



## **Dargle Conservancy Annual General Meeting**

**18 May 2011**

**Tanglewood Country House, Dargle**

### **1. Welcome/opening remarks**

Barry Downard on behalf of the Conservancy Chairman extended a welcome to all present and to the invited guest speakers Dr. Andrew Venter and Dr. Roelie Kloppers of Wildlands Conservation Trust.

### **2. Apologies and notice of proxies:**

Proxies received: Jennifer Willan, Tim Baynes, Robin Barnsley, Josie Rowe-Setz, Simone Henselman, Graham Griffon, Gavin & Kathryn Coulson, Mandy Crookes, Kevin & Margaret Culverwell, Carl Bronner.

Apologies received: Wyndham Robartes, Kate Robinson, Mark and Pattie Perry.

### **3. Minutes of the 2010 AGM and matters arising:**

No issues were raised at the AGM last year. Minutes approved by meeting. Proposed by Dieter Rosetts and seconded by Sue Anderson.

### **4. Chairman's report**

See attached Appendix A.

### **5. Adoption of Chairman's report**

Chairmans report was adopted by the meeting. Proposed by Gilly Robartes and seconded by Nikki Brighton.

### **6. Treasurers Report:**

As of 28 February:

Total income: R16,570 (made up of subscriptions: R11,750, Donations: R250, function income: R220, Kilgobbin Forest Walks: R1,150, Movie Nights: R1,500, Dassie Adoption R1,700.

Expenditure: R14,790 (made up of: accounting fees: R700, Donation to Free Me: R3,000, Dassie Purchases: R3,000, Midlands Meander Education Project: R7,000, Subscriptions R1,177, Bank charges, R13. Administration costs are born by the committee members individually.

Total Cash resources: R14,171 (made up of: Money Market Account: R13,583, Current Account: R588. Interest on Money Market: R332. Stock of DC clothing: R1,047). Copies of financial statements are available on request from the Treasurer.

### **7. Adoption of Treasurers report:**

Treasures report was adopted by the meeting. Proposed by Robin Fowler, seconded by Susi Anderson.

### **8. Motions to be put to the AGM – amendments to the constitution:**

The Protected Areas Act requires landowners participating in Stewardship to belong to a formal conservation body. Setting up a separate body for the Dargle Nature Reserve landowners will result in substantial duplication of the current Dargle Conservancy structures. It was therefore proposed to the meeting that the landowners be members of the Dargle Conservancy. This would require 4 clauses to be added to the Conservancy's constitution in order to accommodate this as follows:

- Under the Name and Status of the Geographic Area - adding in: *The conservancy will act as the management authority for the area declared as the Dargle Nature Reserve which constitutes a portion of the area of the Dargle Nature Reserve Conservancy. Title holders of the Nature Reserve who will be members of the Dargle Conservancy will be responsible for the activities and the sole decision making of the management authority in respect of the Nature Reserve.*
- Under objectives – adding: *to secure a portion of the Dargle Conservancy area as a formal protected area and manage it according to a management plan.*
- Under management – adding: *formation and active management of the sub committee of the Dargle Nature Reserve management authority who's activities will support the implementation of the management plan and be made up of representatives of the title deed holders of the nature reserve.*
- Under the power and duties of the committee – add: *the sub committee will have sole powers of decision making as it relates to the area of the Dargle Nature Reserve and the management plan implementation and its review.*

To this Barry Downard added that the understanding is that landowners of the nature reserve will form a committee which will be a sub committee of the Dargle Conservancy Committee. This means there will be a direct line of communication between the two committees. The above amendments in no way take control away from the landowners. The landowners will be running their Nature Reserve themselves through the structures of the Dargle Conservancy.

Barry Downard proposed that the amendments to the Constitution be accepted. This was seconded by Andrew Anderson. No objections were raised and the motion was passed (Amended Constitution signed by Chairman).

#### **9. Election of committee members:**

A call was distributed with the AGM notice calling for nominations or volunteers to join the Committee. A nomination was received for Katie Robinson with Nikki Brighton proposing and Gill Addison seconding. With a show of hands all at the meeting agreed to Katie Robinson joining the committee. Graham Griffin has declined to stand again.

The meeting agreed that the existing committee members stand again.

#### **10. Any matters arising:**

A query from the floor regarding the breaking of virgin land was raised and the role/responsibility of the Dargle Conservancy in this regard. The Chairman responded by saying that the Conservancy is not anti-development and cannot make decisions on development applications. The conservancy provides input in terms of its mandate to help maintain the important biodiversity within the Dargle valley. It was noted that KZN Wildlife's C-Plan regards most of the Dargle areas as being "irreplaceable" i.e. of extremely high biodiversity value.

The meeting was ended with a presentation by Nikki Brighton on the biodiversity assets of the proposed Dargle Nature Reserve and presentations by the Wildlands Trust.

The Chairman thanked the quest speakers and everyone for attending and closed the meeting.



## Chairman's Report

### Introduction

Last year I started my report with comments on linkages between the effect of the economic recession and Global Ecology. This continues to grip my attention. I referred to the concept of Ecological Overshoot. For those of you that have been regular attendees of the series of movies and documentaries, which we have been running throughout the year, this will be familiar terminology.

In terms that we can easily understand the planet, like any finite unit of land, has a limit to what it can sustainably produce, in units of energy that are accessible to the food chain. This is done through the interaction of energy from the sun with the plants in that finite unit of land in any given year. Managed sustainably, the farmer can produce the same output year after year. Manage it poorly and your output reduces with each passing year!

Your farm, this finite unit of land, in the Dargle can however increase its output (energy units) by "importing energy" in the form of supplementary feed grown elsewhere (perhaps your neighbour's farm) and the use of modern technology such as artificial fertilizers (energy units) and pesticides to kill the organisms that compete with production through consuming your output or competing for the resources of your chosen form of energy output. Be it beef, milk, chickens, eggs or veggies!

Like your Farm the planet is a finite unit of land with a finite capacity to produce energy. However unlike your farm the planet cannot import additional energy from another planet to increase its energy output. At the point where we have consumed all the energy that the planet is capable of reproducing with one year's worth of sunlight we enter into Ecological Overshoot. We mark this day by calling it Earth Overshoot Day. We first went into Ecological Overshoot in

With the advent of the industrial revolution we very clever human beings figured out how we could tap into energy that the earth invested billions of years ago in the form of fossil fuels. The result today is a global consumption by humans that, without access to invested energy, would require 1.5 earths to sustain the current population.

However we humans are hot wired to aspire to a better life, which has been interpreted (en-masse) as to mean *consume more!* It is common knowledge that if every human on the planet aspired (and why should they not) to consume at the rate of the average North American, we would require more than 5 planets to sustain such a level of consumption.

Before we get too smug in our attitude towards our North American brothers I put it to you that:

- The least of us in this room is consuming at a level that is equal if not greater than the AVERAGE North American. We have literally become weapons of mass consumption.

- Current research has suggested that we passed peak oil back in 2006. That energy the earth saved up over billions of years as crude oil we have half depleted through exponentially growing level of consumption in the last 50 years.
- Like it or not change is coming, if not for you for your children.

In 2008 World Overshoot Day fell on 23 September and in 2009 it fell on 25 September. In other words, one way of looking at it, the full impact of the global recession on the level of consumption was to push back Ecological Overshoot by 2 days.

Was 2010 a good year for you? Globally it was another boom year with Earth Overshoot day being marked on the 21 August. This represents an advance of 36 days in a single year, which for many of us has been economically tough. Folks it is not rocket science to realize that at this rate we are heading for ground zero after which we are literally self destructing.

The direct connection between global consumption and global climate change is an undeniable fact and yet how much do we as the well educated and well read know or care about this?

## **Report Back On Conservancy Activities For The Year**

### **Membership Programme – Talks, Walks and Events**

Climate change and sustainability have once again been a dominant theme for our ongoing membership educational programme. Huge thanks go to Nikki Brighton for sourcing the documentaries that have been incredibly enlightening and well attended. A summary of these are:

- Second Nature
- Home
- Dirt
- Transition Towns
- Crude Awakening
- The PowerDown Show
- Story of Stuff
- Thousand Suns

This year we have also be very fortunate to secure some excellent speakers on a wide range of topics:

- Claire Janisch - Biomimicry
- Peter Ardington – People Animals Grass
- Nirmala Nair – ZERI
- Justin Herd – Chameleons

We regularly have a very good turnout at these movies and talks (albeit that many of the folk that attend are actually from Howick, Curry's Post, Balgowan and even Nottingham Road) and plan to continue with these in the coming year. I would like to really encourage more of you to take advantage of these evenings to explore these issues and enjoy in the social interaction that follows.

The monthly guided walks in to the Dargle Forest with Barend and Helen Booyesen and assisted by Nikki when they are not available; continue to attract encouraging numbers of folk from all over the Midlands. Barend, Helen and Nikki thank you very much.

### **New Website**

I hope that all of you have visited the new Dargle Website which has been completely revamped and freshened up. I believe we have set the framework in place for a website that will serve the growing needs of our conservancy as well as being a resource of value to the public. Nikki and Paul a huge thank you for your hours of work on this and to the committee for all the proof reading!

### **Environmental Education**

Once again the committee decided that, given the excellent work and achievements of the Midlands Meander Education Project, it would be better to support them through a donation rather than to invest in farm worker and farm school outings. Our annual donation was maintained at R7000.00. The MMEAP is working in both Dargle farm schools.

### **Dassie Reintroduction**

In 2009 the Conservancy in partnership with Graham Griffin successfully reintroduced 40 Dassies at a cost of R20 000.00 (R500/dassie excluding transport) into the Dargle Forest. Although regular sightings of the dassies have been encouraging, a once off reintroduction is generally regarded as a bad investment. Therefore we, again in partnership with Graham Griffin, managed to secure a 2<sup>nd</sup> introduction of 20 Dassies from a different population at a cost of at R300.00 per animal including delivery. I would to thank Graham Griffin for his support with this programme.

In conjunction with this project An “Adopt a Dargle Dassie” campaign has been launched which has resulted in a number of adoptions and an income of R1700 in this financial year alone. In addition to this it has resulted in a substantial saving in what we would normally spend on thank you gifts for guest speakers and folks that we have needed to thank for services rendered to the conservancy. Andrew and Roelie I have your adoption certificates here!

The initial implementation and follow up of the project has been undertaken and has been a resounding success with reports of first generation Dargle Dassies having been seen.

If there is anyone who has time available to volunteer to champion the project and take on the Adopt a Dassie project please contact any of the committee members.

### **Development Issues**

In last year’s Chairman’s report I reported that there was little action on this front, which we put down to the global economic woes. However, much like the advance of the Earth Overshoot Day, this past year has seen an increase again in the number of development issues that we have been engaged in.

- The uMngeni Municipality has finally resurrected its attempt to finalize the Land Use Management Scheme (LUMS) after it stalled 4 years ago, also just before the municipal elections then. The Conservancy has attended and has submitted input to the LUMS steering committee, for the new process. The latest draft LUMS is more or less the same as the previous draft LUMS of 4 years ago, although with the new Planning & Development Act having been introduced, there have been some worthwhile additions which we salute, as they can only be beneficial to the cause of trying to look after the environment. However, once again the Municipality has left things late, and with the elections, and possible new councilors, we may well have to start the process again.
- Highgate Wine Estate. This development proposal at Piggly Wiggly entailed the establishment of a wine farm, winery, boutique hotel, expanded shopping node, and, initially 57 houses, although the developer dropped to a final application of 26 houses. The Conservancy registered as an Interested and Affected Party, and in keeping with our consistent stance, made submissions indicating that the residential component was contrary to the draft Rural LUMS. We know that Dept of Agriculture, both national and provincial, also objected on the same grounds. The development received a favourable Record of Decision, which we appealed and reiterated the fact that it was clearly contrary to the LUMS. The Midlands Meander Association also appealed on procedural grounds. The MEC has subsequently, based on the MMA’s appeal, set aside the Record

of Decision, and our understanding is that all is in abeyance for now while the documents submitted for the assessment process are being reviewed by the DAEA&RD.

- Petrustroom Mountain Biking Academy. The Conservancy was asked by the Dept of COGTA to make comment on an application for the development of a mountain Bike training academy opposite the sawmill in Petrustroom. As you're aware, the Conservancy welcomes this sort of activity, however, it appeared that the proposal was a thinly disguised attempt to also include 7 houses. Again, based on our consistent stance, we submitted comment that we welcomed the mountain biking facility, but that the housing component was also contrary to the LUMS. We're awaiting the outcome.
- Gill and Barry both attended a workshop on EIA procedures and issues held by the KZN Conservancies Association.
- Gill has been monitoring the Eskom Ariadne Venus Powerline EIA. It looks likely that the yellow route option, through the Dargle, will be dropped. The process is still at the draft scoping report stage.
- The Wedding and Conference venue at St Ives (which gained approval in 2004) is now in the process of applying for revision of the original Record of Decision, and applying for additional infrastructure/roads/wedding chapel/expanded restaurant and parking facilities. The Conservancy has registered as an I&AP and will be assessing and submitting comment.

I am aware that there are concerns from residents (members and non members) that the Conservancy is anti development, progress and job creation. We are most certainly not and I would like to point out to those folks that we live in an area where largely the biodiversity is deemed to have the highest level of irreplaceability by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, and we believe that the onus is on us as landowners to do what we can to at least try and maintain the status quo, if not improve it. To this end, the committee endeavours to keep on top of issues of what we deem to be inappropriate development

I hope I speak on behalf of the majority of our membership when I extend thanks to Barry Downard and Gill Addison for the thoroughness with which they have taken on this onerous portfolio.

In the coming year it is our intention to encourage the new councilors to finalize and present the LUMS for adoption early in their new term of office. We believe that as a community conservation organization we need to approach the issue of development at policy level where we have input into the relevant process such as LUMS and the IDP. If we are successful (are we ever not I hasten to add) our role will become more a matter of ensuring that the correct procedures are followed and that all the various government departments do their best to ensure their respective mandates are properly carried out in the best way to ensure a healthy balance between developmental needs and the environment. We should not be the proverbial ham in the sandwich but merely an interested and affect party ensuring that due process is being followed.

#### **Other Conservation Matters and Issues**

### **Land Custodianship**

The value of our remaining patches of indigenous forests and grasslands cannot be overstated and for those landowners that have the privilege of being the custodians of these we would like to assure you we are committed to supporting you in any way possible given our modest means.

However when a custodian knowingly engages in actions that destroy this we cannot stand back and impotently look on. This year we engaged with the Department of Forestry with regard to the excessive and improper use of indigenous forests as “fire breaks”. They undertook a site inspection and followed up with the landowner involved. Folks as we approach the new fire season please protect the forest margins and do not abuse forests in this way.

### **Midlands Conservancy Forum**

On a more positive note in July 2010 we initiated communications with other conservancies in the Midlands with the idea of a greater Midlands Conservancy Forum where we can meet to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. In a matter of a few months this idea has unearthed a number of conservancies we never heard of before and has generated such a ground swell of support that the Midlands Conservancy Forum is now firmly established. It is still early days yet but I believe this forum has initiated something that is on a trajectory which I believe could herald a new way in which we view conservancies in the future and most importantly the role private landowners will serve civil society in the protection of the environment outside of formerly protected areas. All I would like to say at this stage is watch this space!!!

### **Cape Parrot Count**

The Country wide Cape parrot count takes place annually in May and this year the Dargle Conservancy took on the job of coordinating the field work for this area which overlaps with areas outside of our ‘jurisdiction’. Over the years the database has become quite outdated and due to the increasing threat on these special birds it was felt that we really need to make a concerted effort to increase the effectiveness of the count in our area. A lot of work went into cleaning up and updating the database and making contact with all the relevant landowners etc. So from next year on this will be a very easy job. We are looking for someone who is willing to take this on as a project. Please contact Nikki if you would like to know more.

### **Dargle Nature Reserve**

After the positive advances we reported at our last AGM regarding the establishment of the Dargle Nature Reserve it has been disheartening to see backward movement in the initiative. However I am a firm believer that everything happens for a good reason and in accordance with a perfect plan. Some of the initial landowners have pulled out for various reasons entirely out of our control and we shall not dwell on these and will continue to engage with them. In order to keep the process on track we have invested our precious and limited financial resources in employing a “warm body” to take over the project from EKZNW to push the project ahead in these final stages of the proclamation process. This issue will be resolved in the coming months.

### **Critical Eco-systems Partnership Fund Project**

Early on in the year we were approached by the Wildlands Trust to consider submitting a project proposal for funding, which they are managing on behalf of the Critical Eco-systems Partnership Fund. Andrew and Roelie will be talking more on this!

However realizing that biodiversity is such a critical issue we would not honestly be able to submit the best proposal without looking beyond our Dargle boundaries. Thus we engaged with the newly established Midlands Conservancy Forum with the idea of a MCF project. Support from the MCF members for this idea was unanimous in support of the Dargle Conservancy taking the lead role in engaging with Wildlands Trust to come up with a MCF project proposal.

It has been a stimulating process if for no other reason than to be part of a civil society initiative where everyone is seeking the best outcome for biodiversity and not for their own "patch". Without going into more detail I am soon going to hand over to Nikki who has compiled a stunning overview of the Dargle Nature Reserve and then our Master of Ceremonies will introduce our Guest speakers who will be telling us more about this programme.

### **Thanks to outgoing Committee**

In conclusion I would like to extend a very big thank you to an outstanding outgoing committee, Graham Griffin, Barry Downard, Nikki Brighton, Clive Shippey and Vaughan Koopman and Gill Addison. They have done an outstanding job through their support, enthusiasm and most importantly delivery.

I would also like to extend an invitation to all of you to get involved with your conservancy in any way you can or to take the time to write to us to tell how you feel. Your letters of appreciation would be most welcome but we would also like to hear your constructive criticism and suggestions.

Andrew Anderson