



Dargle Conservancy AGM 2019
Chairman's Report – Ashley Crookes

Welcome to all members and visitors, and to Alan Briscoe, Chairman of the Beaumont Eston Conservancy

River Projects

- Umgeni River – Honorary member, Andrew Fowler along with other volunteer members of the NFFC (Natal Fly Fishers Club) continued work in partnership, this year with the WWF. The Furth and Umgeni rivers continue to be cleared of alien invasive plants and logs which block areas, and they provided lovely footage on Youtube captured by a drone flying over the cleared areas. Unfortunately the Dargle Conservancy learned that funding from the WWF has been used up, so we continue to look for sponsors to help with the clearing of our rivers.
- The Dargle Rivers Project – Julia Colvin and her “Spekboom Tours” have continued to raise awareness of the need to keep the Dargle river as well as other areas of the Dargle clear of alien invasive plants, and she has continued to dedicate 10% of all the funds received from her tours through the Dargle area which are given to the Dargle Conservancy. Once we gained sufficient funds for the Dargle River Project then Alfred Zuma and his team were re-hired to clear and maintain the Dargle river area in November 2018. We will most likely get them in again in spring when the brambles start sprouting up!
- Herbicide for Riverside Landowners – Last year we lost the support of DUCT (Duzi Umngeni Conservation Trust), as they had been a great help in providing herbicides which the Dargle Conservancy distributed to key areas to aid in clearing invasive plant species. Unfortunately we haven't managed to obtain anymore since then, so we continue to appeal to our members to inform us if anyone has contacts who are willing to provide or donate herbicides to help members who are actively clearing their properties of alien invasive plants.

Education

- Spring Hike up Inhlosane Mountain - Ashley Crookes and Gugu Zuma lead a group of DC members, as well as keen visitors from outside of the Dargle to Inhlosane mountain in October. This annual event continues to be enjoyed by the local community. We once again departed from Mount Park Guest Farm, who kindly donated all the proceeds from the hike to the Dargle Conservancy, as well as provided tea and eats afterwards for all the weary hikers. The nXamalala Education group also came along, although we need to remember to have the talk about dropping orange peels along the trail for everyone to see!

- Kilgobbin Forest Walks - Barend Booysen's monthly walks in the forest and grasslands beside it, continue to be popular with folks needing to get out to the countryside for a walk in the fresh air. The Dargle Facebook page has scheduled all the walks for the year to be displayed so our members and friends will be reminded about it, as well as on the recently formed Boston, Dargle, Impendle CTO group.
- Membership Program – We would like to thank Carl Bronner and her staff for once again allowing the Dargle Conservancy to make use of the Cairn of Old Kilgobbin for the AGM. Tanglewood Boutique Hotel has had it's ups and downs over the past few years, so they currently are in a transition process once again, but the new owners, Kewen and Elsie Walden are quite keen to host us once they have settled in and have things up and running again. We would like to also thank Jenny Walsh and her team for hosting all our evening events last year, and really appreciate the superb curry dinner (prepared by the ladies from Thokans!) that they donated at the very well supported Otter Talk!
- We had some interesting speakers over the past year coming to inform and educate us.
 1. Herbalist and Energy Therapist, Gillian Robartes (not Gilly!) came out from the UK in November to talk on "Weeds as Medicine" although some of the other uses which gave some eye opening information such as roasted Dandelion roots being used as an alternative to coffee or African Wormwood and Peppermint being made into a powder or spray to keep ants and mice away!
 2. Nikki Brighton, a regular self proclaimed weed eater, then came out to inspire us all to give "free food" a try at her "Eating Weeds and other wild ideas..." talk.
 3. Wade Whitehead from FreeMe then managed to get the biggest turnout for his "An Otters Tail" talk. The Dargle Conservancy had provided some of our trail cameras to FreeMe to use when they were studying the little guys after releasing them back to the wild.
 4. Tammy Caine gave a presentation on the worrying problem of "Vultures in Crisis".
 5. "The Mind Amongst the Trees" was a very interesting talk on elephants given by Bruce Page.

The Harcourts Midlands Open Gardens was a great success last year, and we would like to thank DC members Helen Booysen from Crab Apple Cottages and Alvera Crookes from Copperleigh Trout Cottages for opening up their beautiful gardens to the public, and choosing to donate all their proceeds to the Dargle Conservancy, over R3000 rand. We then took the proceeds obtained from the Otter Talk and donated a total of R4000 to Howick FreeMe when we had the huge hailstorm in March, where thousands of Amur Falcons were injured. It was a great cause to support.

- Dargle Trashion Show – The brain child of our wonderful Gugu Zuma and co coordinated by Honorary member Nikki Brighton, the "Dargle Trashion Show" continued to be well supported since it moved from the Dargle to Howick. The Howick Agricultural Hall was once again filled with excited learners coming to display their spectacular outfits and creative ideas in June 2018. The Dargle Conservancy has agreed to support this event once again on 13 July 2019.
- Fracking - Dargle Conservancy continues to support the Frack Free SA campaign with mailing list service provider and administration. Brenda Grant of DC continues to be our development coordinator and comments on all applications for extraction and keeps members updated on any developments in the area.
- Wildlife Sightings/Dargle Diaries – The Dargle Diaries continues to be well received by our members and friends both at home and abroad, although we have had to change it to a seasonal letter as work demands on the current chairperson have made it extremely difficult to maintain it as a monthly

newsletter. Images and stories are also shared onto the Dargle Facebook page and Instagram to appeal to a large group of interested individuals.

The DC volunteers also started up the “Dargle Conservancy” Whatsapp group to keep members and interested parties up to date on important events and presentations. It had been requested by a few members already, so we have provided a one way platform to serve the community’s needs.

Unfortunately we couldn’t keep it as an open group, as we know folks in general will post things unrelated to the group or it becomes a general chit chat line and then people leave due to irritation. Members are welcome to contact the admins of the group directly should they wish to share any interesting information.

The two trail cameras continue to record interesting and unusual behaviour of elusive wildlife. One thing we are struggling with is getting the cameras back from both members and non-members who rent the cameras out, sometimes taking months to get them back which is a bit of a frustration, and something that will need to be looked at should we continue with that. DC also continues the monthly donation to Free Me to support their efforts in assisting our wildlife.

Social media is the most efficient way to share Dargle happenings and our followers continue to increase. Instagram and Facebook – dargle.kzn

- Dargle Local Living/Dargle Trade – the barter/share/swop market continues to take place on the 3rd Thursday of every month and strengthens community and sharing of excess produce. Participation continues to grow. Read more at:
<https://midlandsmosaic.wordpress.com/2017/03/29/midlands-barter-markets/>

One of the struggles of the committee members is to come up with interesting ideas for talks and speakers. We would really like to request more input from our members for future events. We are happy to facilitate, but none of us are in a position to be the sole custodians of setting up all events. The main function of the volunteers is to create awareness and enable suggestions & proposals using the financial resources of the Conservancy with the help of the whole community. Members with special skills and areas of expertise would be greatly appreciated in helping us to serve the community more effectively. If you would like to do a presentation or run a workshop or environmental project on your farm or property then please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Over the past year I think all of us on the committee have all felt a bit like a let down, that we haven’t met the communities needs or done enough, BUT, I think after our previous meeting on the verandah of il Postino, we are all feeling excited about the year ahead now, and have all decided that EDUCATION is going to be our focus and our drive this year. We want to support our youth and local schools, especially the Dargle Primary School and Corrie Lynn. We would like to sponsor television sets and dvd players, along with documentary type videos such as BBC’s Planet Earth series or other amazing nature, environmental and educational titles to stimulate the minds of our youngsters. We welcome any donations or ideas for educational titles, and will also be going on a drive to obtain books to stock their libraries – lifeskills or conservation being key areas to focus on, but any children’s books would be great. Educational toys will also be great to have. We are keeping things local this coming year, and will be focusing as much of our energy as possible here, close to home.

DC Volunteers for 2018:

Ashley Crookes (Chairperson), Lynne Garbutt (Treasurer), Jenny Goddard (Secretary), Brenda Grant (Development), Gugu Zuma (Education). Additional Members - Robin Barnsley (Agriculture Liaison) Pauline Holden, Gail Wray, Paul Van Uytrecht (Webmaster), Barry Downard (Posters and Marketing), Nikki Brighton (Trashion Show), Merrill King who continues to sponsor our meals at il Postino!

Lynne Garbutt requested to resign last year – but has since decided to retire from her work and has decided to stay on as Treasurer as she now has a bit more free time to share so we were delighted at the news.

Thanks to Culverwell and Co for doing our finances once again.

- Finances

Current account R29 933,66

Money Market account R92 781,09

Income R47 309

Expenditure R23 276