

Overview

SANBI has successfully led the implementation of the Living Catchments project (2020 – 2023) in partnership with the Water Research Commission (WRC) through funding from the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI). The project was a continuation of previous platforms by SANBI and the DSI that began in 2015. The Living Catchments project was aimed at responding to the Water Research, Development, and Innovation Roadmap, which is a national planning intervention aimed at addressing water scarcity in South Africa over a 10-year period between 2015 and 2025. The Water RDI Roadmap is highlighted in the National Water and Sanitation Master Plan as key to supporting the development of new solutions and technology, providing evidence to support robust decision making, and building capabilities that enable South Africa to respond to challenges.

Central to the Living Catchments project was the improvement of water governance at catchment level. Improving water security means viewing water management holistically, influenced by built infrastructure (that supports bulk water infrastructure and water distribution), ecological infrastructure (naturally functioning ecosystems such as mountain catchments) and social-ecological systems (which includes engaging stakeholders). The project focused on supporting strong catchment governance through communities of practice, as well as the promotion of research and innovation into policies and implementation through application of transformative social learning processes.

With the envisaged transitioning of the project to the Living Catchments Programme, this newsletter will continue capturing and documenting the co-learning, and will be used as a platform to communicate and share stories of the work happening at different living catchments. The newsletter has grown to include other catchments.

For further information and story submission please contact newsletter co-ordinator, Namhla Mbona, at SANBI: N.Mbona@sanbi.org.za

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Umzimvubu Catchment

The 43rd uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership meeting was hosted

By Lebohang Mokhele



Delegates went to visit the Lambasi farming project in Lusikisiki.

The uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership held its 43rd meeting in Port St Johns, Eastern Cape, in November 2024.

Convened with the theme 'Source to Sea', the initiative aims to tackle rural poverty and ecosystem degradation in the area by bringing together a range of organisations. Through collaboration, these organisations foster shared learning to address catchment challenges, advance ecosystem-based adaptation, and actively engage traditional leaders and local communities while integrating their indigenous knowledge.

A catchment is a geographical area of land that collects water from precipitation and drains it into a river, stream, lake, or ocean. Catchments, which can vary in size, are important for human survival as they provide support to local ecosystems. Lack of infiltration, loss of biodiversity, and invasion of weeds are some activities that can have a negative impact on a catchment. The lower catchment area is a part of a stream where more tributaries have joined, which then increases the flow of water and causes the stream to move more slowly. In this area, the stream's channel is wider and deeper, and it meanders through a

flat valley or a flood plain. The stream deposits sediment it has carried from upstream in this area.

The event brought chiefs and headmen from different tribal authorities together, allowing for a learning exchange between the traditional houses. This further shed light on practical steps that can be taken to ensure



The mouth of the uMzimvubu River.



The Msikaba bridge, currently under construction, forms part of the N2 Wild Coast Road project and aims to improve the travel time between Durban and East London for light and heavy freight vehicles.



(Right to Left) Chief Nkosana, Head Lady Phakane, Chief Lebenya, Chief Faku, Head Lady Malindi and Headman Lebenya.

alignment between the upper and lower catchment areas, and how we can close communication and implementation gaps within these catchments. The traditional leaders in attendance were Chief Mkwedini, Chief Nkosana, Head Lady Phakane, Chief Lebenya, Chief Faku, Head Lady Malindi and Headman Lebenya.

Chief Mkwedini emphasised the importance of a collaborative effort between government, the private sector and local communities in using local resources to ensure inclusive restoration of landscapes. It was also evident from the chief that the local implementing partners are making efforts to ensure capacity building for the traditional leadership, who then find it easier to influence their own communities on conserving and restoring their land. The proposed strategic next steps for strengthening source-to-sea collaboration include broadening stakeholder inclusion, by engaging a wider range of stakeholders, including upstream land users, coastal communities, and private sector entities, to enhance the partnership's reach and impact. The collaborations should enhance data integration by improving the collection, sharing, and analysis of data across catchments to support evidence-based decision-making and track progress.

All partners are hopeful that these kinds of platforms will strengthen policy alignment by advocating for policy changes that enable and incentivise the integrated, sustainable management of the uMzimvubu river catchment. In addition, the aim is to secure sustainable financing by exploring innovative funding mechanisms to ensure the long-term viability and implementation of the partnership's initiatives.



Attendees of the 43rd uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership meeting.

Farming the Future: How Amadiba's young farmers are cultivating sustainability and food security

By Mxolisi Ngongoma

In the scenic region of Amadiba, a powerful movement is sprouting, driven by small-scale farmers and an inspiring wave of young agriculturists. Together, they are redefining what it means to farm in a world facing the twin crises of food insecurity and climate change. Through innovative practices, these farmers are demonstrating that sustainable agriculture can not only nourish communities but also protect the environment for future generations.

A new generation of farmers

While small-scale farming has long been a way of life in Amadiba, the involvement of young people has breathed fresh energy into the practice. Far from viewing farming as outdated, these young farmers see it as a pathway to self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship. With a forward-thinking mindset, they are embracing the land to grow their own food, start agribusiness ventures, and build a sustainable future for their families and communities.

One of the standout initiatives among Amadiba's young farmers is their commitment to propagating trees, particularly orchards and indigenous species. These trees serve a multitude of purposes: they provide shade, diversify food sources, and enhance the overall ecosystem. By integrating trees into their gardens, the farmers are fostering biodiversity and contributing to long-term resilience against climate change.

The power of diversification

Central to their approach is an understanding of the benefits of diversification. By growing a variety of crops and incorporating trees, Amadiba's farmers are creating agricultural systems that are more resistant to climate shocks. Diversified gardens improve soil fertility, encourage



Propagation of an orange tree using air layering technique.

the activity of beneficial microorganisms, and naturally deter pests – eliminating the need for harmful chemicals. This sustainable approach aligns with their broader mission to produce food in an environmentally friendly way while addressing the pressing need for food security.

Early harvests and seasonal bounty

This season, the fruits of their labour are already visible. Early harvests of beans, calabash, pumpkins, and other vegetable crops are providing homes with nutritious food. Additionally, wild imifino – a traditional, nutrient-rich plant – adds much-needed variety and sustenance to local diets.

In Amadiba, the planting of beans is a cherished tradition, typically done in October and February though it can be planted all year round. After just three months, families enjoy a bountiful harvest. Other seasonal crops like maize, millet, and sorghum also play a vital role in feeding the



Wild pumpkin, ginger and turmeric shows the power of crop diversity to promote resilience in times of climate change. The picture on the right shows companion planting and mulch which promotes crop resilience against pests and reduces soil erosion.



Early harvest of different varieties of bean, a staple food in Amadiba, cultivated by young farmers.

community, while certain crops thrive throughout the year, ensuring a continuous supply of fresh produce. The young farmers' awareness of these year-round crops has been instrumental in maximising the productivity of their land.

A model for sustainable farming

The work of Amadiba's young farmers is more than just a local success story – it is a model for sustainable farming in action. By combining traditional knowledge with innovative practices, they are showing how agriculture can address both immediate food needs and long-term environmental challenges.

Their journey is a testament to the power of community-driven initiatives. These young farmers are not only feeding their families and creating livelihoods; they are proving that the path to a sustainable future begins with the soil beneath our feet. In Amadiba, the seeds of change have been sown, and the harvest promises to be one of hope and resilience.



A bowl of boiled calabash and pumpkin. Younger people are starting to enjoy this healthy food, previously thought of as food for old people.

Exploring Pondoland's wonders

By Mxolisi Ngongoma

On December 16th, we embarked on an unforgettable journey through the Pondoland Centre of Endemism, a region rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage. Starting with a briefing at the Wild Coast Sun, we explored breathtaking sites, including the ancient petrified forest



Hikers, all showing beautiful smiles, starting the walk from Mzamba.



The famous Mzamba petrified wood



Crossing Mzamba Lagoon

and fossil beds at Mzamba Beach, the iconic White Man's Caves, Malulwane Beach's fascinating seaweeds, and the stunning Mnyameni mouth.

This hike deepened our connection to Pondoland's history and ecology, especially for local youth. Walking proved to

be a powerful way to strengthen our bond with nature and community. Special thanks to our amazing guides and all who joined!

The hike was made possible by a local, youth group organisation called Impilo Yeth.

uThukela Catchment

Water Research Commission research study – Uthukela river catchment initial stakeholder engagement

By Joyce Loza

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Water Research Commission (WRC) in December 2024 to implement a research project titled *'Supporting municipalities to bridge the missing link of rural communities in sustainable district water service planning and implementation, for the achievement of SDG 6'* in uThukela and uMzimvubu River catchments, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape, respectively, from 2024-2027. The

research, which seeks to support the district municipality in addressing water service delivery to rural communities in the two catchments, is undertaken in collaboration with University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC).

uThukela River Catchment Stakeholder engagement at Cathedral Peak Hotel, January 2025.



In kickstarting the process, an initial stakeholder engagement for the uThukela River catchment was held successfully in January 2025 at the Cathedral Peak Hotel, Drakensberg, KwaZulu-Natal. About 50 participants attended, including 20 community members from AmaNgwane and AmaSwazi Traditional Authorities, and representatives from the Northern Drakensberg

Collaborative partners – WILDTRUST, Institute of Natural Resources, WWF, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Municipal Infrastructure Support Agency, Alpine Heath Resort, Mahlathini Development Foundation, Expanded Freshwater and Terrestrial Observation Network, Mnweni Triangle Development Committee, South African Environmental Observation Network.

Berg-Breede Catchment

Fourth Catchment-Based Indaba: A call for collective action in water security

By Namhla Mbona and Dan'sile Cindi

The 4th Catchment-Based Indaba on Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security took place in November 2024 in the Berg-Breede catchment, bringing together stakeholders from government, academia, civil society, and local communities. Hosted by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and partners, the Indaba reinforced the importance of ecological infrastructure in ensuring long-term water security and climate resilience.

Preserving the source, securing the future

Held under the theme “*preserve the source, secure the future, build resilience to a changing climate*”, the Indaba highlighted the interconnectedness of biodiversity, water security, and community livelihoods. Given South Africa's water scarcity, protecting Strategic Water Source Areas (SWSAs) is crucial – these areas cover just 8% of the country's land but supply over 50% of its water. The Indaba focused on how nature-based solutions, community-driven conservation, and policy integration can secure water for future generations.

Field visits: learning from practice

Day one of the Indaba featured immersive field visits to ecological infrastructure projects in the Berg-Breede catchment. These visits provided practical insights into how local interventions are restoring catchment health and improving water quality. Highlights included:

- **Nuwejaars Nature Reserve Wetland** – Showcasing wetland restoration to mitigate floods and enhance biodiversity.
- **Onrus Catchment to Coast Project** – Demonstrating integrated water management from catchment to estuary.

- **Genadendal Baviaans River Protection Initiative** – Highlighting community-led riverbank rehabilitation efforts.



Delegates engage in field visits, witnessing ecological restoration efforts firsthand.

Strengthening partnerships for water security

The Indaba's discussions focused on:

- **Ecological Infrastructure and Water Security** – Maintaining healthy catchments as natural water regulators.
- **Community-Based Conservation** – Empowering local initiatives to take ownership of water resources.
- **Science-Policy Integration** – Ensuring research informs decision-making and policy implementation.
- **Youth Engagement** – Equipping young leaders with knowledge and skills for environmental advocacy.

The Youth Learning Exchange was a standout session, where young conservationists showcased innovative projects. A key takeaway was the need for ongoing mentorship and financial support to sustain youth-led initiatives.

A roadmap for action

The Indaba concluded with six key actions for advancing water security through ecological infrastructure:

- Develop effective communication strategies for diverse stakeholders.
- Host theme-based Indabas to enable more focused, measurable outcomes.
- Integrate cross-catchment learning for scaling best practices.
- Strengthen youth capacity-building initiatives for long-term impact.
- Develop standardised reporting systems for national and global water commitments.
- Accelerate the transition from policy to implementation for real-world impact.



Young leaders share insights at the Youth Learning Exchange session.

Moving forward

The 4th Catchment-Based Indaba was a powerful reminder that water security is a collective responsibility. With growing climate risks, investing in ecological infrastructure is not an option but a necessity. As stakeholders return to their respective catchments, the focus now shifts to translating these discussions into action.

Read more about the Indaba here: <https://www.sanbi.org/news/4th-catchment-indaba-deepens-communities-of-practice-and-reinforces-collective-commitment/>

Delegates collaborate on strategies for securing South Africa's water future.



uMngeni Catchment

Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security project celebrated World Wetlands Day in Mpophomeni's Mthinzima Wetland

By Lindokuhle Khanyile



SANBI's stand during the World Wetlands Day celebration.



On the 27th of February 2025 the South African National Biodiversity Institute's (SANBI) Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security project (EI4WS) and uMngeni uThukela Water (UUW) in collaboration with Mpophomeni Enviro Champs hosted a wetland awareness campaign in Mpophomeni's Mthinzima wetland. The event focused on educating community members and learners through interactive discussions on wetland conservation and showcasing activities that highlight the connection between communities and wetlands.

World Wetlands Day, observed annually on February 2nd, is a global initiative aimed at increasing awareness of the vital role wetlands play in supporting both human life and the environment. The 2025 celebration emphasises the importance of wetlands, and the role mankind can

play in sustaining wetlands. South Africa is a water-scarce country, as many water sources are under extreme pressure and face pollution challenges. Wetlands emerge as essential agents in purifying water, regulating stream flow, and enhancing overall water health. Despite their direct contributions to resources and recreation, a lack of awareness often leads to human-induced transformations that threaten these valuable ecosystems. Acknowledging and advocating for the inherent value of wetlands is crucial for their conservation and the welfare of both local and global communities.

The objectives of the celebration were to unite various stakeholders and engage the youth of Mpophomeni, fostering knowledge transfer on local wetland conservation and preservation, exploring career



Learners who attended the World Wetlands Day celebration.

opportunities in the environmental sector, and illustrating the connection between communities and wetlands.

The event was attended by different stakeholders who work within the Greater uMngeni catchment with wetlands. Each stakeholder gave a talk on the connection between their work on wetlands and communities. The highlight was when the Mpophomeni Enviro Champs shared their experiences in working at the Mpophomeni wetlands. They further went on to elaborate on what learners and community members can do to protect the wetlands.

The second part of the event allowed the learners and community members to visit various organisations where

more information was shared on the work they do, and this also included career advice by SANBI's Environmental Education Programme. GroundTruth demonstrated how Mini SASS is done which was very exciting for the learners and community members.

It was humbling to see learners being engaged and promising to make a difference, find solutions and accelerate change, within their households, schools and neighbourhoods. The event went well, and the audience was kept engaged throughout the proceedings of the day. The students that answered and asked questions were given awards for their efforts by the different partners. The event was truly a success leaving everyone having learned a thing or two from one another.

Ripples of change: Celebrating the impact of the Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security project

By Londiwe Makhaye

The Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security (EI4WS) project started in 2018, funded by the Global Environmental Facility, and led by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in partnership with the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, and the Department of Water and Sanitation, along with a range of organisations and institutions. The project brought together a diverse group of partners with a shared vision, which has been to improve water security by integrating biodiversity and ecosystem services into the planning, financing, and development processes within the water sector. The project aimed to practically demonstrate this in two key regions: the Greater uMngeni

catchment in KwaZulu-Natal and the Berg-Breede catchment in the Western Cape.

After six years of showcasing the potential of ecological infrastructure to address water security issues in South Africa, the EI4WS project entered its final phase with a close-out event that was held in February 2025 at DBSA in Midrand, Gauteng. The event provided an opportunity to celebrate the successes of the project, share inspiring stories and pave a way forward to sustain the efforts of the project. As a young professional who has been working in the project for the past year, the event provided me with an opportunity to deepen my understanding of how far the project has come and of the impact that has been made.



Participants of the EI4WS project close-out event, outside the Vulindlela Auditorium at the Development Bank of Southern Africa in Midrand, Gauteng.

The scene for the event was set on the first day by the Chief Director of the Biodiversity Information and Policy Advice Division, Mr Mahlodi Tau, who spoke on how the achievements of the project were a reflection of a myriad of efforts made by SANBI and its partners throughout the years. This provided perspective on the enormity of the impact of the project, as it became clear that its success extends beyond its immediate outcomes, creating a ripple effect with a much greater and lasting impact than what could be shared within the space of two days.

Day one also included a highly anticipated keynote address from SANBI CEO Mr Shonisani Munzhedzi who spoke on the significant impact that the EI4WS project has had within the organisation. This highlighted how the project has been mainstreamed into the work of the organisation and the partnerships that have been formed will last beyond the project's existence. Project Leader, Ms Jenifer Zungu reminded the participants of the project's journey, its challenges (including surviving the COVID-19 pandemic), and the team that brought it to its final phase. A key takeaway from Ms. Zungu's speech was the project's remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, highlighting the amount of determination and adaptability, which ultimately ensured its success despite the numerous obstacles encountered along the way.

Further reflections offered valuable insights from partners who have learned from the project that success is not only measured by tangible changes in the natural environment. Instead, success can also be found in the lessons learned throughout the journey in aiming towards set goals. This emphasised the value of the process, highlighting that the journey towards achieving the goals of the EI4WS project, which includes the challenges faced, and the knowledge gained, has created meaningful experiences for those who have been involved.

My most memorable moment of the day was the signing ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding between SANBI and the Pongola-uMzimkhulu Catchment Management Agency (PUCMA). This ceremony marked a significant milestone, showcasing how the EI4WS project has facilitated establishing relationships and sharing knowledge, creating a partnership that is set to thrive well beyond its conclusion by building upon the foundation laid throughout the duration of the project.

Another highlight of the first day was a facilitated panel discussion featuring young professionals who have been involved in the project. As a young professional in a country grappling with a high youth unemployment rate, it was encouraging to hear their stories on how the project has helped kick-start careers, offering invaluable opportunities for growth and skills development. Hearing the young professionals share how the project has profoundly impacted their career journeys emphasised the project's influence on the next generation of leaders.



Mr Sibusiso Makhanya the Deputy Chairperson of the Pongola-uMzimkhulu Catchment Management Agency (PUCMA) board (left) and the CEO of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) Mr Shonisani Munzhedzi (right) signing the Memorandum of Understanding between SANBI and PUCMA.



Pictured from left to right at the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding – Mr Mahlodi Tau (SANBI), Ms Jenifer Zungu, (SANBI), Mr Sibusiso Makhanya (PUCMA), Mr Shonisani Munzhedzi (SANBI) and Mr Nkosinjani Mkhize (PUCMA).



Young professionals sharing their journeys in being part of the EI4WS project.

Day two of the close-out event focused more on contributing to the plans for sustaining the efforts of the project. The scene for this pivotal discussion was set by Professor Tafadzwa Mabhaudhi, who delivered the keynote address for the day. Prof. Mabhaudhi highlighted the importance of shifting from a project-based approach to a more sustainable programmatic approach. This was enlightening as it emphasised that this shift would allow for the efforts of the EI4WS project not to be sidelined by new and emerging initiatives but to continue to thrive and be a foundation upon which others can build.



Fixed-point photographs showing recovery after establishment of brushpacks and revegetation in the amaSwazi area in the Northern Drakensberg. Photos: Mfundo Myende, INR.

together key partners to share expertise and insights – ranging from on-the-ground fire management challenges to institutional requirements and legislation.

The ongoing challenge of alien vegetation clearing and rangeland restoration remains a top priority for the NDC. Efforts continue in amaSwazi, led by Mr Mfundo Myende from the Institute of Natural Resources (INR) in collaboration with the restoration team employed by WildTrust. A key milestone in this work took place in

early December 2024, when the team planted vetiver grass – a critical step in stabilising sediment captured by brushpacks. Strengthening local networks and social cohesion, a community nursery in Okhombe, established through a LandCare project, provided a local source of vetiver. Mfundo revisited the site in February 2025 to assess progress. Using fixed-point photography, he has documented the recovery of degraded areas, tracking changes over time. The impressive results of the amaSwazi team's efforts are evident in the figures above.

Strengthening strategic collaboration: The Northern Drakensberg Collaborative

By Rebecka Henriksson

The Northern Drakensberg Collaborative (NDC) is moving forward, advancing its strategic work and fostering collaboration across key stakeholders in the upper uThukela catchment and the Northern Drakensberg Strategic Water Source Area. As the project continues, the NDC is focusing on strengthening governance frameworks, improving water and land management practices, and building capacity for sustainable, resilient communities.

A key aspect of this work is the ongoing development of the NDC's comprehensive strategy, including frameworks for blended finance and long-term sustainability of the partnership. The establishment of working groups is central to this process. These groups, focused on various thematic areas such as water access, land management,



rural livelihoods, and research, monitoring and evaluation, are vital for fostering co-learning and collaboration. The NDC is currently developing a consistent monitoring and evaluation system to track progress, measure impact, and ensure the long-term success of the collaborative's initiatives.

As part of enhancing its visibility and communication, the NDC has launched a new website, <https://www.ndrakcollab.org/>, serving as a hub for information sharing and collaboration. Additionally, at the recent Southern African Mountain Conference held at Champagne

Sports Resort in Maloti-Drakensberg in March 2025, the NDC distributed a four-page factsheet developed with support from WWF, along with a new NDC banner and posters showcasing the amaSwazi restoration work. This exhibition helped to increase the visibility of the NDC's efforts, further establishing its role as a key player in landscape restoration and water governance in the region.

With strategic work underway, new initiatives emerging, and increased visibility, the NDC is enthusiastic to continue making a meaningful impact in the Northern Drakensberg catchment.

SANBI

Bridging the gap between conventional science and traditional healing practices knowledge: empowering communities through Citizen Science Workshops

By Lebohang Mokhele

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), in partnership with Nature Speaks and Responds (NSR) and the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) continued their Citizen Science Awareness Workshop initiative at Moretele Park, in Mamelodi, in December 2024.

The initiative, which aims to promote the conservation of biodiversity and ecological infrastructure while supporting livelihoods and enhancing the well-being of both people and nature, has enjoyed eight successful editions since its launch at the Pretoria National Zoological Garden in February 2024. Since then, the workshops have been held in Benoni, Nigel, Alexandra, Soweto, Tembisa, Vosloorus

and Mamelodi townships, and has sprung young, inspired Nature Champs who have committed themselves to ensuring that the lessons learned are spread across their regions.

Gontse Maphoko Dipholo who is a traditional health practitioner and a Nature Champ in Alexandra Township, shared the impact the workshop has had in Alexandra and how her role as a Nature Champ has helped her embrace her calling as a custodian and an ambassador of the environment.

"We have managed to protect the environment in Alexandra and conserve the natural resources we have."



Gogo Nomsa Sibeko welcoming traditional health practitioners to the eighth workshop.



Gogo Noloyiso collecting sampling water from the Pienaars Rivier in Mamelodi.



Dan'sile Cindi being interviewed by members of the media regarding the event.



Traditional health practitioners recording the data from the collected sample of the Pienaars Rivier.

We have reduced the pollution around the Jukskei River, which is where we perform our traditional duties with our clients, and we have shared what we learned at the workshop with our colleagues from surrounding areas."

NSR has appointed 16 Nature Champs who are responsible for ensuring that the river that they have adopted, and environment are clean and safe to work in. Gogo Nomsa Sibeko, a traditional health practitioner and CEO of Nature Speaks and Response shares her thoughts about the work her young stewards have done in their communities. "Very impressed and excited that my vision of healers being active participants in conservation is being realised." She then praised the positive effects the workshop has had on the various communities it has visited.

"The workshops have been improving steadily and surely. We have polished our delivery, made sure that no participant was left behind, learnt to explain conservation in a language that they understand, and the impact of each workshop reverberates positively because changes in behaviour and actions towards nature are now becoming visible. The number of river clean ups in the areas we have visited have increased and healers are taking responsibility for the places they work in."

NSR has appointed Lorraine Motau and Brutus Magolego to become the new Nature Champs of Mamelodi and have been tasked with ensuring that the outstanding

work which has been implemented in other regions by their counterparts continues in Mamelodi. Lorraine Motau shares her excitement about joining the Nature Champ team,

"I am honoured to be tasked with such a responsibility that comes with such considerable expectations. Traditional health practitioners rely on the environment for medicine so it is time that we came together and joined the fight to save it. Our rivers have become polluted, and the environment has been damaged, which has become difficult for us to serve our communities. It is time we stood up."

Dan'sile Cindi, Principal Specialist for Ecological Infrastructure at SANBI, expresses her delight for the success of the workshop. "At the start of the year we set out to improve the communities we live in, and I am happy that our efforts have been recognised." She further added that:

"Traditional health practitioners are important people who play a critical role in ensuring the well-being of our community members and we saw it necessary to involve them in our work in conserving our environment. I am happy that the Nature Champs of NSR have taken this role of being environmental ambassadors seriously and have begun advocating for the preservation of our environment."



Lucy Ngubeni explaining how the iNaturalist app works to the traditional health practitioners.

The 2024 National Wetland Indaba: A celebration of collaboration and conservation

By Lucy Ngubeni and Namhla Mbona

The 2024 National Wetland Indaba, a significant event on South Africa's environmental calendar, was hosted by the Eastern Cape Wetland Forum with the support of the South African Wetland Society. This annual gathering serves as a crucial platform for professionals and stakeholders dedicated to the conservation and sustainable management of wetland resources across the nation.

Bringing together a diverse array of participants, including scientists, decision-makers, researchers, conservationists, and educators, the Indaba fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing. Representatives from various organisations and government departments joined forces to explore innovative strategies for preserving these vital ecosystems.

Wetlands, often referred to as nature's kidneys, play an indispensable role in maintaining ecological balance, supporting biodiversity, and providing essential services such as water filtration and flood control. With South Africa's wetlands facing increasing pressure from urbanisation, agriculture, and climate change, the Indaba's focus on sustainable solutions has never been more urgent.

Key themes of the 2024 Indaba included:

- **Integrating science and policy:** Bridging the gap between scientific research and policymaking to ensure that conservation efforts are guided by the latest data and evidence.

- **Empowering communities:** Highlighting the importance of involving local communities, particularly traditional health practitioners and other custodians of indigenous knowledge, in wetland management initiatives.
- **Climate resilience:** Discussing adaptive strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change on wetland ecosystems.

The event featured engaging presentations, workshops, and field trips, providing participants with opportunities to deepen their understanding of wetland conservation and network with like-minded professionals.

Please congratulate the winners of the National Wetland Awards for 2024 which were announced at the Gala Dinner of this year's National Wetlands Indaba held at the Cape St Francis Resort in the Eastern Cape.

1. Education and skills development – WetResT
2. Science and research – Bramley Lemine
3. Stewardship – Damian Walters
4. Young professional – Sinazo Songca

As South Africa continues to navigate the challenges of environmental degradation and resource management, the National Wetland Indaba remains a beacon of hope and progress. It underscores the collective commitment to safeguarding these precious ecosystems for future generations.



Students funded by the Water Research Commission at National Wetland Indaba 2024



Delegates at the plenary session of the National Wetlands Indaba 2024

South Africa shines in City Nature Challenge 2025 – Local action, global impact

By Namhla Mbona

The 10th anniversary of the City Nature Challenge (CNC) saw record-breaking participation across Africa – and South Africa once again stood out as a continental leader. With over 65 000 biodiversity observations and participation from 25 cities, local naturalists, learners, researchers, interns, and community groups helped make CNC 2025 a resounding success.

Held from 25 to 28 April, this year's challenge featured more than 61 African cities, with Southern Africa contributing the majority. Standout participation came from Tshwane, eThekweni, Cape Town, Matatiele, Garden Route, Wild Coast, and Nelson Mandela Bay. Using the iNaturalist app, participants documented everything from backyard beetles to rare wetland flora – capturing the ecological heartbeat of our urban and rural spaces.

Key outcomes for South Africa:

- 25 cities and towns participated, including rural and underrepresented catchments
- Over 65 000 observations and 6 000+ species recorded nationally
- Significant youth engagement, especially in areas linked to the Living Catchments Programme
- Traditional healers participated in BioBlitz events, piloting the integration of indigenous knowledge



Take on the City Nature Challenge
25-28 April 2025

The City Nature Challenge (CNC) is an annual global event where cities use iNaturalist to document urban wildlife. Through friendly competition, participants aim to record the most observations, identify the most species, and engage the highest number of people, fostering collaboration and a shared passion for nature.

Documenting wildlife in protected areas (like nature reserves and parks) helps biodiversity agencies manage species effectively. Locally, residents can record species in their suburbs or estates to better understand and appreciate the biodiversity around them.

iNaturalist is an online platform where anyone can share observations of plants, animals and other organisms to help map global biodiversity.

Tips for capturing great photos

- Ensure photos are clear and show key features of the organism. Use zoom and focus for closeups.
- Position the sun behind you for optimal lighting.
- Don't forget nighttime activity – look for moths, spiders and frogs around your home or garden.
- For plants/trees: capture bark, branches, leaves (upper and lower surfaces), flowers and fruits. Include the entire plant, not just flowers.
- For insects/critters: use burst mode for fast-moving insects. Early mornings or evenings are best.

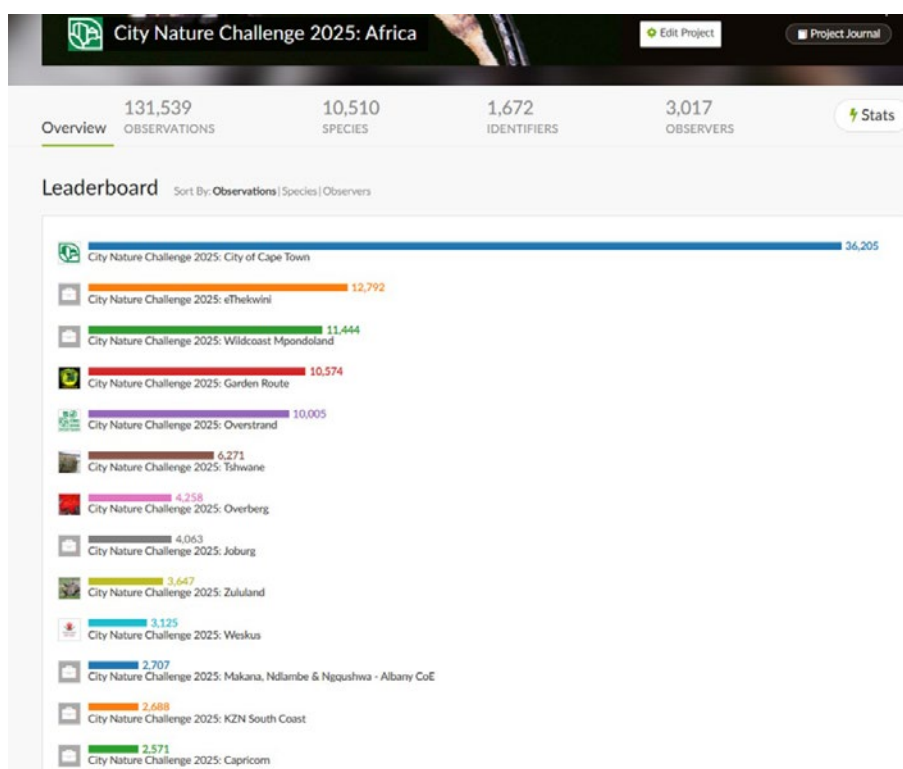
Taking part is easy

1. Download the iNaturalist app on your smartphone and sign up.
2. Switch off your data and switch on your location.
3. Take good photos of any living or dead organism, or evidence of organisms (plants, animals, fungi, seaweed, lichen, shells, tracks, scats, feathers, etc.) that you see in your garden, around your home, in your neighbourhood, park, beach, reserve, etc.
4. Upload your observations at the end of your outing when you have sufficient Wi-Fi for data coverage.
5. Mark plants or organisms that are cultivated (e.g., in gardens, pots or farms) or captive (e.g., pets, zoo animals) as 'captive/cultivated'. This ensures accurate biodiversity data and supports research.
6. Check back to see what people say about your observations.

More information
www.inaturalist.org | www.facebook.com/NatureZA
https://www.citynaturechallenge.org/

Illustrations:
www.freepik.com

iNaturalist
SANBI
Biodiversity for Life
South African National Biodiversity Institute



Leaderboard showing city rankings and number of biodiversity observations submitted in Southern Africa during CNC 2025.

- Observations continued from aquatic ecosystems and Strategic Water Source Areas, reinforcing the role of CNC in ecological infrastructure awareness

CNC has become an annual highlight for South Africa's citizen science movement, closely linked to SANBI's broader work in catchment-based ecological infrastructure planning. It supports both awareness raising and community-level data generation, enhancing local ownership of biodiversity stewardship.

SANBI aligned initiatives – including the Freshwater Ecosystem Network and youth-focused platforms – helped facilitate training, engagement, and data capture. The involvement of schools, municipalities, interns, and traditional leaders further underscores the inclusive potential of participatory biodiversity work.

"These kinds of participatory tools are not just about data – they're about creating a shared identity around our ecosystems," said Namhla Mbona, Freshwater Biodiversity Planner at SANBI.



Look for this logo on your app store to download iNaturalist.

Looking ahead, SANBI and its partners will continue to use CNC as a strategic tool for mainstreaming biodiversity across both rural and urban catchments. The success of CNC 2025 reinforces the power of collective action – and reminds us that science is not just for scientists.