

Project Update: June 2017

1. Project Summary

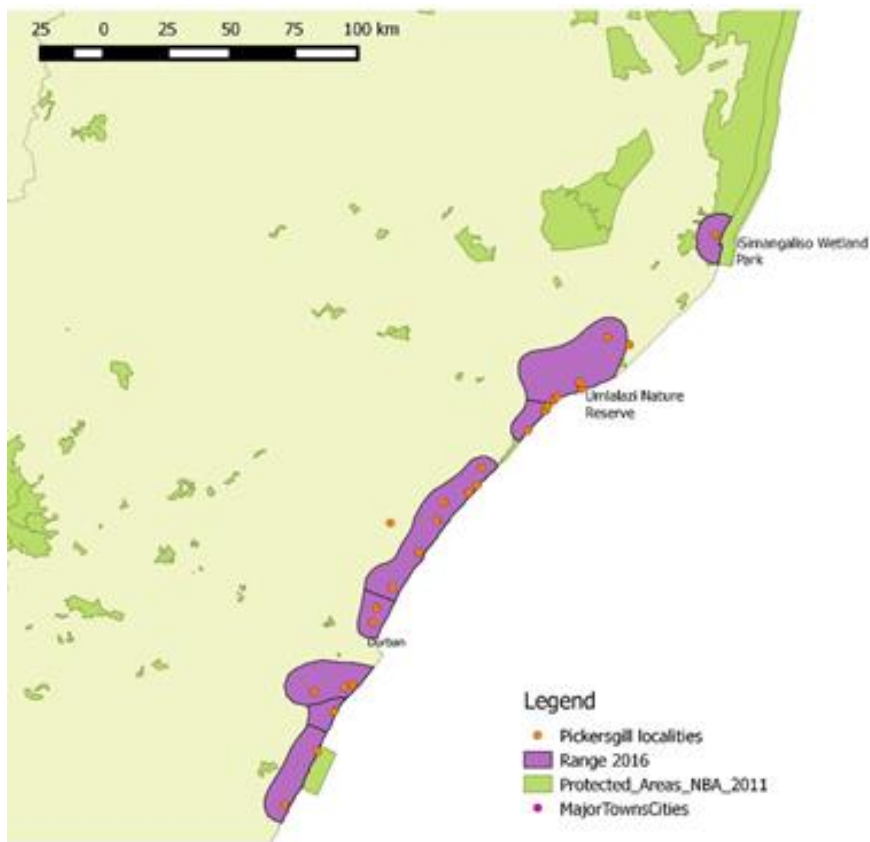
- Pickersgill's reed frog monitoring has been a success and I am waiting for data to be analysed.
- New Pickersgill's reed frog sites have been found in Adams from doing monitoring.
- Community engagements on environmental education have been running smooth so far, working together with traditional leaders and municipal councilors in Adams mission and Isipingo.
- Alien clearing project has also been on track, the sites are looking good.
- Vegetable gardens project at Isipingo is going well and more and more people want to part of the project in the area.
- New frog resources are being developed (Posters) for the Free State province and Mpumalanga province.
- Housing developments close to wetlands are a threat to the work we doing.

2. Species monitoring

Monitoring of the Endangered Pickersgill's reed frog monitoring has been on track since the beginning of the species' breeding season from end of 2016 to March 2017. The work forms part of the national resource management project which is to clear alien invasive plants. We have four passive acoustic recorders (Song Meter SM3, Wildlife Acoustics) to be fitted to rechargeable lead-acid batteries to allow long-term powering of the recorder. These recorders were strategically placed at the locality hosting one of the largest populations of Pickersgill's reed frog (Mount Moreland, and three other wetland sites that host the species, namely Simbithi Eco-Estate and Widenham.) Recorders were set to record from sunset to sunrise each day. These automated devices are used to record frog calls and to verify that Pickersgill's reed frog is present at a site. The data from the Song Meters will also be used to estimate population size, abundance and spatial utilisation. A mini workshop to analyse the data collected over the past two seasons is planned in collaboration with North-West University for June 2017. Song meters were removed from the sites in late April 2017. The breeding season is over and the frogs will not be calling during the winter season. Other great events that have happened is that we found a new Pickersgill's Reed Frog site in an un-expected area in Adams mission.



Setting up acoustic recorders



Pickersgill's Reed Frog distribution map

3. Community/Social

The project also has a community outreach programme which looks at solving environmental problems in local communities whilst empowering them with education. The community outreach programme focuses on school and communities in the greater Durban area. A lot of engagement has been done to educate the communities living near the sites at which we are carrying out wetland rehabilitation work about the importance of wetlands. In particular, surveys have been conducted to find out land use as well as the attitudes of the local community towards wetlands and frogs, and how natural resources are used. We provide seeds, gardening tools and advise which assists local gardeners at Isipingo. Conservation agreements with the gardeners have been drawn up ensuring that the wetland where Pickersgill's reed frog is found, is protected and not damaged further. There has been success in putting a stop to planting and drainage directly in the wetland, and have provided alternatives such as box gardens and vertical pallet gardens.

Community surveys have been conducted in Adams mission and Isipingo to find out if there are any stories that people know that make them dislike frogs. The surveys also look at finding out people's attitude towards not just frogs but nature at large and if people are willing to do things differently for the sake of a healthy environment.



Vertical pallet gardens

4. Wetland health

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and Eco-Pulse (Wetland specialists) intend to initiate rehabilitation and monitoring of selected, critical wetland habitats supporting the *Hyperolius pickersgilli* (Pickersgill's reed frog), in the eThekweni Municipality to determine the disturbance levels at the sites so as to come up with strategies to address these threats through rehabilitation measures. Some of the disturbances in the wetlands will be from alien invasive plants, littering and removal of plants material in the system. Other disturbances are ablution waste from human settlements and storm water. These assessments are very important but they come with me being bitten by mosquitos and scratched by grass and thorns in the wetland.

5. Project exposure

An article has been written for publication in the EWT's Threatened Amphibian Programme Newsletter, (The Hoppington Post.) There have been awareness talks with the community Indunas (Chiefs) at Adams mission, with the community and councilor in Isipingo and local schools in Umkhumbane to date.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust also held a Leap day for frogs in Durban, the idea of this important event was to create frog awareness worldwide and also to break the Leap game record held by the Netherlands. The Leap game involves a number of people Leap jumping over each other for a certain amount of time. The Endangered Wildlife Trust has been running a project of selecting four field guides in the area of Adams mission. The field guides were selected based on a three part based interviews which are a classroom workshop, a field assessment and a one on one interview. Training for the four field guides is in progress at the moment. The selection of the guides is not only a form of community development but will also help with extra hands in the field for species monitoring particularly frogs.



Leap day for frogs' event 2017



Addressing Indunas in Adams mission



Training field guides

On other news I have been attending classes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal as part of my course on Community Development. The course provides me with an opportunity to explore, develop and apply theories and principles for understanding and acting within the community development context. The theoretical perspectives and principles concerns how community development interventions may facilitate, strengthen, and improve less advantaged communities; empower community members to define and participate in the development process and interact in larger social, political and economic systems on behalf of the community. The course also broadens my knowledge and skills required to understand, and engage with the principles of community development in a congruent and meaningful way by critically analysing the various components of development such as social, economic, political, cultural, environmental, and personal.