

Zwartkops Conservancy Chairman's Report To End February 2023

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Overview

The Zwartkops Conservancy's operations in the areas of education, pollution control and conservation were conducted with customary enthusiasm by Dale Clayton and his litter pickers and Jenny Rump and her educational team.

We have been exceptionally fortunate in recruiting Femke de Wet as Dale's and Jenny's understudy. She has a degree in conservation, is passionate about what the ZC does, and loves getting stuck into the task at hand, including cleaning out the dreadful Motherwell Canal, dead dogs and all. And she brings down the average age of the team dramatically!

We are extremely lucky to have the assistance of Carl Welgemoed of the Metro branch at Tiger Bay. He and Vian Wilken from Redhouse spend a lot of time in our boats Whimbrel or Curlew pulling up gillnets in the depth of the night; helping to conserve our already depleted fish stocks!

Executive Committee

At the last AGM, Dale Clayton was elected Chairman of the ZC. A couple of months later we were informed that as an NPO we needed to have an Executive Committee consisting of independent members who are responsible for Policy, and a Management Committee that includes salaried staff, responsible for operations.

Thus EXCO meets once every three months chaired by the current Vice Chairman and MANCO every month, chaired by the Operations Manager; Dale Clayton.

Sub Committees

Administration

As always, Hon Sec Arthur Rump and Hon Treasurer, Ken Flugel managed the red tape with fluent efficiency.

Legal

Advocates Richard Buchanan and Gitesh Gajjar and Attorney Jaden de Villiers are slowly closing in on the Metro and we expect some action from the courts in the future.

We are most fortunate to have these gentlemen offer their pro bono services to the Conservancy.

Fund Raising

Donations during the 2023 financial year totalled R480 621. The list of our major contributors follows. We are always most grateful to all who made donations.

BWB Ratepayer	R350
BWB Surf Lifesavers Club	R6 800
Catchment Tour	R600
Digistics	R5 000
Individual members	R9 620
Orion Engineered Carbons	R110 000
Plastics SA	R62 251
SPAR Eastern Cape	R240 000
Swartkops Terminal	R20 000
WESSA	R7 000
ZIPSKI	R12 000
TOTAL	R480 621

The annual Metro Grant-in-Aid which had been running one year behind is now up to date.

Public Relations

The positive image of the Conservancy has resulted in a growing number of supporters who wish to get involved in the various activities in which we are engaged.

This is very largely due to the excellent work in the field of public relations done by Dale Clayton. Dale has gathered a small army of helpers and somehow persuaded them to get involved in difficult tasks such as removing alien vegetation, cutting trails through the reserves, and removing snares.

Dale also launches articles on our Facebook page which really do make an impact, judging by the statistics showing the number of people who read them.

Our annual calendars continued to be in great demand and sold out again last year.

Education and Awareness

Environmental Education Annual Report March 2022 to February 2023

Our Environmental Education team of Jenny Rump, Head Educator Patricia Ntabeni, Educator Shirley Tawa and assistant Zoliswa Ntabeni have done wonders during this period. 20 high and primary schools mainly from Motherwell, Wells Estate and Kwazakhele have been taught during this period under our Masifundisane Program. The lessons are always to the Motherwell Stormwater Canal then either to the Dufor Park mudbanks for the estuary lesson or the Swartkops or Aloe Nature Reserves for the Thicket lesson.

This year, due to demand, we are greatly increasing the number of schools by teaching on a Thursday as well as the usual Wednesdays. We are eternally grateful for the fresh sandwiches made every week by Orion Engineered Carbons for the learners as well as for their sponsorship. This year we are doing a follow up from the lessons in the form of the Zwartkops Conservancy Eco School Competition. The competition covers School Grounds Appearance, Sanitation Facilities, Recycling Initiatives and Vegetable Garden. The aim is to put into practise what the learners have been taught during the lessons and to assist the schools to improve the appearance and hygiene of their schools as well as to raise funds from recycling and growing vegetables.

In October as usual ZC was part of the teaching team for Marine Week at SANCCOB where we taught about the importance of estuaries and how pollution affects the life in them and our own lives.

We also taught town schools, students, cubs and scouts mainly about the Swartkops Estuary and pollution. In total we have taught about 1800 learners during this period.

The ZC also gives talks, workshops and leads public walks and snare hunts in our reserves – all aimed at bringing the plight of our environment to the attention of the public. During Arbor week last year, we assisted EnviroServ with tree planting and education on the value of trees at several schools and creches in Motherwell.

The ZC Motherwell Enviro Club, now called the ZC Buhlebendalo Enviro Club, because members do not only come from Motherwell, but Wells Estate and Kwazakhele as well, has done amazing work. There are about 157 members from both high and primary schools. They meet at weekends and during school holidays under the leadership of Patricia, helped by Shirley, Zoliswa and parents. Patricia's leadership is something to be seen. The members both love and respect her. She goes out of her way to support them and care for them. They have done an assortment of cleanups from the beach to the Motherwell Canal with their record being 240 bags on Madiba Day last year. They also did tree planting and hikes amongst other things. The highlight was their October Spring training week at the Motherwell Community and Enviro HUB when about 60 of them were given talks on different topics – followed by a test!

The education team and the Enviro Club have all been very involved with progress at the Motherwell Community and Enviro HUB. Stage 1 is complete and is up and running. This is the recycling and making and selling of craft from what they collect. Stage 2 is the building of the Enviro Edu centre which is where we will operate from and includes an area for food gardens. This has been held up because the metro has not yet granted us the lease of that section of the land, even though they are very supportive of the project.

Our grateful thanks especially to Patricia, but also to Shirley and Zoliswa for their dedication to the ZC and the vital work they do in helping to educate the learners about our environment.

Pollution and River Clean-up

Litter Collection

Municipal refuse collection and anti-littering enforcement has deteriorated for many years to the point where the Zwartkops Conservancy has been forced to intervene to save the Zwartkops Estuary and surrounding wetlands from plastic pollution on a grand scale.

In 2010 Mike Spearpoint (past ZC Chairman) coordinated litter collection efforts until the end of 2015 when Dale Clayton took over.

Unfortunately, Metro funding for the litter team ceased for the first 5 months of 2016 when Spar East Cape came to our rescue. They have been helping foot a major part of the wage bill ever since. Their contribution, especially, is gratefully appreciated.

Some Metro funding for wages continued until 2018 when it finally ceased; forcing us to reduce litter staff from 5 to 4 persons in 2019 and to 3 persons from April this year. We now rely solely on private sponsors to fund wages. The Metro provides us an annual grant in aid but stipulate that it cannot be used for wages. We have the best dressed but most underpaid litter team in town!!

Until 2018, when we had five litter staff, we did a full sweep of the entire 16 km estuary and surroundings but we are now forced to target the litter 'hot spots' including indiscriminate dumping by all and sundry. This includes many fishermen who all swear they don't litter but the evidence suggests otherwise!!

Since 2017, we have collected 67317 bags of litter up to end June 2023. The average daily bag collection per litter picker is about 11 bags. It is exhausting work especially when collecting along the muddy banks in gumboots and loading and offloading one of our two boats Curlew or Whimbrel

Our biggest polluter, still, is the Motherwell stormwater canal. We are pleased to advise that the 3 litter traps have been revised and recently re-installed on July 17. This should help to reduce the torrent of litter into the estuary but we must still collect litter out the traps otherwise it still ends up in the estuary with the next rain--- plastic floats then goes over the top.

Refuse removal from the bins along the banks of the estuary is now almost non-existent so we do a weekly sweep (usually Monday morning) of the bins at the BWB Lifesaving Club, Settlers Bridge, the Fort and Weinronk Way.

The wind blows a lot of plastic from the BWB Transfer Centre onto the nearby Church grounds. We clean there as well as down Tippers Creek then along Amsterdamhoek to the Police Station. Passing visitors including buses are often observed throwing litter out of windows!

We said goodbye in March to Marie Tierfry, our longest serving litter picker. She has worked since 2012.

Alien Removal

Jointed Cactus

Our biggest project for the last 5 years has been the removal of jointed cactus where we had huge infestations along the banks of the estuary and a variety of areas in proximity. It has been a huge effort involving many volunteers, chief of whom have been the two evergreens from Redhouse, Margreet Koch and Karin Keulemans as well as Machel du Plessis and Louise Frier from BWB. A recent stalwart is Lesly Mac Gwynne from St Georges Park. Another stalwart has been Sibuyosi, recently moved from Wessa but unfortunately due to shortage of funding we had to say goodbye at the end of June.

We peaked in 2021 at 490 bags of cactus collected by working twice a week, then down to 250 bags in 2022 when we reduced to once a week. This year we are basically mopping up the last small patches—mostly hidden—and we may top 100 bags. A great effort by all—not the least being the skippers of our boats who have taken us to the collecting sites and returned later to collect us and the cactus. Special mention must be made of Margreet who has invited us into her home every week for coffee and biscuits—thank you!

Other aliens

In March 2022 we turned our attention to other aliens in the area.

First were the huge infestations of Agave, Mauritian Hemp and to a lesser extent, Port Jackson and Yucca at the top end of Amsterdamhoek adjoining the old railway embankment.

Our team was greatly assisted by local member, Louis Beyers, who used the winch and steel rope on his Land Rover to rip out the big plants.

Also present were Carl Welgemoed and Ken Pressley from Metro Enviro who assisted with their chainsaws; mostly removing Port Jackson.

Our team used forks to remove the smaller plants. A huge effort was made to collect the thousands of seeds dropped by the Agave and Hemp. We placed them in bags and, when we had about 50, Enviroserv kindly accepted them for disposal. We made a few trips to Enviroserv. A huge thank you to them. Disposing them at the Metro tip would have merely transferred the problem elsewhere.

We then turned our attention to the mass of Mauritian Hemp behind the Scout Hall at the bottom of Tippers Creek. This infestation was threatening to move into the Aloe Reserve. After about 4 months of huge effort, we removed most of them; again, a tremendous thank you to Louis Beyers for pulling out the big ones with the winch on his Land-rover and clearing others with his chainsaw.

Next plan is to clear prickly pear from the Aloes Reserve; at least those that can be reached. This valley thicket is almost impenetrable except where humans and animals, especially goats, have thinned it out!

We will also turn our attention to the Port Jackson/ Rooikrantz growing along old Grahamstown Road between the railway viaduct and the Markman stormwater canal.

Infrastructure

Many thanks to our skippers Carl Welgemoed for Whimbrel located at Tiger Bay and Pete Senn and Rod Lochhead in Redhouse who skipper Curlew. Carl is Metro Environmental Officer located at Tiger Bay offices where Whimbrel is housed. We really appreciate his assistance.

Reserves

Saltpan east of Redhouse

In late 2017 Swartkops Sea Salt abandoned the saltpans east and north of Redhouse. Rampant vandalism of their infrastructure was one of the issues.

In 2018 the saltpans dried out; exacerbated by the fact that there had been no significant rains since 2015 due to global warming. Thousands of birds left.

In October 2021, as reported at the previous AGM, the ZC instigated the diversion of the flow of the Motherwell Stormwater canal, via a 300 -metre channel, into the pan east of Redhouse. This 70-hectare pan took until mid-2022 to fill. At a recent count done by Dr Paul Martin he reported over 2000 greater Flamingos on the east pan plus a host of other birds. Fantastic!

Most are aware that our sewage infrastructure in NMBM is sadly deficient and our river and estuary is being polluted at many points. The greatest polluter at mid-point is the Motherwell Stormwater Canal which drains the township of the same name so diverting the flow into the saltpan is an added benefit.

A recent test at the pan outflow point into the estuary north of Redhouse, which is some 2.9 km from the inflow point at the Motherwell canal, gave a reading of 9 E.coli which is well within recreational limits: GOOD NEWS FOR A CHANGE!!

Our team work hard at maintaining this channel flow starting with clearing the diversion at the canal which is blocked by plastic and slimy green grass which proliferates in nutrient rich water. Cattle, especially, and the occasional scrambler bike breach the walls so we are often busy closing these leaks.

The ZC is hoping to obtain sponsorship to do the same for the Markman Stormwater Canal which also occasionally pollutes the estuary. An additional worry is that uncontrolled manganese storage and handling at Markman Industrial has resulted in traces of manganese finding its way down to the estuary via the Markman canal. We believe that diverting the canal flow into an artificial wetland instead of draining directly into the estuary will greatly improve the health of the estuary.

Nature Reserves

The Swartkops Nature Reserve was proclaimed many years ago. It runs east of Redhouse between the estuary and Motherwell Estate from Motherwell Stormwater Canal to north of the Powerlines near Sumcay.

Part of the area along the estuary was infested with jointed cactus. As previously reported, we have removed most of it. This and the fact that the birds are back on the pan has motivated the resumption of hikes on the 11k Flamingo trail. We have also done sweeps for snares—a recent one produced 55 snares.

The Aloes Nature Reserve has not been fully proclaimed. We are working closely with the Metro to get it fully motivated and proclaimed at a Council Meeting; no easy task as the Metro is paralysed by continual changes in political management.

We must mention that these reserves which contain huge swathes of spekboom, are a fantastic carbon sequestrator, helping in the fight against global warming and attendant droughts.

We are bringing this to the attention of the relevant Metro authorities together with an earnest plea to seek other less environmentally sensitive areas for new housing and other projects. There is an urgent need to repair some of the damage done by replanting; especially spekboom.

Work progresses on planning for the transfer of water from the Motherwell Canal to the West Bank of the River. Recently, we successfully tested the existing under-river pipe to ensure that water would still flow into the Bar None pan.

There is a lot still to do before we see the Western pans filled with birds again.

Frank Collier 28th August 2023