

Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Hotspot CEPF


Small grant project - final report

Dr Bob Smith, Current Conservation Community Interest Company

Project Title and Request
Project Title Strengthening Izele, the online social network for conservationists in the MPAH
CEPF Region – Please list the CEPF region where your project will be implemented. CEPF funding regions are described on www.cepf.net . Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Hotspot
Project Duration – Enter the approximate time period of your project. 1 month
Strategic Direction from the CEPF Ecosystem Profile – Enter the single strategic direction this proposal aims to address. Use the exact number, such as 1, 2, etc. and wording from the ecosystem profile for this region found on www.cepf.net . 4.2 Establish and strengthen institutional arrangements that will increase and coordinate civil society participation and facilitate lessons sharing to promote linkages that ensure effective conservation action at a broad scale

Organization Information
Organization Legal Name Current Conservation Community Interest Company
Project Lead Contact – Provide the name and contact information for the person responsible for correspondence with CEPF regarding this project. Dr Bob Smith 56 Rushmead Close Canterbury, Kent CT2 7RP, United Kingdom Email: bob.smith@izele.org
Organization Chief Executive – Provide the name and contact information for the chief executive or person who is authorized to sign contracts on behalf of your organization. Dr Bob Smith 56 Rushmead Close Canterbury, Kent CT2 7RP, United Kingdom Email: bob.smith@izele.org

Executive Summary

- The Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Hotspot (MPAH) is an area of 275,000 km² covering part of Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland. CEPF have supported a range of different projects in the MPAH, with a focus on building capacity in state protected areas, creating biodiversity stewardship projects on private land and supporting community-based projects on communal land. The long-term success of these projects depends on sharing information and building links with their partners, neighbours and visitors.
 - This is why we received a grant from CEPF to produce Izele (www.izele.org), an online conservation social network to link and benefit people throughout the MPAH. The Izele website can be viewed on any computer, tablet or smartphone and encourages people to share news, information, maps and advice. The website name comes from iZeLe, the isiZulu word for the black bird-berry tree (*Psychotria capensis*), which is found in the MPAH and has a star-shaped flower. This flower forms the basis of the Izele logo and the website's icon for marking a page or comment as a favourite.
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- Izele creates an online social network by letting people share, post and comment on news and information. It does this by letting conservation areas and conservation groups create pages that include a news feed, a map showing their location and details of their important species. Each of these pages is linked, both through showing their locations on the map and detailing project partners. This raises the profile of every area and group by letting users browse the website through the maps and links to discover new pages.
 - Izele was originally developed with funding from CEPF and we then received follow-on funding to make some improvements. The follow-on project improved the content included on Izele by updating the News feed tab so it can include more than one Twitter and Facebook account. This lets page managers feature a wider range of social media posts on their pages. This improvement included adding a Twitter and Facebook hashtag filter, so that the News feed tab will only show posts from specified social media posts if they include “#izele”. This means the News feed can feature posts from a wider range of groups or people, without worrying that some posts would not be relevant, as Izele ignores posts from those other accounts unless they included the relevant hashtag.
 - This follow-on project also added two more features to the Izele website. First, it improved the formatting and presentation of Twitter and Facebook posts on the News feed tab. This will make it easier for people to share information. Second, it redesigned the website so that each Izele page can be indexed in search engines, so they can now be found using Google, Bing and other similar websites.
 - The next steps in developing Izele involve: (1) increasing the number of pages on the website. We have already added pages for Balgowan Conservancy, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and Wildlands and plan to increase the number of pages for the Midlands Conservancies Forum members in the near future. We will then expand the network further within the CEPF region and elsewhere, and; (2) fundraising to cover the costs of improving the Izele website, with the initial goal of allowing page managers to create and edit their own pages.

Project Rationale

Background

The Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Hotspot (MPAH) is an area of 275,000 km² that covers part of Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland. The CEPF have supported a range of different projects in the MPAH, with a focus on building capacity in state protected areas, creating biodiversity stewardship projects on private land and supporting community-based projects on communal land. The people working on these projects also vary widely in terms of their experience and expertise, so it is vital that these conservationists share information and lessons learnt. In addition, the long-term viability of these projects depends on sharing information and building links with their partners, neighbours and visitors.

This is why the Current Conservation Community Interest Company, with funding from the CEPF, developed Izele, an online conservation social network that seeks to link and benefit people throughout the Hotspot and beyond. The website lets conservation areas and conservation groups set up a page (Figure 1), which consists of the following four tabs: the News feed tab, which lets users post comments and share links, and also brings together posts from the conservation area or group's Facebook and Twitter accounts; the Map tab, which shows the polygon marking the boundary of the conservation area or several polygons making up a collection of conservation areas; the Species tab, which shows six notable species found in the conservation area and also lists the bird and mammal species, and; the About tab, which contains information about the conservation area or group.

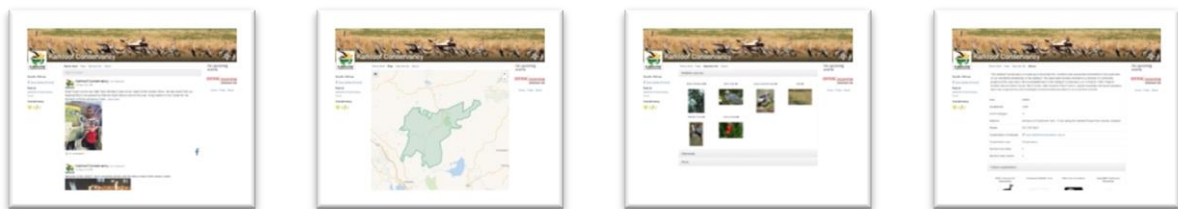


Figure 1: Screenshots of the original version of the Izele website

This project was piloted in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands with members of the Midlands Conservancies Forum and the website was launched in November 2015. User feedback on the website was excellent but there were a couple of limitations we were unable to address in the pilot project because of funding constraints. Fortunately, we were able to apply for a follow-on project from CEPF to address these problems. This document makes up the final report for this follow-on project and describes our project approach, results and future plans.

Project Approach

The project management structure involved an Implementation Team and a Steering Group. The Implementation Team consisted of Dr Bob Smith from Current Conservation as the team manager and Tom Mullier and Greg Vaughan, who are independent consultants, as the software designers and developers. The Steering Group consisted of Twané Clark from Karkloof Conservancy and the Midlands Conservancies Forum, Greg Martindale, Mark Gerrard and Kevin McCann from Wildlands Conservation Trust, Roy Tabernor from Lions Bush Conservancy and Adrian Wilson from Rosetta Nottingham Road Conservancy. Because of the short time span of this project, we adopted a simple two-step process: (1) the

Implementation team developed and tested the improvements to the Izele website, and (2) the Steering Group were asked to test and comment on the updates. The final version of the website was then completed in March 2016.

Project results

The aim of the project was to implement four improvements to the Izele website, which are listed below together with screenshots illustrating the changes.

1) Each news feed can include more than one Twitter and Facebook account.

Izele can now show posts in the news feed from more than one Twitter account and one Facebook account. This let page managers specify more than one social media account and so broaden the amount of information that can be shared (Figure 2). For example, it could be used so that the Izele news feed tab shows tweets from an individual conservancy and the Midlands Conservancies Forum.

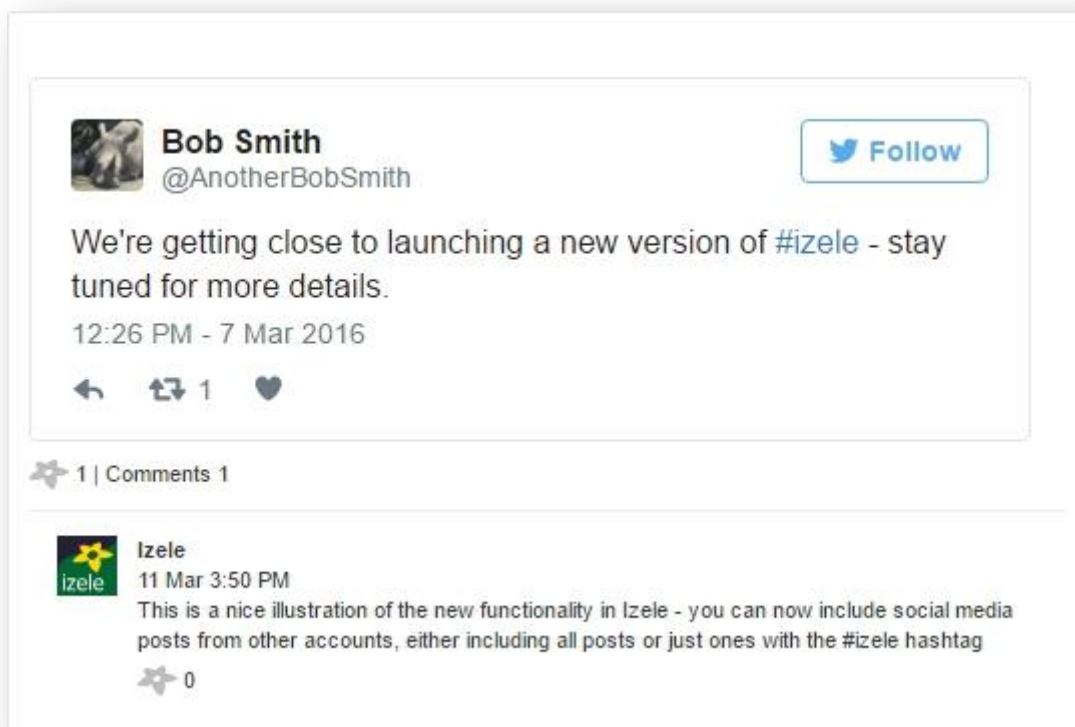


Figure 2: Example of post on Izele page from different Twitter feed with #izele hashtag

2) Adding a Twitter and Facebook hashtag filter.

In conjunction with adding more than one social media account, the new version of Izele lets the page manager specify that posts from certain accounts will only appear in the news feed if they contain the hashtag "#izele" (Figure 2). This means the news feed can feature posts from a wider range of groups or people, without worrying that some posts would not be relevant, as Izele ignores posts from those other accounts unless they included the hashtag.

3) Improved format of Tweets and Facebook posts shown on the News feed tab.

The initial formatting of tweets and Facebook posts in the News feed did not include active website links or show the posts using the standard Twitter or Facebook style (Figure 3). The revised version of Izele has corrected this issue (Figure 4), producing pages that look more appealing and make it easier for people to share information.

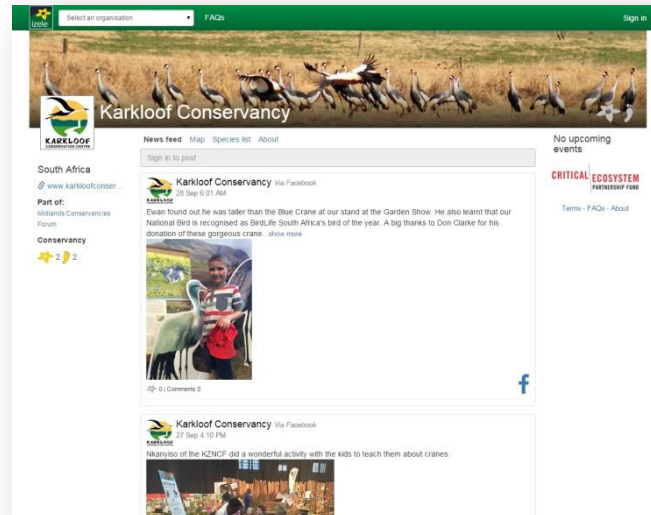


Figure 3: Screen shot of the pilot version of the News feed tab with the original formatting for tweets and Facebook posts

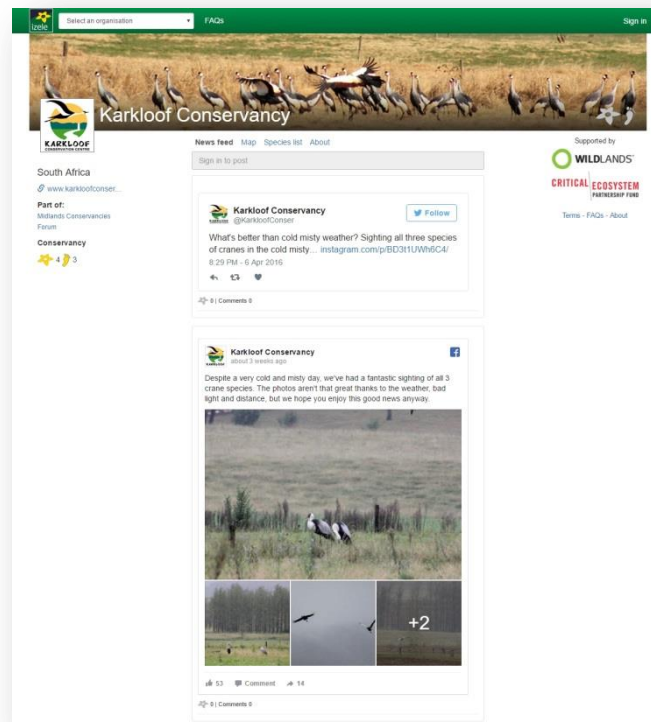


Figure 4: Screenshot of the updated version of the News feed tab with the new formatting for tweets and Facebook posts

4) Improved inclusion of Izele pages in search engines.

The pilot version of the Izele website could not be indexed in search engines because of the way each page was stored. The new version overcomes this problem and so each of the Izele pages now appears in search engine results (Figure 5).

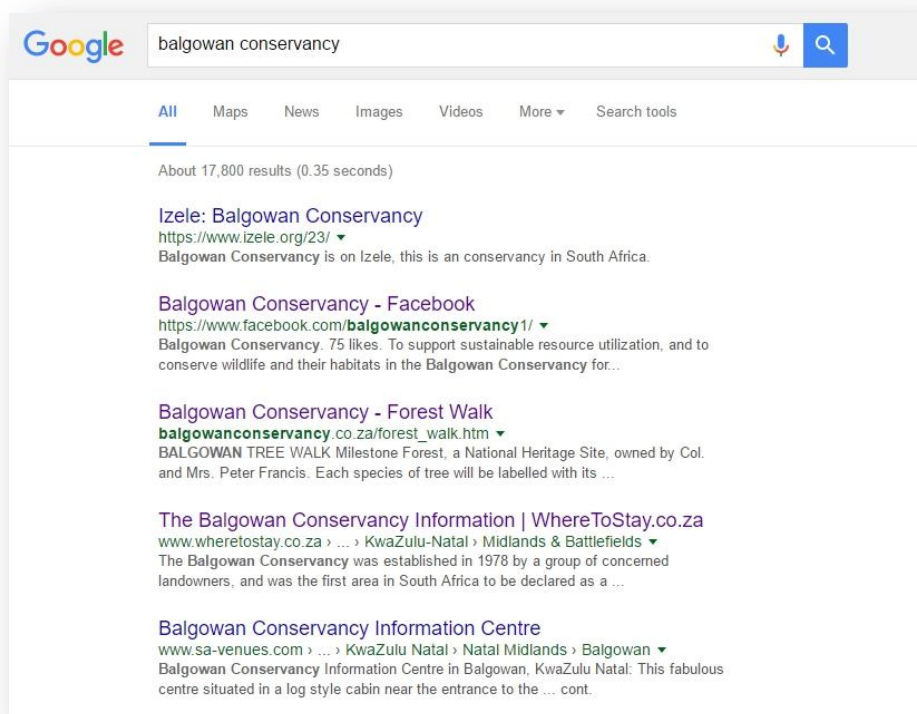


Figure 5: Screenshot showing the Google search results for the Balgowan Conservancy, with the Izele page as the first item.

Conclusions

The updated version of Izele addresses several issues with the pilot version and now makes it easier for page managers to share information and raise their profile. We will now focus on increasing the number of pages for conservation areas and conservation groups and fundraising to add more functionality. In particular, there is a need to allow page managers to create and edit their own pages and for increased functionality for ecotourism ventures to engage with their current and potential customers.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Adrian Wilson, Emily Botts, Greg Martindale, Roy Tabernor, Twané Clark and Warwick Fraser for their feedback and advice on developing the website. In addition, we would like to thank Kevin McCann and Mark Gerrard from the Wildlands Conservation Trust for their help and advice while managing our grant and to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund for their support in funding this project.