



Dargle Conservancy Annual General Meeting 2013 Chairman's Report prepared by Nikki Brighton

Dargle Conservancy is well-recognised and admired in Conservation circles. Initially formed in the 1980 by Iain Sinclair, Nick and Helen Methley and others, after a period of dormancy, it was revived in 2003. This year we celebrate our 10th anniversary. Here are some highlights from the past year.

Branding

We do pay attention to our brand which, of course, means it is well recognised.

Logo was updated – sharper, crisper

New member signs designed and manufactured with uv resistant coating to minimise fading. Distributed free to paid up members.

Faded Road sign replaced

Website – constantly updated with events, newsletters, wildlife sightings, up to date info from SAPIA, Cape Parrot research, Fire Regulations and other useful info. Di Dold – WESSA Board said at the KZNCA AGM recently “Dargle is the Queen of Conservancy websites” Thank you Paul Van Uytrecht for voluntary effort to keep it up to date.

Why are we a Conservancy?

Situated right in the middle of vulnerable eco-systems within uMgungundlovu Municipality. Recent research has shown that at current rates of transformation there will be no completely natural habitat left in KZN in 37 years' time. We are custodians of eco-systems which provide goods and services to millions eg water, clean air, carbon sinks, pollinators, flood attenuation etc. Forests, Grasslands, Wetlands and Rivers.

uMngeni Vlei at the head of Mngeni river recently declared a Ramsar site – Wetland of International Importance. Mngeni river provides water to over 5 million downstream users.

How do we inspire action?

Regular community gatherings at Tanglewood. Our long table suppers afterwards are very popular where new friends are made and interesting topics discussed.

10 talks and movies this past year including: uMngeni River Walk, Walking the Wildcoast, Problem Plants, Birds of Ecuador, Oribi and Dog Hunting, Getting off the Grid, Snakes, One Man, One cow, One planet, Story of Dargle Plants. Iain Sinclair *“I am really appreciative of your efforts in keeping the Dargle Conservancy active, only the Balgowan Conservancy is senior in age, please keep up the good work. Dargle is a very special place, inhabited by special people.”*

Curiously, we attract more outsiders than locals to our events.

Pam Haynes *“Thanks for a very inspiring evening. We love your strong sense of community and feel quite at home in Dargle”*

Farm Visits and Sustainability workshops: Biogas and Alternate energy showcase, Hay bale building and off grid living, Water quality workshop, hands on Alien Clearing (poorly attended despite being main issue at the last AGM).

Lesley Hughes *“This was such an interesting talk and gives a lot of food for thought. Thank you for putting it together.”* Charles was a little perplexed at the thought that he'd have to change all the light bulbs again – to LED ones.

Lucinda Bate: *“It was an absolute pleasure having a delightful, enthusiastic crowd of people visit our part of the river.”* Tom promised a picnic if we go back and ensure a higher mini-sass score next time!

Wildlife Sightings

Lots of contributions and beautiful pictures from members and residents.

We have inspired other Conservancies to follow. *“I just want to thank you for all your blogs. Every time one comes through I devour it. Living in a 3rd floor flat in the middle of Durban, this is my taste of the country. You are all so privileged to live where you do”*

Important data for monitoring migration of species and adaptation to climate change – researchers can use this information. Amanda Jones African Small Cat research *“I really think the sightings are so important and that valuable information needs to be converted into a useful format. I am helping KZNCA with getting the maps up to date of all the Conservancies - I have some ideas on the sightings database which I would love to implement.”*

Cape Parrot Count

Thank you to new member Sally Cumming for taking on this task enthusiastically and doing a good job. As usual, no birds sighted in Dargle over the weekend, although 36 spotted in Boston. Since then 18 birds seen in Dargle.

Mngeni River Challenge

During the last few days of 2012, riverside residents were encouraged to submit photos of their part of the Mngeni river. 16 people submitted 22 photos to compile a delightful record of summer on the river. Gilly Robartes *"This is my little sanctuary and swimming pool"*

Dargle Nature Reserve

Our most significant achievement to date. Over 1000ha of irreplaceable biodiversity owned by 5 different landowners conserved under the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme.

The process began 6 or 7 years ago, with the vision of Andrew Anderson. Thank you, Andrew. Changes in personnel at EKZNW who manage the BSP process in KZN, meant that progress was slow and unfortunately the original 2400ha dwindled to 1000ha. *"The future of biodiversity conservation is in the hands of the landowner. Accolades must go to the landowners who have made such a bold and forward-thinking contribution to conservation in South Africa."*

Landowners: Griffin, Robinson, Bronner, Booysen, Schneideman. We need to work to close the gap and add more grassland and all the forest.

Dargle Farm – old Griffin family farm, original settlers. Site of dassie release programme, grassland and forest.

Lemonwood – mostly forest, cape parrots, samango monkeys, encourage walks and host school groups, on the SKZN birding route.

Old Kilgobbin – special small things, seeps and springs, blue cranes, orchids, stonewalls

Kilgobbin Cottage – Samango, old logging paths, first regular walk, Streptocarpus fanniniae, Sandersonia auriculata.

Biodiversity Stewardship Programme: Involves formal, legally binding agreements with landowners for a minimum of 30 years. They maintain ownership of their land, receive guidance and management assistance, and are offered support to diversify their land-based activities while protecting the country's unique biodiversity against the threat of climate change.

All documents have been completed by the landowners and approved by the EKZNW Board and submitted to the MEC to sign off. Gareth Boothway *"The Nature Reserve is placed within a highly productive landscape, providing the ideal habitat for a number of iconic species. It is fantastic to see private landowners making this invaluable contribution to conserving KZN's biodiversity, increasing the green footprint in our country."*

Development Monitoring – report by Barry Downard

Very important to monitor inappropriate development to protect biodiversity and eco-systems. Fortunately, a quiet year on the development front. Barry Downard manages this portfolio *"The Dargle Conservancy requests the Honourable MEC to consider the long-term effects the final decision will have in terms of responsible planning, and which is in the best interests of an entire region, rather than the short-term interests of an individual landowner."*

It was a relatively quiet year in terms of development monitoring.

- Highgate Wine Estate (Piggly Wiggly)
After several rounds of objections and appeals, Department of Agriculture finally, and inexplicably, gave authorisation for subdivision of 26 individual stands (and subsequent residential estate).
Excerpt from DC appeal to the MEC:
"The Dargle Conservancy requests the Honourable MEC to consider the long-term effects the final decision will have in terms of responsible planning, and which is in the best interests of an entire region, rather than the short-term interests of an individual landowner."
- St IvesDC submitted comment, but no objections to proposed changes to already approved plans.
- Low cost housing township (near Thokans) DC submitted additional comment on behalf of Wyndham Robartes. Nothing further has transpired.

Development related activities:

- DC submitted comment on the Draft National Water Resource Strategy to the Department of Water Affairs. We emphasized the critical importance of the uMngeni catchment system, and pointed out that the report was laying emphasis on water supply systems, and paying little attention to the critical aspect of broken delivery systems.
- DC submitted comment to the Parliamentary Committee on Environmental Impact Assessments.
- DC submitted comment on the ongoing Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment for the uMgungundlovu District Municipality. We also participated in discussion sessions.
- DC registered with the uMngeni Municipality as an Interested & Affected party in terms of the Integrated Development Plan, and Land Use Management System.

- DC maintained communications with the Department of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs & Rural Development, and other organizations concerned with development issues.

We are fully in support of contributing funds to the hiring of an MCF development monitor to represent all our interests at meetings and make comments on EIAs etc.

Environmental Education

Focussed on Dargle and Impendle Schools. Did not do as much as usual, just too stretched for time.

Hired Penelope Malinga to do water studies with Corrie Lynn and also to conduct forest excursion. Thanks to African Insight for transport, CrabApple for accommodation, neighbours for sandwiches and fruit.

Thenjiwe Ngcobo educator *"The learners were excited, had fun and enjoyed themselves while learning lots from Penz' experiences. It is good for them to relate the theory from class into real experiences."*

Pat McKrill, snake presentations in 6 schools – Dargle, Lions River and Impendle

Also presentation to farm workers – well attended and positive comments.

Busi Nondaba Principal *"It is the talk of the day. Learners are telling others that they must not kill a snake if they see it on the road. Thank you so much for this opportunity."*

Nombuzelo Nokhoakhoa *"It's unbelievable. I won't ever scream when I see a snake again, I am not frightened now. I thought it would feel wet, but it was smooth and dry, just like my skin."*

Sustainable Solutions tour for high school students to Lane's End and Rainbow

Lungisani Mthlane *"Eish, this guy is intelligent. I didn't know that someone in South Africa can live like this. It is impressive. We are the future leaders and this knowledge will help us take care of the Earth."*

Liz Gow *"I got goosebumps reading this particular story: an illustrated tale of just two Dargle-based families succeeding in their efforts to live consciously and responsibly in order to leave a lighter footprint on this earth. Helping to expose our younger folk, at their early age, must surely have helpful results going forward. So much that each of us can do."*

Walks

Kilgobbin most popular walk on Midlands circuit. Lemonwood third Sunday and now Satori third Wednesday. These have inspired 10 other regular walks in the Midlands! Access to private property is big drawback. How can we expect anyone to value biodiversity if they have never seen these places?

Financials – Treasurer's report by Clive Shippey

We do not have audited financial statements to present. This is because we are between bookkeepers and also trying to sort out the MCF money which came through our account for the past 18 months. Kevin Culverwell has assured us that presenting these figures like this is acceptable. We are on track to have all sorted out soon.

Subscriptions	R12250.00
KilgobbinWalks	R2350.00
Lemonwood Walks	R340.00
Movies/Talks	R3850.00
Dargle Map	R1600.00
Donations	R1450.00
Interest	R1775.27
Total Income	R23 615.27

Afrihost	R524.00
Admin costs	R673.00
Bank Charges	R40.50
Education	R4920.00
Speakers Fee/meals	R716.00
Donation to Free-Me	R600.00
Subscriptions	R400.00
Map Printing	R1200.00
Total Expenses	R9073.50

Bank Balances:

Current account: R5 035.31

Call Account: R51 273 94

Special expenses:

New road sign R1500

Banner R1200

New Members Signs R3400

Wildlife Warning Signs

Dargle Decade Celebration

Thanks Barend for cutting pine trees invading grassland and selling as Christmas trees. Donation of R500 to DC funds.

Midlands Conservancies Forum

Inspire, Motivate, Challenge

Most of you will have heard of the MCF by now, but I thought you might like a bit more info about the forum. The idea originated in Dargle – our Vision has always been to work with like-minded people and strengthen the Conservancy movement in the Midlands.

The vision of the Dargle Conservancy is to strengthen our effectiveness as an independent organisation, and in coalition with other like-minded people and bodies, to work proactively to achieve a greater Midlands area that is wisely managed by all to ensure long term environmental sustainability.

In June 2010, we invited other Conservancies we knew about to discuss the idea. Most important things which came up were supporting one another so Conservancies don't fizzle out and helping newer ones.

MCF Mission: Facilitating and coordinating the activities of a coalition of KZN Midlands conservancies, focussing on biodiversity conservation, which will ensure long-term environmental sustainability in the area.

Then in early 2011 we applied for CEPF funding to support Biodiversity Stewardship Programme (complete existing sites and find more) and catalyst funding for MCF initiative. Dargle Conservancy was the conduit for the R1,2 million raised as we had financial records, NPO number etc. This meant for a while our bank balance looked amazing!

CEPF are concerned about protecting land in Biodiversity Hotspots (34 in the world) and we are in the middle of the Maputaland Pondoland Albany Hotspot (one of 2 in SA). By the end of 2013 we will have secured 8090 hectares under BSP, falling short of our target of 10 000ha.

Judy Bell *"Thanks to the founding group of Dargle-ites who were inspired and courageous enough to take this wonderful idea and make it happen."*

Dargle has twice hosted CEPF at the request of Wildlands to showcase all that is special about the Midlands. Thanks Carl for the use of your barn and Barend for guiding walks.

Ren Ito World Bank *"I have only just moved to this post in environmental matters. I used to spend my time at air force bases in war zones and inspecting nuclear sites. This has been wonderful. I am so glad that I finally came back to the real earth, and very much enjoyed joining you all today."*

Quarterly road show meetings held at different Conservancies are an important part of MCF. Last July everyone came to Dargle and had a marvellous afternoon. Margie and Warwick Fraser Lions' Bush Conservancy *"Thank you for a truly wonderful afternoon in the Dargle. The walk through the forest with Barend was amazing. The tea and delicious eats were incredible. The speakers to were interesting and I especially enjoyed the presentation on The Dargle. There is clearly something to be learnt from what you are doing. Thank you for sharing this with us."*

MCF gives us a bigger voice and access to bigger opportunities- for instance now an honorary member of the N3 Gateway.

MCF Hosts a very successful blog which I encourage you to follow. www.midlandsconservanciesforum.wordpress.com

Tanya Smith *"I really enjoy the MCF blogs so it is only a pleasure to promote them through our EWT website. The MCF is a critical partner for our efforts in KZN and I am not surprised that many of your "hits" are for Wattled Cranes as you publish so much up to date info on them (and the other Cranes) all the time."*

Dargle Local Living

We accept that we do need to change our lifestyles if biodiversity has any chance of survival. DLL aims to provide inspiration and information to help us do this. DLL blog: 47 Stories, 69 followers, 115 comments, Lots of lovely pictures, 3255 visits. The blog is a great place to share community stories like the Eat In Awards winners – three from Dargle, Spurwinged Goose Pie, Dargle 100 years book launch, sunrise on Inhlosane.

Joy Coleman *"Such great things happening in the Dargle, what a wonderful community! I visited the February market and did not want to leave! How refreshing to meet 'real' people doing 'real' things :)"*

Do follow the blog – it is really easy – all you have to do is click on the FOLLOW button and new stories pop right into your inbox. www.darglelocalliving.wordpress.com

Dargle Local Market

Barter with neighbours, hear local news, share saved seed, taste new things, stock up on local produce and build food security

The market is also about building community, as we will need a strong community to cope with the challenges ahead. Old friends gather, new friends are made. Wonderful that children and teenagers are also getting involved. Special events this year have been the Pumpkin Competition, Marmalade Competition, first Birthday and Kyknet film crew.

Eidin Griffin *"After the success of the Pumpkin Competition... how about a Chook Festival? A Parade of the Dargle's finest, fattest and most colourful chickens?"*

Midlands LETS – community exchange – wide variety of offerings (36) with 23 people signed up to trade. Important to keep our money circulating locally.

Facebook

Dargle enters the 21st century. Easy tool to spread news, ask for help and inspire action. Thank you Rowena for setting it up.

Helen Booysen *"Change is no longer an issue. We hold on to all our core values but keep abreast of modern technology. So proudly Dargle!"*

Stats: 104 people like us (especially Dieter Setz)

Mostly women aged 35-54

13-24 year olds "talking about us"

Average monthly viral impressions of posts - 3000

Average number of stories created about our page - 60 per week

Publicity

Displayed our banner and Barry and Nikki assisted at KZNCA stand at Sustainable Living and Indigenous Plant fair.

Media coverage in local press – Meander Chronicle and Hilton Times

Big feature on DLL in Witness

Wildside magazine feature on Dargle in Autumn 2013 edition

2013- 2014 budget

Although we have a nice nest egg which has grown steadily over the past years (and substantially the past two years while we have been too nervous to spend any money in case it belonged to MCF not us!) We should not spend more than our current income. We have spent some of the reserves on updating signage and may use some towards Wildlife Warning Signs on the P134 if the Roads Dept is not able to fund them all.

We propose increasing subs by R30 to R280pa. This means an increase from 68c per day to 76c – do you think we can manage that? From this year, we will be doing pro-rata subs for all new members and the membership sign will be included in the fee.

Dargle Decade

Although the original Dargle Conservancy was started in 1985, the current Conservancy was revived 10 years ago. We feel that this calls for a little celebration. 9/10/11 August - a weekend of celebrating Dargle icons. All local dinner in Corrie Lynn Barn with David Johnson as guest speaker, coordinated by Tinks Fowler with help from everyone. David was the first speaker at a DC meeting 10 years ago. Then Saturday late morning hike up Inhlosane with bring and share picnic (and gin and mint cocktails) organised by Brandon Powell and Jethro Bronner, Sunday walk with Barend Booysen and Bernard Janisch through the Dargle Nature Reserve properties from Kilgobbin, through Carlisle and ending with soup and bread at Lemonwood.

Help!

All of these things actually take more time than we have and we seriously need some help if we are to keep Dargle at the forefront of the local Conservancy movement. Can you contribute? It doesn't always need a lot of time.

5 mins a week: upload photo and/or comment on Dargle facebook page

1 Hour a month: Gather your wildlife sightings and submit (take some gorgeous pics – add 20 mins)

1 day a month: Collate all the exciting wildlife sightings from across the Dargle, send out to our mailing list

3 or 4 hours a week: Join the Dargle Conservancy committee and make a big contribution to keeping the DC active and at the forefront of the local conservation movement.

2 days a year: help with annual Oribi Count, or research projects: black sparrowhawk, caracal, samango monkeys.

3 days: Arrange an educational excursion to grassland, forest or wetland in Dargle for a group of Dargle school children

1 hour a month: Put up and take down the Dargle Market Signs

One evening and 5 emails and a couple of phone calls to organise an inspiring speaker for our community

One day: Prepare something local and delicious to serve at our Dargle Decade Celebration in August.

