



**Dargle Conservancy Annual General Meeting 2015  
Report from the Chair prepared by Nikki Brighton**

**What does Conservancy mean to you?**

Clearly it means different things to different people – even amongst the small Dargle community. Is it about firm cadastral boundaries? Removing fences and enabling access? Protecting eco-systems for the benefit of humans and other creatures? Maximising the use of natural resources? Making sure nothing harms the animals? Is it cooperating with neighbours? Learning to be a better steward? Conserving the sense of place? Maintaining the status quo? Is it working with others on a landscape level? Adjusting your lifestyle to do as little harm as possible? Showing off the land you are custodian of, and the creatures who share it? Repairing ecosystems and endangered habitats? Simply enjoying the natural treasures of the area? Understanding that Dargle is part of something so much bigger?

**Phd student Nelly Mwangi, who conducted research into the Conservancy movement using Dargle Conservancy as an example,** completed her research recently. In particular, she asked the question: Can we think about conservancies as a way of looking at conservation at the landscape scale of analysis? How people in a conservancy act – do they act collectively or as individuals concerned with their own issues?

The results showed that the success of a conservancy as a landscape approach is dependent on landowner commitment to collective action. Landowner commitment is influenced by a shared understanding of the conservancy as a multi-tenure conservation area managed collectively for the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services that require common property rights regimes for their sustainable use and management.

Findings show that the main challenge is landowner interpretations of their properties as private resources. Traditional understanding of private property rights raises ownership anxiety among Conservancy members in relation to the loss of rights over control of their properties through management partnerships across the landscape.

*“There is little collective action and identity from the point of view of contributing to some key conservation ideals. Most importantly - conserving biodiversity and ecosystems services. A key issue is that an overall management plan is required for the conservancy. Few have such plans and that is a weakness. There is a lack of thinking or reflection at the landscape scale of analysis by conservancy members. There is limited collective action and identity around key conservation outcomes for the conservancy as a whole.”* Prof Rob Fincham

**Recently, too, one of our members expressed concern that some of the movies screened by the Conservancy were ‘sniping at farmers’ – in particular, Cowspiracy, which**

explored the issue that major environmental organisations are ignoring the fact that animal agriculture is a leading cause of greenhouse gasses. We have screened a wide variety of films around many major environmental issues of the years.

This did give us the opportunity for debate and reflection regarding the relationship between the Conservancy and commercial farmers. At present, two out of the five committee members are farmers, which is quite likely the highest representation we have ever had. Within the Committee opinions vary, as they should. We believe that the purpose of any Conservancy is to act as a voice for the environment as a whole, including the ecosystems on which all of humanity rely. Our actions as custodians of these life-support systems in Dargle have repercussions for the rest of KZN. We are neither a Chamber of Business nor a Landowners Association which may focus narrowly on benefits for its members – our responsibility is much broader than that. Our Vision and Mission statements make this clear. We cannot ignore planetary-scale issues in the hope that Dargle will remain untouched by these issues.

A healthy society requires lively debate on all aspects of its organisation. We believe that the range of activities reflects the very varied interests of the community that we live in. We have no particular strategy about what to screen or host - we rely on volunteers who invest private time, resources and energy and who have the inclination to organise an interesting event, and in this way we ensure the variety of offerings.

**We trust that whatever Conservancy means to you, that we have done something to delight you amongst the myriad activities in our valley over the past year.**

### **Activities**

Forest ecology and Tree ID - Two day course with Eugene Moll.

*"I enjoyed every minute. Eugene is such a nice man, so knowledgeable and so happy to help us mere mortals along the way. I certainly learnt a lot and need to get into the forest far more often to get really familiar with all of the trees."* Jenny Fly

Movies: Climate Change, Cows, Plastic Pollution, Water, Fracking, Land Restoration, Bees Screenings at Everglades, Hebron Haven and Tanglewood providing opportunities to connect with neighbours, make new friends and learn.

*"You put on a movie which made us think, and better still, makes us ask questions. We really enjoyed last night, despite the fact that we found lots unscientific about the movie. I believe it is good to produce controversial matter every now and then – it is good for the planet!"* Iona Stewart

Food Gardening workshop at Corrie Lynn School for local residents. Many job opportunities have been lost along the Petrusstroom Road over the past year, which will most likely increase hunger and lead to increased poaching.

Tracks and Scats ID Workshop - Who do we share the Dargle with? Facilitated by expert Neville van Lelyveld

Burning Workshop – facilitated by Kevin Barnsley and Bobby Hoole

*"If you are not 100% sure of what is best, ask a couple of 'old-timers' for their opinion BEFORE you strike the match."* Robin Fowler

Presentation in Zulu on Hunting and Poaching by Samson Phakathi Endangered Wildlife Trust.

*"Our staff certainly enjoyed the talk and they proudly showed me all the literature given to them. Thank you so much for arranging these talks, as they are so beneficial to our members and staff."* Chris O'Flaherty

Talks by experts: Invertebrates by Jason Londt and Crowned Eagles by Shane McPherson

Spring Walk up Inhlosane - <http://youtu.be/7K9kQkKzZTE>

Assisted Raptor Rescue find release sites for rehabilitated birds

*"What a privilege to be chosen as a suitable custodian and be able to engage closely with a bird of prey. This is a very rewarding experience if you have the enthusiasm, time and money to assist our precious raptors and contribute to conservation."* Katie Robinson

Sponsored installation of Owl boxes – Offer taken up by Bolton, Robinson, Mackintosh and Long.

### **Dargle River**

Alien Plant Control- Follow up invasive plant clearing on the banks of the Dargle River. The difference is incredible in just a year. We are most impressed with Alfred Zuma and his team.

Dargle River Walk Report (undertaken in 2014) Finalised and available to download at: <http://www.duct.org.za/index.php/umngeni-river-walk/river-walk-reports.html>

*"The Dargle River, although only 20 kilometres long, is negatively impacted like many other South African rivers. However, being so short, and having some wonderfully enthusiastic landowners alongside, we hope that our river walk and this report will be a motivation to undertake a restoration of this small but beautiful river."*

### **Environmental Education in Schools**

Collaboration with Midlands Meander Education Project and Impendle EcoSchools node. Snakes, Recycling, Water at Hlelolusha, KwaKhetha & Gomane schools in Impendle. Creative eco-lessons in Lion's River, Dargle and Corrie Lynn schools. Forest fieldtrips with the ever generous Barend Booysen - making memories to last a lifetime. Thanks Carl Bronner for support.

### **Nxamalala Enviro Club**

Facilitated by Gugu Zuma. Thanks Rob and Tinks Fowler for support.

Activities around biodiversity, recycling and reusing waste creatively and a forest walk.

*"The forest walk was such a lovely thing to do. I liked it when we had quiet time in the forest - listening to the birds singing. I felt so connected to Nature's creations."*

Tshepho Cele

## **Development Monitoring**

- Additional accommodation at Everglades Hotel. Objection on the grounds of sub divisions being contrary to the uMngeni Municipality LUMS.
- New Chicken Sheds for Dargle Farm & Ndiza
- N3 Bypass - 13 routes - only one of which would potentially pass near Dargle. DC will not take a NIMBY approach.
- Bridge widening over the uMngeni River at Petrusstroom.
- Use of herbicide Gramoxone by Merensky Forestry

## **Guests and Celebrations**

Media Tour of the Midlands – hosted lunch in the Cairn of Old Kilgobbin and a walk in the Kilgobbin forest lead by Barend Booysen.

*"Oh, my goodness what a special piece of paradise. If I was Winnie-the-Pooh this would most definitely have been my part of the forest."* Anita Heyl

N3TC Board members' visit for Midlands Conservancies Forum – walk in the forest and all local produce picnic lunch (moved into the Booysens' home due to cold wet weather).

*"What a pleasure and privilege to spend time with you all. Thank you very much for all the trouble you went to for our visit and especially for the delightful, 'picnic' that everyone talked about for days afterwards."* Andy Visser N3TC

Summer celebration in collaboration with Midlands Conservancies Forum. A great opportunity to connect to other Conservancies in the area and network with environmental organisations.

*"What a lovely evening. Wish I had arrived earlier. At least I was there for the dancing!"* Gilly Robartes

*"Thank you so much for time shared with fellow enthusiasts. The wine was splendid, the food outstanding, the venue breath taking, but most of all - special time spent with special people."* Caroline Leslie - EKZNW Honorary Officer for Lion's River

## **Wildlife Sightings**

Thanks Ashley Crookes for facilitating and compiling an inspiring collection of sightings from the past year. Winners in the various categories received Dargle Dollar vouchers to spend locally.

Most Interesting Observation: Jenny Fly - Mushrooms

Most Enthusiastic New Contributor: Helen Booysen

Best Overall: Marashene Lewis – Sunrise

Best Trail Camera capture: Gilly Robartes – dassie, monkeys, genet and more.

*"These nocturnal sightings and observations are more gripping than a John Grisham novel!"* Meriel Mitchell

*"Some stunning, stunning pics. To think I go out walking every morning and I don't take my camera. ... stupid me!"* Gill Nelson

## **Treasurer's Report 2014/2015**

Income R38 502.00 Made up of these major items:  
Subs R22 150  
Activities R14 000  
Donations R 1 000

Expenditure R28 401.00 Made up of these major items:  
Education R8 650  
Invasives R2 520  
Speakers R5 468  
Functions R1 600  
Office Exp R4 800  
Donations R2 050  
Gifts R2 400

Surplus for the year R10 101.00

Cash in the bank R69 887.00

Thanks Pam Smit for keeping our books in order

Thanks Kevin Culverwell & Co for auditing

Completed Financial Reports were not yet available due to the fact we held our AGM a month earlier than usual.

## **Facebook and Dargle Local Living Blog**

Sharing stories and images, building community.

*"Love this post! I look forward to trying the super recipes but will have to go out to buy a pumpkin as dassies and monkeys have munched all the cucurbits that were growing with wild and wonderful abandon in our compost heap."*

Andrea John

## **Tribute to Barry Downard**

One upon a time, in a valley beneath Inhlosane lived a humble woodcutter, musician, photographer, designer, animal lover, story teller, photoshop wizard, blacksmith, luckiest person on the planet.

Barry was one of the founding members of the Dargle Conservancy, so this is a great opportunity to look back at our history. Over lunch beside the uMngeni at Hopedale in 2003, Conversation turned to the thought that a Conservancy be formed. *"We all agreed it was a great idea, but that we'd support it as long as someone else actually set it up and ran it."*

Barry Downard

Jennifer Willan explored the idea and with the help of George Zaloumis - DCO for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife embarked on establishing a Conservancy. The first committee elected in May 2003 comprised: Brian Griffin, Andrew Nash, Struan MacGregor, Jennifer Willan, Peter Hanbury, Jill Hamilton and Barry Downard *"It was a steep learning curve as there wasn't much experience of such matters, but between us we contrived the balancing act that established the basis for the Conservancy that has grown to what it is today."* Barry Downard

The first issue to galvanize support was that of looming development. Much time was spent formalizing a policy and appropriate approach towards inappropriate development. Barry studied national, provincial and local legislation, conferred with experts nationwide, sat in municipal meetings and learned to decipher development doublespeak. Dargle was consulted for assistance by concerned Conservancies throughout SA, and was commended by Government departments on taking a principled approach. Word spread of potential difficulties in looking to develop in the Dargle, and apart from a couple of instances, inappropriate development has not been much of an issue since.

*"Commenting on EIAs is a thankless, frustrating task. Barry has managed to keep his sanity whilst being a voice for Dargle and the Midlands. His comments are always level headed, insightful and un-emotional. There are few people – far too few - who take on the task of submitting comment when the inevitable development applications are circulated, we all owe him an enormous thank you for standing up and tackling often contentious issues head on."*Penny Rees DUCT

Education was an important component from the start -both for farm staff and in local schools. Barry has participated with enthusiasm, lead with integrity, spread the message, volunteered time, skills and knowledge. Created magnificent posters for events that ensured Dargle stood out from the crowd.

*"Barry's vision for a greater Midlands managed wisely by all, for all – the Guduza initiative - was a large part of the inspiration that lead to the formation of the Forum. His contribution to the local conservancy movement cannot be underestimated."*Judy Bell Chair Midlands Conservancies Forum

No doubt, Barry has had heaps of fun, laughed a lot and become an integral part of the Dargle community. Having conquered the mountain - Barry is hanging up his conservancy boots. Thank you Barry, for your contribution to biodiversity conservation and community in Dargle and beyond.