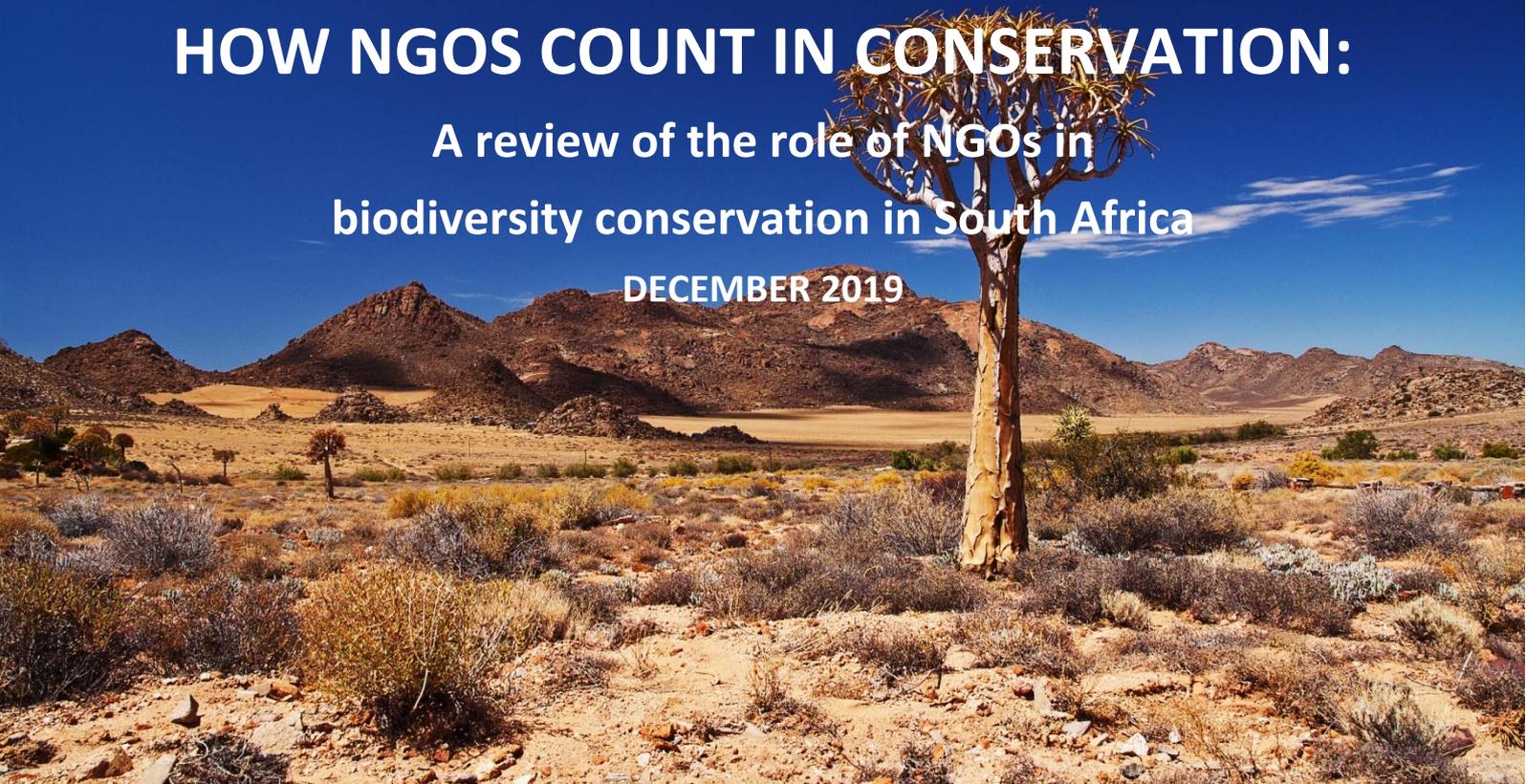


BRIEF FOR DECISION MAKERS

HOW NGOS COUNT IN CONSERVATION:

A review of the role of NGOs in
biodiversity conservation in South Africa

DECEMBER 2019



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charitable trust

— MANAGED BY NEDBANK PRIVATE WEALTH —

Synopsis

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play an important role in conserving South Africa's biological diversity, but their contributions as a sector have not previously been well documented. This brief for decision makers summarises a preliminary analysis of the collective contributions of 13 NGOs (all members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, IUCN) to biodiversity conservation in South Africa.

Survey questionnaires were used to obtain NGO information and included categories on how conservation priorities are set, the types of programmatic work conducted, the indicators used to measure conservation success, levels of income and spending, and employment demographics. The period under review was the 2017/18 financial year, or 2018 for those NGOs working on a calendar year. A longer period (2011–2018) was included for work contributing towards the expansion of land under conservation.

The programmatic work was divided into three overlapping categories: 1) habitat conservation; 2) species conservation; and 3) people and conservation. Six participating NGOs focused on one category, four focused on two, while three focused on all three categories. Habitat conservation was a focus for nine NGOs, species conservation was a focus for four, while people and conservation was a focus for 10 NGOs. Conservation strategies were developed by Boards of Trustees and senior managers but, although these roughly aligned with national priorities, this

alignment was not generally systematic. Conservation priorities were driven by a combination of factors including project legacy, perceived needs, organisational capacity and expertise, likely impact, and opportunity.

Measuring impact was sometimes difficult for NGOs when long time periods were needed to achieve results, when multi-organisation collaborations complicated the attribution of work, or when the causal links between interventions and impacts were tenuous. While activity indicators were measured for almost all conservation projects, outcome indicators (how projects affect the conservation problem of interest) were measured for 70% of projects, and impact indicators were measured for only 43% of projects.

The findings of this review demonstrate that NGOs contribute substantially to the persistence of numerous species and habitats and the life-giving services that they provide. The full report (which can be found [here](#)) provides an impressive list of accomplishments and demonstrates the huge value offered to donors and supporters of these organisations. As these NGOs represent only a small proportion of conservation organisations operating in South Africa, a detailed assessment of the contributions of all the conservation NGOs would likely demonstrate an extensive set of achievements. Results highlights are summarised in Tables 1–4.



Table 1. Key conservation contributions during the 2017/18 financial year

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Habitat conservation</p>	<p>Five NGOs made key contributions towards the expansion of terrestrial land under conservation, while two played pivotal roles in the expansion of marine protected areas. The total increases in area were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrestrial land acquired or declared Protected Areas with NGO assistance (2017/2018): 22,165 ha (with 642,217 ha under negotiation) • Marine Protected Areas declared with NGO assistance (2019): 4,547,900 ha
	<p>Eight NGOs invested in ecological infrastructure, such as through clearing invasive alien plants, rehabilitating wetlands, restoring buffers of natural vegetation in riparian areas, and improving rangeland management practices. Results included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total area restored: 12,441 ha • Benefits derived: water retention, erosion control, wetland rehabilitation, riparian restoration, water catchment management, forest restoration and flood attenuation • Total number people employed during 2018: 1,656
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Species conservation</p>	<p>Eight NGOs worked on species conservation, either directly with projects that primarily focus on species, or indirectly where the focus is habitat conservation or community upliftment, but where there are knock-on benefits for species conservation.</p>
	<p>Eight worked on <i>in situ</i> species conservation. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wild Dog (Endangered): managed metapopulation is stable • Cheetah (Vulnerable): managed metapopulation is increasing • Wattled Crane (Vulnerable): population size and breeding pairs increasing
	<p>Two worked on <i>ex situ</i> conservation. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pickersgill’s Reed Frog (Endangered): 600 frogs bred in captivity; 250 released in wild • Wattled Crane (Vulnerable): 2 captive-reared cranes successfully released into the wild • African Penguin (Endangered): poor current breeding success
	<p>Eight worked on illegal wildlife trade. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero rhino poaching in the 25 KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) private reserves assisted by NGOs • 24 community rhinos dehorned (impact hard to measure) • ~1 million people reached through social media demand reduction campaign in Vietnam (impact hard to measure)

Table 1. Key conservation contributions (continued)

People and conservation	<p>Eight NGOs contributed to work on the biodiversity economy. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 SMMEs and 15 cooperative businesses in ecotourism supported • 120 homestead gardens and 12 school gardens planted, with ~80% retention • ~800,000 visitors to oceanarium exposed to Western Indian Ocean biodiversity
	<p>Six NGOs contributed to biodiversity mainstreaming. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uptake of ecosystem-based adaptation concepts by three municipalities • 34 companies trained to use a standard of the Global Ecosystem Service Partnership
	<p>Six NGOs contributed to public engagement. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 140,000 children engaged in art projects • 17,000 children received general conservation education • 130 schools and 90 businesses established recycling collection points
	<p>Four NGOs contributed to foundational knowledge. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kruger Wild Dogs and Cheetah surveys conducted • 200 citizen scientists reported over 200,000 roadkill data points • Regional and/or national Red List assessments completed for 10 different taxa
	<p>Eight NGOs contributed towards training on conservation. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total people trained on SAQA accredited courses: 2,911 • Total people trained on non-SAQA accredited courses: 5,205

Table 2. Finance highlights for the 2017/2018 financial year

Income	<p>The total income for 12 of the participating NGOs during the 2017/2018 financial year was R498.7 million (~USD38 million), with 73.5% (± 33) of this being derived from South African funding sources. The main funding categories were donations and bequests (26% ± 37), trusts and foundations (15% ± 16), government (13% ± 21) and corporates (13% ± 26).</p>
Spending	<p>On average 79% (± 14) of NGO income was spent on direct programme costs (i.e. project expenses), including staff salaries, while the remaining 21% went towards support costs (overheads/administration costs). Direct programme costs were evenly divided between species conservation (34.6%), habitat conservation (33.5%), and people and conservation (31.9%).</p>

Table 3. Employment highlights for the 2017/2018 financial year

Employment	<p>The total number of permanent employees in the 13 participating NGOs at the end of June 2018 was 962, with an additional 1,656 short-term contract workers.</p>
	<p>Permanent employees: 9% senior management, 16% professionally qualified middle management, 27% technically skilled junior management, 21% semi-skilled, 16% unskilled and 11% interns.</p>

Table 4. Recommendations arising from the review

For NGOs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repeat the review (in streamlined format) on a regular basis. This will provide NGOs with a consistent way to evaluate their performances over time, monitor the work of other NGOs, provide information on the progress of conservation across South Africa, identify what conservation initiatives work (and what does not work), and keep the government informed. 2. Increase NGO participation in future reviews. The review would greatly benefit from the inclusion of a larger constituency of conservation NGOs, as this would ultimately make it more representative. This could be done through an independently run workshop to allow NGOs to debate the pros and cons of the process and help shape its future design. 3. Refine the methodology. This review was the first of its kind in South Africa and has provided some valuable initial insights into NGO contributions towards conservation. However, a substantial refinement of the data collection process is needed for future iterations to make the process less onerous for reporting NGOs. A possible solution to this would be the development of a simplified reporting framework for monitoring key biodiversity indicators. 4. Increase the measurement of conservation impact. Conservation impacts are sometimes challenging to measure, but NGOs need to make a greater effort in this regard. In cases where NGOs do not know exactly what their conservation impact is for a specific project, they should make this a deliverable to be determined during project implementation. 5. Measure cost effectiveness. Measuring cost effectiveness of projects is not a common practice among NGOs but will likely become increasingly necessary to obtain donor funding in future. Cost effectiveness could be incorporated into a reporting framework but will need an agreed common method for measurement.
For government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Support and participate in future iterations of the review: A standardised, refined and repeatable review process would provide the government with a relatively straightforward way of collating information on the contribution of NGOs to South Africa’s national conservation targets, which would assist with international reporting frameworks. Support from government would strengthen the perceived validity of the review and encourage other NGOs to participate. Participation in the process would allow the government to have a say in what information should be included, which would potentially make it more relevant to DEFF. 7. Strengthen partnerships between biodiversity stewardship programmes and NGOs: Given the important contribution that NGOs make to the biodiversity stewardship process, some of which were not captured in the current assessment, it is worth highlighting the statement made in <i>‘The business case for biodiversity stewardship’</i>¹ report that said that ‘partnerships between biodiversity stewardship programmes and NGOs should continue to be strengthened, building on the effectiveness of existing partnerships in the landscape’. 8. Continue to support the conservation efforts of NGOs: NGOs make substantial contributions to the conservation of threatened species, including rhinos, Wild Dogs, Cheetahs and Wattled Cranes, amongst others. NGOs encourage public engagement in conservation, lead the accumulation of relevant knowledge, increase capacity through training, create jobs and attract large amounts of funding.

¹ South African National Biodiversity Institute (Ed.). (2017). *The business case for biodiversity stewardship: A report produced for the Department of Environmental Affairs*. South Africa National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

Acknowledgements

The report was funded by the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, which is managed by Nedbank Private Wealth. It was developed by the Endangered Wildlife Trust and written by Andrew Taylor, Harriet Davies-Mostert, Yolan Friedmann and Claire Patterson-Abrolat.

External oversight was provided by Professor Barend Erasmus (University of Pretoria), Professor Emma Archer (University of Pretoria) and Dr Luthando Dziba (South African National Parks).

The South African National IUCN Committee provided critical feedback and recommendations during the review process.

The following NGOs are thanked for their efforts in participation: African Conservation Trust, Conservation South Africa, Delta Environmental Centre, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Institute of Natural Resources, Leadership for Conservation in Africa, National Association of Conservancies of South Africa, Peace Parks Foundation, South African Association for Marine Biological Research, Southern African Wildlife College, Wilderness Foundation, Wildlife ACT, WILDTRUST (WILDLANDS & WILDOCEANS).

We thank the following provincial biodiversity stewardship officers for assistance with biodiversity stewardship data: Garth Mortimer (Western Cape), Malaika Koali-Lebona (Eastern Cape), Ralph van der Poll (Northern Cape), Dave Hayter (Free State), Christina Seegers (Gauteng), Eric Ramatsea (Limpopo), Derrek Ruiters (KZN) and Brian Morris (Mpumalanga).

We also thank Kevin McCann (Conservation Outcomes) and Candice Stevens (Wilderness Foundation Africa) for useful discussions.

Recommended citation:

Taylor, W.A., Davies-Mostert, H.T., Friedmann, Y. and Patterson-Abrolat, C. 2019. *How NGOs count in conservation: A review of the role of NGOs in biodiversity conservation in South Africa*. The Endangered Wildlife Trust, Johannesburg, South Africa.

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