

2014 AGM – Chairman’s Report

It has been another busy year and whilst I do not propose to go through every activity we have undertaken during the year I will cover the major projects and also focus on how effective or not I think we have been in working to our mandate which is summed up in our motto: Protecting nature. Inspiring change.

Some of our projects cover both aspects but let’s start with the Protecting nature challenge which I think has been our traditional strength as a conservancy.

Let me get the negative bit out the way first! We do have a serious shortcoming in this area. Our role as environmental watchdogs is largely unfulfilled. We should for example be monitoring illegal dumping and developments such as housing and office developments in residential areas but we just don’t have the wherewithal to cope with that. We have helped residents on a few occasions when they have contacted us with information but we do not have a systematic and organised way of doing this so there is likely to be much which we are missing. Unfortunately unless someone volunteers to take on this task we are unlikely to see any change in the immediate future.

On the plus side we do have a number of projects based on our invasive alien programmes which have been active throughout the year and which do contribute to Protecting nature. We have six projects that stand out and these are:

- 1) The Alien Busters – verge project: As you should be aware we have set ourselves the goal of making the public spaces in Kloof free of IAPs by the end of 2015 and we are employing a team for 5 days each month to clear IAPs on the street verges. We have run this project as a joint venture with Keep Kloof Beautiful with whom we enjoy a good working relationship and I would like to thank Carolyn Osborne and her team for that. This project had good momentum when we had Dusty Donnelly available to run it but she has temporarily withdrawn due to her pregnancy – I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Dusty for her input over an extended period and wish her well and hope we can get her back soon! Thanks also to Mike Haskins from Parks Department who has assisted us in this project.
- 2) The Msinsi Project – this project has marched slowly but steadily along since October 2011 and we have succeeded in clearing approximately 6ha of the 8,5ha of the property. The area we have cleared is now in good condition and is of significant value to our biodiversity. CREW visited the property in November 2013 and gave a very favourable report on the species found there. More recently an ecologist from eThekweni reported favourably on the condition and status of the grassland – it is relatively rare to find a property such as Msinsi in the middle of a residential area and the residents should really be more involved and have more ownership to secure the long-term future of this property. I would like to thank those residents (and members) that make regular financial contributions to make the work possible – Dr Nancy Rayner, Paul van den Heuvel and Stuart Bradbury – I also thank Bruce Crouch and Ian Southerland for their regular physical work on the 2nd Saturday of every month. I would also like to thank the EPCPD section at eThekweni Municipality and Rael Hughes from their Working on Fire programme for the great assistance they have given us in the past 6 months.

- 3) The Memorial Park Project – this has taken a bit of a back seat this past year as we are trying to get the parks department to take primary responsibility for the park but we do keep a monitoring watch and we have intervened when needed. We also hold an annual Happy Hounds day as part of an educational process to encourage responsible use of the park – with mixed success I have to add! A big thank you to Mandy Barrett – the Dog Guru for her input into these events. Thanks also to Barry Lang of Parks Department for his support.
- 4) The M13 Project – this project is managed by our previous chairman Dave Peters and has been running for over 10years. It continues to run well and whilst we have had a few hiccups with the persistence of some IAPs the section of the M13 we look after is a great example of a business/conservancy/authorities joint venture for the benefit of all involved and for the general public as well.
- 5) The Molweni River Community Park Project – the planning and negotiations for this were started last year but the physical work on the ground got going in January with the funding made available by the Durban Green Corridor which has enabled us to employ 5 permanent workers. Additionally, Kloof Conservancy funds the management fee for iDube Landscapes to manage the workers and the work programme. This project will see the rehabilitation of 3km of the Molweni River from the fence of Krantzklouf Nature Reserve to the Umgeni River and once complete and if it is maintained will make a significant contribution to the protection of the biodiversity along this river. Here I would like to extend my thanks to Gary Cullen of the Durban Green Corridor for having the confidence to partner with us and invest in what is a long term project. I must also extend our thanks to Bart Fokkens of DUCT and Brent von Benecke of iDube Landscapes for their technical support.
- 6) The Enforcement Project – Court Case against the Government of South Africa – this has been a major and significant activity that we have undertaken with dare I say the bold decision, made in 2012, to take legal action against the government on the absence of regulations to give effect to NEMBA. There have been numerous messages in this regard so I am not going to repeat everything tonight. We are waiting for the judgement which should be available any day now. Irrespective of the outcome I would like to thank Senior Counsel, Advocate Michael Smithers who has put in countless hours on a pro bono basis and without whom this case would not have been possible. Mike has been outstanding in his thoroughness and passion for the case. I would also like to extend the conservancies sincere thanks to Advocate Andreas Coutsoudis and to Shepstone & Wiley and in particular Janice Tooley and Matthew Thornton-Dibb who have all contributed on a pro bono basis. Together they made up a formidable legal team.

Other projects such as the Glenholme Project, which we run in a joint venture with WESSA Highway branch, and the number of occasions we have assisted members of the public with information and advice on IAPs all contribute to protecting our bio-diversity.

It would be easy to say that since we have been very busy we must therefore be making an impact but I have to take a more realistic and sober view. The court case could, if it goes in our favour, have a major impact not only regionally but nationally as well and that would be a significant achievement but other than that the impact that we are making on protecting the biodiversity of our area remains small in the context of the total area of all the gardens and in particular the DMOSS areas of Kloof.

Our projects whilst valuable in their own right are at best creating small pockets of improvements so there is still much work to be done to Protect nature!

Moving on to our work in the area of Inspiring change

These activities are aimed at educating the public and in particular younger people on the value of our environment and on the importance of changing the way we live so as to ensure the long term sustainability of the earth's finite resources. We hope that our passion for what we do will rub-off and inspire people to either join in our work or start their own projects.

We do have a number of exciting projects.

Krantzkloof Nature Reserve and the Kloof Conservancy 3 Falls Trail Run

First and foremost on our agenda is the promotion and long term sustainability of Krantzkloof Nature Reserve. Over the years most of the funds we have raised have been ploughed into the reserve. With the introduction of our many diverse projects in the past two years it became necessary to secure additional funding to maintain our important commitment to Krantzkloof. This has come about in a spectacular fashion with the introduction of the 3 Falls Trail Run. This was the brainchild of Andrew McKay and it came to fruition in 2012 when we raised R20 000 for the reserve. This was handsomely surpassed with the 2013 event which raised R52 800. The 2013 funds are currently being used to build the new entrance at the Kloof Falls Road site. In this context I would like to thank Rob Vosper who designed the new entrances, Stephen Nicholson who did some of the planning and Dave Honour who is managing the construction. This event has also involved the Honorary Officers to whom we are sincerely grateful for their involvement not only in the 3 Falls event but in most of our projects. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Brad Phillips who recently resigned as the chairman of the HO's. Brad has been a pillar of strength and support for our activities and it has been a pleasure to work with him. His successor is also very well known to us – Richard Hancox most probably spends more time doing work for Kloof Conservancy than he does in his own conservancy which is Everton so we are pleased to see him in this new role and wish him well!

The 3 Falls Trail run has not only generated cash for the reserve but it has been enormously successful in promoting the reserve. The feedback we have received has been overwhelming and there are now many more regular runners in the reserve and the number of visitors to the picnic sites is also significantly up. Our promotional messages for the run all stress the value of the reserve and the importance this has as a biodiversity reservoir for our area. I think that overall this project has been an exceptional success.

The Indigenous Open Gardens Event

Our Indigenous Open Garden event remains our flagship event in terms of fund raising and raising awareness on the importance of our biodiversity. The number of people attending is of concern and I will be keen to see the turnout at this year's event which takes place next weekend. The Indigenous Open Gardens is also the one event where a large number of our members and outsiders put up their hand to help and make a contribution. In this regard I would like to pay tribute to the entire team and whilst it is often inappropriate to thank one individual person I do think that Brigid Turner does deserve special thanks for her unstinting hard work the whole year round in preparing and planning this event!

Back-to-Nature Series Events

Our Back-to-Nature series of events aimed at young families with primary school children has gone from strength to strength and is a good example of our joint venture approach where we provide the logistical support and other organisations provide the “technical or subject” expertise. A big thank you to the Durban Natural Science Museum, Steve Woodhall and his Lepsoc team, BirdLife Port Natal, David Johnson in his personal capacity and Dr Jeanne Tarrant of the EWT’s Endangered Amphibian Programme all of whom have willingly partnered with us in educating the public through these fun events. Our next joint venture coming up in July is a Dangerous Creatures: From Catchment to Sea which is a joint venture with uShaka Marine World. This demonstrates our commitment to continuously find new, exciting and innovative ideas to attract younger people into the conservation fold.

Eco-club

Whilst our Back-to-Nature events do target the youth there is much more that we could be doing to develop environmental interest in young people. We have continued to build our relationships with a number of schools and we will work hard to grow these relationships but we need a more concerted effort and I hope to address this in the current year and maybe even revive our Eco-club concept.

Molweni River Health Schools Project

Another project that has been very well received and is influential in Inspiring change is our Molweni River Health Schools Project involving 7 high schools in the Molweni River catchment. This is a good example of a project that spans an eco-system and is not restricted by suburb/municipal boundaries. The project is now in its 2nd year and the feedback from the schools is extremely positive. The learners have great fun catching bugs in the river but also go away significantly better informed. In this project we have many joint venture partners which I would like to thank. These are Umgeni Water, a number of departments from within eThekweni Municipality, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the Honorary Officer and our key partner GCS-Environmental Consultants. Led by Russell Stow GCS have been involved from the very beginning and allocate significant resources to this project. This ensures that every school team is accompanied by a water scientist thus guaranteeing the high quality of the learning experience. The learners are really privileged to have such high calibre support.

E-mail - Website – Facebook – E-newsletter – The Leopard’s Echo

Communication is a very important tool in our efforts to Inspire Change – our suite of communication tools comprising regular e-mails, a detailed reference website, monthly e-newsletter, a biannual in depth magazine, The Leopard’s Echo and a popular Facebook page, is most probably the most impressive of all the conservancies in KZN – we constantly receive positive feedback on the interesting information we share not only with our members but with the public at large. Our Facebook page has 708 followers the vast majority of which are not members nor residents of Kloof, many are foreigners and I can only assume they follow our page because it has information which is of interest to them. Our website is often praised and I need to thank Jared Crossly for the design and upkeep and SOS Webservices for hosting it on a pro-bono basis.

A key component of our plans to inspire change has been our desire to expand our green footprint into previously disadvantaged areas. I have already mentioned the concept of looking after an eco-system which would logically take us into neighbouring communities but it is equally important that we assist where we can to help others change attitudes towards the environment. I have already mentioned the Molweni River Community Park and the Molweni River Health Schools Project as

major projects – both of these operate in the Molweni Valley which has no community environmental organisation. We have more plans for the Molweni Area but our approach is a cautious one as it is critically important to ensure that any project we are involved in not only has the backing of the community but their direct involvement as well. The issue is complicated because of the political factors where projects have to be approved by both the traditional leadership of the area and the elected politicians. This is a reality we accept and are learning to live with. We also have to walk a bit of a tightrope and have fine balance so as to remain neutral and focussed on our objectives which are to protect nature and Inspire change in the community. We are fortunate that we have been able to develop good relationships with a number of organisations working in the valley – I mentioned these in the context of the Molweni River Health Schools Project – All our projects in the valley are all run as joint ventures.

A critical aspect of our work in previously disadvantaged areas is the importance of creating income generating opportunities which balance conservation and development. It is difficult to have personal dignity without a job and without dignity the environment has a low priority. Unfortunately unemployment is exceptionally high in the valley and this makes it difficult to raise the profile of environmental issues. We have been fortunate that in the Molweni River Community Park Project we have been able to create 5 jobs but this is a drop in the ocean of what is needed. This is a difficult area and is the reason why we have invited our guest speaker, Kevin McCann to talk to us about the Wildlands experience. I understand they have had reasonable success in creating green entrepreneurs. We are keen to learn from others so I will be listening attentively!

One project that is still at an embryo phase is the establishment of an up-market Molweni Community Eco-camp on the Molweni River on border with Krantzkloof Nature Reserve. This is an important initiative as it addresses many of the goals we are aiming at i.e. protecting nature, inspiring change and creating jobs. This is a project that is not without its challenges but it does have the approval in principle of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the eThekweni Municipality. The search is on for partners that can contribute to the design of the camp and the ongoing administration of the hospitality aspects. The establishment of a community run camp on the border with Krantzkloof Nature Reserve is an important step in giving the Molweni community equal status to the Kloof Community in terms of its access and interest in the reserve. I am strongly of the view that the current set-up of the reserve does not accord the Molweni community the same privileges and dignity that is afforded to the Kloof community and this cannot continue indefinitely as it is not conducive to the long term security and sustainability of the reserve. A strong community stake in the reserve is what will ensure its long term viability and this has been handsomely demonstrated by Kloof Conservancy's support for the reserve – our direct interest and passion for the reserve has inspired us to help it survive and improve. The same should be expected from the Molweni Community. I fully understand that for security reasons this may not be a popular view but I am convinced that if one takes a long-term view then it is the correct position.

Still on the subject of extending our green footprint we continue to assist the Kwa-Ximba Conservancy in its growth phase. Again this is not without its challenges. The lack of resources and absence of job creation opportunities stymies progress. Having said that, there is a core group of enthusiasts and progress is being made. Simon Maphumulo with support from EPCPD at eThekweni Municipality has addressed the local Tribal Council and the first steps have been taken towards setting up a stewardship area which we hope we can ultimately convert into a fully proclaimed Nature Reserve. We took Andrew McKay for a look at some of the stunning scenery in the area and he in turn has persuaded Riverside Trail Running Club to partner with us in developing a trail run in the area as a first step towards creating value from the beauty of the natural resources – again we are trying to balance the environmental and developmental needs at the same time.

So overall I think that our activities aimed at inspiring change have made good progress – to quote Bob Dylan who once said “What else can you do for anyone but to inspire them?” He wasn’t talking about conservation but the logic is the same. Having said that it is always very difficult to judge the impact we are making so the jury is out on how much impact we are actually making.

With all these activities on the go I think we had misguidedly hoped that we would get more members joining us – the reality is that there has been a decline in membership from a total of 266 on 31 March 2013 to 252 on 31 March 2014. I think this emphasises the need to directly market and recruit members as was successfully done in the past. The management team will need to address this in the current year.

All the activities I have mentioned do not happen in isolation – they are part of an overall plan and this would not be possible without the dedication of some key role players. It is difficult to thank any one individual as there is always a risk of forgetting someone but I must thank all the volunteers who regularly give of their time – Anna, Jenny, Trish, Melanie, Gernot, Richard, Sandra, Vanessa, Bev, Sheila, Dusty, Simon, Pete, Mark, Martin and all the HO’s. I would also like to thank the management team that does all the planning work. A big thank you to Sarah Chiles who was an invaluable part of the team until she was recruited by the African Wildlife Foundation – we really do miss her. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Desiré Pelser who ran the media portfolio for a few months during 2013. A big thank you also to Cynthia Stanton who has run our financial books after Steve Kersey resigned the portfolio. Cynthia was introduced to us by Sandy Bird who initially offered to take on the portfolio but had to resign in the first week for personal reasons. I am not sure if Cynthia knew what she was letting herself in for but she has coped admirably and taken a significant load and concern away from the management team. Thanks also to Kevin Collett who does have time limitations but nevertheless puts his shoulder to the wheel when needed and takes great photographs! Wendy Erasmus spends a lot of time on vacation and I guess that is not a bad thing! In between her trips she does look after our membership and she is an invaluable link to the many members that she knows personally. I have already mentioned Brigid in the context of the Indigenous Open Gardens but her help goes far beyond that and she sends me almost as many e-mails as I send her (which I have to admit is a lot). She always has suggestions and points of view which help refine and get to the correct end point. A big thank you to Bruce Crouch who I suspect is a very reluctant vice-chairman as he prefers to work in the background but his tireless input has been invaluable and he has been of great support and made my task that much easier.

I have had a lot of people to thank tonight and I hope I have not forgotten anyone – if I have please do forgive my oversight. The reason why there are many people to thank is that there is a lot happening and I guess that is a good sign. Throughout my presentation you will have heard the words “joint venture” and “project” repeated many times – this was a fundamental outcome of the strategy review we carried out with ITI last year. Our management team is too small to do everything that we would like to do so we have leveraged the concept of joint ventures to bring in other organisations and other resources to help us run many projects. We do not claim ownership of any of these joint venture projects, and we are extremely grateful for the input from our partners who deserve equal credit.

Again I think we need to be realistic and whilst we can be pleased with how the year has gone we must understand that the challenge is very big. Having said all that I do think that in some small way we may have contributed towards Protecting nature. Inspiring change! Thank you for your attention.

