

FINAL REPORT TO THE CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM FUND ON THE USE OF A SMALL GRANT FOR COMMUNITY FACILITATION



Photo 1: The 2013 Annual General Meeting of the KZN Crane Foundation in 2013.

This report provides an overview of the use made of grant funding of US 17 879, ZAR 135 880) allocated to the KZN Crane Foundation by the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (administered by the Wildlands Conservation Trust) for the purpose of “*expanding conservation areas and improving land use*”.

The bulk of the funding went towards the salary costs of staff employed to assist the KZNCF in fulfilling this mandate. Without staff many of the programs adopted would have been difficult to implement and monitor.

1. IMPROVING LAND USE

Thanks to help from the CEPF we were able to improve management of the 450 hectare Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature Reserve and its grassland and wetland habitats. The nature reserve is an

important habitat for several Endangered species most notably the Oribi and Wattled Crane. The grassland and wetland habitat types protected in the nature reserve are themselves at high risk of land use transformation because their high agricultural value, making them the most transformed biomes in South Africa.



Photo 2: Vegetation (forb and grass) assessment of the grassland components of the Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature Reserve

Activities during the period funded by the CEPF included:

- ❖ Ongoing implementation of the Management Plan for the nature reserve which regulates all forms of activity on the nature reserve including use of the nature reserve for agricultural purposes within acceptable ecological parameters, with the assistance of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife the provincial conservation authority.
- ❖ Hay baling is permitted within the nature reserve and we experimented with leaving pockets of unmown grass in the areas mown thereby creating refugia for wildlife.
- ❖ Several *Cyathea dregea* (tree fern) were secured by fencing them off preventing livestock from damaging them.
- ❖ Colonies of rare plants *Eucomis autumnalis* (110 plants), *Gunnera perpensa* (130 square metres), *Crocsmia pottsii* (15 sq metres), *Criinum mocawanii* (1 plant), *Tulbaghia natalensis* (50 plants), *Bowiea volubilis* subsp. *volubilis* (125 plants) and *Merwillia plumbea* (250 plants)

were introduced to the nature reserve in 2012-2013 from areas to be inundated by the new Mearns Dam.

- ❖ A real effort was made to make the nature reserve more accessible to the public. Included guided walking tours by a KZNCF Volunteer guide, tours of our new facilities completed in 2014, a bioblitz with support from the South African National Biodiversity Institute involving some 60 people identifying plants and animals and downloading data including digital photos onto the SANBI's internet portal and database and the highlight was the attendance of some 200 people at the launch of our new centre for the rearing and release of Wattled Crane chicks into the wild.
- ❖ Litter was also removed from the nature reserve and our 3 kilometre public road frontage and sorted and recycled, an average of 2 bags a week until the worker doing this work was retrenched at the end of 2014.
- ❖ We are continuing to investigate the expansion of the nature reserve, which has good support from at least one partner but this will involve some form of compensatory payment to affected landowners and is therefore dependant on outside funding.
- ❖ Scotch thistle, an alien invasive plant, was 'controlled' (it would be wrong to use the word eradicated) on some 100 hectares of the nature reserve using mattocks (ie digging out the roots of the plants). This weed requires ongoing control efforts, but the more regular the control efforts the easier it is to control the weed.
- ❖ Fairly intensive efforts led to the recovery of 20 snares on the nature reserve.
- ❖ We also publicised our work through our newsletters, a regular feature for 2014 was to publish contributions made by farmers in the KZN Midlands who have breeding pairs of Cranes on their properties, all of the contributors detailed practices that they used to make their farming more environmentally friendly from burning regimes in grasslands, to wetland management and the adoption of no till farming.
- ❖ We also undertook some work at the Rosetta Dam thinning willow trees and clearing litter in the hopes that this would provide some inspiration to the local community. Since then several public flea markets have been organised next to the dam, perhaps a small seed was planted which will have positive long term effects for the dam and its associated wetland and riparian habitats (time will tell).

Thanks to the CEPF funding we had the resources to look after and care for the Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature Reserve with positive outcomes.

2. COMMUNITY FACILITATION - PROMOTING THE WISE LAND USE MANAGEMENT

KZNCF Conservation Project Manager Ann Burke facilitated a very well attended initial meeting on the Conservancy concept. This was attended by some 40 local landowners. This was followed by several meetings with identified local "champions".

With the appointment of Gareth Boothway after Ann Burke took leave and with support from volunteers on the nearby Fort Nottingham Conservancy we were finally able to do the necessary 'follow up' and several meetings were attended by Mr Boothway and a core group of interested people which led to the establishment of the Rosetta Nottingham Road Conservancy.

Conservancies are non-statutory, voluntary organisations and therefore the emphasis will be on working closely with other like-minded individuals and organisations. The conservancy extends from the town of Nottingham Road to the hamlet of Rosetta and includes numerous farms, both smallholdings and a number of dairy farms. Importantly the Conservancy area also includes large stretches of the upper reaches of the Mooi River one of the more important water sources in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Province. Part of the Mearns Dam completed in 2013 late 2014 also falls within the Conservancy area. The dam is part of an inter-basin water transfer scheme which supplies the Durban Metropolitan area (South Africa's main port and third city) with water.

The Conservancy has identified some of its goals as being:

- (a) "Promote the protection of indigenous plants and animals, undisturbed or important biological communities and landscapes of exceptional beauty and foster biodiversity.*
- (b) Promote the protection and quality of streams and rivers within its area, particularly in the riparian zone and wetlands and encourage a catchment management approach.*
- (c) Cooperate with authorities in respect of the management of the conservancy.*
- (d) Collect and raise funds and use such funds for the promotion of the conservancy's activities.*
- (e) Raise awareness of environmental issues amongst the community, within the membership and with the surrounding landowners of the conservancy.*
- (f) Contribute to the appropriate development of the urban and rural environment. " author A Wilson - RNR Conservancy.*

A conservancy is a voluntary organisation of individuals including in particular landowners who are committed to protecting the environment on their properties and the establishment of this Conservancy was undoubtedly the highlight of 2014. The Conservancy, under its chairperson Adrian Wilson has been reasonably active in the time since its establishment:

- Organising public lectures on topics ranging from protecting Chameleons to Owls;
- Taking and analysing water samples from local streams with assistance from another NGO (the Dusi Umgeni Conservation Trust);
- Establishing a presence on the Internet (rnr.one-circle.com) and Facebook;
- A game count in 2015;
- Selling owl boxes and bird feeders; and,
- Organising opposition to Fracking a potential threat to the limited water resources of KwaZulu-Natal Province.

Ironically, it is threats to the environment by Fracking and other such activities which often provide a much need boost to membership of environmental organisations like the Conservancies which often struggle to fill the office bearer posts.

3 CONSERVING ENDANGERED SPECIES

Gareth Boothway's presence was hugely useful for other work done by the KZN Crane Foundation we had completed an ambitious building program to build a new endangered species breeding centre and the presence of someone like Gareth who is handy with a tool box was hugely useful in making the finishing touches to the building before the launch. The first years chick rearing was a success with all three birds successfully reared to term. Isolation Rearing is a very specialised activity undertaken to ensure that birds reared by humans do not imprint on humans and also are fit to survive in the wild. The general consensus of expert opinion from the Wattled Crane Recovery Program (a partnership of various South African zoo's, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the Endangered Wildlife Trust and ourselves) was that in the first year of chick rearing there would be too many teething problems to release the first birds raised at the facility into the wild. Instead the three bird's raised in our first year will join the Captive Breeding Program and also form part of the gene bank of the unique genetic stock of the South African population of the Wattled Crane which provide's some insurance of the preservation of these genes in the event of any disaster affecting the wild population of Wattled Cranes. We hope that in 2016 we can make further progress in augmenting the population of this endangered species in the wild. There is no question that the progress made with this 'rear and release' program has been welcomed by landowners and other rural people who are responsible for the habitat's that our Wattled Crane's require in order to survive (and thrive) in the wild.



Photo 3: Visitors admiring the new Wattled Crane Rearing and Release Centre at the Bill Barnes Crane and Oribi Nature Reserve

4 SPECIAL EVENTS

There is no question that Conservation Project Manager Ann Burke, before her illness, made an inspired contribution in terms of outreach to the local community events organised included:

- Songbird, an evening supper mixed with the readings of Aldo Leopold and music.
- Wisdom Tales for Cranes, a book with a collection of short stories with magnificent illustrations aimed at children and the young at heart.
- In addition Ann has participated in numerous public speaking engagements at schools, community meetings, etc.

The KZN Crane Foundation will continue to work hard to build an awareness that our organisation provides a valuable service to our local community (including Nottingham Road and Rosetta).

5 EDUCATION

A programme targeted specifically at the historically disadvantaged communities has been rolled over several years now to farm schools in the area surrounding the nature reserve. Not only does this work provide a positive image of conservation in the minds of the local community it also

provides participating children with valuable skills (all work is done to a set curriculum which is in line with the national curriculum. A total of 6 schools participate actively in the program with 30 lessons targeting some 400 plus schoolchildren during the course of the CEPF project, this work relies substantially on the generous support of a the N3 Toll Concession a South African corporate sponsor. It should be emphasised that most of the schoolchildren get more than one lesson during the course of the year, we have a set curriculum and try to work through it for each grade/class. A brief breakdown of education work from July 2013 to March 2014 is provided below. Again the CEPF funding helped fund the support staff who did some of the administration work that enabled Nkanyiso Ndlela our Education Officer to do his work.

| Date | School and Grade | Number of students |
|-----------------|--|---|
| 17 July | Shea O'Conner Combined School, Grade 4 | 48 (Zulu) |
| 17 July | Shea O'Conner Combined School, Grade 5 | 50 (Zulu) |
| 25 July | Esiphetwini, Grade 4 | 17 (Zulu) |
| 25 July | Esiphetwini, Grade 5 | 18 (Zulu) |
| 29 July | AI Kajee | 45 total: 20 Zulu; 25 Indian |
| 30 July | Esiphetwini, Grade 4 | 17 (Zulu) |
| 30 July | Esiphetwini, Grade 5 | 18 (Zulu) |
| 31 July | Silindile Primary (all grades) | 25 (Zulu) |
| 25 October 2013 | Shea O'Conner Combined School, Grade 4, Mr SH Mthethwa | 42 Grassland Treasures, identify grassland creatures |
| 29 October 2013 | Esiphetwini Sendezi School Grade 4, Mr Zuma | 14 Grassland Treasures, value of grasslands and wetlands |
| 30 October 2013 | AI Kajee School Mooi River, Mrs Kosi | 48 Introduction to Cranes and Grassland Treasures lesson and worksheet |
| 1 November 2013 | Shea O'Conner Combined School, Grade 4, Mr Mthethwa | 42 |

| | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| | | (Lesson Grassland and Wetland Biodiversity) |
| 5 November 2013 | Esiphetwini Sendezi School Grade 5, Mrs Zumu | 25 Wetland awareness discussion followed by worksheet and making Crane masks |
| 6 November 2013 | Shea O’Conner Combined School, Grade 4, Mr Mchunu substituting for Mr Ngidi | 32 Wetland awareness groupwork discussion followed by completion of worksheet. |
| 7 November 2013 | Teacher’s workshop facilitated by Jenny Stipcich | 6 adults Discussion of Cranes in the Classroom teachers handbook |
| 12 November 2013 | Esiphetwini Sendezi School Grade 6, Mr Mhlanzi | 24 Cranes of the world migration worksheet |
| 19th February 2014 | Three Cranes Challenge – Karkloof (Triandra, Yarrow and Gartmore Primary) | 45 Nkanyiso read the story of Baba Nohemu to pupils taking part in sports activities as part of the 3 Cranes Challenge |
| 23rd February 2014 | Isilindele Primary School, Grade 6, Ms Zuma | 11 Cranes of the World migration |
| 26th February 2014 | Shea O’Conner Combined School, Grade 6, Mr Dladla | 31 Cranes of the World migration |
| 27th February 2014 | Shea O’Conner Combined School, Grade 5, Mr Dladla | 45 |

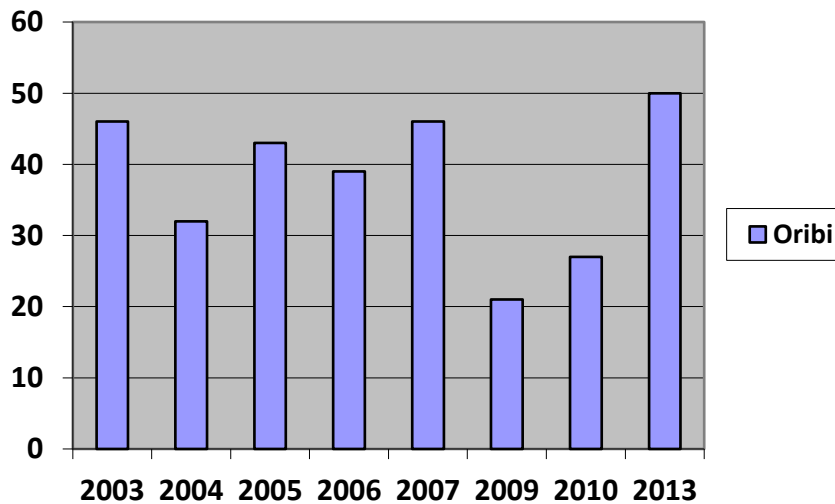
| | | |
|---------------|--|---|
| | | Crane message importance of our wetlands CAPS life orientation |
| 3 March 2014 | Isilindele Primary School, Grades 4-6, Ms Zuma | 25 Wetland Food Web links to CAPS Natural Science |
| 4 March 2014 | Shea O'Conner Combined School, Grade 4, Mrs Mlotshwa | 42 The three Crane/colour me beautiful links to CAPS Natural Science |
| 6 March 2014 | Esiphetwini Sendezi School Grade 4, Mr Zuma | 28 Story Baba Nohem/last Crane standing links to CAPS personal and social well being |
| 11 March 2014 | Isilindele Primary School, Grades 4-6, Ms Zuma | 21 Dance improvisation dancing with Cranes links CAPS performing arts. |
| 12 March 2014 | Esiphetwini Sendezi School Grade 6, Mr Mhlamvu | 28 Life coaches discussion links to personal and social well being |
| 13 March 2014 | Esiphetwini Sendezi School Grade 5 | 29 Buka Mina Crane Dance links with Performing Arts |
| 23 March 2014 | Isibonokuhle Primary School, Grade 5, Ms Zondi | 23 Why are wetlands important ? links to CAPS Natural Science |
| 25 March 2014 | Isibonokuhle Primary School, Grade 6, Ms Zondi | 26 |

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| | | Life coaches discussion links to personal and social well being |
| 26 March 2014 | Shea O’Conner Combined School, Grade 6, Mr Dladla | 32 Sedakos Crane Story links to personal and social well being |
| 27 March 2014 | Shea O’Conner Combined School, Grade 5, Mr Ngidi | 32 The wetland food web links to CAPS life, living and structures |

6 WILDLIFE NUMBERS

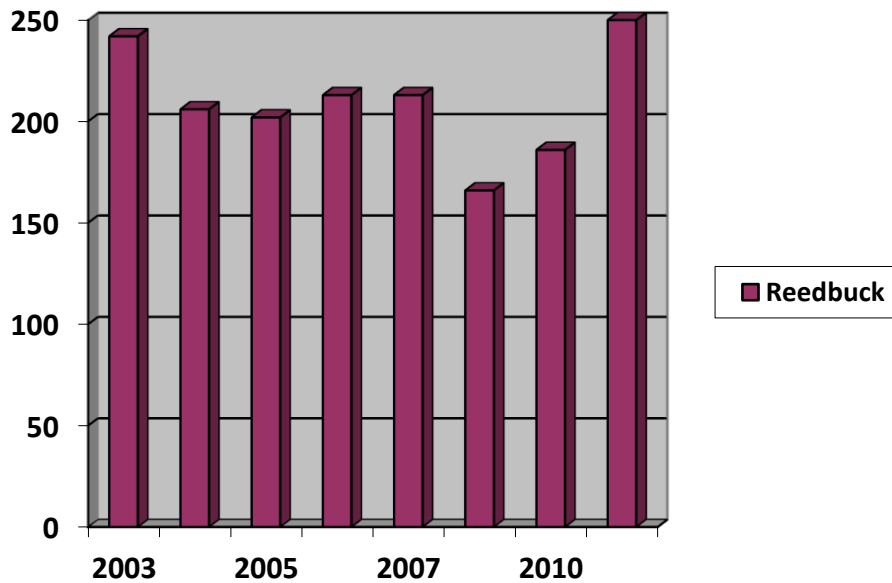
A winter game count undertaken in 2013 suggests that our efforts supported by the CEPF are having a positive impact helping to reverse a downward trend in wildlife numbers that had persisted for several years as the attached graphs for two ungulates Oribi and Reedbuck show.

Graph 1: Oribi Numbers in the Study Area



Half of all Oribi recorded 2013 found on the Crane Foundation’s nature reserve and two neighbouring properties one of which is a dairy farm.

Graph 2: Reedbuck Numbers in the Study Area.



Nearly half of all Reedback recorded from two dairy farms.

7 USE OF GRANT FUNDING TO DATE

All grant funding to date has been spent. Our first funding tranche of R 67940.00 received in 2013 was used to pay part of the salary of Ms A Burke our Reserve Manager (amongst other duties) with 10% of funding set aside for administration and our second funding tranche of R 61 146.00 received on the 10th of February 2014 was allocated to her temporary replacement Mr G Boothway again with 10% set aside for administration costs.

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| SubTotal towards Reserve Manager (wages) | R 116 177.40 |
| SubTotal Administration Costs | R 12 908.60 |
| TOTAL | R 129 086.00 |

During the period under review the KZN Crane Foundation has also been able to obtain the support of the N3 Toll Concession both for our Education Work and to both build and run the nursery. Fundraising remains of course an ongoing challenge however, we are perhaps more fortunate than most conservation organisations in that we have a small endowment and our more active presence in the local community over the past two years has been extremely helpful from a fundraising perspective.

8 LESSONS LEARNT

I personally am convinced that for the period in which the Community Ecosystems Partnership Fund supported us the KZN Crane Foundation had some of the greatest successes in its 25 year history. It

is always a tricky business of aligning the objectives of funders with the objectives of a Donor. The small facilitation grants were hugely useful to use for the following reasons:

- There was sufficient flexibility in terms of the funding allocated for the KZNCF to undertake a variety of activities;
- We were able to use the funds allocated in 3 spheres where we normally struggle to find funding improving land use management ie looking after our nature reserve, community facilitation an activity that takes a long time to bear fruit and staff costs towards these ends.

I wonder from the CEPF's perspective whether there would be agreement that partnering with established organisations (large and small) with a track record in conservation is a useful way of spending donor funds.

One aspect of our work that the KZNCF has not yet begun to grapple with seriously enough is the need to partner more and work with all spectrums of South African society. Our education work is encouraging but we face many challenges in this regard. As land ownership patterns in South Africa change we will have to adapt our work and there will be a definite need for extension work targeting black farmers in years to come.

In our original proposal we indicated that we hoped to encourage more landowners to formally commit to having parts of their properties set aside as nature reserves. We did not achieve this milestone but we certainly put a lot of effort into community facilitation and hopefully these efforts together with the establishment of the Rosetta Nottingham Road Conservancy will bear fruit over time. Thereby leading to more of South Africa's critically endangered grassland and wetland biomes being formally protected, in years to come. I certainly believe that since the grant allocation was for community facilitation purposes we can definitely say that the money was spent with this purpose in mind and quite successfully. I am also confident that the energy we were able to bring to our work with the CEPF's support has laid a solid foundation for years to come, as an active organisation we have able to attract new members and new committee members onto the organisation. Also the newly completed release facility gives the organisation a valuable focus and publicity which all assists in the ultimate objective of protecting and conserving the biodiversity of the Pondolong to Maputuland Biodiversity hotspot.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Ferendinos

(Past Chair KZNCF 2013-2014)