

WETLANDS



uMngeni Vlei, where the uMngeni river rises, is a 600ha wetland.

Wetlands are areas where water plays the dominant role in determining plant, bird and animal life within that environment.

In the past, wetlands were misunderstood and many were drained for agriculture, development and dams. Nowadays, the value of the ecosystem services they provide humanity is being increasingly

understood. A healthy wetland has richer species diversity than other eco-systems and plays an important role in traditional Africa culture with medicinal plants and spiritual beliefs.



They store water and release it at a steady rate through the year, have the ability to clean polluted water, are havens for wildlife, provide useful materials (eg reeds) and offer fishing, recreation and tourism opportunities too. Very often, wetlands are the birth place of rivers and streams, as in the case of uMngeni Vlei. They also help protect people and homes from floods by slowing down the flow of water through the landscape. Small wonder then, that there are many efforts in process to protect and restore them.

One such project is the midlands wetland rehabilitation project, funded by NLDTF and implemented by Eastern Wetland Rehabilitation.

This project aims to rehabilitate four wetlands in the Nottingham Road area, all of which are important for biodiversity, including the critically endangered Wattled Crane (*Buheranus carunculatus*).



It is for this reason that this project is acknowledged and fully supported by the Endangered Wildlife Trust's African Crane Conservation Programme Programme. Wetland rehabilitation often includes the construction of gabions and weirs that are carefully placed within the wetland to slow the flow of water and reinstitute wetland functioning. It is estimated that KwaZulu-Natal has lost the functioning and ecosystem services of approximately 50% of our wetlands. Wetland rehabilitation is slowly giving back some of the essential services wetlands are so effective at delivering.



Fortunately, uMngeni Vlei has not been transformed and is still able to fulfil the role of a well-functioning wetland supplying water to the uMngeni river and, in turn, to everyone who lives and works in the Howick, Wartburg, Eston, Pietermaritzburg and Durban areas.

uMngeni Vlei is classified as one of KZN's priority wetlands by wetland ecologists and is an Important Birding Area (Birdlife International recognition). Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, who manage the area, would like to obtain Ramsar status for it and are in the early stages of doing so. The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Source: <https://umngeniriverwalk.wordpress.com/2012/02/03/wetlands/>