

# WORLD WETLANDS DAY COMES TO MATATIELE

On Tuesday, 3 February, World Wetlands Day was celebrated for the first time in Matatiele, in an informative itinerary organised by local partners who form the Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership Programme (UCPP). The Matatiele Local Municipality boasts over 41 000 hectares of wetlands, which forms 10% of the municipal area, more than any other municipality in South Africa.

Since the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in Ramsar, Iran, World Wetlands Day has been celebrated globally on the same day every year, with the intent of raising awareness about the importance of wetlands and the environmental benefits of preserving such areas. In SA, only 11% of wetlands have any form of protection, most are degraded through poor infrastructural development and lack of awareness of their importance.

This year, the event was themed 'Wetlands for Our Future' and the main focus was educating the youth around the topic of wetlands so as to raise an environmentally conscious and active generation.

The grade 11 class of King Edward High School in Matatiele attended the event. Pupils were first provided with background information on the value and negative implications of destroying wetlands, at the local town hall after which they were driven to Wilfred Bauer Nature Reserve where they participated in a hands-on series of activities to understand the functions of a wetland. They were shown the different wildlife and plant species found in wetland environments, and what these indicate in terms of wetland health, as well as how to use soil augers to identify the various soil textures which determine wetland boundaries to assist with delineation for development planning to reduce impacts on wetlands. Clarity tubes, nets, magnifying glasses and binoculars added to the learning experience.

The day proved informative for the pupils. Stian Oosthuizen said, "I didn't know anything about wetlands before today so this itinerary has been educational. I have learned that we should all try to preserve wetlands as they save the ecosystem. We all depend on water. I am planning on spreading the message via social media."

Zinhle Buthelezi, a Groen Sebenza intern being mentored by Matatiele based non-governmental organisation Environmental & Rural Solutions (ERS), defined wetlands as low-lying areas of land saturated with moisture. The famous isiMangaliso wetland is an example. Counting some of their many functions, Buthelezi said healthy wetlands help decrease flooding and disasters as they retain and slow a great amount of water; they also absorb pollutants in water thus releasing it in a more purified state into our rivers, and produce valuable reeds and grasses, materials used for basket weaving and making traditional reed mats.

The UCPP team involved the Alfred Nzo District (who sponsored the lunch), Matatiele Local Municipality, Department of Environmental Affairs, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Conservation SA, Lima and the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Programme. The itinerary was co-ordinated by ERS with local partners. The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund sponsored caps and water bottles for participants.



LEFT: Environmental Facilitator, Fani Nyembezi from Alfred Nzo DM, showing learners how to use a clarity tube.

RIGHT: Grade 11 pupils from King Edward High School together with environmental practitioners from ERS (Mafuza Nkomo) and LIMA (Lumko Mboyi) learn to delineate wetlands with a soil auger.