

## **AGM 2013 - Chairpersons Report**

Our broad mandate as a conservancy is to protect our biodiversity for future generations and we try to do this through hands on work in the field as well as through, training, education and promoting environmental issues. I think that this is nicely summed up in our new positioning line: Protecting nature. Inspiring change - that is do something practical and hopefully it will inspire others to do the same and more.

When we formed the new team in May last year we set ourselves the goal to make progress in four distinct areas. These were:

- To protect our biodiversity
- To encourage sustainable living
- To expand our green footprint
- To communicate more effectively with our members and beyond and to attract younger members

So how have we done in the past 12 months?

I do not propose to go through every activity that we have undertaken but I am sure you will agree that we have been very busy. The activities have been on the slide show and the images give you a reasonable impression of what we have been up to. I will attach a full list of all our current projects to this report which will be available on our web-site.

With specific regard to the biodiversity goals of our activities have been anchored on the conservancies past experience and we continue to build on that excellent foundation which was built by my predecessors, Helen Terblanche and Dave Peters. These include activities relating to promoting indigenous gardening, Invasive alien plant eradication, the M13 Project, Memorial Park etc.

There have been some significant developments in regard to the alien eradication aspects and specifically with the work undertaken by Dusty Donnelly on the Alien Busters projects and the work undertaken by Michael Smithers on the Enforcement Project.

These two projects complement each other in that they are two elements of a multipronged approach aimed at protecting our biodiversity. Both work towards the goal we have set to make Kloof an IAP free suburb by 2020. Dusty and her team are clearing all the verges in Kloof of IAPs and she is offering assistance to residents to eradicate IAPs from private properties. We also offer identification services and training courses on IAP eradication. We have also had extensive discussion with eThekweni Municipality officials on their role in IAP eradication. So these elements are all aimed at educating, informing, persuading and helping residents to eradicate IAPs.

Our Enforcement Project takes a different approach. South Africa is rated as having some of the best environmental legislation in the world but ranks only 147 out 153 nations in implementation of these laws. The Enforcement Project aims to compel the Government of South Africa to implement its own laws. This project has no precedent in South Africa. There have been cases where conservancies have taken individuals, developers or organisations to court (and vice-versa) but as far as I am aware this is the only constitutional challenge on environmental issues by a conservancy. It is a very serious matter and one which we have not undertaken lightly. Without the implementation and enforcement of effective environmental legislation all our IAP eradication projects are, quite frankly, a waste of time. There is no point in eradicating IAPs at

Memorial Park if the home across the road is allowed to continue to maintain its 30m high camphor that drops in excess of 100 000 seeds every year.

So as you can see we are taking a very comprehensive and what I consider to be a reasonable approach. We are getting our hands dirty by physically eradicating IAPs, we are offering advice, assistance and training but ultimately we also expect the law to be applied. Our court case against the Government is scheduled for the 26<sup>th</sup> June and we will keep you posted in this regard.

Still on the biodiversity front, Krantzkloof Nature Reserve remains an area of high priority for us simply because it is such an important protected biodiversity reservoir. We have a very good working relationship with the reserve management and the Honorary Officers. We jointly run a number of activities aimed at promoting and raising funds for the reserve. The 3 Falls Trail Run introduced last year was a huge success and this year's event should be even better. We aim to raise R60 000 for the reserve with the Trail Run.

Apart from the Krantzkloof Nature Reserve, Kloof's biodiversity is heavily vested in the areas that are designated by the municipality as D'MOSS. This includes most properties adjacent to the reserve and many properties that are situated on the numerous streams that flow into the reserve. I realise that there are many divergent opinions on D'MOSS but from a biodiversity protection perspective it is a very sound system and one that we strongly support. We have actively promoted the concept of D'MOSS and a number of our projects involve D'MOSS areas. By helping to rehabilitate D'MOSS areas we can make a significant contribution towards protecting Kloof's biodiversity and the plan is to continue to give these areas high priority. I strongly urge residents that have D'MOSS land to embrace the concept and to work toward rehabilitating it and getting it as close as possible back to its original indigenous or natural condition. I realise that many feel aggrieved by what they perceive as de facto expropriation and then to add insult to injury they are told to maintain it. The reality is that if you own D'MOSS land then you are amongst the privileged few and you are living on the most environmentally sensitive land in Kloof. Kloof is situated within the Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Hotspot, one of only 34 "biodiversity hotspots" on the planet and one of only 3 in South Africa. So we are blessed with an enormously rich biodiversity but with that comes a responsibility which is often too easy to ignore. In today's environment it is unrealistic to expect the state or the municipality to maintain this land. The power to make a difference is in our hands. I speak from personal experience – if you rehabilitate you will be rewarded beyond your expectations by nature's generosity. These rewards are not the financial rewards much sought after by today's society but rather the rewards of knowing that you have done something no matter how small towards improving this world and the rewards of being in harmony with nature in your very own back-yard.

Moving on to the issue of Sustainable Living. Changing attitudes and persuading residents to choose an environmentally sustainable lifestyle should be a very important aspect of our plans. Unfortunately our resources are stretched and we have not made any significant progress in this regard. It remains on our agenda but realistically we are unlikely to make progress in this area unless we have members that are willing to take up the challenge and run some specific projects on sustainable living.

We have made progress on the next target area and that is to extend our environmental footprint. The logic is that the environment does not recognise official municipal boundaries and it does not make sense to have a healthy environment in Kloof while the environment around us is degraded or is allowed to deteriorate. Our Enforcement Project clearly has significant implications well beyond Kloof but closer to home we have embarked on a number of outreach programmes. We have helped one of our members, Simon Maphumulo, to set-up a conservancy in Kwa-Ximba. We also started the Molweni River Health Schools Project which involves schools in Kloof and Hillcrest as well as in the Molweni Valley. We are steadily building our relationship with these schools as evidenced by the presence of Wyebank and Thololwazi High Schools at our Museum Day this past Sunday. We have also continued to build on good relationships with other

conservancies in the area. It is not our intention to divert our limited resources to areas outside of Kloof but rather to assist in developing skills in nearby areas where such skills are lacking and to find synergy with our neighbouring conservancies where the common goal is the protection of our environment. We are keen to form joint venture projects where the different partners bring special skills or resources – a good examples of this are the work we do in conjunction with Keep Kloof Beautiful Association on the Alien Busters Project, our joint venture with WESSA Highway Branch to put Glenholme Nature Reserve back on the visitors map and the recent Museum Day run as a joint venture with the Durban Natural Science Museum.

Moving on the last focus area and that is to communicate effectively with our membership, increase our membership and appeal to younger potential members. We have recorded our activities on facebook and in our e-newsletter. The e-newsletter was originally designed for us by Christine Smart who also did the first 16 editions for us so I need to give a big thank-you to Christine. We have also made extensive use of our website and e-mail system (some say too many e-mails!) and we have reformatted the Leopard's Echo. Overall we have tried very hard to keep our members well informed and I would like to think that the communication with existing members is on a good footing.

However we have not made significant progress in recruiting new members. In fact I suspect we may have gone backwards as many existing members have not renewed their membership – although most remain on our mailing lists.

Appealing to younger members has also been a challenge. We mothballed the Eco-club idea because we did not have the resources to drive it forwards. The Back-to-Nature series of events were aimed specifically at young families and we seem to have attracted them to the events but this has not translated into significant numbers of new members. We have had some success with schools and now have good working relationships with Kloof High, Thomas More College, Hillcrest High, Kwabazothini High, Kwadinabakubu High, Thololwazi High and Wyebank High. There is significant scope to continue building these relationships and hopefully this will eventually translate into new young members.

That covers the areas that we had set goals for ourselves for the past year. It is a mixed bag of some good progress and some areas of relatively little or no progress.

An area that we should be active in but are not, is the role of environmental watchdog. We have responded to ad hoc requests for assistance but we do not have a structured approach to monitoring building developments, checking EIA's and generally monitoring that the environment is not abused. This remains on our agenda but is "un-resourced" at this point in time.

On the financial side Steve has given you the numbers but we have been under some pressure. Our Indigenous Open Gardens show last year whilst successful was not as profitable as we had hoped. We have many projects that need funding and we have had to hold back in some instances because of limited funds. The Indigenous Open Gardens show remains our biggest fundraiser and this year we have managed to secure a major sponsor in Massbuild who will be using Builders Express as the sponsor brand. The show is scheduled for 22/23 June and for the first time includes two industrial gardens. Hopefully we will get a good turnout which will boost our reserves. Brigid Turner did not want to take on the role of co-ordinating the Indigenous Gardens event but has quietly gone about doing most to the work!

I would like to move on to the people aspects of our activities

During the past year we set up a "technical panel" consisting of a number of our members who have specific expertise in various fields. The idea being that they are there to back up our non-expert project teams. We have made some use of these experts and I hope that they will play a much bigger role in the future as our activities continue to gather momentum.

Another aspect of our operating philosophy has been the approach where we try to encourage the formation of small project teams to run as many projects as possible. This has had limited success and the workload is currently spread amongst too few people. This system has the greatest potential to make a practical difference and I can only appeal to members to volunteer to take on small but manageable projects or small parts of bigger projects. Big goals can be achieved by many small activities.

Whilst we have not succeeded in getting large numbers of members involved in activities we are fortunate that we do have a merry band of very loyal volunteers. It is always difficult and sometimes inappropriate to pick out individuals for special mention but it would be remiss of me not to thank Dusty Donnelly for her many, many hours of toil on the Alien Busters project often at her own expense! I also need to thank Advocate Michael Smithers SC for his many hours of work and unwavering commitment on our court challenge on the Enforcement Project. He has been assisted by Advocate Andreas Coustoudis and instructed by attorneys Shepstone and Wylie all of whom have offered their services on a contingency basis for which we are most grateful.

I also need to express sincere thanks to International Trend Institute based in Kloof. Their MD, Paul Krauss allocated senior resources in David Botha and Nicky Ridle to assist us, at no cost, to go through a very comprehensive branding process which helped us define who we are and who we want to be and which also resulted in our new logo – we hope that you like it as much as we do!

With the new logo, Jared Crossly redesigned our web-site giving it a much more professional look and on which we have had very favourable feedback.

I also would like to thank my colleagues on the Exec team and Sarah in particular who has been an invaluable stalwart always there to help, advise, correct my poor English and get just generally getting things done. I must also thank the many volunteers that have helped run the many events that we held in the past 12 months – the events could not have happened without them – I am not going to mention individuals for the fear of missing one but they all know who they are and most are here this evening. You will have seen some of them in the slide show.

In this regard I do however need to thank Steve Kearsley who has been our Treasurer for 7 years and who has requested to step down due to his many other commitments. We will be having a short presentation for Steve at the end of my report. Sandy Bird has volunteered to take over from Steve.

In wrapping up I am very much aware that ultimately our success as a conservancy will not be measured by how busy we are nor by how many IAPs we eradicate in Kloof but by how successful we are in changing the attitudes and behaviour of residents and the local authorities. I have mentioned that a lot of small activities and a lot of small successes all help and will add up towards the overall goals and we are doing that but I also have to be frank and realistic. Kloof has a population of approximately 21 000 residents which translates roughly to 5000 families. We have approximately 250 family memberships so optimistically that represents approximately 5% of Kloof's population. Even if we believe that our influence goes beyond our members we have to admit that we still have a very long way to go – so the challenge remains ahead of us:

Protect nature. Inspire change.

Thank you

Paolo Candotti

Chairperson

23 May 2013

## **Kloof Conservancy – 2012/3 Active Projects List**

3 Falls Trail Run

Alien Busters Project

- Pamphlet distribution
- Street Verges clearing
- Identification service
- Eradication Service
- Gum Tree Felling
- IAP Gardener Courses
- Herbicide distribution/control

Back-to-Nature Series Events

- Butterfly Day
- River Day
- Bird Day
- Tree Day
- Happy Hounds Day

Enforcement Project

- Engagement Process
- Legal Process
- CARA Enforcement
- SANRAL discussions
- eThekwini discussions

Forest View Primary School Grassland Project

Glenholme Nature Reserve

Indigenous Open Gardens

Krantzkloof Nature Reserve – support and funding of improvements at Nkutu and Main Site

Lantana Bio-control Project

M13 Project

Memorial Park Project

Molweni River Health Schools Project

Msinsi CCA

Museum Day

Re-branding Project

St Marys Neighbourhood Environmental Precinct

Ronald's Kloof Environmental Precinct