Project

This is a project which received the eThewkini Mayors Award for Excellence – Biodiversity Category in 2014. The project is now in its third year and is recognised as one of the better run and most consistent

citizen science projects in our area. The schools love it, the learners love it and it serves a good purpose.

The Mayor's award came with a cheque for R10 000, a high-spec laptop computer and a high volume printer/copier/scanner. We donated the laptop and printer to Professor Colleen Downs at the School of Life Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus as a number of her students are doing research in our area. She decided to allocate the laptop to Craig Widdows who is doing research on Large Spotted Genets and the printer/scanner will be used in the faculty office.

The R10 000 will be used over the next three years to provide an annual Kloof Conservancy Top Life Science Student award of R500 at each of the 7 schools we work with on this project.

I would like to see this project extended further to include the entire Nkutu River and establish river monitors.

Outreach – Expanding our Green Footprint

We have continued with our stated intention to expand our green footprint into previously disadvantaged communities. We have co-ordinated and organised a trail run in Kwa-Ximba as well as Bird Day and a Bio-blitz in the proposed stewardship area in Kwa-Ximba. Our work in this area has not been without its problems. The concept of volunteer work is not well appreciated and the lack of understanding of the formal processes required to run and administer a volunteer organisation has created problems which we are gradually overcoming. These issues have necessitated a change in strategy and we are now putting a greater focus on running individual projects rather than trying to ensure we have a well-run and well administered formal conservancy.

Closer to home the Molweni River Community Park Project is now one of our flagship projects and it is attracting a lot of attention particularly in municipal circles. We have installed 3 picnic benches along the river and I am glad to report that they are being used and we have put them to good use as well for some of our activities. The 5 man team is now being funded by DUCT with whom we have a good working relationship. We are working on starting the process to make this as an official municipal park.

We also had a successful "Celebrate Molweni" event in November when we organised a relay event for the primary and high schools in Molweni which also involved the Durban Natural Science Museum.

In this regard I would like to extend our thanks to Allison Ruiters, the Director of the DNSM and her team. We have a very good relationship with the museum and they have assisted us with a number of events over the past 2 years. We have also collaborated with an article in their annual Thola Magazine where I outlined our strategy of expanding our green footprint and what it entails. This magazine is circulated widely and copies are sent to all the natural science museums around the world so it is a feather in our cap to be featured in it!

We recently collaborated with the DNSM in facilitating the official launch of their Go Wild mobile museum at Tholulwazi Secondary School in Molweni.

Also as part of our outreach programme we are hosting walks in the reserve for high school learners so that they can appreciate the value of the reserve and hopefully we can inspire a greater passion for our environment. We have done 4 walks in the past 12 months. At the end of June we will be hosting a group of 46 from Tholulwazi who have been selected as the student leadership group and we will be combining the leadership aspects with talks on the environment.

As mentioned in my report last year we still have a “dream” of building an community run eco-tourism camp on the border of the Krantzkloof Nature Reserve in Lower Molweni but at this point in time have not made any substantial progress in this regard and I am still struggling to find an architectural partner and a hospitality partner.

Krantzkloof Nature Reserve

Krantzkloof has always been and remains our greatest commitment simply because it is an amazing reservoir of our biodiversity and by helping to protect it we can make a major contribution to the biodiversity of the area. All our work in the reserve is done in partnership with the reserve management and the Honorary Officers. All in all we have a very good working relationship with the reserve and the Honorary Officers and I would like to thank Waldo Bekker and Brad Phillips for their co-operation on all the work we do.

In August we ran the 3rd edition of the highly successful 3 Falls Trail Run which raised R56 200. These funds were used to improve the entrances and we are currently busy with the gardens at the entrances. I am sure that if you have driven past there recently you will appreciate the significant improvement that has been made.

We recently conducted a survey of visitors with 165 respondents and based on the feedback we held two strategy workshops with the Honorary Rangers and Ezemvelo management and staff and we have embarked on a collaborative programme of gradually improving the reserve with the goal of making it the best small nature reserve in South Africa. The programme includes basic activities such as trail maintenance, improved signage, a new map, upgrading of facilities and communication with visitors.

We have also presented an ambitious proposal to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to take over the management of the Interpretative Centre and to convert it into a wedding and conference centre to be called the Krantzkloof Conference Centre. The plan is to run this as a joint venture with the Honorary Officers and it is our view that we can most probably raise about R50 000 per year in addition to paying Ezemvelo an annual "outsourcing fee". The proposal does require us to invest about R150 000 into upgrading the facility.

We have just embarked on a scheme to introduce more and younger Honorary Officers to the reserve through an innovative guiding scheme in partnership with the Wilderness Leadership School and the Honorary Officers. We will provide bursaries for these recruits to become fully fledged guides and in turn they will join the Honorary Officers and help us run more guided walks in the reserve. We are selecting youngsters who are busy with their diplomas or degrees in environmental or conservation management. The first batch of 4 new recruits, three of whom are black, should start their training in June

Also in Krantzkloof Nature Reserve we have introduced a highly innovative high-tech information system to provide visitors to the reserve information on species and features of interest. The system is called the Kloof Conservancy BioGuide and was developed entirely by a small team of volunteers. Bruce Crouch and myself did all the early ground work to test the Cellphone signals and find the existing information plates which are no longer in use, Hilary McLernan and myself did all the text information with Simon Maphumulo and Reggie Chamane doing the isiZulu translations. Jarred Crossley did a brilliant job of designing the web-site and the developing all the software. It is truly a system for the future and demonstrates our commitment to innovation and Inspiring change!

Other Projects

The projects I have mentioned form the key backbone of our activities but there are numerous other smaller projects and activities that carry on in the background, these include our support for some school activities, assisting UNISA students with their curriculum, the Glenholme Project and many

others – too many to mention here but I will list them in the report which will be available on the website.

Communications

A significant amount of effort goes into keeping our members informed on our activities. We use e-mail which is most probably the channel most used by our members.

Our monthly e-newsletter is extensively read and The Leopard's Echo bi-annual magazine seems very popular and I know it is circulated far beyond our membership group. We have very knowledgeable authors and quality of the articles is really good and all of local relevance. It's a real pity that we cannot afford to print it as I am sure we would have an even bigger readership.

Our website is still very much a leading website in terms of conservancies and we recently added a "blog" to promote the indigenous open gardens. Thanks to Jo Sobey who is promoting the digital channels and also added an Instagram account for the conservancy. In the long term these channels will be invaluable to get to the younger generation!

Although not popular with our members our Facebook page, is without doubt our most widely used and most popular communication channel. The page is updated a few times per week and contains information on our events and various activities in our area including photos and videos from our camera traps. We have almost doubled our "followers" in the past twelve months and we now have just over 1300 followers. Our recent posting of the "three caracal video" reached over 25 000 people and was viewed over 6 000 times!

If you are keen to know what we are up to then I strongly recommend you follow our facebook page!

I would like to thank Jared Crossly for the design and upkeep of our website and SOS Webservices for hosting all our digital channels on a pro-bono basis.

Ethekwini Conservancies Forum

Over the past year a new regional initiative has been started to make conservancies more effective in KZN. Up to now the KZNCA has been an association where the member conservancies registered and basically shared some information. It has never been an effective organisation in terms of playing a meaningful role in conservation in KZN. Led by Rob Crankshaw, the organisation is undergoing a major strategic review with the aim of becoming a meaningful player in conservation in KZN. Part of this strategy includes the formation of 6 or 7 regional forums with eThekwini being one of them. Kloof

Conservancy is playing a very active role in shaping this forum and we are beginning to develop a working relationship with eThekweni Municipality which I hope will be formalised in a Memorandum of Agreement by year end. As a conservancy we are very much aligned to this new KZNCA Strategy.

Membership

As pointed out last year our membership base has not grown in recent years and disappointingly there was a further decline over the past twelve months from 252 members in 31 March 2014 to 235 members on 31 March 2015. We did say we would look at this but have not done so. It will have to be made a priority for this current year.

Within the context of membership let me re-emphasise that we work on a project basis so if anyone has an exciting project we would be very keen to help that person promote and even fund the project but someone needs to actually run it. There are many suggestions and ideas that are brought to us and they are always welcome but we need your manpower as well. In essence our level of activity is limited by the human resources we have available.

Finances

On the financial front things are in order as demonstrated by the annual financial statements. I do think that we achieve a lot with relatively little money and our expenses are always kept to an absolute minimum. If the conference centre proposal is accepted by Ezemvelo then we will take a knock and our reserves will be reduced but we will still make sure that we maintain an adequate reserve. A special thanks to Cynthia Stanton who very kindly and competently manages our financial affairs on a pro bono basis.

Thank-you

I have thanked a few people so far but we have come to that point in the report where I need to thank all the people that make this conservancy what it is. Someone once said that **“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it”** but as mentioned earlier we had over 80 volunteers helping at the open gardens so if I were to thank each one individually I could keep you here all evening. So I am going to do a big thank-you to everyone that has been involved throughout the year, from our mascot Rubi-D, to those that donated cake for the garden show, braaied the wogs, ran the tuckshop, manned the entry gates, took stunning photographs for our various media channels,

managed our digital and media channels, organised activities at events, marked out the trail run routes, registered trail runners at 5 in the morning and welcomed them at the finish a few hours later, waved the red flags at our trail runs, lead guided walks, got their hands dirty eradicating invasive species, helped with our media campaigns, fetched and carried everything we need, processed new members and chased up on old ones. I also thank all of you that supported us by paying their membership fees – without you there would be no conservancy! I must also give special thanks to vice-chairman Bruce Crouch who works quietly behind the scenes and makes my job that much easier.

When I started this report I mentioned that we should not confuse busyness with effectiveness. If this were a business I would hope that you would feel that you got value for money for your membership fee and I hope that I have given you some assurance that within our limited capabilities and limited resources we have been both busy and effective and that in some small way we have indeed made a positive impact on;

Protecting nature. Inspiring change!

Thank you for your attention.

Paolo Candotti, Chairman – 28 May 2015

Kloof Conservancy

2014/2015 Project - Activity List

3 Falls Trail Run

Kwa-Ximba Trail Run

Support for the Molweni Trail Run

Alien Busters Project

- Street Verges clearing
- IAP Gardener Courses
- Herbicide distribution/control

Back-to-Nature Series Events

- Butterfly Day
- Molweni Bird and Butterfly Day
- Happy Hounds Day
- uShaka Marine Day
- Frog Evening

Enforcement Project

- Legal Process – Court case against the Minister of Environmental Affairs
- CARA Enforcement – interaction with DAFF on problem properties

Forest View Primary School Grassland Project

Glenholme Nature Reserve Project

Indigenous Open Gardens Show - Event

Krantzkloof Nature Reserve – support and funding of improvements

- Entrance upgrades
- Visitor Survey
- Facilitation of projects to plan improvements
- Guiding Project (Wilderness Leadership School)

- Signage and new map project
- Kloof Conservancy BioGuide Project

M13 Project

Memorial Park Project

Molweni River Health Schools Project

Molweni River Community Park Project

Celebrate Molweni Day - Event

Molweni Community Eco-camp Project

Msinsi CCA – Rehabilitation Project

Support for Kwa-Ximba Conservancy

Kwa-Ximba Bird Your Hood Day

Ronald's Kloof Environmental Precinct

Student Support Programme

Environmental Awareness Walks for High School and Community Groups

Communication

Monthly E-newsletter

Bi-annual The Leopard's Echo

Facebook

Thola Magazine – special input

Indigenous Open Gardens Blog

Instagram

External Activities

Involvement in eThekweni Conservancies Forum