At the end of 2012, we talked about the notion that WESSA has so much to offer to so many people and that it is important to paint a broader picture of how and where we are involved in our passionate efforts of being People Caring for the Earth.

In looking at each edition of WESSA at Work, one will certainly form a picture of the depth and extent of our involvement with environmental issues all across South Africa. There is indeed a very wide range of projects and initiatives being implemented on a national level, as well as through our regional structures in various Provinces.

One of our core philosophies and basic departure points when we look at environmental issues is that we position our responses with a people centred approach. In fact, WESSA has the key competencies, skills and experience to launch the most effective human capacity development programmes both in the wider SADC region and within the borders of South Africa. In addition to having a strong track record of delivering human capacity development programmes, WESSA is also particularly active in life-supporting ecosystems such as water, energy and biodiversity.

WESSA is the only Centre of Excellence for Environmental Education in the SADC Region, a United Nations University appointed Regional Centre of Expertise, an Accredited Training Service Provider, and an Institute of Sectoral and Occupational Excellence.

The WESSA Eco Schools programme is now in its 10th year and has become a valuable curriculum framework for schools to work toward sustainable development goals. Since it was launched in South Africa in 2003, the number of schools that have registered has increased from 100 in the first year to over 1200 schools currently, with approximately 500 000 learners benefitting from this valuable programme.

On the strategic front, as we move forward, our human capacity development focus will increasingly be driven in the specific areas where we decide to apply our considerable skills, namely SADC Region, Local Government, Community and Youth and then of course, Schools.

The WESSA national footprint allows us to play a highly effective role in securing species and ecosystems, through focused projects and activities that broaden participation in the protection, sustainable use and the wise management of natural resources. The WESSA Regions are working within the National Biodiversity Priority Areas in South Africa. This is the ideal place for our members and the broader public to become involved with excitement and passion in the issues that matter most to them in specific geographic areas.

So, when you are reading WESSA at Work, you will no doubt find something that interests you or stimulates your organisation’s thinking about the Environment. If you are a member or a member organisation, I invite you to invite your friends and your colleagues from other organisations to come and join us. We will welcome you with open arms and guarantee that there are very exciting things to do in caring for our Earth together with WESSA!
National News

- **WESSA’s USAID-funded Stepping up to Sustainability project supports creation of The Green Shack at Design Indaba 2013**

WESSA is excited to have participated at 2013 Design Indaba through its support for The Green Shack pilot project. WESSA and the Ackerman Pick ‘n Pay Foundation have formed a partnership with Cape Town-based designer Stephen Lamb from Touching the Earth Lightly and have co-funded the creation of The Green Shack, which aims to demonstrate how informal dwellings can be changed into safer places of living by addressing the issues of ground water flooding, shack fires, food security and thermal insulation. The Green Shack relies on cheap, low-tech design that is novel, simple and can be replicated on a large scale, and it suggests that one can address the need for informal housing and for food security in the same physical space.

A simple four-wall, corrugated-iron structure forms the basis of the Green Shack but this is augmented by several innovative features. It is raised off the ground to prevent flooding and daylight is supplied by light bulbs made from upturned, recycled plastic bottles that are filled with water and transmit light into the shack without the need for windows, which often offer an invitation to criminals. Two sun-facing walls of the shack are wrapped with vertical organic vegetable gardens supplied by a slow-release, gravity-fed drip-irrigation system. These two walls act as a living food wall, a fire break and also as a temperature regulator. Rain water is captured off the roof and stored on site.

The remaining two walls utilise sandbags filled with earth, lime and hemp mix combined with a fire-resistant solution.

The concept of The Green Shack project is closely aligned with the objectives of WESSA’s national three-year “Stepping Up to Sustainability” project, funded by USAID, through which 11 “Sustainability Commons” have been established across South Africa, offering public access to sustainable practices and technologies. Stepping Up to Sustainability has a strong focus on building capacity with civil society and educators around the use of these sustainable technologies which can be introduced into formal as well as informal housing - as is evident with The Green Shack.

**Design Indaba took place from 27 February – 3 March at the Cape Town ICC.**

- **WESSA helps sustain paddlers at canoe marathon**

In February WESSA supported Day 1 of the 2013 Dusi Canoe Marathon by hosting a water point at the Guinea Fowl portage in Enkanyezini just outside Pietermaritzburg. WESSA staff and volunteers supplied passing paddlers with a variety of snacks, including potatoes, bananas, watermelons, jelly babies and chocolate bars, to help replenish their energy levels. In the searing heat WESSA’s enthusiastic team also offered water sponges to cool down the exhausted paddlers as they approached the gruelling hilltop portage in temperatures well over 40º. The support was greatly appreciated and many paddlers stopped for a rest and a chat. The water point gave WESSA the opportunity to generate awareness amongst the paddling community and supporters around the organisation’s involvement in ‘Celebrating our Rivers’ - a WESSA Water Programme plan of action to aid the restoration and preservation of South African catchments.

**Paddlers at the water point**

Photo credit: Shivam Trivedi

- **News from WESSA Eco-Schools**

**Eco-Schools/DWA workshop explores opportunities for collaboration**

The National Eco-Schools co-ordination team and provincial programme managers hosted Provincial and National representatives of the Department of Water Affairs’ 2020 Vision for Water Programme at a workshop held in in Howick in late January. This meeting and workshop was initiated by Mr Vukani Mtya,

**WESSA and Government participants at the one day workshop**
Director of the Baswe Le Meetse project, with a view to finding ways to align the Baswe Le Meetse competition, Youth in Water Prize and the Aqua Enduro projects of DWA, with the work that Eco-Schools does to support water education, to support whole school development projects that focus on water conservation, and encouraging “Stepping up to Sustainability” regarding water use and behaviour.

Planning for the year and integration of programmes and projects is a priority for DWA and Eco-Schools were very pleased to have made contact with all the provincial managers from DWA as well as having the support of the DWA Directorate. It is evident that there is scope for work between NGOs and Government and this relationship was cemented at this workshop. WESSA’s Director of Education, Dr Jim Taylor, remarked that with water being the celebrated natural resource for 2013, it is more important than ever for civil society and government to work together to educate children around the better management of water. Mr Sanele Dlamini, Director of Executive Support reporting to the Minister of Water Affairs, attended and commented that communication between NGOs and their partners in the Directorate is critical as there is a lot of great work being done through these collaborations. The workshop was also attended by Mr Curtis Mabena, Director of the 2020 Vision for Water Programme, who was impressed by the depth of work being done by WESSA and Eco-Schools.

Eco-Schools receive their DIAMOND DECADE Award
Five incredible schools were awarded their Diamond Decade award in 2012 for 10 years of sustained effort in the Eco-Schools programme. These schools are five out of the original 50 schools who were awarded their Green Flags in 2003 when WESSA launched Eco-Schools in South Africa. Epworth, Scottville Primary, St Nicholas Diocesan School, King’s School and Brakpan Primary have been part of the programme since the launch and have sustained, developed and maintained their efforts consistently year-on-year which is no mean feat! Many of the original 50 are still part of the programme but have, for good reasons, missed a year here and there. Congratulations to our five star schools- and may they be an inspiration to all schools in South Africa!

“...The involvement with this programme and all its various aspects has become a way of life here at our school. The recycling program is now almost entirely run by the students. Indigenous tree planting has become something all Grade 6 students look forward to - they have planted more than 500 trees so far. Community service is encouraged and the children are very willing to give to those less fortunate than themselves. In the past 10 years Scottville’s children have collected and donated approximately R263 000 to various charities.” Scottville Primary

1169 schools were registered on the national Eco-Schools programme for 2012, of which 785 were successful in earning an award. This is the highest number of awards in the history of the programme.

WESSA’s National Coastal Programme forms partnership to save sea life
Dyer Island Conservation Trust, Plastics SA and WESSA’s National Coastal Programme have partnered in a joint project, The Fishing Line Recovery Programme is aimed at limiting or reducing the amount of fishing tackle discarded along our coastline and thereby to reduce environmental damage and limit marine animal mortality.

DICT initiated the Fishing Line Recovery Programme in South Africa, based on an innovative project pioneered the USA, and it is implemented by strategically placed fishing line bins that are accompanied by an educational poster designed by Brenda Walters of DICT. The project is aimed at educating the public on the problems caused by fishing line left in the environment and it encourages recycling where possible.

DID YOU KNOW? Fishing line is non-biodegradable and lasts up to 600 years in the environment where it entangles wildlife, is eaten by animals and birds and is hazardous to boaters and swimmers.

WESSA and its National Coastal team would like to take the opportunity to thank the Mazda Wildlife Fund and its manager Humphrey Le Grice for supporting our Coastal Project by sponsoring a Mazda 3 vehicle. This vehicle is used in monitoring the fishing line bins which are located at various points on our coastline, from Richards Bay to the Northern Cape.

The fishing line bins are inspected to see whether or not they are being used, whether they require emptying, whether they are suitably located, and what condition they are in. These bins are mostly found near rocky shores, which are a favourite fishing spot for recreational anglers, and anglers are encouraged to dispose of their fishing line responsibly.
WESSA would like to thank those municipalities and organisations who have joined this initiative for enthusiastically placing and monitoring their fishing line bins, which function both as an environmental education and a management tool.

Dyer Island Conservation Trust, Plastics SA and WESSA’s National Coastal Programme have partnered in a joint project, The Fishing Line Recovery Programme is aimed at limiting or reducing the amount of fishing tackle discarded along our coastline and thereby to reduce environmental damage and limit marine animal mortality.

Celebrate WATER in March

2013 is the United Nations International Year of Water Co-operation and 22 March is World Water Day!

DID YOU KNOW?

Fresh water isn’t in oceans or seas. It is a global common resource that occurs naturally in ice sheets, ice caps, glaciers, bogs, ponds, lakes, rivers, underground streams and aquifers.

Water co-operation means getting everyone together – scientists, policy makers, government, water management specialists, civil society – to ensure that fresh water best serves everyone’s needs.

We can all care for our precious Water...

WESSA Share-Net has put together an exciting resource pack to support the International Year of Water Co-operation, National Water Week and World Water Day. The pack costs R120 (including VAT and postage) and includes:

- miniSASS. Can be used to monitor the health of a river and measure the general quality of the water in that river. It uses the composition of macroinvertebrates (tiny insects) living in rivers.
- Sweet Water. A short story from the Indigenous Knowledge Series which aims to mobilise indigenous knowledge for school and community contexts. The booklet is centred on the wisdom in early patterns of life and challenges us to live more sustainably today.
- Catchments to Coast Enviro Picture Building Puzzle. Through construction and discussing pictures of the environment, learners gain confidence in articulating and responding to local environmental issues around water.
- EnviroFacts on Water; Wetlands, River Catchments and Freshwater Fishes.
- Eco-Puzzle on River Life.
- Teachers Guide: Water is Life! Provides a range of learning area activities around water.
- Hands-On: Stream and Pond Life. An A5 booklet for fieldwork with the emphasis on observing common stream and pond life through a hands-on experience.
- Change Choice Pamphlet - Water in our school gives simple ideas to ‘step up to sustainable living’ by changing some of our current water practices.

To place your order contact WESSA Share-Net on 033 330 3931 extension 2124 or 2144 or email sharenet@wessa.co.za

WESSA is For Love Of Water – are you?

What is your attitude towards water? How do you value water? Are you wasteful or mindful? It is time to delve deeper into this conversation - at home, at the office and on the street.

The objective of this year is to raise awareness, both for the potential for increased cooperation, and on the challenges facing water management in light of the increase in demand for access, allocation and services.

It is within this spirit that we as South Africans begin to have the conversation and explore our attitudes towards Water. Let water and the urgent need to preserve it become the rallying point that brings us together as South Africans. Regardless of race, class, gender or religion, we all need access to clean water.

Make a commitment to do one thing to value water in 2013!

To learn more about the FLOW campaign visit www.forloveofwater.co.za or follow the movement on Twitter @forloveofwater
News from the Regions

WEssa Free State Region

Enthusiastic support for Eco-schools Free State Workshop and Award Ceremony

WESSA and the Free State Provincial Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs co-hosted an Eco-Schools workshop and Provincial awards ceremony in Bloemfontein in February. The event was also supported by the National Department of Environmental Affairs.

An astounding 300 educators representing 174 Free State schools turned up for the event and remained committed to all sessions for the 2.5 day workshop! Workshops included un-packaging the three new lesson plan packs that support three themes of Healthy Living, Resource-Use and Nature & Biodiversity. In a hands-on session educators made a wallet out of recycled Tetrapak boxes, and other areas covered were a revision of the 7-steps of the programme as well as the Platinum Award guidelines. An impressive 172 schools registered in the Province for 2012 and 105 were successful in achieving an award. Teachers also received a Wonderbag hotbox, copies of all three lesson packs, and seeds for their school’s gardens. This year the number of participating schools is expected to rise to over 200, thanks to support from National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund.

WESSA Eastern Province Region

EP heroes of the day

On Monday 18 February at 13h15 our WESSA Rangers who patrol the Baakens Valley were informed by December Goduka of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality that there had been a break-in at Peter Graham Avenue in Fernglen.

After receiving a description of the thief, our Rangers, Ernest Sineli and Xolani Bokuva, pictured below, realised that they had just passed this person on the way to the house. The Rangers then retraced their steps and apprehended the thief with all the stolen goods in his backpack. These included a camera, computer hard drive, charger and, surprisingly, lots of chocolates! Atlas Security and the police arrived shortly afterwards and arrested the culprit.

WESSA works with the Municipality and other stakeholders in the Baakens Valley Community Partnership. The programme is funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and the Ranger programme is funded by Coca-Cola Fortune.
Eco-Schools Award ceremony held at Addo Elephant National Park

On 16 February the EP region held its very successful Eco-Schools Award ceremony, which was hosted by SANParks at the Interpretive Centre at Addo Elephant National Park. It was attended by 55 principals and educators from 30 schools. The event was held in partnership with SANParks and the Born Free Foundation, both of which support Eco-Schools nodes in the area. Wendy Johnson from SANParks welcomed all present and the Programme Director was Luthando Gxowa, our Senior Education Officer.

The scourge of rhino poaching and the appalling statistic of nearly 100 rhinos already poached this year formed the backdrop to a presentation by Martheanne Finnemore, Regional Manager of WESSA. The focus was also on the rhino and its role in the greater ecosystem within which it lives. Teachers were provided with the excellent rhino edition of the EnviroKids magazine. The good news that WESSA EP will be participating in the WESSA Rhino DNA identification programme was shared. Schools have indicated their willingness to raise additional funds for this project. Nomfusi Matikinca from Fumisukoma, noted that the presentation on rhinos “was very informative and eye opening”.

Christine le Roux from Born Free shared her story of the amazing successes of the Eco-Schools in Paterson and Alicedale. Some of the highlights shared were water conservation projects including the installation of tanks, food gardens that provide nutrition for learners’ lunches, tree planting, a massive decline in teenage pregnancy after lessons were given by a local doctor, increasing pass rates, Eco-library corners providing environmental information, rhino poaching initiatives and litter clean ups.

Sindi Yoyo, who is the Deputy Chief Education Specialist in Life Orientation Specialist in the DBE, then addressed the teachers on some of the goals of the Department of Basic Education and welcomed the very productive relationship between the DBE and WESSA.

Pearl Jonas called the schools to receive their awards, which ranged from Bronze awards up to Platinum for schools that had successfully promoted environmental education and management in their schools for more than 5 years. The schools that received their Green Flag are shown in the picture below. After this the educators enjoyed a game drive where they viewed two huge herds of elephants at the waterholes as well as numerous other species. Many educators had never been to the Addo Park before and their description of the event ranged from “wonderful” to “absolutely amazing”. The game drive included a stop at Jack’s picnic spot where the teachers enjoyed some lunch.

In evaluating the day, Sindy Yoyo noted that the event “was excellent - with teachers showcasing what they had achieved. I am impressed with the way the curriculum is taken into the community to deal with local issues thus alleviating poverty”.

Thanks go to SANParks, Born Free Foundation, Coca-Cola Fortune, ABB and Orion whose sponsorship of our Eco-Schools in the region made this event possible.

WESSA WESTERN CAPE REGION

Green Leaders step up to mentor fellow youth

The hardy core of our Stepping up to Environmental Leadership group, armed with a range of new skills, insights and sustainability experiences, has been helping with a recently launched community services programme for unemployed youth.

Pupa, Justine, Luzuko, Claire, Julian and Sonica are now in the eighth month of a demanding and eclectic programme that features both leadership practice and hard skills to do with renewable energy, water conservation, food security and waste minimization. They have now been able to share their knowledge with twenty-five recruits in the community services programme from Grassy Park, Lavender Hill, Philippi, Nyanga and Gugulethu.

The new green leaders have thus far organised several day-long programmes, including sessions on permaculture, worm farming, compost making and seedling planting.
making and recycling. More are in the pipeline. The aim is to enlist the new intake of youth that has shown great interest and enthusiasm for the initiative into the growing cadre of under-thirties committed to making changes for the environment and leading by example.

*The Stepping up to Sustainable Leadership project is funded by the DG Murray Trust.*

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**World Wetlands Day celebrations at Silvermine Nature Reserve**

World Wetlands Day is celebrated all over the world on 2 February. It provides an opportunity to draw attention to this highly threatened ecosystem type and the unique services they provide, such as water cleansing, flood attenuation, water storage and habitat for a range of aquatic biodiversity. This year WESSA Western Cape joined in a fun event called Walking for Wetlands at Silvermine Nature Reserve. It was organised by the Wetlands Forum in partnership with TMNP and Working for Wetlands and was supported by a range of environmental organisations. Over 150 people joined in the 6 km walk around the upper Silvermine River Catchment area and had the opportunity to talk with Working for Wetlands staff involved in wetland rehabilitation of some of the wetlands in the southern peninsula.

The Ramsar Theme for 2013 is “Wetlands take care of our water” and we urge all South Africans to take care of their wetlands!

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**Overberg Eco-Schools award ceremony and introduction to waste expo**

Over 100 educators, learners and guests attended the Overberg Eco-Schools Node Awards ceremony on 12 February at the Green House, home to Whale Coast Conservation.

Guests were welcomed by Dr Pat Miller, Whale Coast Conservation (WCC) Board member, who apologised on behalf of the older generation to the younger generation present for not having done a better job of protecting the environment and for the need to pass on so many environmental challenges for them to find answers to in the future! Mayoress Nicolette Botha-Guthrie spoke about the importance of looking after the environment in the Overstrand and encouraged the learners to continue with their excellent start to becoming committed custodians of this precious gift. She referred to the strong benefit derived by the municipality and community from the work of the Eco-schools programme and the WCC newsletters and other materials, which are used by the municipality to support its application for Blue Flag Beach status and for the Greenest Town Award. The programme also included an overview of the Eco-Schools programme by regional Eco-Schools Manager Helena Atkinson; a report on the on-going shark egg case survey project along the Whale Coast by Sheraine van Wyk from Whale Coast Conservation; and a talk by John Kieser, representing the Plastics Federation, who talked about the statistics obtained from the International Coastal Clean-up last year.

Achievement awards were handed out to 30 schools that had participated in the Eco-Schools programme during 2012. Small grants were awarded to 20 schools for which successful project funding applications had been made by the WCC through WESSA to the HSBC. Special awards for their exceptional individual participation were given to Ester Pitzer, Zani Muller and Deseree Davids. A total of 10 schools have now achieved International status.

The first cut of the WCC’s rhino video was shown, which features learners from schools that have raised funds for rhino conservation, and appeals to other children from Eco-Schools in Asian countries to engage with them and to make a difference in preventing rhino poaching. The video, funded by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF), will be distributed throughout the world through the Eco-Schools network.

Thanks to WCC’s Eco-Schools programme coordinator, Delray Janse van Rensburg, and the WCC team who made the event a great success.
‘Journey of discovery’ for YES programme youths in George

In the space of a few weeks, the 25 candidates in the DEA funded Youth Environmental Services training programme have discovered a variety of facts and been prompted to address many interesting questions about the environment. Their journey of discovery has included playing games and researching the content of EnviroKids magazines and the PSP Plant and Animal cards. They have watched several relevant short films, such as The CareTakers, The Manager, ’n Mens kan Droom and sections of Curitiba: A convenient Truth, Solutions from Brazil. They didn’t realise how interrelated things are in nature – even the chameleon has a role in the food web. The peanut butter cookies baked in the sun stove brought looks of surprise to all and the notice board was quickly filled with comments like ‘crispy’, ‘delicious’, ‘when can we bake again?’

As part of the professional development programme, the beneficiaries debated and drew up codes of conduct for the work place. Advice and ideas were shared whilst doing a session on planning and achieving one’s aims. Success stories were shared and are sure to inspire the others. The beneficiaries are, at this stage, rather apprehensive about starting at their work places. We believe that they will be that much more prepared than they were before the professional development sessions.

Southern Cape rural schools embrace the Eco-Schools programme

Kommandantsdrift Primary School, situated about 80km from George, is rather off the beaten track. This little school is situated in the Kammannassie mountains. Starting their 3rd year in the Eco-Schools programme, teacher Anel Burger, was excited about how well the programme supports the new Curriculum Assessment Policy statements. This school, and neighbour Scheeperskraal Primary, will be working with the biodiversity, resource us and healthy living themes. Projects already completed at the schools include the painting of the school ground equipment with donated environmentally friendly paints. Having accessed materials that were no longer required by neighbouring farms, a structure was built for the new school bus and gutters now funnel the rainwater from the roof of the car port into two water tanks. Scheeperskraal Primary staged their first ever school concert for the community. Parents, labourers and farmers packed the venue and so enjoyed the show that learners had to wait for the audience to settle down several times before they could proceed with their lines and actions. Most of these achievements were reached through working with the theme of Healthy Living. The teachers and supportive farmers speak highly of the changes being brought about in the community since enrolling for the Eco-Schools programme.

WESSA Knysna Branch reports on 20 years of ‘CWAC-ing’

The Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) conducted in February 2013 marked 20 years of surveys of waterbirds on the Knysna Estuary and at the local sewage works. We had three teams on foot and two teams on SANParks boats to record the lagoon waterbirds on the CWAC day. One team counted waterbirds at the sewage works, where the numbers are not nearly so vast.

Lagoon numbers were up a bit this year, to 4092, thanks to the 350- plus Cape Cormorants who stayed just long enough for us to count them before they disappeared through the Heads for a day’s foraging! The sewage works are currently being upgraded and the birds are disturbed throughout the day, but in spite of this it was good to see a few Hottentot Teals around. One African Purple Swamp Hen made a swift appearance flitting across the reeds.

WESSA at Work
It is thanks to the faithful service of our many birding friends, who are mostly also WESSA members, that we have managed to achieve this 20 year record. Our citizen scientists are making a wonderful contribution towards the knowledge of our beautiful natural world.

**Catch WESSA on the airwaves**

WESSA George has been invited by EDEN FM 93.8 FM to fill a new slot on their breakfast show hosted by Christo Gawie. This weekly slot Thursdays at 07h40 will be dedicated to environmental issues. Similarly, WESSA Cape Town will be filling a weekly slot on Cape Pulpit 729AM every Wednesday morning at 08h15, speaking about conservation in general.

**WESSA NORTHERN CAPE REGION**

Eco-Schools endorsed at Northern Cape education workshop

The National Eco-Schools Co-ordinators were hosted by the Department of Environment and Nature Conservation at the Northern Cape provincial teacher’s workshop and Eco-Schools Awards ceremony. The acting Premier of the Province and MEC for Education, Grizelda Cjiekella, gave her support for the Eco-Schools programme and endorsed the partnership. There was a strong presence from senior management in the Departments of Education and Environment and Eco-schools looks forward to continuing to strengthening these partnerships. Teacher and trainer workshops are being planned for the Northern Province through funding from German GIZ aid agency. Erna Groeners coordinates the Eco-School’s project in the Northern Cape and is supported by Les Abrahams (Director), Mr Van Heerden (HOD) and her team of officials.

**WESSA NORTHERN AREAS**

CWAC Green Team tackle Hartbeespoort Dam

On Saturday 9 February the WESSA Northern Areas organised CWAC count kicked off at 6am with seven teams in the field to do the counting. Two groups were in boats and the rest on foot.

This was the 9th count undertaken by the group since 2009. The total of this summer count was 5414 birds, with several interesting bird species being observed such as increased numbers of Purple Swamp Hen, Goliath Heron, Cape Teal and White-winged Tern to name but a few.

This count also serves as an opportunity to monitor the health of Hartbeespoort dam and its incoming rivers. This year saw a major increase in water hyacinth coverage on the dam by and a marked increase in algal bloom, which could lead to a number of environmental problems in late summer when blue green algae forms and then gives off of sulphite gas when it dies off.
The Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) project was launched in 1992. The objective of CWAC is to monitor South Africa’s waterbird populations and the conditions of the wetlands which are important for waterbirds. This is being done by means of a programme of regular mid-summer and mid-winter censuses at a large number of South African wetlands. CWAC currently monitors over 400 wetlands around the country on a regular basis, and furthermore curates waterbird data for close to 600 wetlands.

This project was initiated by the then Ramsar Working Group of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in part-fulfilment of South Africa’s commitment to the Ramsar Convention. CWAC also forms part of the African Waterbird Census (AfWC), a programme coordinated by Wetlands International based in the Netherlands. Data collected by CWAC is regularly submitted to the AfWC Regional office in Nairobi, Kenya. The Project is coordinated by the Animal Demographic Unit at the University of Cape Town.

**WESSA LOWVELD REGION**

Mini conference adds a new dimension to Limpopo Eco-Schools Awards ceremony

This year’s Limpopo Eco-Schools Awards ceremony was different to previous years in that the one day event was turned into a mini conference. The first part of the event was graced by two of Limpopo’s icons, Mr Clive Walker, founder of Lapalala Wilderness School and Mr Mike Gardner who is the editor of the book titled *A selection of Legends and Folk stories from the Valley of the Olifants*. Both of them spoke powerfully of their experiences in environmental education and our cultural heritage respectively. The next session allowed the 250 odd educators who attended the ceremony to visit, network, and learn more from a market place of exhibitors of diverse businesses, organisations and institutions who deal with environmental learning or matters in some way. After lunch, which was generously sponsored by the DWA, the awards ceremony got underway where there were two additional speakers and a learner rendering poetry on the importance of water, which was much enjoyed. Positive feedback was received from many who attended.

“Thank you for a perfectly wonderful day and the opportunity to meet up with three of my former teachers of our school and so many others who had been touched by the school experience. A tribute to you and all who arranged such an important event and may you be strengthened by your endeavours. The food, the venue, the gathering was a big plus for Limpopo and you and all at Eco schools”. – Mr Clive Walker

**WESSA KZN REGION**

Coastwatch KZN now a Friend of WESSA

In 1997 a group of concerned conservationists serving on the WESSA’s KZN Conservation Committee decided that there was a need to focus on coastal and marine matters. Out of this idea, Coastwatch KZN was born. Coastwatch has a vision of a healthy coastal environment with equitable and diverse opportunities for all, now and into the future, while the mission of the group is to become an effective coalition of concerned people working to achieve the long-term protection and sustainable management of the natural resources of both the coastal zone and the offshore marine zone.

Coastwatch was originally a project within WESSA but the group decided at their meeting in late 2012 that they wanted more autonomy. They hence decided to become a Friend of WESSA which allows them to keep their strong ties with the parent organisation while achieving more independence.

The group consists of a core of approximately 25 dedicated individuals with either expertise or experience in marine and coastal matters. A larger group of experts are available to assist with specific issues.

One of the most important roles of Coastwatch is their expert commentary on coastal development plans in the KZN province. Since 2006, Coastwatch has been able to comment on more than 100 Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) or Record of
Decisions (ROD) which affect the coastline of KZN. Ranging from single houses to small craft harbours, golfing estates to sewage plants, Coastwatch has been active in opposing many ill conceived proposals that, had they been successful, would have caused irreparable damage to the integrity of the coast. The issue of land derived waste discharged into the marine environment is being addressed in a number of forums, including the important Licensing Advisory Forums. Working closely with a wide range of government departments, mostly behind the scenes and with almost no funding, Coastwatch is able to contribute positively to many decisions. *Contact person: Di Jones  Coastwatch@ceasy.co.za*

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**2013 starts with a bang for Coastal KZN Eco-Schools**

More than 100 dedicated and enthusiastic Eco-Schools along the coast have been celebrating the great results of the past year, with 23 achieving their Eco-Schools Green Flag and 16 schools achieving the esteemed International Flag for 5 years of environmental management and learning at their schools. Events were held as a dual workshop and awards ceremony in each of the coastal districts, and both educators and learners were invited to share their wonderful stories of progress and positive change during their “Oscars-style” acceptance speeches. With four workshops / awards events completed and three more ahead, the Coastal KZN Eco-Schools team, including supporters such as Engen, the South African Post Office, the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (DAEA), Eskom and Nedbank are really enjoying the opportunity to engage with schools and to help them achieve even greater things in the coming year.

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**WESSA Treasure Beach Hosts an Intern from Germany**

Maike Köster from Germany is spending two months at Treasure Beach Environmental Education Centre for an internship. She says, “I am a very curious young lady from Germany and my name is Maike. I have the pleasure of doing my internship at WESSA Treasure Beach. The internship is part of a Leadership Training to the subject of Education for Sustainable Development, which is organized by the GIZ in Germany. With view to my time at WESSA: exceptional, awesome, enriching, without any doubt special! Why? Because I learn something new every day, especially since it is in a field that I am interested in, and with such wonderful people, makes my experience even more worthwhile. I honestly couldn’t have had more luck!”

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**Environmental Education Centres get together at Treasure Beach**

2013 began with much enthusiasm for the WESSA Environmental Education Centres during their annual methodologies sharing session which took place at the Treasure Beach Environmental Education Centre this year. Education officers from WESSA Umgeni Valley, WESSA Twinstreams and this year WESSA Umbogavango and the “Bugs” from the Midlands Meander Education Project, got together to share ideas and activities to kick start the year.

Much fun was had by all testing out ice-breakers as well as meaningful environmental games and activities for rainy days. Information was shared on lesson planning, ESD, fracking and disciplining of unruly learners. Various methods and activities for Rocky Shores, Grasslands and Wetlands were trialled and their adaptability for other environments was discussed.

A big thank you goes out to everyone who participated, for sharing their knowledge, experience and activities with all of us. These sessions help to lay an excellent foundation for the year ahead.
DONATE TO SUPPORT WESSA’S WORK
As an NGO we depend on funding from corporates as well as individual donations to allow us to continue to do our work.
A donation to WESSA is an investment in our planet and the children of all species, including our own.
If you would like to support us across the many sectors in which we work, click here.

WEssa Border-Kei Region

last chance to take a walk on the wild side with WESSA in 2013!

Join WESSA on a spectacular journey through the ecologically rich, dynamic and diverse Wild Coast region. The Wild Walk event will be held for the third year in succession, starting at the Wild Coast Sun on 1 March 2013 and ending in Chintsa on 24 March. The trail comprises of five fully catered and supported trail sections, and hikers have flexibility in choosing their preferred hiking distances, accommodation options and sections of coastal geography. See wessa.org.za for full details.

"Surf and turf" experience introduces youth to our marine eco-systems

The Coca Cola Fortune funded WESSA Nahoon River and Beach Project hosted a group of 12 aspiring Chintsa development surfers from the Unstressed Surf Club on an environmental learning experience to the Nahoon Point Nature Reserve, a snorkelling expedition at Nahoon Reef’s Mermaids’ Pool and an interactive pairing with the East London Nippers (junior lifesavers) in February.

The Unstressed Surf Club is in its second year of development as an experiential marine and coastal youth club for vulnerable children and embraces the growth and education of the participants through their exposure to our coastal environments. The Nahoon River and Beach Project provided the platform for peer to peer learning as the participants engaged with and competed against East London’s up and coming lifesavers under the supervision of some of the country’s top lifesaving names such as Keith Fenn and Derek Breetzke. The morning was followed up with a visit to the Footprints Museum at Nahoon Point, which is the site of the Nahoon footprints that have been dated at 200,000 years ago and belong to the archaic hominid period, according to Kevin Cole of the EL Museu. By contrast, the well-known Langebaan prints were made 83,000 years later and belong to an anatomically modern hominid. The area has been described as “a treasure trove” and efforts to trace the journey of the footprints are underway, which would likely make Nahoon eligible for World Heritage status.

A visit to Mermaids’ Pool unleashed the wonders of the world below the big blue to the wide eyed learners, who explored the magic of this Marine Protected Area and learned of the importance of our marine ecosystems and the need to protect and preserve them. The day ended with a coastal cleanup of the Nahoon Reef area.

Meeting the Nippers in East London

Participating in “flags”, a lifesaving discipline

Pure wonder
WESSA Friends Groups

WESSA has over 70 active Friends Groups throughout South Africa. These are groups of volunteers that band together to conserve, rehabilitate and protect a natural area or space of special interest, and are guided by the mission statement, policies and position statements of WESSA. In this section WESSA would like to pay tribute to these groups of committed individuals who embody and encourage WESSA’s mission of building public participation in caring for the Earth.

For more information on getting involved in or establishing a Friends Group, please contact Nina on 033 330 3931 or e-mail wessafriends@wessa.co.za

Paardeberg Sustainability Initiative (PSI) – Western Cape

Help us adopt this leopard!

Three camera traps have been installed on the Paardeberg as part of a survey of its fauna. The PSI is to “adopt” one of the leopards captured on camera, through the Cape Leopard Trust Boland Project (see www.capeleopard.org.za ) to monitor its movement and further understand the complex behaviour of these beautiful animals!

To raise funds for this, several leopard art items are to be auctioned over the next three weeks, through the BidorBuy website and items are available for viewing at the Hout Street Gallery on Main Road in Paarl in the Western Cape. Please everyone you know - especially your visitors from abroad - to visit BidorBuy [Art section] to submit a bid using the key words “Cape Leopard Trust” or “Paardeberg Sustainability Initiative”.

Click here to view the auction flyer.

Friends of Nylsvley – Northern Areas

Our 14th Bird Census in February commenced late, as, most unusually for the bushveld, there was thunder lightening and rain! The sun came out, the birds came out and we had a good count.

An above-average total of 136 species was recorded this year, a little above the 13-year average of 133, with one new bird, the European Honey Buzzard, being recorded on a census for the first time and bringing the list of woodland species recorded during all censuses to 198. A feature this year was the complete absence of Red-billed Quelea from Nylsvley. By contrast aerial insectivores - Swifts,
Swallows, European Bee-eaters and Amur Falcons - were in force, with 465 counted (versus 13-year average of 300). The shortage of Queleas is explained by recent aerial spraying and seen afterwards during the 24 hour count. The informal 24 hour count netted 210 up from 208 in 2012, 193 in 2012 and 185 in 2010 when we first started doing the 24-hour species count only within Nylsvley.

Nice sightings at the recent CWAC count were a Secretary Bird seen from the Kingfisher Hide, 51 Black Headed Heron and 3 Black-crowned Night Heron.

The full bird count report is available from Marion Mengell – email mwmwmd@mweb.co.za

Friends of Bracken – Western Cape

When Bracken Nature Reserve was proclaimed, the “Friends” group was given the mandate to try to return a canon to the site. Historically the granite hill, now quarried and filled in with refuse which is presently under rehabilitation, was part of the signal system introduced in the time of the Dutch East India Company. There was a canon which would be fired whenever there was a need to call up farmers to protect the Cape against enemy invasion. It formed a link in the chain from Tygerberg to Somerset West.

The location of the original cannon, which was replaced after a safety inspection in the late 18th century, is unknown. The replacement, however, is in the safe keeping of Dirkie Morkel on the farm Bellevue. Since Tygerberg Nature Reserve is now in possession of a 12-pounder cannon, they have donated their 6-pounder cannon to Bracken Nature Reserve. This was delivered to the reserve on 18 February, free of charge, compliments of Rob Nash of Mech-o-Care and - through the kind efforts of many people -in particular Jurg Zimmermann. Once the canon has been stabilised, the Friends will have a launch by firing the cannon in the presence of some VIP’s as well as members of the community and local schools.

Friends of Serene Valley – Northern Areas

Friends of Serene Valley in Garsfontein, Pretoria, held a Bird Walk in February. It was a lovely cool early morning after rain the night before and our group of experts and amateurs spotted 38 different birds including a Black-headed Heron, European Bee-eaters, African Paradise Flycatcher, Black-backed Puffback and White-bellied and Amethyst Sunbirds.

The Friends spot something of interest ahead!
Montagu Eco-Club – Western Cape

February outing to African Game Lodge

Members of the Eco-Club recently enjoyed a visit to the African Game Lodge located in a pristine valley surrounded by the spectacular Langeberg Mountains. The hosts at the lodge provided interesting information on the purpose of their major conservation project dedicated to ‘Wildlife Rehabilitation, Awareness and Biodiversity’. They also explained the background to and the everyday functioning of their game lodge situated approximately 28 km north-east of Montagu. At the same time, they related several stories about some very interesting ‘rescues’ that they had managed to conduct in bringing hurt animals and certain endangered species to be rehabilitated at their centre. In addition to sightings of Eland, a tame mongoose, a wily ostrich and an introduction to four cheetahs (two tame and two wild) the group also enjoyed a trek along a river bed, where they had the interesting experience of picking up pieces of rock and identifying fossil deposits millions of years old. A short climb up the slopes of a hillside and visit to an ancient cave in which both birds and bats find refuge, added to a better understanding of the surrounds and offered the group a magnificent view of the distant mountains.

For more information visit www.africanlodge.co.za

Members of Montagu Eco-Club at African Game Lodge

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WESSA is grateful too for the various donations received – monetary and in kind – from individuals and trusts.