



**Dargle Conservancy Annual General Meeting 2016
Report from the Chair prepared by Nikki Brighton**

Rivers

The riparian zone is degraded – often with invasive plants which transform the natural landscape and overrun the original biodiversity. For grassland streams, like Dargle, the plants shade the water, change the temperature and the aquatic biodiversity, and dense stands prevent wild animals accessing the water. When this ecosystem is weakened water quality is affected.

If a river has a long enough stretch without any negative impacts, with natural vegetation lining the banks, it can restore the quality of the water without help from humans.

- **Dargle River Campaign**

In an effort to raise awareness of the importance of our rivers, we initiated the Dargle River Project. A QR code leads to the Dargle Rivers page where visitors are encouraged to make a donation to keeping the banks clear of invasive vegetation and the water flowing. As Dargle is a tributary of the uMngeni on which 6 million people rely for daily water, keeping these ecosystems working well is essential for the wellbeing of our province. Payment options include an SMS donation number (SMS Donate Dargle to 40580 to donate R20) and a link to our GivenGain page.

Local restaurants are excited about the opportunity to support the Dargle Conservancy and will display the QR code and catchy slogans on their tables. Restaurant table top stands with Dargle Water is Delicious and Good Water = Good Coffee distributed to SteamPunk Café, Farmer's Daughter and il Postino. SMS donation line and QR code link to Dargle website Rivers page.

- **Dargle to Dargle**

Dargle Resident Jethro Bronner drove his vintage car to Dargle Ireland, through Africa and Europe. He displayed the logo and QR code on his car, to raise awareness and funds for this cause by displaying the QR code on his car.

- **Invasive clearing**

Logs jams and re-growth of invasives cleared during summer and autumn on the Dargle River by Alfred Zuma and team. We are very impressed with their work, particularly as they created a picnic site from the found and fallen wood.

- **#BRU Blue Ribbon uMngeni**

Natal Fly Fishing Club, led by Andrew Fowler, regularly tackles wattle and other invasive trees on the banks of the Furth Stream and uMngeni River. While their purpose is to improve fishing spots, they have a big impact on river health.

Dargle Nature Reserve

Officially proclaimed on 9 October 2015.

874 hectares. Contains endangered vegetation types (Midlands Mistbelt Grasslands (CE); Drakensberg Foothill Moist Grasslands (VU); Eastern Mistbelt Forest (VU); Eastern Temperate Wetlands (VU). Altitudinal gradients supporting adaptational capacity/ features for climate change (420m). Local and greater area water provisioning services. High levels of floristic endemism: 5 KZN endemics, 14 South African endemics. Provides suitable habitat for priority species such as Wattled Crane and Oribi Antelope, Cape Parrot and Black Stinkwood.

Baren Booysen's Forest Walks on the first Thursday of each month continue to be very popular.

Education

Collaboration with Midlands Meander Education Project and Impendle EcoSchools node - creative learning, valuable life skills and meaningful environmental education.

- Forest fieldtrips

Corrie Lynn Primary, Dargle Primary visited Kilgobbin and Lemonwood Forests

Dear Forest, We thought it was funny at first when we heard we were going to be visiting a home, but we soon realised that a habitat is a home and just as we would never barge into someone's home uninvited and behave badly, we should do the same here. Thank you

- Young Entrepreneurs at the Dargle Market

We hosted learners from 6 schools to sell their wares, mostly created from waste materials.

- Owls

Tammy Caine and Shane McPherson of the Owl Box Project (who have installed owl boxes for some of our members) did a very entertaining and informative presentation at Tanglewood Country House in June. During the afternoon, farm staff enjoyed a presentation by Tammy and Andile Nzuzo of the Raptor Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre and asked many, many questions.

- Hike up Inhlosane

15 Learners from Nxamalala Enviro Club hiked with residents and visitors.

From the top we saw different places like iMpendle, Drakensberg, Kamberg, Karkloof . The part we enjoyed the most was racing down the mountain. Sabelo Zuma

- Trashion Show

Held at Corrie Lynn School during the winter holidays, 20 learners participated showing off their wire cars and fashion created from waste. Great media coverage in Country Life magazine. This event will include more schools in 2016.

- Snakes

15 October was Snake Day in Dargle. Ever popular Pat McKrill, accompanied by his box of slithery friends and Gugu Zuma (Dargle Conservancy Committee member), spent the morning visiting the three schools we support. Lion's River Primary, Corrie Lynn Primary and Dargle Primary. Reception was mixed, but many children had the chance to get up really close and touch a snake for the first time.

After lunch, farm staff attended a session at the Lion's River Club. Most were nervous, but Baba Zuma set the trend by being the first up to hold a snake, with everyone else following. In the evening, Pat had us roaring with laughter at his entertaining talk. We learnt a heap about snakes, got to feel the interesting rough texture of a File Snake.

Gatherings

6 movies screened at Everglades and Tanglewood

Talk by Harry Wels, author of *Securing Wilderness Landscapes*, on the start and development of the conservancy movement in South Africa.

Generous donations received from two local events: The Little Exhibition and The Mongolian Derby presentation.

We bid farewell to Dargle Conservancy Committee Member Brandon Powell at a Mad Hatters Tea Party at Inversanda.

Wildlife

- Relocation

Controversial reedbeek roundup adjacent to Dargle Nature Reserve. Ezemvelo verified that this was a legal activity - the landowner had a permit to remove 20 animals. Investigation revealed that the farm manager had stated there were 150 animals on the property, which is extremely unlikely. We have been engaged with Ezemvelo through KZN Conservancies Association to ensure that numbers are correctly verified before permits are issued in future.

- Hunting with dogs

The hunts no longer take place only Sundays, but Fridays and Saturdays too. We encourage residents to report to SA CAN Hotline 083 799 1916 rather than taking matters into your own hands which can be dangerous.

- FreeMe Wildlife Rehabilitation

We give a regular donation to Free Me and have undertaken to sell 500 tickets in their Fundraising raffle. FreeMe continue to offer our members and wildlife an excellent service.

- Game Count Weekend

We plan to count game in Dargle during winter 2016 in an effort to ascertain numbers and prevent permits being issued erroneously.

Fracking

Believing that exploration for unconventional gas in the midlands (and beyond) would be detrimental to human and environmental health, Dargle Conservancy has contributed to the Frack Free SA campaign in various ways. We contribute to keeping the Frack Free Facebook page interesting, Tweeting latest news, liaising with media (including Malvina van Bremem hosting a film crew from 50/50 and Nicole Schafer collaborating with Carte Blanche to do a documentary), have collated an extensive mailing list and sent out regular updates, Lynne Garbutt collected signatures for a petition, Eidin Griffin facilitated a poster painting workshop, and of course, we had a strong presence at the Rhino Oil & Gas meetings held in Lion's River, Howick West and Mooi River.

Information Boards

We created six striking information boards featuring iconic Dargle species to display on the veranda of the popular il Postino Restaurant. Visitors and local alike have enjoyed them.