On the 01 September 2014, 55 new recruits from Ward 7 at Mzongwana area signed up for a new DEA funded, and CEPF subsided, Land User Incentives Programme which Environmental and Rural Solutions and Conservation South Africa are implementing. Mzongwana is a remote, disadvantaged community in the beautiful North Eastern corner of the Alfred Nzo District against the Lesotho border where 60% of the new employees have a maximum of grade 7 / std 5, and only 5 recruits have matric. Although many people own livestock and generate income from selling livestock, firewood and vegetables, most people in the area have at least 4 dependents and no source of cash income. The Mzongwana valley, from which the Mgeni river flows as one of the key upper tributaries of the Mzimvubu river, is incredibly badly infested with over 3000 ha of mature black and silver wattle, which is threatening homesteads, rangelands and streams. Rather than tackling areas where the wattle already has a stronghold, and where we will never reclaim productive ground, we are targeting areas where we can fight back new manageable stands of wattle back from invading grazing and arable lands, and where it is starting to establish in riparian zones. Catchment first and will eventually progress further down stream so that the uMzimvubu catchment is restored from the source of the river to the sea at Port St Johns.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA), and Conservation South Africa (CSA) are proud to announce the launch of a European Union (EU) sponsored project that will focus on natural resource conservation and management for the generation of a water-linked green-economy in the Eastern Cape and Southern KwaZulu-Natal.

“The project, initiated in March 2014, will address challenges around water security, poverty alleviation and the value of freshwater investment scenarios in three priority sites: the Amathole, uMzimvubu and UmZimkulu catchments in South Africa. Our key objectives are to improve natural resource protection and management; to empower communities to value the natural resources under their custodianship; and to empower communities to enter the green economy through the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods. We are certain that this coalition of three local NGOs with such in-depth knowledge and understanding of the issues within the region will ensure the success of the project,” said Bridget Corrigan, Manager of the EWT’s Source to Sea Programme. On the African continent there are approximately 345 million people without access to clean, usable water. Surveys from 45 developing countries show that women and children bear the primary responsibility for water collection in the majority of households. This is time not spent working at an income-generating job, caring for family members, or attending school. Globally, women spend 200 million hours a day collecting water. Every 21 seconds, a child dies from a water-related illness. There is no denying the sheer importance of water and how crucial it is for our survival, our health and our dignity.

“Within uMzimvubu catchment CSA is working with Traditional Authorities and Municipalities to enable local communities realize protection of thousands of hectares of NIEPA wetlands that are a source of water for two million people downstream. Communities are showing huge interest in becoming custodians of wetlands while clear benefits such as job creation through clearing of invasive vegetation are tied to these agreements. ” says Sinegugu Zulu, Manager of CSA’s Umzimvubu green Economy demonstration site.

“We are extremely excited about this partnership and this project because it is a concerted, large-scale and focused response to the increasingly alarming water situation in the priority areas. We are approaching the project holistically and we are confident that real changes will be made in terms of habitat rehabilitation, species preservation and community development,” concluded Corrigan.
Reflections of an Ecoranger

Life in the veld with Sibongiseni Xingwana of Motseng

Sibongiseni is well known to his neighbours, he is an INTANGA or traditional healer who was called to heal by his ancestors, an honor he graciously accepted. Inyanga’s like Sibongiseni are important leaders who provide crucial services including healing physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses, carrying out birth or death rituals, finding lost cattle and recounting traditional stories and myths from their ancestors. After a long initiation process Sibongiseni began to use his special gifts to help people, often prescribing remedies from nature to help his patients. A claw for flu and Amafuthomhlaba known as Ox-eye daisy for stomach problems, cramps and indigestion.

When Sibongiseni and his siblings were devastated by the passing of his father, he took up the helm as head of the family. With his new responsibilities and only one or two paying patients a week, he wasn’t able to provide for his family and all three moved to extended family for financial support. Sibongiseni felt frustrated that he was unable to fulfill his obligations as head of the family and through the many months they were apart he dreamed that one day he would get them back.

In 2013, The Department of Environmental Affairs, Conservation South Africa and Environment and Rural Solutions joined forces to tackle the mammoth task of restoring the degraded rangelands in the region. After consultations with Chief Lebenya, the head of Ward 14 and his headmen, Sibongiseni and 95 other people were recruited to the programme.

Sibongiseni and his colleagues now spend their days outside, steering their animals to healthier pastures, monitoring animal and rangeland health and clearing new growth of invasive alien plants. Communities are already seeing the benefits of this work and in just under a year more than 200 hectares have been cleared and stock is healthier than ever before.

For Sibongiseni, the day he brought his siblings back home symbolized his journey to manhood, to again be able to take care of his loved one’s and to once again reclaim his place as head of his family. On pay day Sibongiseni takes his older sister on the long trip to town where they are able to buy provisions for the month. The income he now receives has also enabled Sibongiseni to finish building their previously unfinished home.

When Sibongiseni reflected on his journey with Conservation South Africa he finished by saying “I have learned a lot about our big and small livestock, about rotational grazing and follow up clearing of our difficult black wattle which will bring much change to our land and rivers but the biggest change for me personally is having my family back where they belong, back to the land our ancestors fought over and treasured for so long.”

Eight Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) Ecorangers outdid themselves when they taught fifty Environmental and Rural Solutions (ERS) NRM/EPWP workers at Ward 7 in basic ecology and some environmental concepts. Within seven weeks of exposure and mentoring from EWT’s Cobus Theron, the Ecorangers were able to facilitate the training. EWT hopes to place four Ecorangers on a permanent basis by the end of the year. The Ecorangers are exposed to a variety of experiences and opportunities that will develop them both personally and professionally. It is hoped that they will eventually play an important role in private and communal stewardship sites and add to all the other activities of the UCPP and Healthy Catchment alliance. Congratulations to EWT and their Ecorangers on this wonderful achievement.
Earlier this year the Alfred Nzo District Municipality brought together decision makers from national and local government, research institutions and ngos to assess the risks and challenges that climate change poses to them and the vulnerable communities they represent.

The climate change summit was geared towards bringing the climate change debate to local people and explaining the possible impacts that could be felt internationally and locally. The summit provided scaled down future projections for changes in rainfall and temperature within the district over the medium term (2050) and long term (2100).

These changes will have an impact on peoples ability to live and provide for themselves.

A district level Vulnerability Assessment, underway by Conservation South Africa (CSA), was presented showing areas most sensitive to change in climate. By following an Ecosystem Based Adaptation (EbA) approach, people can continue to thrive while still protecting important natural areas. Of most importance to summit participants was the fact that this process provided evidence to motivate why development should not be approved when planned within wetlands, flood zones and sensitive natural areas.

The promotion of climate responsive projects like protecting wetlands, improving storm water drainage, removing alien invasive species all help to improve peoples responses to climate change.

As a result of the summit, a Lets Respond Toolkit workshop was held with decision makers to help integrate climate change concerns into local development plans.

Thereafter the Vulnerability Assessment, areas of importance, were accepted by the climate change committee, and the 1st draft will be completed on 1 February 2015.

The climate change committee has proved to be an efficient and appropriate platform to highlight and motivate for climate change issues that need to be addressed in the district. This is allowing greater alignment with municipal IDPs.

A road show has been scheduled for the beginning of 2015 with the purpose of explaining and helping multiple municipalities Councillors and staff understand the importance of climate change integration into their development planning processes.
Conservation South Africa (CSA) welcomes four Groen Sebenza interns to their Eastern Cape, Matatiele office. The four interns were originally hosted by NGO, Sustaining the Wild Coast before transferring to CSA. The interns will acquire soft skills and will be exposed to our work in the upper catchment of Umzimvubu. The four interns will be joining the five Groen Sebenza already-hosted by CSA.

Bongeka Ntola's roots are firmly planted in the Eastern Cape town of Bizana. She was raised by a single mother with four sisters and three brothers. Bongeka went to Gcinisizwe SPS and completed her junior grades at Mbekwa Junior Secondary School located at Mpisi village near Baleni. She then furthered her secondary education at Nomagwapthsheka Comp Technicon. For Bongeka this internship is a stepping stone to helping her achieve her goals. Bongeka is joining the CSA team as a Para-Ecologist (Intern) and will be collecting plants specimens, and compiling monthly reports based on her work with the community. She is looking forward to working with Conservation South Africa and learns more about all that they are involved in.

Sibusiso Mqadi was born in Bizana at Xholobeni in 1985 August 14. He finished high school in 2005. He is joining CSA as Xholobeni Para-Ecologist and as a Permaculturist. Sibusiso enjoys working with his people and while he is knowledgeable about plants he is looking forward to learning more from the traditional healers at Xhobelani. He is currently working with the community members to protest against proposed mining. in his region. He is actively involved as a member of the Accoda Trust, a committee that looks after the development at Amadiba location.

Mxolisi Ngqongoma (well known as Msoh) was born and raised in Bizana, at a village called Balelini years ago in the Eastern Cape. 26 year old Mxolisi attended to Baleni Junior Secondary School and continued his secondary education at Baleni Senior Secondary School where he matriculated in 2006. He furthered his studies at University of Fort Hare where he obtained a Bachelors of Arts in applied communications management. He was one of the fortunate Groen Sebenza pioneers who joined Sustaining the Wild Coast in June 2013. His role was environmental education at local schools, collecting indigenous plant specimens and pressing. The purpose of the programme was to expose Mxolisi to the biodiversity sector and learn about the indigenous species in Pondoland. He has acquired a lot of experience over the past year and has fallen in love with writing. Mxolisi is looking forward to this new part of his journey with Conservation South Africa. He enjoy being challenged because he believes the only way to grow is gaining enough experience to aid you in overcoming challenges and learning from mistakes. With this attitude he believes he can go far in life. "I have always wanted to get work exposure and work experience and this is what I am expecting from CSA, being exposed to different people from different backgrounds will contribute to my personal and professional development". He also believes that his passion for the environment will be his motivation in producing better work and working for the province and the village he is from is an accomplishment in itself.

Mzamo Dlamini was born at Amadiba Administrative Authority in a village called Sigidi with his three brothers and two sisters. He attended primary and junior schooling at Mahaha Junior Secondary school where he passed matric with exemption in 2000. Mzamo grew up as a herd boy which meant he had to take turns with neighbours and siblings to care for their livestock in between school days. He started working for Amadiba Adventures until 2002 where he was trained as a tour guide. Mzamo attended the Southern African Wild Life College where he received his certificate in tourism development and protected area management. During this time he represented Amadiba Adventures in an international trade fair in Berlin Germany.

He then joined Sustaining the Wild Coast an organisation that has played a huge role working and uplifting communities. Through his involvement in this work he was formally inducted into their community structures for development like ACCODA trust. Mzamo was elected to Amadiba Crisis Committee to respond to mining applications or development projects that result in marginalised communities.

Mzamo has also worked with Endangered Wild Life Trust (EWT) as Wild Coast Stewardship leader for two years and attended a course Transformation Training, by Keamage College.

In addition Mzamo has worked for Community Organization Resource Centre (CORC) in Cape Town doing environmental education with communities and schools in the Eastern Cape. This opportunity enabled him to grow as he attended an Eco-Village design course in Germany. As part of development work with SWC they had a project on water tanks supply. Amongst his numerous achievements he has won a Telly award for best community development facilitator.

Mzamo is thrilled to be joining CSA as one of the Groen Sebenza interns.
62 KILOMETRES OF FIREBREAK FOR MATATIELE

WILDFIRES DEVASTATE vast areas of South Africa with unacceptable loss of human lives, livestock and property. Thousands of hectares are burnt by wildfires with huge economic losses in the agricultural, forestry and wildlife sectors. Rural communities in the Mata-tiele district in the Eastern Cape are threatened by wildfires every year, and local residents have endured many hardships in the past. One of the main sources is fires that cross the border from Lesotho.

In desperate need of an intervention

The Firewise Communities Programme educates local residents in these isolated areas to the dangers of uncontrolled fires to the community. The programme provides simple measures and training to help communities to mitigate wildfire threats. Each season a firebreak plan is put in place around villages. This year a much bigger test was put in place and the decision was made to put research to the test and undertake a first of its kind mission to burn an open ended firebreak of over 60 kilometres in the volatile stretch between Ongeluksnek and Quaggasnek.

Being proactive rather than reactive

An open ended firebreak provides a practical means of creating cost effective and ecologically acceptable firebreaks that span over vast distances. It is effective in controlling the spread of damaging wildfires. Best Operating Procedures for burning open ended firebreaks were developed in the Kruger National Park, where research on open ended firebreaks was initially conducted.

The concept of an open ended firebreak on consistences is applied to partially cured grass fuels and usually done during the late summer. An open ended firebreak will spread very slowly as it is a low intensity fire, which will subsequently be extinguished by the decreasing temperature and increasing relative humidity at night.

Besides for their usefulness for obstructing the spread of wildfires, firebreaks provide a safe zone from which to start back burning in times of crisis. Minimal labour is required when burning open ended firebreaks under the right weather conditions.

In anticipation of the big day

The window of opportunity for the open ended firebreak in Matatiele was very narrow as it had to be done before the first heavy frost of winter, which could result in a very high grass curing percentage. In addition to this, weather conditions had to conform to the Best Operating Procedures.

Obtaining an accurate weather forecast for the mountainous area along the border was challenging due to the inaccessibility and remoteness of the area. There was also a narrow window of opportunity for the collection of relevant data on which critical operational decisions were to be based.

The Firewise team measured the grass fuel load at 1900–3000kg/ha. Although it does not fall into the ecological requirement for grass fuel loads (4000kg/ha) it was deemed adequate for burning an open ended firebreak. A kestrel weather meter was used to monitor weather conditions at higher altitudes to provide a comparison of weather parameters.

62km of firebreaks in under nine hours

After waiting for over three weeks in anticipation of the right weather conditions, Bob Connolly, Working on Fire Operations Manager announced the go-ahead on June 10th, 2014. The mission was led by Incident Commander Val Charlton (Kishugu Non Profit Company) with the support of the FireWise teams.

Raindance equipment was installed in the helicopter for aerial ignition and 4937 ignition capsules were dropped at an altitude of +1800m over a distance of 62km, between Ongeluksnek and Quaggasnek. The fire burnt as a very low intensity, slow spreading fire, characterised by low flames of generally less than 0.5m in height, and lasted for almost nine hours until it was finally extinguished at 23.00 on the same day.

“Except for a few hot spots and areas that did not burn, I think the burn was a great success,” says Bob Connolly. “My estimate is that the firebreak is about 90% burnt with an average width of +/- 200m. I am thankful for the opportunity to do an open ended firebreak in this challenging terrain!”

“With the support of the Matatiele Municipality, we would hope this to be an annual pre-fire season security measure that is integrated into the Municipal Integrated Development Plan and extending, not just 62km, but the entire length of the municipalities mountainous interface zone,” says Val Charlton.
A recent stock sale raised just under half a million rand for communal farmers in the region.

Christo Marais from DEA national office meets ERs supervisor (and Motseng CPA chair) Ntate Mbuyiseli Xingwana on an exploratory uMzimvubu catchment trip facilitated by FireWise.

Sise, Councillor Sibongisakhe Baba and Noloye planting Combretum erythrophyllum trees at ward 14 communication hall to commemorate the passing of Tata Madiba.

Photo by Sissie Matela.

Royal Bakoena Community Development Trust representatives meet with reps from EWT, CSA and FRS to discuss plans for conservation-based agriculture and development in the Orguluxek valley and wetlands, which has been under claim by the Bakoena people since 1998.

DEA visit.

Christo Marais from DEA national office meets ERS supervisor (and Motseng CPA chair) Ntate Mbuyiseli Xingwana on an exploratory uMtimvubu catchment trip facilitated by FireWise.
We spent a happy day as QueensMercy in Matatiele celebrated its first FireWise day hosted by Nkau project and joined by team leaders and their site supervisor from Madlangala project, with the purpose to make the community aware of the work done by FireWise in this area and also for FireWise to hear from the community about how they feel about the work done by FireWise in their communities.

This was a joyous celebration with all the teams taking part in rendering music, traditional dances, poetry all on the theme to fight fires….joining in the celebration were the following dignitaries: Headman Nkau (from Nkau village), Headman Sphambo (Madlangala Village), Mrs Nkau (Community Development Worker), Councillor Shukumisa (Ward 11), Douglas Olen (FireWise Assistant General Manager), Nomathemba Mlaba (Matatiele local Municipality), Mrs Molaoa (Queens Mercy Clinic), Working on fire (Ongeluksnek), Madlangala, Mpharane, Mrs N Gugushe and Mrs Lejeloane from Mpharane FireWise Committie, Mrs Ntsontso, Ms Marareni and Mr. Silwani from Nkau FireWise Committie.

These are some of the quotes from the people that rendered their speeches;

“Looking at the work done, fire wise should open 5 more projects in other wards too” Nomathemba Mlaba, Matatiele local Municipality.

“we see the good work that is being done, as people in development we also wish the skills imparted could be coupled with certification to confirm the skills that have been given… something the members can show even when they go to other employment areas” Mrs Nkau, Community development worker.

"Thank you to Mr Douglas, Mr Majikijela, Mr Lwazi, and Mr Ntokozo, I wish you strength as firewise to grow in leaps and bounds as we see progress, our cows now have grazing lands as the Wattle has been removed” Mr Sobuntu, Nkau committe member.

“as you enter the community of Madlangala, you see the yellow uniform shoeing that there are people working. Mr Mkangala, Madlangala committee member

"Upon all challenges that have been faced by FireWise in Mpharane, you have managed to get through. Keep up the strength and the good work” Mrs N Gugushe. Mpharane FireWise Committee

“In Madlangala it has not been long, we have seen a miracle – it is so clean already, stock theft has been reduced since the Wattle clearing, destroying the bushes as people used to hide stolen animals in these bushes. In 62 families people do not ask from anyone – poverty has been reduced drastically” as you enter the community of Madlangala, you see the yellow uniform shoeing that there are people working. Mr Mkangala, Madlangala committee member

“As a Queens Mercy clinic we are grateful to be invited, we see firewise doing good things. Now we see open spaces and crime is drastically lowered. We do not hear of rape cases anymore. Even in field fires, if the forest happens to burn, it does not burn as densely as it used to before. ” Mrs Molaoa, Queen’s mercy clinic

Although domesticated plants and animals (or products derived from them) probably make up most of your diet, everything you eat originates with wild species. That is a worrying fact, considering that human activities have elevated the extinction rate to 1,000 times its natural level. Pollinators like bees and birds are responsible for about one in every three mouthfuls of food we eat.

In addition, a recent study found that because pollinators support certain crops that provide important nutrients to malnourished countries, a decline in pollinators could worsen global malnutrition.

The importance of bees means we should heed their recent dramatic declines. Although there are likely numerous causes of this collapse, protecting bees from known threats like pesticides is an essential step in maintaining our food security, even as we redouble research into the threats we don’t understand.
GERBRAND NEL grew up on a mixed farm in the Matatiele district and always favored livestock farming above cropping and cultivation. When he finished school, he went on an adventure to see the world and spent two years working on farms in the United Kingdom. He studied Tourism and Geography at University of Pretoria. Working eight to five of office hours on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for civil engineers, led Gerbrand to enroll for a part-time correspondence MPhil in Environmental Information systems (GIs) for civil engineers; led Gerbrand to enroll for an adventure to see the world. When he finished school, he went on an adventure to see the world and spent two years working on a mixed farm in the Matatiele district and always favored livestock farming above cropping and cultivation. He started working as a geography teacher and has published two books, including “Community based Ecotourism for Sustainable Development in Southern Africa”. With Honours in Environmental Science, a diploma in environmental education and permaculture, as well as qualifications in development design, management and facilitation, she has 18 years of hands on experience working in rural areas with development initiatives, including soil conservation, water supply and sanitation, and low input agricultural production. She has managed a South African non-profit organization and presented several papers on natural resource management, environmental education and tourism in SA and abroad. Nicky has made contributions to policy debates leading to formulation of environmental laws in South Africa. She has conducted policy papers, mobilized community groups, trained local stakeholders and was instrumental in establishing the Metheding hiking trail and its owner, the Metheding Community Trust. She has extensive experience compiling business plans, carrying out feasibility assessments, implementing and managing development projects, facilitating community liaison, and conducting community and authority workshops on policy and project management with a focus on environment. Project management includes community based ecotourism products, Working For Water, school greening and sanitation initiatives, and implementing Poverty Relief fund initiatives. DWA water sector reviews, tourism development plans and district environmental management plans for various local authorities and private clients have augmented her experience with environmental impact assessment work. Basic GIS skills complement her role. She is a certified member of the Southern African Institute of Ecologists and Environmental Scientists.
The Firewise programme is implemented within 3 wards of Matatiele local municipality and employs over 298 beneficiaries within 23 teams. Each team includes a team leader, a first aider, a herbicide applicator and a health and safety representative. All the beneficiaries have been trained in firewise principals and basic fire-fighting. The Mpharane community within ward 13 comprises of eight ground teams and two horse teams, the Nkau community in ward 12 consists of six ground teams and two horse teams and lastly, the Madlangala community within ward 11 consists of three ground teams and two horse teams.

On organising the open ended firebreak:

“Firstly I organised a meeting with Chief Jerry Mosheshoe to explain the completion of the open ended firebreak. After this meeting I then consulted with the headmen at Nkau, Madlangala and Mpharane regarding the fire break and this was met with no objections. I then organised a follow on meeting with Chief Jerry Mosheshoe at Nkau tribal authority where all of the headmen under his administration were present. He explained everything to them wherein an agreement was signed between FireWise and each headman allowing us to burn. Dates were then communicated which subsequently changed due to unsatisfactory weather conditions. I then kept Chief Jerry and the headmen at Nkau, Madlangala and Mpharane constantly updated as to the weather conditions, thus ensuring that everyone was on the same page. The prescribed burn finally took place on the 10th of June 2014. When the big day arrived, I contacted all the headmen and the chief to inform them of our intention to burn on that day”.

“I joined the helicopter crew and pointed out the areas where we had to start and end the burn. I also helped them to ensure that we not burn too close to the homesteads and the cattle kraals in the mountains. When the initial operation was complete, I kept on monitoring through constant communication with the residents in the areas to ensure that all remained on alert for potential flare ups.”

Where has Yamkela Luphindo worked? He has worked in the areas of invasive alien plants (silver wattle, poplar, etc.) in the management of invasive alien plants and ground operating teams in the more accessible lower areas. Strategic fire breaks are constructed and fire awareness campaigns are undertaken within the communities by trained FireWise team members in order to reduce the potential risk of loss/damage to lives and property created by wildfires during fire season. These awareness campaigns include “door to door” visits to schools, creches and homes before and during the fire season. The aim is to ensure that the communities are well aware of the risk of fires and the prevention measures that can be implemented to prevent unwanted ignitions or the spread of wildfires. Other activities of the programme include fuel reduction around schools, clinics, creches and old age homes.

Yamkela Luphindo recently joined CSA as a Technical Research Associate and its focal area is Climate Change at the Matatiele office. He is passionate about research and aiming on using his skills at CSA in supporting the Climate Change component. Yamkela grew up in Matatiele and attended his Primary and Secondary education at Moshoeshoe at Nkau tribal authority. Following his administration were present. He explained everything to them wherein an agreement was signed between FireWise and each headman allowing us to burn. Dates were then communicated which subsequently changed due to unsatisfactory weather conditions. I then kept Chief Jerry and the headmen at Nkau, Madlangala and Mpharane constantly updated as to the weather conditions, thus ensuring that everyone was on the same page. The prescribed burn finally took place on the 10th of June 2014. When the big day arrived, I contacted all the headmen and the chief to inform them of our intention to burn on that day.”

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SOUTH AFRICA is famous for housing some of the most beautiful and well preserved Rock Art known to man.

On a recent visit to Matatiele we had a rare opportunity to do some sightseeing. We were privileged to visit was the rock art paintings of Lehlapeng. While it was quite a feat to clamber down to the site, it was well worth the visit. The paintings were plentiful and our very interesting guide decoded some of the drawings for us. Here are some of the interesting facts we learned.

Rock Art paintings are the only footprint left behind by the Bushmen who roamed the mountains and grasslands of South Africa. Bushmen were nomads who moved with their herds of animals when the seasons changed. They rarely left behind much in the way of infrastructure, just their stories, thoughts and beliefs depicting animals and people stained on the rocks that once served as their shelter.

The paintings were created using minerals in red, brown and yellow pigments made from ochres while white came from silica, china clay and gypsum and black from specularite or other manganese minerals. Bushmen mixed these minerals with organic binding agents like blood and egg albumin, making it very difficult to date the paintings because of the organic nature of the materials used.

The San Bushmen were very spiritual people. They believed that animals were their connection to another world. Their paintings reflect this belief with many of the paintings demonstrating San religious beliefs and practices.

Some well known images include the trance dance, an important religious rite. The San believed they could, through this dance, communicate with the spirit world where they had the power to heal the sick, travel far and manage their animals. Some things you could look for that are markers for this scene are dance poses, bending forward at the waist, arms held out backwards, bleeding from the nose and a hand to nose posture. Look out for items such as dance rattles and fly whisks.

Rock Art is incredibly vulnerable to climate change and vandalism and every effort should be made to preserve these historical paintings. Here are some basic things you can do to ensure you or your visitors do not damage the rock art sites you are visiting.

• Get permission from the landowner or relevant authorities before visiting a rock art site
• If you find a site that is not open to the public, do not give the location to anyone else. Contact the nearest rock art institution or heritage authority.
• Treat the art as you would a picture in your house or in a gallery. Never throw water or any liquid on the images or chalk the outlines of engravings to highlight them.
• Never place graffiti on a rock art site; it is often impossible to remove. These illegal practices obscure and damage the art.
• Look closely at the art so you can see fine details, but do not touch or lean on painted or engraved images. Fats and oils from the hands lead to the decay of the art and contaminate it for any future dating or chemical analysis.
• Never remove stone tools or other archaeological artefacts from rock art sites. Even a single artefact can jeopardize further research and lead to the destruction of the site.
• Avoid stirring up dust from the floors at rock art sites. Dust settles on the art and, in time, hardens to form a dark crust over the paintings.
• Never attempt any tracing or rubbing of the art since it is easily damaged. Take only photographs (Flash photography will not damage the art).
• Follow the wilderness motto: Leave nothing but your footprints behind. Litter spoils the experience for the next visitor.
• Intervene if you see anybody damaging or vandalizing the art. If they persist, inform the police and/or contact the South African Heritage Resource Agency.

Local Rock Art

For more information go to: www.zap.org.za
Visit Ug at: www.wildlands.co.za

Ref: UG-9603
Water is our most precious and invaluable natural resource, however, it is often taken for granted. While freshwater is a renewable resource, when demand outstrips supply, water becomes scarce.

South Africans are facing this crisis head on with estimates of up to 98% of our available water supply accounted for and 40% of our waste water treatments in a “critical state”. 70% of this water is used for agricultural purposes and the 28% for domestic and industrial use.

Water is essential as this is a source of life for human and biodiversity and with the challenge of the growing gap between the water supply and demand there is a need for radical actions be taken. For so many years we concentrated on building huge infrastructure, but this is a call to change our ways in order to sustain our water supply.

Nature is part of the solution - by conserving ecological infrastructure, like wetlands that hold water, vegetation cover that keeps the soil out of rivers and removing thirsty alien plant invaders dominating our rangelands - we can go a long way to solving part of the problem. This also means humans using water more sparingly and planning water-wise gardens, recycling grey water and generally conserving whatever we can.

There are number of initiatives that are implemented projects to sustaining our future for example the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership Program is working towards conserving the last Umzimvubu river basin which is one of the last free flowing, wild rivers of South Africa.

The uMzimvubu river provides water to a million users from source to sea and the basin forms the northern portion with the highest mean annual runoff in South Africa and comprising nearly 15% of the total river flow in the country. Well worth the attention and investment of more than 32 organizations involved in the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership Programme.
Have you seen the Rudd’s Lark?

Nicholas Theron

The Rudd’s Lark (Heteromirafra ruddi) is what most people might refer to as an uninteresting LBJ (Little Brown Job) and little attention is paid to this bird. Making a case for the Rudd’s Lark is further complicated by the fact that it is very fussy and difficult to find in its preferred grassland habitat. The grassland must be flat and undulating and between 1700 and 2200 metres above sea level. The grass must be short but not too sparse and grazed but not overgrazed. Regular annual burning is also not ideal but nor is a lack of fire. It is no wonder then that the species is highly localised, patchily distributed and rare! Up until recently the species was classified as critically endangered and although we know the species is likely declining we do not really know to what extent. Determining the status of the species is therefore of high priority if we are to conserve it.

Outside the town of Matatiele in the Eastern Cape a small isolated population of Rudd’s Lark is known to occur on the flat gently sloping hillsides surrounding the town. In December 2013 BirdLife South Africa arranged an expedition to Matatiele accompanied by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the Eastern Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and the Matatiele Municipality to determine whether the species still occurs here. We centred our efforts on the recently declared Matatiele Nature Reserve (also an Important Bird Area – IBA) which was once communal grazing lands and was declared partly to protect the Rudd’s. We spent a total of 3 days in the area but failed to locate the Lark. The reason for the apparent ‘disappearance’ of the species here is difficult to explain at this stage and further monitoring is needed before conclusions can be reached. It seems likely though that with the declaration of the Matatiele Nature Reserve a change in the structure of vegetation and again they were unable to find the species in this area. The reserve still remains one of the best sites for Yellow-breasted Pipit in South Africa.

How you can help?
Contact us for further information or to provide details of Rudd’s Lark sightings in the Eastern Cape please contact Nicholas Theron at 078 545 8977 or nick.theron@birdlife.org.za

The Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany biodiversity hotspot stretches across 275,000 square kilometers through parts of Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa. It is one of 24 biodiversity hotspots identified around the globe as Earth’s most biologically rich yet threatened areas. The Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany biodiversity hotspot is one of the most extraordinary places on Earth, remarkable for both its high level of biological diversity and the life-sustaining systems it maintains for millions of people. Characterized by a vegetation type called subtropical thicket, which is unique to the region, the hotspot expands east to west from the Indian Ocean coast to the Great Escarpment and is the meeting point of six different biomes.

The mammal fauna of the hotspot includes more than 200 species. Of these, eight are endemic and five, such as the black rhino, are Critically Endangered. The hotspot is also home to 631 species of birds, including 14 endemics and 25 globally threatened southern Africa bird species. There are 225 species of reptiles found in the hotspot, of which 62 species are endemic, including at least seven species of dwarf chameleon. A total of 73 frog species occur in the basin, including 24 endemics. Of the 73 species of freshwater fish in the hotspot, 20 are endemic. Sometimes overlooked, the region’s seascape is equally diverse.

Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany have many immediate and long-term threats to biodiversity persist, primarily habitat loss and degradation from agriculture, timber production, mining and urban development. These make the entire region and its biodiversity more susceptible to negative impacts from anticipated climatic changes. Underlying these direct threats are economic development models that do not account for the costs of environmental loss and degradation; lack of institutional capacity and knowledge; poor governance; limited land tenure security; and the dependency of local communities on natural resources.
MEAT NATURALLY
Sustainable Agriculture Programme in the N & E Cape

Tessa Mildenhall

CSA is testing emerging approaches to communal livestock production that will reduce the vulnerability of farmers in the Northern and Eastern Cape Provinces of South Africa. Given the looming uncertainty and insecurity facing South Africa under all climate change projections, our approaches to sustainable agriculture must maintain and restore ecological infrastructure.

Within the country’s agricultural landscapes, it is both prudent and cost-effective to build poor farming communities’ resilience to climate change by restoring nature’s capacity to retain soil, provide fodder for livestock, replenish aquifers, store water, and reduce impacts of floods. Nearly 70% of South Africa’s land is suitable for grazing livestock. Unlike irrigated agriculture which is highly vulnerable to water scarcities predicted for SA, livestock production can be developed to mimic historic wildlife migration patterns and work in harmony with natural systems. And yet, ironically, South Africa currently imports 23% of its red meat, much of which comes from its northern neighbour.

The programme brings conservationists and herders together to develop best practices for sustainable grazing that protects native plants and makes for healthier, and more commercially desirable, livestock. Each region is dominated by livestock production activities and large scale unemployment however they farm under different climatic conditions with similarities that include water and soil erosion arising from bad land management practices and invasive alien plant species. Wherever possible, the programme brings herders and conservationists together to develop best practices for sustainable grazing that protects native plants and makes for healthier, and more commercially desirable, livestock.

Key Activities of the MINI

1. In Namaqualand we employ 42 unemployed people to secure improved management on 774,600 ha of communal rangeland that will benefit the entire commonage population of about 20,000 people.
2. In the Eastern Cape CSA employs 80 people (26 through sub-grants) to improve the management of 435,000 ha of rangelands that will benefit up to 1 million people around the river that drains into the uMzimvubu river.
3. CSA is establishing a foundation for implementing the National Environmental Standard for Red Meat Production with the Commonage Management Plan Structures, thereby building the capacity for communal farmers to enter and benefit from emerging veld-fed meat markets.
4. CSA is building youth skills, scientific knowledge of biodiversity, and economic understanding of benefits of healthy ecosystems to regional livelihoods.
5. CSA is testing the use of Ecorangers and Anatolian guard dogs as a non-lethal predator management practice (and thus wildlife-friendly meat) through livestock guarding. The long-term goal is to demonstrate that Ecorangers, with skills in mobile technology, can deter predators and provide scientific data for managing farms. This has the added benefit of creating long-term relations and the necessary skills.
6. Providing farmers with access to market. A recent communal cattle auction brought in half a million rand – the largest auction communal farmers of the area have ever participated in.

Massmart IN THE FIELD WITH CSA

Mxolisi Ngongoma

Massmart’s Environmental & Sustainability Analyst, Ms Dumisile Mokoena visited Conservation South Africa (CSA) in Matatiele, Eastern Cape. During her visit Dumisile visited Motseng, ward 14 of the municipality, to see one of the kraal sites in the area. This was great timing as she was here for a visit to Letlapeng for the vaccination of livestock.

Dumisile joined CSA in October for a six week work shadow programme, to learn more about our sustainable agriculture and green economic development programmes in the Northern and Eastern Cape of South Africa. Dumisile’s visit to the Eastern Cape office came about as a result of Massmart’s interest in the Meat Naturally Initiative. Massmart is supporting efforts to develop expertise, insights and best practice on sustainable agriculture that they can advocate through their supply chain.

“Masmart recognizes that advocacy to suppliers offers significant opportunity to limit the harmful effects of consumerism on the environment, and we therefore continue to focus on intensifying engagement efforts with our suppliers through various environmental advocacy programmes such as sea food, timber, palm oil, packaging rationalization and reduction of electronic waste to landfill” said Dumisile.

With seafood, Massmart has a four step advocacy process which is:
1. They assess the sustainability of all seafood species being supplied to Massmart. And through their seafood guidance, they have committed to not sourcing any endangered, critically endangered or SASSI red-listed species.
2. They deploy Massmart’s Seafood advocacy survey deployed to all suppliers annually. In addition they address issues around traceability, by-catch reduction, over fishing, the social impacts of fisheries and fishery improvement projects.
3. They organize workshops to give suppliers a platform to communicate with them and for them as Massmart to communicate their expectations with suppliers.
4. Lastly, they visit sites to validate information provided in the survey process.

Dumi says that the difference between Massmart and other companies is the way in which they interact with their suppliers.

“Our advocacy process gives our suppliers a voice and opens doors for collaboration as opposed to us just making policies without consulting suppliers and getting a solid understanding of what is happening within our supply chain.” They also give environmental awards to recognize suppliers who have shown an industry leading commitment to sustainable supply chain management.

Photo by ©CSA/NMgwali: Dumisile in Motseng to monitor a kraal site in the area. This is one of the sites where the kraal was placed, last summer, to help with the restoration and rehabilitation of grazing lands, and the green grass is starting to grow.
Ticks - Africa’s billion rand problem

Farmers on rangelands are regularly faced with the problem of ticks. Ticks can cause a variety of diseases and must be treated to ensure animals remain healthy. Annually, in Africa, tick-borne diseases kill 1.1 million cattle resulting in economic losses of around R1.6 billion.

Tick-borne diseases are spread between animals by the bite of an infected tick. Ticks become infected by feeding on animals that are either sick from disease, or are healthy but have the parasite in their blood (carriers). Ticks then infect animals through their saliva when they feed on the livestock and it can take as little as a single tick to pass diseases on to an animal. Animals most susceptible to ticks are exotic breeds, tropical breeds like the Nguni and Brahman, older animals, goats and sheep, animals that move from disease-free areas to disease areas and animals born in winter (not exposed to parasites when young). Disease is most likely after good rains.

Warning signs for all diseases are often loss of appetite, depression and weakness, lower milk production in milking animals and abortion of babies by pregnant animals.

Ticks can cause various diseases including:

- **Redwater** (uMbhendeni) affects cattle and is caused by the blue tick during feeding. About 1 out of 480 ticks in an area is contaminated with the disease that means every cow in the kraal can be infected. Calves from 0 to 9 months of age have the natural immunity against the diseases to act against redwater, the more it is bitten by the infected ticks the more resistant they become, therefore calves must not be dipped at all.

- **Heartwater** is caused by bont ticks and affects goats, sheep and cattle. Sick animals will present with a fever (40°C or higher), nervous signs which can often be seen more easily in cattle than in sheep and goats. Trouble with walking, heavy breathing, constipation (from rumen movements stopping). Note that calves are resistant for the first 6 to 9 months of life. When treating an animal for Gall sickness use Tetracyclines (many different brands) or Imidocarb diproprionate (eg Imizol or Forray 65). Keep the animal quiet and do not let it walk long distances.

- **Gall sickness** is caused by blue ticks and red legged ticks and affects cattle. Gall sickness can also be spread from one animal to another by biting flies and by blood on instruments and needles (eg during vaccinations, injections, dehorning and castration). Signs to look out for in a sick animal are a possible fever, pale to yellow eyes and gums, trouble with}

Animals should preferably be exposed to the parasites at a young age so that they can develop natural immunity in areas where the diseases occur. Tick control by dipping or spraying can reduce the risk. Note that strategic tick control is good, as it is a level of control that prevents ticks becoming a nuisance, but allows enough ticks to remain for infection to occur at an early age so that the animals become protected against the diseases. Ngunis or Brahmans are more resistant to ticks and tick-borne diseases and are therefore easier to care for. While there are vaccines available for heartwater, redwater (both types) and gall sickness the vaccines, particularly for heartwater, must be used carefully. Pregnant animals should not be vaccinated, as abortion may occur.

Ecorangers working with ERS and CSA undergo comprehensive training, from human health aspects to animal handling and health care. Dipping and inseminations are just one part of the programme to ensure animals on the rangeland have the best chance of remaining healthy.
Many years ago, all over South Africa, women herders were not such an uncommon sight however that was then and this is now. To a number of people, herding reflects a certain economic class especially for women in rural areas. Girls have certain duties and herding is rarely one of these nowadays. Men are required to take care of livestock and make sure that all the livestock are healthy and safe. Prior to the year 2000 women performed the same duties as men and they too spent most of their time in the veldt looking after livestock. During this time the challenge of livestock theft was not as great and girls could still roam freely in the veld in safety. To these women, being a herder did not only include looking after livestock and spending hours up the mountain but herding involved interacting with various species and learning to protect and live with their livestock.

Most herders began herding at a very young age of between 6-8 years old and spent most of their teenage lives up the mountain. They developed systems to care for their livestock and worked in partnership with other herd- ers. For example, some herders combined their livestock and moved as a group rather than travelling on their own. For many this was less lonely and some event played games during quiet times.

CSA spoke to Nompendulo Mgwali who grew up herding at Idutywa and told us her own story. Nompendulo spent most of her days in the veld and this was normal to her. She says lunch was no problem as they spent most of the time playing and discovering new plants that they could snack on. One of the fruits they ate for lunch was Kay apple which is also known as Umgokolo. They hunted small animals for food some of which include rock daisies (Imbila), Buck (Mpuzi), Birds and Snakes. They also spent their time collecting wood for their homestead fires. She says “herding was normal to me and we felt equal to the village boys.”

The only time they had to worry about dressing up and combing our hair was when we had to go to church. This life was simple and great and we never experienced any inequalities within society.”

When they grew up and needed to attend school they had to come up with strategies for herding and those included taking the livestock early in the morning before school and after school they went back to the veld to check on the livestock. They would collect wood for the house, take it home and later on in the evening they would return to the veld to bring their livestock back home.

In Idutywa at Eastern Cape herders are still taken seriously but the number of women herders has decreased due to crime and societal roles being changed to more domestic duties for women. The few women that are still herding are those who are widows, women with no males in their families and families where their children went to the city for a better education.
ERS WIN AWARD

Nicky McLeod

The trials and tribulations of environmental impact assessment are extreme and it’s not just the remote and sometimes non-existent rural roads. Many of the water supply construction schemes being monitored in the Alfred Nzo District involve some tricky situations, where contractors without requisite skills and experience come head to head with environmental and engineering personnel who have a mandate to ensure ecological and technical compliance. As part of addressing these frustrations when providing ECO (Environmental Control Officer) services to these projects, on behalf of engineers and the District, ERS has developed an innovative approach involving village based Environmental Liaison Officers (ELOs) to assist with improved environmental awareness for affected communities, and to act as local eyes-on-the-ground. ELOs are appointed through the contractors in the same system as the Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and Safety Officers, and are mentored and trained to ensure practical environmental compliance, supporting the contractor to deliver effectively, and providing a resource for protecting the community’s natural resources from damage during construction.

LIVESTOCK THEFT

Are ecorangers part of the solution?

Singeugu Zukulu

STOCK THEFT is a major concern for Matatiele villagers as they have lost vast quantities of livestock through the illegal actions of invaders. Upon speaking with community members about this issue most people felt that they do not get enough assistance from the Matatiele Stock Theft Unit and as a result are continually losing their income, dignity and respect from within their communities.

In early May 2014, 200 sheep were stolen and traced to the borders of Lesotho. Community members discovered this through the traditional tracking of livestock footprints.

A local, informal association has been established to deal with this issue however members often put their lives in danger to protect their stock. This has not been an easy task with some instances resulting in fatalities after fights with armed livestock thieves. Apart from dealing with armed thieves another big challenge they encounter is that many of the herders are from Lesotho, making it easier for them to take the livestock across the border. The Nguni people invest their money in livestock rather than depositing their money in a bank account for safekeeping. They sell livestock for vital reasons like paying for schooling and for subsistence. Livestock plays an important role in the Nguni culture and traditions including the all important marriage negotiation of paying for a bride with cattle - called Lobola.

The employment and training of local people as Ecorangers therefore brings some relief as it revives the tradition of herding as a viable and valuable career (ELOs) for South African youth. This will minimize the number of Lesotho herders looking after livestock in South Africa and the added benefit of having tracking devices attached to livestock will all contribute to greater security for farmers in the region.

ERS is a mother and provider to two lovely children, 10 year old Olwethu and 1 year old Bohatile. They live in the village of Motseng and with the help of Gogo, grandmother to Mathabos two children, Mathabo is now working in the informal sector and its rewards are changing all of their lives in ways Mathabo had not anticipated.

Olwethu, Mathabo’s oldest daughter now walks tall next to her school friends, happily showing off her first school uniform and loving the thought of having lunch to eat when the break bell rings at noon. These are just some of the benefits Mathabos job now provides.

Before working for Environmental and Rural Solutions Mathabo struggled to make ends meet. As a woman there were few opportunities available to her with many jobs deemed to be men’s work. Being a single mother she could not stay at home and watch her children starve and feel out of place at school. To provide for her family Mathabo took to brewing and selling homemade beer. Her beers sold for five rand a mug, with many people only buying her brew at month end when they had received their social grant money. This made bringing in a steady income incredibly difficult.

Mathabo now has no ordinary job. Her office is the wide open space of the rangelands in the Eastern Cape and her tools of the trade are hacksaws, spades and cutters. She initially thought this was a man’s job because it involved so much physical labour, but her circumstances did not allow her to be picky.

It has been a few months since the invasive alien clearing started, and Mathabo has noticed that no matter how much they clear the baby wattle continues to grow, something that frustrates everyone involved in this project.

Thankfully they recognise that they are part of the solution and not the problem. Through the training she received and the understanding she has gained this is proving to be an opportunity she would now recommend to anyone – male or female.

The invasive alien clearing project is bringing about changes to Motseng, not only to the people who are employed by ERS and CSA but to the entire village who benefit from the restored land and river catchment for their survival.

For women like Mathabo this opportunity is a dream come true especially since they rely on the health of their grazing land and river catchment for their survival.

Mathabo dreamed of living a better life, where she could shop for clothes and food every month and buy furniture for her home. The standard of living has slowly changed for many of the villagers working in this programme with some people using their monthly stipends to upgrade their homes.

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Mathabo MADINGANE

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