



# Mid-year Newsletter 2023

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The KZNCF committee meets several times a year to discuss all aspects of the foundation, one of the issues we have is to make use of the Crane rearing facilities that have not been used for several years. Janet Snow and Jon Bates continued with their great Environmental Education Programme. We managed to get Ben Hoffman from the Raptor Centre in Camperdown to come and to the centre and give us some input. He suggested we could keep some non-releasable cranes in pens. They could in turn help “teach” chicks born in captivity to be rewilded. Bishop Ngobeli of the Joberg Zoo has chicks available from the Wattle Crane Recovery Programme. He also suggested that the facility could be used for rehabilitation of cranes and other birds wounded from collisions or sick from poisoning. On the reserve side we got Alex March to come and give advice on rehabilitating the quarry site. This programme will probably be started next year as we do not yet have funds for it. Steve McKean of Conservation Outcomes together with WeAct have initiated a programme to get Carbon Credit. His team took extensive site tests and with subsequent visits they could get some Carbon Sequestration credits and earn some cash. The Usher Centre has had a lot of TLC recently thanks to Sue Moller and is looking much better with trees cut and buildings cleaned on a regular basis. The local pair of Wattles have used the dam in front of the centre to breed and we are hoping to see a new little one shortly. Cobus Botha and Intelact had a Veld Assessment Course on the Reserve in April. We handed out many “The Sentinels” to the participants.

James Berning.



## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

2023 has brought new initiatives and a growth to our environmental education project. We began the year with our first Teachers Community Workshop which was successfully led by Janet Snow. The focus of this session was to look at school excursions risk assessment and management. It was a good opportunity to re-connect with our dedicated teachers in the local rural schools and we welcomed 3 new schools to the project. It was therefore decided that a need for First Aid training was a highlight for this year, in order to best equip the educators when bringing their class groups to the reserve for their outing. The First Aid Level 1 & 2 course, led by Dave Adam, was gratefully received by the educators who were able to attend and 13 educators received their certificates. We thank N3TC for their sponsorship of this addition to our education programme, the value it has brought to the quality of education for the teachers is immeasurable. The teachers were presented with environmental education resource materials that are available online and all schools were given KZNCF Crane education posters to add to their teaching aids. The Bill Barnes Reserve has had 4 schools visiting in the first half of the year, each year brings new students and so much potential for environmental knowledge especially with the guidance of the enthusiastic and dedicated Janet Snow!



School visits from the first half of 2023.



Teachers receiving their Level 2 First Aid certificates.

## Grey Crowned Crane Masters Project

It has been a great privilege for the KZNCF to be able to help Carmen in her masters project and we have enjoyed seeing the wonderful Grey Crowned Crane images and listening to the stories of Carmen's journey to each site. We look forward to seeing the results of all her hard work and congratulate Carmen on her vision and input into this study.

An update from Carmen:

Habitat loss is known to be one of the leading factors influencing the decline of cranes. If we are to inform and effectively implement conservation strategies, we require a fuller understanding of a species' habitat requirements for their reproduction and survival. Of the three crane species in southern Africa, the Grey Crowned Crane is by far the least studied crane species. In particular, we lack a deeper understanding of aspects relating to their breeding. As outlined in last year's mid-year article, my Masters project focuses on the factors affecting the breeding success of the endangered Grey Crowned Cranes in the southern Drakensberg. I stressed that the waterbodies which this species utilises for breeding makes them inconspicuous among the tall reeds and makes their nest sites difficult to access. In the hopes of overcoming these challenges, my focus has been on exploring the possibility of utilising drones as a complementary tool to better monitor this species during this important phase of their life history. The 2022 – 2023 breeding season has seen heavy rainfall and flooding which affected the nesting of this species; however, families are taking flight and data collection is almost complete with only one aspect of the breeding success data remaining to be collected. The KZNCF has played a key role in assisting with the funding of both equipment and fuel which have aided rigorous data collection and has ensured that I can regularly visit nest sites throughout the breeding season. I will be spending the remainder of the year completing my data collection, analyses and the writing up of my thesis. I have very much appreciated the ongoing support and encouragement from the KZNCF throughout my Masters and look forward to sharing the findings of my project in the near future!

By: Carmen Demmer



## Bill Barnes Trails



John Huson and Roderick (Christopher) Phiri

The trails are a joy to mountain bikers, hikers and scholars. Through our members and visitors, we often get valuable feedback and pictures of interesting fauna and flora. With membership and usage growing annually we now generate income which covers the ongoing maintenance of trails and the fence and stream bridges. Each of these crossing points are now clearly numbered which enables trail users to navigate and also communicate where they are if ever this is needed. KZN CF Committee member John Huson does a sterling job, as does Roderick Phiri who methodically follows the routes as part of his daily routine. Before the onset of the rainy season we will be concentrating our efforts to improve drainage.

## Reserve Update



Since it was formed in 1998, the Bill Barnes Conservancy has been an example of how well conservation and farmers can work together in nurturing and managing a natural area of Highveld grasslands and wetlands. The management plan is executed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and Conservation Outcomes plus the 3 farmers who were the donors of land – now making up some 462 hectares running parallel to the P147 District Road on the way in to the village of Nottingham Road. Here run antelope such as Oribi, Common Reedbuck, Duiker and Blesbuck plus a wide variety of Highveld grassland and wetland dependant birds. All of these species are also seen regularly on the neighbouring farms



Our resident pair of Wattled Cranes rarely miss a year without successfully rearing a chick.



On Springvale farm, next to the Reserve a Crowned Eagle is photographed having killed a Dassie.

Next year our big project for the Bill Barnes Conservancy is the rehabilitation of an old quarry. This project will involve moving some of the enormous rocks, introducing quality soil and planting indigenous shrubs and small trees. At an appropriate time Dassies will be introduced as it should be an ideal habitat for them.



The rehabilitated quarry will serve as a stop off point for walkers and mountain bikers.

## MEMBERSHIP & SPONSORS

We have completed 1 year since the inception of our “full access” membership option and are very pleased that we have members renewing their membership. The Bill Barnes Reserve is a convenient space for the residents and visitors of Nottingham Road to access via the pedestrian gate at the Midlands Community College and offers well kept 5km and 10km trail routes. It is good to see so many families enjoying this piece of natural beauty and we are thrilled to be able to share it. We appreciate all the support from the members who live further afield and are happy to contribute an annual fee to be a part of the KZN Crane Foundation, your contribution to the work we are able to do is welcomed. The KZN Crane Foundation could not function without the input of our donors, your belief in the work that we do and the projects we have partnered with is important for the future of our environment and the education of as many children and adults towards a sustainable outcome for generations to come. Please see the list of our major contributors below who have partnered with the KZNCF, we thank each of you for allowing us to continue making a difference.

If you know of anyone who would be interested in becoming a member of the foundation please contact us on: [kzncranefoundation@gmail.com](mailto:kzncranefoundation@gmail.com) for any queries.



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