Annual Report 2024



Contents

About Us	3
Three-Part Mission	
Vision	4
Projects and Programmes: Building a Conservation Economy	6
What is a Conservation Economy?	7
Comprehensive Communal Planning (CCP)	8
The Applied Ecology Unit	8
The Social Employment Fund (SEF)	9
Food Security	11
Landscape Management & Restoration	12
Donga & Erosion Repair	12
Bush Thinning & Invasive Vegetation Removal	13
Heritage Conservation	14
Community Rock Art Custodians	14
Lost settlements of the Kruger National Park:	14
Training and Skills Development	15
Agro-Ecological Training	15
Chainsaw Training	15
Curricula Vitae Development	15
Demographic profile of participants	16
Volunteer Days	16
SEF 2 Project Highlights to Date	17
Project Partners	17
SEF Funders and Management	17
With thanks to	17
Footprint	18
News and Media	19
Social Media	20
Summary Financial Statements	21
Contact Details	24
Follow Us	
Whistleblower Hotline	24
Fundraising Platforms	24
Photographic Acknowledgement	24



Who We Are

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 socioecological 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/N
- 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
- Founding member of **Project Rhino**
- Founding member of the SAFE Alliance (now Frack Free SA)
- Founding member of the Imfolozi Community Alliance

Biodiversity & Protected Area Conservation Memberships

- Wild dogs Mr. Paul Cryer member of the Advisory Panel to the KZN Wild Dog Management Group
- Cheetah Mr. Paul Cryer chairperson of the Cheetah Advisory Group
- Bearded Vulture Mr. Francois du Toit Member of the **Bearded Vulture Steering Committee**
- Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park Mr. Paul Cryer with/for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife chairperson of the **iMfolozi** Wilderness Area Steering Committee
- Conducting research into protected area management policy and practice Paul Cryer- in conjunction with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the Geography Department of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.



Trustees

Mr Carl Grossmann (Chairperson)

Mrs Zibuyile Ngwenya

Miss Nomfundo Phewa

Mr Leonard van Schalkwyk

Chief Executive Officer

Mr Francois du Toit



Projects and Programmes:

Building a Conservation Economy

What is a Conservation Economy?

"A conservation economy is an ideal future economy in which economic wealth is harvested from a bioregion's local natural resources in a way that meets local communities' needs yet restores rather than depletes natural and social capital."

A conservation economy¹ comprehensively integrates Social, Natural, and Economic Capital to demonstrate that a sustainable society is both desirable and achievable.

A Conservation Economy is respectful, restorative, regenerative and resilient.

It is broader than the Green Economy, the Wildlife Economy, the Biodiversity Economy. It is all of these and more. The key differentiating factor is balance and respect and a longer-term restorative approach to management of fragile assets.

The Conservation Economy requires a deep understanding of complexity and service above self. Most importantly, it is local, meaningful, and thoughtful.

The key question emerging is thus:

WHAT is important? It is both a question and an answer. Indeed, it is the quintessential question. **WHAT** is important to us as individuals, as a community, as a family and as a society?

Water, Heritage, Agriculture, and Trade is important.

It is within this framework to commence dialogue that we will co-create and help build resilient, resourced, respectful, regenerative and restorative societies with partner communities to shape the future they deserve and want.



¹ Initial concept drawn from <u>www.conservationeconomy.net</u>.



Comprehensive Communal Planning (CCP)

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 and Zululand district municipalities, with a core focus on food security.

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 stakeholdersfor 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.



Social Employment Fund (SEF)



To date, over 114,300 people have participated in and benefited from the SEF across the country. This includes 60% youth and a 74% women workforce.

The Social Employment Fund (SEF) is a Presidential Employment Stimulus fund aimed at tackling unemployment through strengthening partnerships with a wide range of social and civic partners, enabling them to create 'whole of society' initiatives for greater scale and greater impact across South Africa.

In the South African context, there is no shortage of work to be done to address social barriers and access to employment and economic opportunities. SEF supports the considerable creativity, institutional capabilities and broader initiatives that engage people in work that unlocks opportunities while equally benefitting communities.

Participation in work not only provides much-needed incomes through stipends, it also gives people work experience. This builds entry-level work readiness through soft and hard skills too. These are vital for participants chances of getting a job in the wider labour market – but also enhances their chances of becoming self-employed or starting an enterprise.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus has committed R2.4 billion to the Social Employment Fund thus far, and the SEF has created over 114,000 jobs for the unemployed to provide community-building services.

ACT is one of 37 Strategic Implementing Partners of the SEF and was awarded a second SEF contract in August 2023. The current project, *SEF2: Conserving Your Communal Economy*, is providing temporary employment to 3,000 community members across four provinces in South Africa: KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo. We are working with 187 teams under three broad themes: Food Security, Greening and the Environment, and Arts and Culture.



Food Security



participant supports a household of 7.8 people.

"We save a lot because we are no longer buying vegetables from the market. And some neighbours who bought from us they enjoy buying from us because they eat fresh from the garden. Some of us we take a chronic medication but eating from garden helped us a lot because we are healthier. With extra cash we able to save and buy electricity."

Suzan Lakaje, Team leader for Matsikeng Team 8 (Free State)

In response to the growing need for sustainable solutions to hunger and poverty, ACT has prioritized food security through agro-ecological farming methods. Working across four provinces - KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo - we are empowering communities to cultivate resilience and self-reliance. By promoting permaculture practices, we not only increase food production but also enhance soil health and biodiversity, creating sustainable food systems that uplift communities and improve long-term livelihoods. On average, each SEF

Under the second SEF contract, participants have developed 743,492.57 m² of agricultural land, equivalent to 37,174 gardens of 20 m². These gardens have been established at homesteads, public spaces such as schools and clinics, and communal spaces on farms or private land. Individual teams pursue different goals - some focus on growing a diverse range of crops to reduce food costs and provide their families with nutritious produce, while others concentrate on cultivating fewer crops for commercial sale.

Many teams have already experienced success, selling products like spinach and cabbages at informal markets, including pension collection points, and to lodges and larger stores such as Boxer. Participants are growing a wide variety of crops, including beetroot, peppers, chilies, cucumbers, brinjals, tomatoes, courgettes, pumpkins, beans, and spinach. Regional differences have influenced crop success: participants in KwaZulu-Natal have successfully grown watermelon, while those in Limpopo and Mpumalanga have had greater success with maize, groundnuts, and okra.

In addition to agro-ecological training, teams are equipped with tools, personal protective equipment, and seed packs to support their farming efforts. During the SEF1 contract, we distributed over 500 plant propagation kits (micro-nurseries). Since then, we have built six large-scale nurseries, each with the capacity to produce 10,000 seedlings per month, to further support the farmers. By the end of the contract in June 2024, at least one additional nursery will be completed, located across our key project sites.

A highlight of the SEF project has been the incredible generosity of participants, who have donated over 31.5 tons of fresh produce through the SEF2 project (August 2023 – 29 February 2024). In addition to supporting community centres such as crèches, clinics, and old age homes, participants have extended their donations to funerals, elderly individuals, child-headed households, and impoverished families.

Landscape Management & Restoration

These activities align with the SEF theme of *Greening and the Environment*. Efforts include erosion control, bush thinning, and the removal of invasive vegetation, all aimed at enhancing biodiversity, protecting natural resources and promoting healthier, more resilient landscapes.

Donga & Erosion Repair

South Africa has the highest per capita soil loss in the world and loses an estimated 400 million tons of soil per year. This has devastating consequences, particularly the build-up of silt in dams and the loss of valuable agriculture.

The Upper Thukela catchment of the Maloti Drakensberg is a strategic water resource area for both Lesotho and South Africa, but it faces significant environmental challenges related to soil erosion and the formation of dongas (gullies). These dongas are deep erosion channels formed primarily due to the combination of steep slopes, intense rainfall, deforestation, overgrazing, and poor land management practices.

12 dedicated teams in the Amangwane and Amazizi traditional authorities have been using manual labour techniques to repair these dongas, which include the creation of stone packs and stone lines, as well as piloting the weaving of wattle trees (removed as part of an EPWP invasive species project), interspersed with smaller branches, to trap topsoil and prevent further erosion.

These teams have constructed 3,500 m² of erosion walling under the SEF2 contract to date (August 2023 – February 2024). In addition to their work, our SEF participants have taken on several projects within their communities, including swales, gabions, smaller stone lines, road and erosion repairs, together amounting to some 50,260 m² of erosion repair and stabilization.



Bush Thinning & Invasive Vegetation Removal

The thinning of invasive vegetation is predominantly taking place in the greater Mkhuze area of northern KwaZulu-Natal. A key focus is the thinning of Dichrostachys cinerea (sekelbos). A consequence of poor livestock grazing practices, sekelbos easily outcompetes other native pioneer species, causing bush encroachment and livestock food reduction. Fortunately, excellent firewood is produced from Sekelbos, creating additional cashflow as a project byproduct. It is also donated to needy community members, used as construction material to aid in erosion control, fence building, or fence-line structures positioned on hill contours, to manage livestock movement.



Five small teams are working to remove water hyacinth from the greater Isimangaliso Wetland Park (World Heritage Site) as part of their work. *Pontederia crassipes* (formerly *Eichhornia crassipes*) is highly invasive, forming dense mats which completely cover the water surface leading to altered water chemistry over time.

As of the end of February, participant teams had thinned and managed 318.7 hectares of landscape, much of it near conservation areas, including Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, Mkhuze Game Reserve, Manyoni Private Game Reserve, and Somkhanda Community Game Reserve.

By reducing the density of invasive plants and overgrown vegetation, communities can mitigate wildfire risk, improve soil water retention, and boost biodiversity. Thinning invasive vegetation also allows native species to flourish, which is essential for maintaining healthy ecosystems. Moreover, it supports the growth of vegetation that provides critical ecosystem services, such as erosion control and wildlife habitat.



Heritage Conservation

From a cultural perspective, UNESCO based the Drakensberg World Heritage Site designation on two Outstanding Universal Values: a) it is 'the largest and most concentrated group of rock paintings in Africa south of the Sahara and is outstanding both in quality and diversity of subject' and b) the San occupied the region 'for more than four millennia, leaving behind them a corpus of outstanding rock art which throws much light on their way of life and their beliefs²'

Community Rock Art Custodians

Two small teams from the Amangwane and Amazizi areas are currently working as San rock art site custodians under the Community and Public Art theme of the Social Employment Fund. These traditional areas fall just outside the protected uKhahlamba Drakensberg UNESCO World Heritage Site, and many of the paintings have already been lost to fire, vandalism and natural weathering.

SEF participants have been trained by the provincial heritage authority, The KwaZulu-Natal Amafa and Research Institute, and conduct site assessments of San rock art sites, listing potential threats, damage, and other relevant information.

As part of their site maintenance, teams have also been mapping a network of potential eco-trails for hikers or mountain bikers to enjoy the beauty of the Drakensberg.

More then 200 site visits have been conducted under the SEF2 contract to date, and participants are targeting 200 km of mapped and monitored trails by project completion.

Lost settlements of the Kruger National Park:

KNP 2017-01 Archaeological Excavation and Research Project

The Kruger National Park has been occupied to various degrees by humans since the earliest of the Stone Age, through the Iron Age until present day. In 2017, the ACT heritage team successfully explored six previously undocumented Iron Age settlements within the park. Of these, three sites contained remnants of stone walls, ceramics, and stone tools. Notably, one pottery shard was discovered that is atypical for the area.

The National Heritage Council of South Africa has awarded us a grant for further research at this site. In collaboration with specialists from OPTRON and PGS Heritage, we will be mapping and modelling the KNP2017-01 site using various technologies, including terrestrial and aerial photography, laser scanning, and ground-penetrating radar to detect possible subsurface disturbances and artefacts. Archaeological excavation will also be conducted to recover and curate materials such as pottery, faunal remains, metal objects, and other cultural artefacts, with curation at a recognized institution. We are currently awaiting permit approval by SANParks to commence with the research.

² UNESCO 2018

Training and Skills Development

Agro-Ecological Training

Agro-ecological (permaculture) practices have shown to increase agricultural yields, produce crops that are more resilient to changing weather conditions, improve nutrition and water usage, and reduce soil erosion. We believe that permaculture has a vital role in the mitigation of climate change and its principles are essential knowledge for sustainable and responsible living.

The 4– to 5- day Agro-Ecological Training programme has been one of our most impactful initiatives under the SEF. Under the second contract we have trained 2,957 participants and community members (almost double our contract target) and have waiting lists at several sites. The training covers all aspects from site analysis and design to plant propagation and seed saving, natural fertilisers and pesticides and how to make a profit from your garden. It can be conducted in deeply rural settings without the need for computers or projectors - or even electricity - and includes numerous practical exercises and applications.

68 SEF1 participants have been upskilled as training facilitators who, together with ACT's trainers, have led the agro-ecological training of participants in home languages in KwaZulu-Natal, Free State and Mpumalanga. We are focussing on developing leadership capacity and other key skills within this training facilitation team, who are receiving weekly notes via WhatsApp Groups, educational lessons, best practices and other helpful resources.

Chainsaw Training

20 participants from 10 communities attended a comprehensive chainsaw training program in northern KZN, conducted by Husqvarna. The 10 teams each received a chainsaw and polesaw, as well as personal protective clothing. These chainsaws will assist these communities to implement their landscape management plans more effectively as well as maximise the potential sale of firewood.

Curricula Vitae Development

The technical team and team leaders are currently assisting participants in developing their Curricula Vitae (CV). A basic template has been created, which includes details of their current work under the SEF programme. Each participant is provided with a USB memory stick to store their CV and any other qualifications, ensuring easy access for printing when needed.







Demographic profile of participants³

Male:

36,8%

Female:

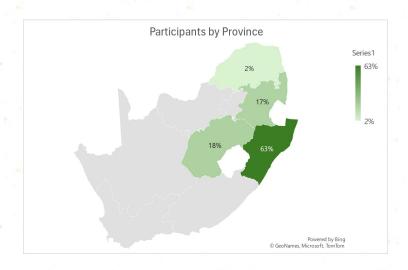
63,2%

Youth:

58,4%

Average age:

e: 35





Volunteer Days

Over and above the actual project deliverables, the 3,000 participants in the programme have donated an incredible **98,691 volunteer days** in service of their communities (01 March 2023 – 29 February 2024). Participants are giving back on a number of levels – from donating vegetables to community members in need, to maintaining police and fire stations, assisting at funerals, and lending a hand to schools and creches. Participants are proud to develop solutions themselves, such as fixing roads or repairing community taps, rather than relying on municipalities. Valued conservatively at R100 per day, this is worth more than R9,8 million for the common good.









³ Participant profile as at 1 March 2024

SEF 2 Project Highlights to Date

50,260 m² erosion control measures implemented, meeting our target of 10,000 m² well ahead of schedule.

2,957 participants and community members have been trained in the 4-day Agro-ecological Farming Practices course.

32,815 kg of fresh produce has been donated to families in need – significantly exceeding our 1,400 kg target.

Food gardens developed in 120 villages / suburbs across four provinces, benefitting an estimated 14,800 people.

521,179 seedlings planted and 6 seedling nurseries constructed, each with a capacity of 10,000 seedlings per month.

318,7 HA of landscapes and community grazing land thinned of invasive and alien vegetation.

207 rock art site visits and assessments conducted.

Project Partners

- Biodiversity Conservation Foundation
- Imbewu Yoshintso
- Inkanyamba Development Trust
- KwaZulu-Natal Amafa and Research Institute
- Manyoni Private Game Reserve / Zululand Conservation Trust
- Project Rhino & Loziba Wildlife Reserve
- Sabi Sand Pfunanani Trust
- Save our Imfolozi Wilderness Environmental Group
- South African National Parks (SANParks)
- Wildlife Spirit / Emarondweni Education Centre

SEF Funders and Management

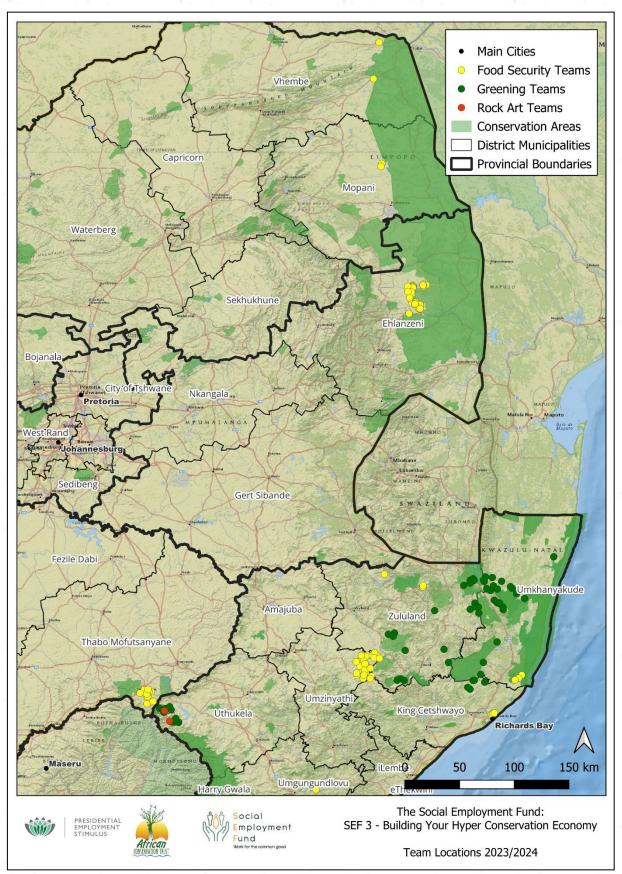
- Department of Trade, Industry and Competition
- Industrial Development Corporation

With thanks to

- The Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development
- Umhlathuze Municipality (Richards Bay)
- Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and Wildlife ACT
- Traditional leaders and authorities
- Ward councillors
- The Social Employment Network (SEN) and other SEF Strategic Implementing Partners
- All the public, private and community entities and individuals who have assisted the SEF participants with agricultural land, garden materials, tools and other support

Footprint

A map of project communities and their respective themes appears below. At the end of the financial year, we had 187 different teams working in 18 sites.





News and Media

Media

African Conservation Trust was featured in the following radio, online, and print publications in the year in review:

- First week of March 2023. Community rock art custodians, East Coast Radio. Brief Insert featured on several NewsWatch Bulletins. Estimated total listenership; 1,265,000.
- 4-Mar-23. **Durban non-profit initiates rock-art monitoring project,** The Highway Mail (delivered to all residents in eThekwini Upper Highway area and online). Estimated readership; 54 700 printed copies weekly.
- 4-Mar-23. **Durban non-profit initiates rock-art monitoring project**, South Coast Sun (repost of the Highway Mail article, online). Estimated weekly reach; 20,325.
- 17-Mar-23. Teach them and they shall eat, The Zululand Observer (printed newspaper available to residents of Richards Bay, and online).
- 1-Apr-23. Bushbuckridge SEF team works for communities, Mpumalanga News (sold in the Lowveld region and online). Estimated readership; 10,000.
- 17-Apr-23. African Conservation Trust What does it do? South Africa the Good News. Online Publication.
- 29-Sept-23. Free State Food Security Initiative. The Good Newspaper. Online Publication.
- Oct-23. Spotlight: African Conservation Trust. Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP) Food Forum newsletter.
- 12-Dec-23. African Conservation Trust Is Fostering a Sustainable Future. Podcast interview - François du Toit with Danielle Ribeiro from Great.com
- 15-Jan-24. Couple's Food Gardens Bring Hope to Phuthaditjhaba Town. Good Things Guy (Online and social media). Estimated readership; Over 1 million readers per week.
- 9-Feb-24. Saving Soil our Life Source. Farmers Weekly. (Agricultural print magazine available throughout South Africa).

Social Media

African Conservation Trust shares updates on its projects and programmes on its social media channels, typically once a week. Our most popular channels remain Facebook and Instagram.

In the year in review, Facebook achieved a reach of 1,1 million from both boosted and unboosted posts. Our posts reach a global audience, with our biggest reach in South Africa, then USA and United Kingdom, followed by Kenya, Nigeria, Australia, Germany, Canada and SADC countries. Our Facebook page is most popular with men (56,4%) in the 25 – 34 age groups. Instagram is more popular with women (56%) in the 25 -34 and 35 – 44 age groups.



Summary Financial Statements

ACT's financial statements have been independently audited by Vigil Chartered Accountants Incorporated, registered accountants and auditors. A copy of the full report is available on request.

African Conservation Trust

(Registration number: IT2174/2000/PMB)

Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 29 February 2024

Statement of Financial Position as at 29 February 2024

2023	2024	Note(s)	Figures in Rand
			Assets
			Non-Current Assets
858 004	1 421 629	2	Property, plant and equipment
			Current Assets
34 148	87 383	3	Trade and other receivables
707 730	2 176 527	4	Cash and cash equivalents
741 878	2 263 910		
1 599 882	3 685 539		Total Assets
			Equity and Liabilities
			Equity
100	100	5	Trust capital
1 481 842	3 582 101		Accumulated surplus
1 481 942	3 582 201		
			Liabilities
			Current Liabilities
114 022	103 338	6	Trade and other payables
3 918	-	4	Bank overdraft
117 940	103 338		
1 599 882	3 685 539		Total Equity and Liabilities
		3	Total Equity and Liabilities

African Conservation Trust

(Registration number: IT2174/2000/PMB)
Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 29 February 2024

Statement of Comprehensive Income

Figures in Rand	Note(s)	2024	2023
Revenue	7	84 474 457	49 332 314
Cost of sales	8	(9 762 067)	(6 280 560)
Gross surplus		74 712 390	43 051 754
Operating expenses		(72 693 805)	(42 146 349)
Operating surplus		2 018 585	905 405
Investment revenue	11	81 678	34 973
Finance costs	12	(4)	(20 010)
Surplus for the year		2 100 259	920 368
Other comprehensive income		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year		2 100 259	920 368

African Conservation Trust (Registration number: IT2174/2000/PMB) Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 29 February 2024

Statement of Cash Flows

Cash flows from operating activities			
Cash receipts from customers Cash paid to suppliers and employees		84 421 222 (82 250 791)	49 888 085 (48 755 334)
Cash generated from operations Interest income Finance costs		2 170 431 81 678 (4)	1 132 751
Net cash from operating activities		2 252 105	1 112 323
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	2	(779 390)	(445 263)
Total cash movement for the year Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year		1 472 715 703 812	667 060 36 752
Total cash at end of the year	4	2 176 527	703 812



Contact Details

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Heritage Website: www.actheritage.org

Follow Us

Facebook, Twitter: @ACTsafrica Instagram: @africanconservationtrust YouTube: African Conservation Trust LinkedIn: African Conservation Trust



Whistleblower Hotline

ACT has implemented an independent ethics hotline, managed by Whistle Blowers (PTY) LTD, whereby anyone can report unethical activity without fear of victimisation. All reports received through the whistleblower line are handled with the utmost confidentiality and are thoroughly investigated. The tipoff line provides a secure and anonymous way for staff, stakeholders, and community members to report any concerns or suspected misconduct related to our operations.

Email: projectafrica@whistleblowing.co.za

WhatsApp: +27 31 308 4664

SMS: 33490

Online: <u>www.whistleblowing.co.za</u>

Fundraising Platforms

- Direct Donations by EFT, Yoco, or PayPal
- GivenGain
- MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet (donations made by retail partners, at no cost to you).

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

Thank you to all our generous supporters and donors 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.

Photographic Acknowledgement

Images in this Annual Report were kindly shared by ACT staff and SEF participants. Scenic images on pages 7 and 19 of this document are licensed under creative commons via Canva.