www.naturesvalleytrust.co.za



Nature's Valley Trust
Annual Report 2016



Introduction

Nature's Valley is one of those rare, special places, where we co-exist with nature in a way that is sustainable. Keeping it that way is a full-time job though, and is the very reason the Nature's Valley Trust exists! With your continued support, we have been able to carry that responsibility through 2016, achieving some significant results.

The year has been one of further program consolidation, and the continued growth of most of our projects. Excitingly, after three years of hard work we are now seeing some of the fruit of our research programs, integrating into our conservation education and community engagement efforts to see meaningful change in the region. As always, each year has its own challenges and its own rewards. We continue to strive to produce conservation, education, community and research programs that help us maintain the ecological integrity of Nature's Valley and its surrounds, to collaboratively educate stakeholders in the area, and to collect essential ecological data to enable the authorities to better manage and conserve this amazing part of the planet.

2016 has been a fantastic year for NVT, our programs are gaining momentum, our mixed funding model is getting traction, enabling us to do more hands on work with your donations. We are rapidly gaining a reputation for producing the goods, being inclusive and building sustainable conservation initiatives in the Bitou region.

We so appreciate the many incredible people who continue to support the work we do. We aim high, and hope you are proud of the work your NVT team has produced this year, which we feature in this booklet. We encourage you to take the time to read about our work in the pages below, and ask you to please share it widely with friends, family and anyone else who may be interested in the work we do.



Meet the team

NVT has been privileged to have amazing staff over the years. This year, thanks to specific project funding we raised from several Grant Agencies, we have been able to increase the size of the team with some high calibre contract staff.

In July, Kirwan Strydom joined us as an Environmental Education Officer working alongside Cindy. Hailing from Oudtshoorn, Kirwan has an honours degree in Environmental Management, and has added great momentum to our conservation education and community engagement programs.

After finishing her WWF-SA internship with us in October, Malmesbury born and bred Brittany Arendse has begun a three-year funded contract as a Conservation Ecologist, overseeing aspects of our Coastal Impact Program, and continuing some of her Fynbos work.

Joining us from November on a one year contract as a Conservation Ecologist is Craig Midgley, who holds a MSc in fisheries science from Rhodes and will be continuing our important shore-fishing research work. Lastly, Kellyn Whitehead transitions from a NVT postgraduate student into a one-year contract post as a Conservation Volunteer Manager, running our volunteer program and overseeing some research programs. This fully funded added capacity comes at an important time, enabling the high impact reach of our work to be effective.

We end the year staff wise with a sad farewell. Cindy-Lee Cloete, having joined NVT 7 years ago as an intern, leaves to take a high-profile position with WESSA in Bryanston, Gauteng. Having led our community engagement and conservation education programs for many years, Cindy will obviously leave a big hole, but we are excited for her new challenge, and know she will remain a strong NVT friend.



Ecological Research

Our research team has had another busy year. We co-supervised five Masters and one PhD student at NVT this year, with two degrees already being conferred (Lisa's Fisherman Impact MSc and Jennifer's MSc the Fynbos). We still have Tracy's MTech on waterbirds, Selena's MSc on white-fronted plovers (which is currently being upgraded to a PhD study), Kellyn's MSc on Fynbos and bird pollinators, and Daniel's PhD on Fynbos fragmentation, ongoing. Our work was presented at international conferences, and some has been published in peer reviewed journals. There is a growing recognition that our research work is adding value to conservation efforts in the region. Here are some highlights from some of the projects:

Tsitsikamma Fynbos Research

Our Fynbos work has gained great momentum, largely through three postgraduate student projects. Kellyn Whitehead is finalising her MSc entitled "The functional role of birds as pollinators in southern Cape Fynbos", which is examining the role birds play as pollinators in the Fynbos around Nature's Valley, and the effects of patch size on plant reproductive output within the reserve. Jennifer Angoh's MSc completed earlier this year, entitled "The Birds, the Bees and Erica: Vulnerability of Plant-pollinator Communities in Fragmented Fynbos Landscapes" was a fabulous piece of work and is helping us understand Erica's in our region more. Daniel Cloete's PhD entitled "Fragmentation effects on Fynbos ecosystem services" achieved much this year, with data on Protea and Erica populations, and bird presence, being collected from 17 different Fynbos patches in the area. Taken collectively, these three projects have dramatically increased our understanding of the way Fynbos species interacts with the insects and birds that pollinate them, and how the system responds to fragmentation. In addition, we now have a database, collected by Kellyn and Brittany, of around 190 flowering plant species identified in the Fynbos around Nature's Valley - watch this space as we develop a field id guide for the area!



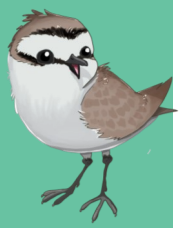
Ecological Research

Our ongoing ringing program in the Fynbos continues to reveal interesting patterns of bird movement and occurrence in the Fynbos. Intriguingly, over the last 4 years we have netted almost all the forest specific bird species in the area – but in Fynbos! If you consider how tall and dense our Fynbos is though, this is perhaps not too surprising. We are getting a good understanding of our Fynbos birds too – for instance our data shows that Cape Sugarbirds need to leave the safe area of the National Park to get food at certain times of the year, while sunbirds don't.

Coastal Impact Program

This program is growing from strength to strength! Lisa Schroeter's MSc entitled "Caught in the middle: A reassessment of shore-based linefishery between two Marine Protected Areas in South Africa" produced eye opening results. We now know it takes more than twice as long to catch a fish in the area than it did in 2004, and that the fish caught are significantly smaller. Not only that, our beach litter research has highlighted that while fisherman make up around 10% of the beach users in Nature's Valley, around 40% of the litter is directly fishing related. These revelations have led us to raise important funds to not only continue with our research, but to design and implement important conservation interventions for these beach users – see below for more info!

Our shorebird research team now has three years of valuable data measuring the impact of people and our companion animals on beach breeding birds. Selena Flores' ongoing MSc entitled "Effects of disturbance on coastal shorebird breeding" has revealed that White-fronted Plovers in particular do very poorly when frequently disturbed. In fact, our data show that only around 10% of the eggs laid in a season end up with a fledgling chick...







Ecological Research

Estuary Program

Brittany continued the two successful fish monitoring programs we run in collaboration with ecologist Kyle Smith from SANParks. We now have three years-worth of monthly data from eleven sites on the Mosquito Fish monitoring project in the Groot River Estuary. The results highlight that while this highly invasive species thrives in summer, the colder winter months see a dramatic reduction in population size and area in the estuary that they occur.

We also have over three-years of seasonal data monitoring estuary fish community composition. This valuable data indicates that the Groot River Estuary is one of the most important regional nursery grounds for marine fish, especially for species like Cape Stumpnose and White Steenbras. We have managed to tag several Leervis, Grunter, Steenbras and Kob in the estuary, and already had a good recovery of a Kob at Salt River.

Marine program

The research team assisted with important research by BirdLife South Africa quantifying bait fish stocks in the Bay this year, measuring not only how much fish is around, but what other biodiversity it attracts. There are exciting prospects for 2017 in terms of marine mammal research work, so watch this space!





Community Engagement

A key aspect of what we do is to engage with communities across the region, empowering them through training and education opportunities to make informed decisions on how we, as individuals, collectively impact our environment.

Clean-up and recycling Program

Another long-term project has been our annual clean-up project in Kurland. Apart from initiatives set up and run with our Crags Eco Club, there is of course our annual clean-up day, which forms part of the International Coastal Clean-up program. For the last few years we have also been supporting and including a local community recycling and swop-shop initiative, ensuring that we not only get Kurland looking better, but that tangible incentives to recycle are in place. We are excited that Bitou Municipality has this year recognised the value of this project, and asked us to partner with them to reach other local communities in Bitou, going forward. Our beach clean-ups in Plett, in partnership with Bitou, Plett Hope Spot and other NGO's are also gaining traction and support. This year our education team, in partnership with the Crags Eco Club, added a fashionably fun aspect to the Kurland Village clean-up with a recycling fashion show.

Greening Program

For over a decade, NVT has facilitated a steady re-greening process in Kurland Village. This is done through an annual tree planting event held mid-year, ongoing tree maintenance through our eco-club at Crags Primary, and through the Tsitsi-Tuinier Garden Club, a community driven initiative administered by NVT that is successfully seeing more and more homeowners growing and harvesting vegetables, and transforming plots with ornamental gardens. The constant investment and partnership for well over a decade has seen an incredible transformation, with some trees from the early days now towering over some of the newer ones. The greening program has built partnerships across different spectrums in the local, regional, provincial and national conservation spheres.





Community Engagement

#ShareTheShores

We are excited to see this conservation intervention aspect of our Coastal Impact Program take flight this summer! Building on the success of the research teams work, we have designed and implemented this campaign to bring about greater awareness amongst beach going visitors and residents about the impact we have on our coastal biodiversity, and how through informed decisions we can reduce this impact. To achieve this, we had local lass and NVT supporter Chrissie Cloete design a few cute and cuddly cartoon characters – Rocky the Oystercatcher and Sandy the Plover, our beach ambassadors. Using a positive education orientated approach, we have created nesting signs, beach info boards, pamphlets, social media infographics, fisherman's resource packs and much more to create awareness for these pertinent issues. Watch out for the #ShareTheShores team on the beach this summer!

Stakeholder Training

In December, our Stakeholder Training program, funded by the Table Mountain Fund, entered its third and final year. Under Cindy's guidance, and with good support from various stakeholders and communities, we had another successful year hosting training workshops around pertinent environmental issues in our region. This year's training workshops included Fynbos ID workshops, Marine Animal Stranding Workshops (mammals and birds), Snake Awareness and Handling Courses, First Responder Workshop for dangerous animals, Pest-control, Compost and Mulching, Healthy Homes, Healthy Families, Healthy World, Blue Flag and Beach Regulation training day for municipal staff, and a series of open lectures on our #ShareTheShores campaign. A big emphasis this year was providing training opportunities to SANParks rangers throughout the Garden Route. In total over 400 local conservation stakeholders received training on the program this year.



Conservation Education

A large component of our work is creating opportunities for meaningful and transformative interaction and learning within the natural environment for children living in our area. To this end, we run several conservation education programs that focus on both the social and ecological aspects relevant to local children, developing the next generation of eco warriors! This year we successfully put almost 2000 people through the program!

Adopt-a-Beach

The Grade 7 and 8 learners from Crags Primary and Coldstream Primary, respectively, once again had a fabulous year on this program. With 7 outdoor lessons on the beach in Nature's Valley, the 100+ learners who participated throughout the year are now fabulous eco-warriors keen to see our beaches protected for years to come. Funding from Bitou Municipality enabled us to end the year with camps for both schools, revisiting lessons learnt and having one more fun session on the Valley's beach! It is so rewarding to see how these learners develop over the year to understand the marine ecosystem as a holistic habitat and how to #ShareTheShores with all beach users.

Adopt-a-River

Coldstream and Crags Primary schools had a few great river outings on this program during the year. Here the children use a mini-SASS river scoring system (using macro-invertebrates) to assess the health and quality of the stream or river closest to their own community!





Conservation Education

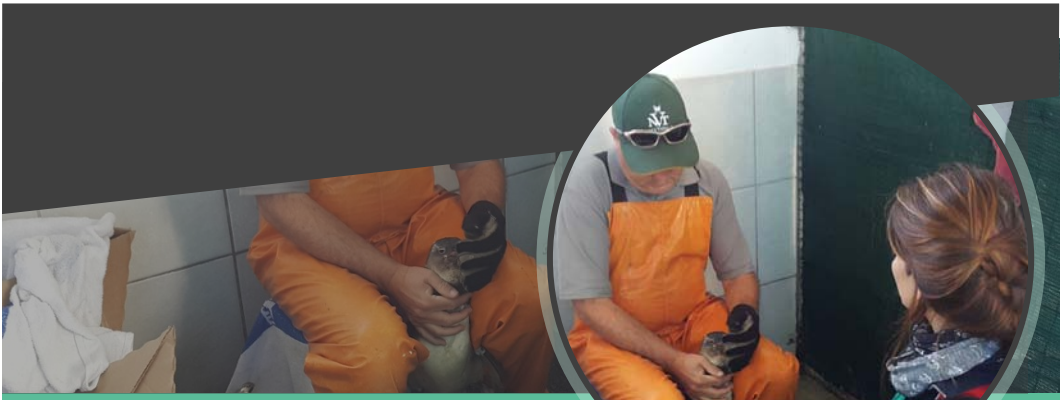
Birding Masters and Champions

We had another fantastic year in partnership with BirdLife Plettenberg Bay – whose members mentored bird clubs in four local schools. With outings each term, and a year-end birding competition and quiz, this is perhaps one of our more exciting programs that gets kids out of the classroom and passionate about conservation.

Calendar Events

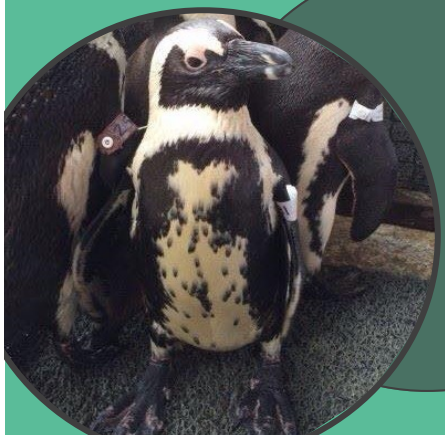
Along with our various conservation partners we celebrated various national and international calendar days during the year, with outdoor learning opportunities for schools around relevant themes. This year we focussed on International Day of Biological Diversity and World Environment Day, with three local schools participating.



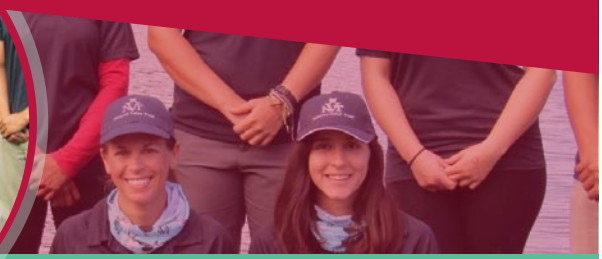


Conservation in Action

We are constantly called to assist on conservation matters in the region. NVT is fast becoming the "go to" organisation in the area to comment and advise on issues as they arise. This ranges from rescuing injured birds on beaches, to commenting on developments, to engaging national stakeholders to see improved conservation status for our region. We continue our strong partnership with SANParks in and around Nature's Valley, using results from our research programs to help shape management of the area, and collaborating on community and education programs. Our partnership with Bitou Municipality is stronger than ever, and we have a great working relationship with Cape Nature, several government departments (regionally and nationally), and a host of like-minded NGO's. The development of a breeding colony in Plett is a strong possibility in the near future, and we are proud to be part of this important initiative.







Volunteer NVT

This year has seen several high quality international volunteers and interns contribute to NVT's work, from the UK, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Canada, the USA and S.A. Not only does this add value to our programs, but it generates sustainable income for us, ensuring more of your donations go straight into project work. We are so grateful for the way our international visitors integrate into the team, throw their energy into our programs, and make a meaningful contribution to the important work we do. To top it off they gain valuable skills, resume quality work experience, and a passion for hands on integrated conservation work.









Wrap Up

Our sincere thanks to all who support us, and who share our passion for Nature's Valley. The shared vision we have of the long term ecological integrity of Nature's Valley being sustained for generations to come keeps us going, and impassions us to work harder towards that goal. To keep up to date with the work we do, visit www.naturesvalleytrust.co.za, follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, sign up for our regular newsletters or subscribe to our blog. Please consider partnering with us if you don't already do so, with a tax-deductible donation, a corporate CSI grant, or by getting a My School card – earn us funds while you shop at no cost to you.

What a year, what a community – thanks to each and every one of you for enabling us to do what we love doing. We wish you all a blessed Christmas, a relaxing Valley holiday and a fabulous New Year!



Merchandise...

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