



**Dargle Conservancy Annual General Meeting 2014
Report from the Chair prepared by Nikki Brighton**

Why do we focus on Water?

The uMngeni River which passes through Dargle supplies nearly 5 million downstream users with water. The recent Water Quality map produced by Umgeni Water, shows the dire state of many of the Midlands Rivers. As custodians, we need to work to restore these rivers to health.

The Dargle River is a tributary of the uMngeni and heavily impacted by invasive alien plants. The problem with IAPs is threefold:

- They transform the natural landscape and overrun the original riparian zone biodiversity
- For grassland streams, as the Dargle, IAPs shade the water, change the temperature and aquatic biodiversity. When this ecosystem is weakened, it affects everything else and water quality is affected.
- Dense stands of bramble along river banks prevent animals accessing the water.

In conjunction with DUCT, we intend initiating a River Custodianship programme focussed on restoring the Dargle River.

A Celebratory Year

The original Dargle Conservancy was established by Iain Sinclair, Helen and Nick Methley in the 1980's. After the death of a game guard, the Conservancy folded.

In 2003 a small group of concerned citizens revived the Dargle Conservancy.

"It came to me that Dargle should form a new Conservancy – it would be good for the land and animals and if there were dark developments looming, there would be people to rally around. We were amazed that 60 people pitched up at the first meeting. Dargle was ripe for it to happen and community enthusiasm cemented the idea." Jennifer Willan

Founding member of the new Dargle Conservancy & still a member in 2013

After 10 years of committed conservation in the Midlands, a celebration was called for. This focussed around Dargle Icons: Inhlosane, Cranes, Local Food, Community and the Nature Reserve.

"The entire weekend was magical! Those perfect Dargle details..."

Eidin Griffin

"A memorable celebration of our community around conservancy with beautiful folk - many of whom are my childhood friends! Such wonderful memories. My children and their littlies love to re-tell the stories and now I have some new ones to add."

Helen Booyesen

100 people attended the Dinner in the 100 year old Corrie Lynn barn on Friday 9 August. David Johnson who was the speaker at the very first Dargle Conservancy meeting in May 2003 was the guest speaker. All produce for supper was sourced from the Dargle. Scottish reels followed supper.

"Well done for last night. You guys did the most amazing evening and the food was outstanding."

Caz Griffin

"Thanks so much for a thoroughly enjoyable evening - the barn was wonderful, the food was plentiful and tasty, the talk was really interesting and the whole event came together fantastically well."

Malvina van Bremem

Saturday saw 40 people climb Inhlosane to enjoy gin and mint cocktails and a picnic at the summit.

"The Beresford family had the most wonderful weekend. Thank you."

Des Beresford

"On a very tiny scale being at the top of Inhlosane must be what astronauts feel when they look back at earth from space – awesome, humbling, reverence for the beauty. That's not the gin speaking, although the sight of Brandon with biodegradable cup stretching towards me was awesome in its own way."

Jane Grey

On Sunday an inaugural hike through the Dargle Nature Reserve attracted a crowd. Starting in the Kilgobbin forests, traversing the grasslands of Carlisle and Old Kilgobbin and then ending below the forest at Lemonwood, for lunch.

"I enjoyed every moment of the weekend - eating, dancing, climbing, walking and best of all - the community."

Christie Exall

"This weekend has been my rite of passage. Now I am truly entrenched in the Dargle."

Marashene Lewis

The Grey Crowned Crane is the logo of the Conservancy so Tanya Smith of the African Crane Programme of EWT did an entertaining presentation on Cranes of the Dargle and beyond. Creative lessons around Cranes were sponsored in local schools. Funds raised by the celebrations were used to buy two camera traps for the use of Conservancy members.

What makes Dargle so special? What else have we done this year?

The Dargle River

- Named for the Dargle river in Ireland
- Rises in the grassland hills near the Fort Nottingham Road
- Drops over forested cliffs
- 18 kilometres long
- Confluence with uMngeni just above the bridge on Petrusstroom road

The DUCT River Walk Team traversed the Dargle River monitoring and recording all impacts on the river in January 2013. Much of the river was severely impacted by invasive vegetation, agricultural effluent and eroded river banks. The highlight of the Dargle River walk was a stretch of completely untransformed grassland and river where, on the third day, the team found stoneflies (which indicate exceptional water quality) and marvelled at the ability of a river to heal itself when ecosystems are intact.

"This made my heart sing. It gives me hope for all our unloved Midlands rivers." Penny Rees

Inspired by the River Walk team, the Conservancy embarked on a project to clear invasive vegetation along the banks of the river closest to the road bridge with crosses the river about 8kms from the Lion's River turnoff. An ex-DUCT River Care Team made quite an impact over a week and a follow up session a few months later. The water is now visible, whereas before it was hidden by brambles. Follow up will continue in 2014. Plans are afoot to create a picnic site at this location.

Gatherings:

Composting Workshop, Excursion to uMngeni Vlei, No Till farming demonstration, Fire, Farming and Conservation morning and Track and Scat ID.

6 Environmental movies screened at Hebron and Everglades followed by communal supper. Francois du Toit of SAFE Alliance gave a passionate talk on the hazards of Fracking. Someone played an April Fool's joke by distributing notices declaring fracking was about to begin in the Dargle.

Walks: regular monthly walks at Kilgobbin Cottage and Lemonwood are very popular.

An Autumn walk was held in the Dargle Nature Reserve

"That was the most glorious day imaginable. We thought we were going for a short stroll and it ended up a truly memorable hike topped off with a wonderful lunch. When I got home I looked up that little plant we saw beside the spring – Utricularia prehensilis, so I learnt something new. I can't wait for some friends and relations to visit so we can show them the area too."

Gill and Mike Woods

Environmental Education

Dargle, Lion's River and Impendle schools benefit from the Conservancy sponsorship of creative learning and fieldtrips. Local schools are honorary members of the Conservancy. Nature photography, snake presentations, water and wetland lessons, cranes, trip to Kamberg Rock Art site, Nxamalala holiday club.

It is the first holiday that I do something meaningful. Usually we just play soccer."

Thobani Gumede

Dargle Local Market

Moved to Lion's River Club where there is more space for dogs, kids, picnics and enormous pumpkins!

Dargle Nature Reserve

1067 ha protected.

Thanks to David and Tammy Schneideman, Helen and Barend Booysen, John and Carl Bronner, Katie Robinson, Graham and Vicky Griffin.
MEC has signed off, 60 days for comments is over, it will be proclaimed very soon.

Publicity

The Conservancy received great publicity in Wildside and Country Life magazines this year – both articles focussed on the Nature Reserve.

Species Counts

Thanks to members for participating in these important data collecting events.

Cape Parrots - Sally Cumming received a Dassie Certificate as thanks for coordinating this event in our area. Next count on 17/18 May 2014.

Oribi – 1429 counted in KZN 2013

Wildlife Sightings

Our monthly collection of interesting sightings is popular and draws positive comments from enthusiastic nature watchers and scientists.

"A wonderful presentation, wonderful photos, wonderful coverage. Quite hard to pick out any aspect from this wealth of sightings, but I do love to see the Midlands Dwarf Chameleon holding its own - that's always cheering."

David Clulow

"During the dry season or when it is very sunny, Painted Reed Frogs turn white and this helps to reflect sunlight.

This colour comes from the food that they consume. Food wastes are converted into substances called purines. Small purine platelets form crystals in their pigment cells in their skin. These crystals act as interference reflectors, and reduce the heat load by reflecting sunlight from the skin.

When the frog jumps in the water, it cools off and therefore changes its colour to those amazing patterns for which reed frogs are famous."

Megan Loftie Eaton Animal Demography Unit Department of Biological Sciences UCT

"Great Crane sightings this month in the Dargle. I capture all these crane sightings, so please remember to record as much detail as possible.

The sighting reported by Giles is of the family of Wattled Cranes that bred on Hastings farm last year. We colour ringed the chick towards the end of last year and very happy to see that the pair and chick are doing well!

The combination of the rings (colours and leg placement) provide a unique identification method that allows us to identify individuals over time."

Tanya Smith Endangered Wildlife Trust African Crane Programme

Some very special things captured on our camera trap, including Aardvark, Blue Duiker, Caracal and Jackal.

Awards for Contributors of Wildlife Sightings

Sue Robinson for the Most Interesting Observation – Cape Vultures

Sandra Merrick for the Most Consistent and Enthusiastic Contributor

Dieter Setz for the Best Picture – Sleeping Bat

Each person received Dargle Local Currency Vouchers to spend at the Dargle Local Market.

Financials

We are very pleased that after a few years of not having proper financials to present due to the CEPF funding we facilitated on behalf of the Midlands Conservancies Forum, everything has been unravelled by Culverwell and Co. 2012 and 2013 presented. 2014 will be ready shortly.

2012

Income - R26 139

Expenditure -R23 244

2013

Income – R33 017

Expenditure – R24 529

2014

Income – R48 436

Expenditure – R38 681

Current Account - R2 437

Money Market Account - R56 012

Speakers	R1000
Environmental Education	R10200
Free Me	R1200
Subs (MCF, KZNCA)	R350
Development monitor MCF	R1200
IAP Dargle River follow up	R5000
IAP plan for Dargle River	R5000
YMLP	R1200
Website hosting	R1000
Post Box	R260
Auditors	R1500
Bank Charges	R200
Stationery & Printing	R1500
Gifts	R500
TOTAL	R33 760