

ANNUAL REPORT 2021 - 2022



**20 YEARS OF
CONSERVATION
IN ACTION**

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Photograph Acknowledgements

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Carl Grossmann
African Conservation Trust

Chris Galliers
Conservation Outcomes / Project Rhino

Leonard van Schalkwyk
eThembeni Cultural Heritage Management

Rory Clark
African Conservation Trust / Imbewu Yoshintso

One Planet / Sustainable Schools
Facebook Page

About Us

The African Conservation Trust (ACT) is an established not-for-profit and public benefit organisation that has been operating in southern Africa since 2000. We strive to contribute to a world where urban and rural communities take responsible care of their environment, work consciously to conserve and protect natural resources in sustainable ways, and preserve historical assets and heritage for the benefit of future generations. Our core focus areas are environmental conservation and the socio-economic upliftment of vulnerable communities. Wherever possible, ACT initiatives work in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders to promote long term success. Job creation, poverty alleviation, community sustainability and education are key principles in all our projects.



Three-Part Mission

Conservation:

Create significant and sustainable environmental change, specifically focusing on climate change, water conservation, food security, waste recycling, sustainable energy, preservation of endangered indigenous fauna and flora and greening projects that incorporate poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods.

Education:

Increase the capacity and expertise of the southern African environment/conservation community, by transferring skills, providing mentorship and building supportive networks that support the development and sustainability of the entire environment/conservation sector.

Innovation:

Use modern technology, specifically GIS capacity to enhance conservation efforts and to pioneer socio-ecological approaches to sustainable protected area management.

Vision

A LIVING WORLD

People on a Profitable Planet

A world that is able to sustain human life, profitable as a result of investment into our most precious asset: Planet Earth, with its abundant natural resources; profitable enough for people to and from a social and economic sense. Living, in that our Planet and its inhabitants are not simply surviving, but are flourishing, and have capacity to give, share and grow.

ACT's Registrations

- **Not-for-Profit Trust No:** IT2174/2000/PMB
- **South African Registered Non-Profit Organisation No:** NPO 030-243
- **SARS Public Benefit Organisation No:** 930014758
(plus Section 18A tax exemption status)

Memberships & Accreditations

- Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Accreditation: **Level 1**
- Member of the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**
- Founding member and secretariat of **Project Rhino**
- Founding member of the SAFE Alliance (now **Frack Free SA**)
- Founding member of the **Imfolozi Community Alliance**

Trustees

Mr Carl Hector Grossmann (Chairperson)

Mr Oscar Mpiyani Emmanuel Mthimkhulu

Miss Nomfundo Phewa

Mr Leonard Outram van Schalkwyk

Chief Executive Officer

Mr Francois du Toit



20 Years of Conservation Action

October 2020 marked the African Conservation Trust's twenty-year anniversary, signifying a significant milestone in its mission.

During the late 1990s, environmental conservation in the region lacked priority, with few NGOs receiving support. The neglect of natural resources led to visible strain on water sources, soil erosion, and wetland degradation. Recognizing these challenges, ACT emerged to address the urgent need for conservation efforts.

- For the first five years, ACT was primarily a volunteer-driven agency, one of the few that offered the opportunity for ordinary people to take part in ground-breaking environment and conservation projects in southern Africa.
- From 2005 – 2009, we gained increasing support from respected agencies such as the UNDP, GEF, the National Heritage Council, AMAFA (Heritage KZN) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, successfully implementing a rock art Monitoring & Education Programme in the Drakensberg; as well as urban greening; and rare and endangered plants projects in northern KZN – beginning our longstanding footprint in these regions.
- 2010 onwards: ACT's capacity grew considerably as we began implementing a number of multi-year and multi-million-rand initiatives in partnership with funders such as the CoGTA and the Department of Environmental Affairs. These included a number of food security programs and we co-developed a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Course in Agro-Ecological Farming practices and a training centre in Howick, KZN. It also included the management of a suite of projects for the National Lotteries Board (2010 – 2012), valued in excess of R85 million.
- 2011: Our fundraising efforts played a key role in the formation of Project Rhino: a collaboration of 37 members working to protect wildlife species in more than 50 game reserves. We are a

founding member and served as secretariat until 2021.

- In 2014 we established our dedicated Applied Ecology Unit (AEU), comprised of social ecologists, ecologists and technical specialists. The AEU designs and implements evidence-based interventions for managing, expanding and connecting protected areas by addressing environmental, social and economic issues in an integrated manner.
- From 2015 to the present, we have continued to implement diverse initiatives focusing on biodiversity conservation and food security, including large scale projects for the National Lotteries Commission, eThekweni Municipality, Department of Environmental Affairs and Humane Society International.

ACT's methodology of working in partnership with other leading environment and conservation agencies helps to improve the collective impact of all involved and importantly conserve southern Africa's environment, natural resources and rich history for many generations to come.



Building a
Conservation Economy



The Applied Ecology Unit

The Applied Ecology Unit (AEU) was formed within the African Conservation Trust to address the complex problems associated with the protection of ecosystems. It works by viewing challenges in an holistic manner and working with all stakeholders to find the best solution.

The AEU consists of people with ecological, agricultural, sociological and economic expertise. Rather than reducing projects, tasks, or problems into component parts, the team makes use of “systems thinking” in which multiple aspects are understood as systems that influence each other within an inseparable whole. This is an holistic way of thinking, which acknowledges that society, the economy and the environment are inextricably interrelated.

We understand that the problems that affect us today often relate to the interaction between social, economic and environmental issues. These issues have different priorities for different stakeholders- for example, municipal planners may prioritise social issues and ignore broader economic trends or the environment care that protects soil and water provision; farm planners may put people and the environment second to short-term agricultural production and conservationists, too often, separate environmental protection from the human context. The role of the AEU is to examine these challenges holistically; in a manner that does not ignore the complex interplay between different systems, objectives, time scales and human interpretations.

Comprehensive Communal Planning (CCP)

A **Conservation Economy** comprehensively integrates Social, Natural, and Economic Capital to demonstrate that a sustainable society is both desirable and achievable. It is broader than the Green Economy, the Wildlife Economy, the Biodiversity Economy. The key differentiating factor is balance and respect and a longer-term restorative approach to management of fragile assets.

Comprehensive communal planning (CCP) is a holistic process that enables a community to build a roadmap to sustainability, self-sufficiency and improved governance capacity. It is a community-led approach to planning, where the process is driven and owned by all community members rather than by a small group or committee.

ACT recognises the critical role that Traditional Authorities have in defining the cultural, economic, and social value of a Conservation Economy that incorporates but is not defined by merely Wildlife and Tourism. Our goal is to work with Traditional Authorities in KZN to help communities develop their own plan for their land, to co-create a vision for a Conservation Economy that respects culture, tradition, the environment and its resources, and respects the right of individuals and the communal communities within this space to determine their own futures. We have been engaging with selected traditional leaders on the CCP process, who are positive and enthusiastic about co-creating a sustainable society. Our initial focus is a pilot project in the Umzinyathi or Zululand district municipalities, with a core focus on food security.



Projects &
Programmes



The Greater Ithala Complex

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.

The northern boundary of Ithala Game Reserve is the Pongola River. Because it cannot be fenced, this has resulted in numerous breakouts by wildlife like rhino, buffalo and particularly elephant. Ithala has a healthy elephant population and when they cross the river into community lands there is increased risk of human-wildlife conflict, damage to agriculture and infrastructure and elephant poaching.

In the 2013, *Securing the Provision of Ecosystem Services in the Greater Ithala Complex* project (funded by the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund), social ecologists 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.

Building on these relationships, ACT's Applied Ecology Unit has been working with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the Kenchaan Foundation and Humane Society International (HSI) to find sustainable solutions for the Complex. HSI is generously funding a multi-year programme which seeks find viable and long-term solutions for both communities and the wildlife in the protected area. The AEU social ecologist team are currently examining the expansion of elephant and rhino habitat north of the Pongola River, as well as the establishment of sustainable communities around the protected area through integrated land-use planning and the building of strategic partnerships.



Towards a Game Meat Value Chain in Northern KwaZulu-Natal

This short-term project funded by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment focused on the development of a business case for a local game meat market in Zululand. Communities and youth in the region rely strongly on agriculture and ecotourism for their livelihoods, and are highly dependent on ecosystem services. The project helped to identify additional opportunities in the Wildlife Economy that could drive positive income and environmental outcomes, and boost community resilience.

The interconnected value chains of local game and red meat play a pivotal role, serving as scalable disincentives for poaching, while also contributing to bolstering food security through protein provisioning. By facilitating access to meat processing facilities for secure and legitimate meat processing, this project creates immediate avenues for income generation. Simultaneously, it strives to enhance wildlife management in strategically designated land parcels (buffers) adjacent to established conservation areas. This proactive approach aids in safeguarding severely imperilled ecosystems and wildlife populations within their remaining strongholds.

The Mandlakazi Food Security Project



The Mandlakazi Food Security Project, conducted from March 1st, 2019, to July 31st, 2021, is a collaborative effort between Roots-Up, the Zululand Conservation Trust (ZCT), and Manyoni Private Game Reserve, aimed at bolstering food security, soil rehabilitation, and ecological preservation in three communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Situated along the western boundary of Manyoni Private Game Reserve, within the Mandlakazi traditional authority, these rural communities encompass the Mbuzeli, uBhejane, and Mzomayethu crèches. In the preceding year (2019-2020), agricultural specialists from ACT led the establishment of food gardens at each crèche, augmenting their daily feeding programs. Comprehensive training was provided to the communities, accompanied by the installation of a container unit at the Mbuzeli crèche to serve as a kitchen and food preparation area. Furthermore, fruit trees were planted, rainwater tanks installed, and garden fencing erected.

Building upon this groundwork, Phase II of the project sought to enhance and expand its impact. An in-depth household assessment was conducted, involving 66 families. Additional measures, including rainwater and run-off harvesting features, as well as drip irrigation systems for vegetable gardens, were implemented. Moreover, four agricultural graduates were recruited as full-time community mentors, primarily sourced from AgriSETA interns. These graduates are gaining invaluable work experience while acquiring new skills in permaculture and extension work.

Beyond addressing the nutritional needs of children by providing them with fresh fruits and vegetables, the crèche gardens serve as demonstration sites, exemplifying thriving permaculture systems.

Galaxy Bingo CSI Initiatives

Thanks to the generous funding from Galaxy Bingo Corporate Social Investment, ACT has embarked on a mission to uplift three schools facing urgent challenges.

In Port Durford, within the Umhlatuze Local Municipality, Ntokozweni Crèche & Pre-School underwent a transformation, including the painting of walls and essential renovations, such as repairing a leaky roof. Additionally, we installed a rainwater harvesting tank and guttering to enhance basic water security.

At nearby Mntokhona Primary School, existing guttering was repaired, complemented by the installation of rainwater harvesting tanks and irrigation systems. Water and electricity are intermittent at this school and water shortage is a major problem. We are also in the process of establishing a large permaculture garden on site, to support the learners daily feeding programme with fresh produce.

Water is a major concern for Fakazi Primary school, located outside of Amanzimtoti in the Ugu District of KwaZulu-Natal. The 300+ learners are forced to walk an hour to the river to collect water and rely on unsanitary pit latrines. Together with a local drilling company, we are installing a borehole which supply the school with water. We are also installing a storage tank and fittings to maximise rainwater water storage.



One Planet | Sustainable Schools

Despite the challenges of operating under lockdown conditions, the One Planet team worked harder than ever, determined to ensure that environmental (sustainability) education and action-taking remained a priority. Their hard work resulted in some fantastic achievements in 2020:

- 2,830 learners from 26 schools received practical in classroom environmental lessons.
- 280 teachers attended at least one of the 16 workshops on COVID, nutrition and the environment.
- 17 Permaculture gardens were set up, helping to supplement nutrition.
- 16 Tippy-Tap stands were installed, helping to keep hands clean and save more than 40x more water than washing under taps.
- 10 functional solar ovens were made; 6 indigenous gardens were planted, and 3 schools received assistance with alien and invasive species removal.
- 3 Schools took top honours in the national Edu-Plant Competition (Shea O’Conner Combined, Nobanda and KwaNgubeni Primary Schools).
- And 6 top teams were awarded +- R35,000 for an upscale project of their choice – these included a free-range egg project, fuel efficient stoves, vegetable tunnels and a recycling centre.

“If I could speak to the president, I would tell him to stop thinking about money and votes, think about our future, why do we need a president when he cannot take care of our future and protect the nature that we depend on. He must stop funding companies that destroy nature and fund business that protect and restore.”

Busi Hlope



Project Rhino



We are a founding member of Project Rhino (www.projectrhinokzn.org) which is a collaboration of 30+ conservation agencies, private, community & state-owned game reserves as well as anti-poaching specialists working together to fight wildlife crime.

The Project Rhino collaboration formed as the rhino poaching crisis intensified in 2011. Initiatives range from urgent anti-poaching reactions (aerial patrols, canine and equine units) to training & equipping rangers and community education and engagement activities. Project Rhino helps to keep watch over more than 300,000 Ha of conservation areas, and over one of the largest remaining black and white populations in the world.

ACT acted as the nominated secretariat for the organisation until September 2021, which included coordination, fundraising, employing certain field staff and management of the Project Rhino bank account.

Feeding the Wildlife Communities

The COVID-19 lockdown devastated Africa’s tourism and hospitality sectors – leading to loss of jobs and incomes for some of our most vulnerable communities. ACT and Project Rhino were part of a multi-stakeholder initiative to relieve food insecurity by providing families, rangers, and wildlife communities with food parcels. Between 2020 and 2022, more than 2.6 million parcels were delivered to wildlife communities, issued alongside neighbouring reserves and with the assistance of the local Nkosi (community leader) to ensure they went to the families most in need. Each food parcel drop went hand in hand with a conservation message as we used the opportunity to educate communities on conservation and the preservation of our wildlife and wild areas.

Lesotho Integrated 3D Mapping Project

Three villages in the highlands of Lesotho: Tloha-rebue, Ha-Phohla and Ha-Tlhakola are currently under threat from complete or partial inundation by the new Polihali Dam under construction. ACT joined several specialist partners and assisted with the 3D digital mapping of the sites (both terrestrial and aerial) with the purpose of obtaining a millimeter accurate 3D documentation of the villages as they exist today.



The villages were also photographed and a virtual tour (walk through tour from your desktop) was created of each. The digital mapping is one element of a larger project; heritage partners have conducted archaeological assessments and also interviewed local inhabitants on their thoughts and experiences.

Solar Energy

This project initially aimed to pilot a financial investment model (rental) in four dispersed fishing villages in Malawi. We hoped to determine the appeal of such systems and which rental option generates the best Return on Investment (ROI). Funding was secured for 57 units and a site visit to Malawi was conducted. Unfortunately, in March 2020 the COVID-19 virus made travel within South Africa and beyond impossible, and by the time the borders re-opened, the Malawian villages had already procured solar lighting systems.

Runaway fires, often caused by candles and paraffin lamps, are one of the greatest dangers to informal settlements. We therefore opted to install the solar systems in three rapidly developing informal settlements in KwaZulu-Natal, namely, Shaka's Head, Albert Falls and Shallow Drift. A mapping exercise was done to determine which households were most in need, with a focus on child and women-headed households.

Project Impact

The project has had truly life-changing effects for community members, who now have lighting for school assignments, household chores and leisure activities. The systems included a cell phone charging adapter, saving beneficiaries the time and expense of having to travel to town to charge their phones. Households have also experienced considerable monthly savings on candles, paraffin and batteries.



Funders and Partners

Thank you to all our donors – private individuals, corporate partners, schools, and generous supporters– who have stood by us in our mission to create positive impact. Your support has allowed us to continue our vital work in conservation and community upliftment.

Whether you contributed directly or through one of our fundraising platforms, each donation has been instrumental in transforming lives, preserving our environment, and fostering sustainable change. Together, we are building a brighter future for our planet and its inhabitants.

Project Funders

- EKOenergy
- Galaxy Bingo
- Global Search for Sustainable Schools
- Humane Society International (HSI)
- Olivier van Walsem
- PGS Heritage

Fundraising Platforms

- Backabuddy
- GivenGain
- GlobalGiving
- MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet

Strategic Partners

- eThembeni Cultural Heritage Management
- Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife
- Future Farmers Foundation
- Imbewu Yoshintso
- Jennifer Seif and Associates
- Kenchaan Foundation
- Manyoni Private Game Reserve
- One Planet Water Explorer
- Project Rhino
- Zululand Conservation Trust

ACT is a SARS approved Public Benefit Organisation with Section 18a status and donations to the Trust are eligible for tax relief.

Contact Details

We have moved...

Tel: +27 (0)31 462 8642

Fax: +27 (0)86 511 7594

Email: info@projectafrica.com

Physical: Care of Wilderness Leadership School
90 Coedmore Avenue
Yellowwood Park, Durban

Postal: P.O. Box 310, Link Hills, 3652

Website: www.projectafrica.com

Heritage Website: www.actheritage.org

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