



THE GREATER ITHALA COMPLEX

WHY IS THE ITHALA COMPLEX SIGNIFICANT?

Situated in northern KwaZulu-Natal, the Ithala Complex (incorporating Ithala Game Reserve) is home to a number of significant plant and animal species, including the Lebombo cycad, Pepper-bark tree, elephant and black and white rhino. It also encompasses the northern extremity of the Mistbelt Grasslands; a corridor that is under considerable threat from overutilization and land use change.

Without directed intervention, stress on these landscapes will result in the deterioration of valuable ecosystem services, which includes carbon sequestration, fresh water resources, grasslands and wetland areas, and biodiversity with plants and animals of environmental, traditional and economic importance. This will have significant consequences for biodiversity within the Greater Ithala Complex

as well as for the local communities that depend on the ecosystem services for survival.

The northern boundary of Ithala Game Reserve is the unfenced Pongola River. Of concern is the reserve's growing elephant population which frequently cross this river into community lands.



WHAT ARE WE DOING IN THE REGION?

In the 2013 *Securing the Provision of Ecosystem Services in the Greater Ithala Complex* project (funded by the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund), our Applied Ecology Unit (AEU) engaged with local communities to identify and protect landscapes which have high biodiversity value, and that are significant to them for the delivery of ecosystem services.

Since then, ACT has been working with [Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife](#) and other stakeholders to find sustainable solutions for the Complex, including mitigating the effects of human-wildlife conflict and the impact of a growing elephant population.

[Humane Society International \(HSI\)](#) is generously funding a 5 year programme which seeks find viable and long term solutions for wildlife in the Reserve and the establishment of sustainable communities around the protected area through integrated land-use planning and the building of strategic partnerships.

The [Kenchaan Foundation](#) is also supportive of our work and has funded wilderness trails for local community members to experience the natural wilderness first hand, as well as start-up funding for potential employment opportunities.

