

# Mistbelt Habitat Restoration Project

2024 PROJECT REPORT



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through our Forests for Life programme, The Greenpop Foundation forms long-term partnerships with small-scale, local organisations and provides support to plant trees, restore forest and woodland habitats, manage critical catchment areas, and improve the lives of communities that rely on forest resources in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since 2011, Greenpop has implemented forest and landscape restoration projects across **four countries**, with **230,299 trees** planted across **147 hectares**. Over this period we have collaborated with **15 implementation partners** in Sub-Saharan Africa and are currently actively implementing **four projects**. This annual project report focuses on one of those four projects: the **Mistbelt Habitat Restoration Project**.

In collaboration with the Cape Parrot Project (a project of the Wild Bird Trust), Greenpop has been implementing the Mistbelt Habitat Restoration Project since 2019. This project involves stakeholder engagement, alien vegetation management, assisted natural regeneration, enrichment tree planting and community engagement in order to improve land management and restore indigenous forests near Hogsback, South Africa.

In 2024, the Mistbelt Habitat Restoration Project introduced a new restoration site (8.4ha) in the Wolf River Forest, where 8.4 hectares are being restored through alien invasive plant management to prevent and reverse the spread of Black Wattle, natural regeneration, and, where necessary, the active planting of 5,000 indigenous tree seedlings. Natural regeneration and active planting will support the process of forest naturalisation, returning the forest to a state where it is able to provide ecosystem services and support to forest-dependent species, including endemic, endangered and rare species like the Cape Parrot. Alien vegetation management and natural regeneration also focused on riparian zones to repair and restore the function of rivers within the project area.



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# INTRODUCING THE MISTBELT HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT



The Mistbelt Habitat Restoration Project is a collaboration between the Cape Parrot Project (an initiative of the Wild Bird Trust) and the Greenpop Foundation. It aims to enhance land management and restore indigenous forests near Hogsback, South Africa.

The Cape Parrot Project focuses on conserving the endangered and endemic Cape Parrot through research, habitat restoration to increase availability, and community involvement. The Cape Parrot is endangered with approximately 1,800 individuals left in the wild. They, along with many other species, are dependent on the Mistbelt forest habitat. However, this habitat near Hogsback, Eastern Cape, has been degraded through historical logging; previous conversion to exotic pine plantations; and forest margin degradation through alien invasive plants. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) is mandated to restore this land but does not have enough resources to do so. Villages surrounding these Mistbelt forests are poor and depend on the forests for firewood, housing materials and bushmeat.

By improving forest land use, this project enhances several ecosystem services for local communities, including climate change adaptation, improved soil stability, increased species biodiversity, and reduced fire risk. Additionally, this project provides financial support to local communities by purchasing trees to be planted on restoration sites from community-based nursery growers; and by employing teams of local people to assist with project implementation.

The primary stakeholder for this project is the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), who have worked in collaboration on this project since 2017, aligning with the state's priority for forest restoration. The community of iZingcuka, with approximately 700 residents, is the second primary stakeholder. Engagement with this community is an active and ongoing aspect of the project, and began with local leaders attending a site visit with DFFE. The rural economy relies on natural resources, notably Black Wattle, harvested for subsistence and the pulp industry. Local leaders allocate harvesting areas and have been crucial in planning to ensure restored areas are protected from future harvesting. The project helps provide employment opportunities to the community through several different avenues.

Since 2019, this project has restored and managed **30.56 hectares** of protected Mistbelt forest land and planted **18,500 indigenous trees**.



# INTRODUCING THE PROJECT PARTNERS

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## THE GREENPOP FOUNDATION

Greenpop is an award-winning registered non-profit organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. We are dedicated to restoring ecosystems and empowering environmental stewards through forest restoration, urban greening, food gardening, and environmental awareness projects across Sub-Saharan Africa. Since our founding in 2010, we have planted over 200,000 trees and inspired more than 356,000 active citizens across South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania.

As a UN Decade Restoration Supporting Partner, Greenpop is recognised as a leader in practical ecosystem restoration with considerable impact in terms of hectares restored and people engaged.

Greenpop is also a 1% for the Planet Environmental Partner, which shows that we are a vetted environmental organisations working toward a wide array of solutions, from climate justice and urban infrastructure to gender equality; conservation policy to environmental education, and beyond.

## THE CAPE PARROT PROJECT

The Cape Parrot Project is an initiative of the Wild Bird Trust, committed to safeguarding the future of the Cape Parrot through conservation research, habitat restoration, and active community participation.

The Cape Parrot Project partners with communities to restore forest habitat. They do this by supporting community members to grow seedlings which the Project then buys back. Together with members of these local communities, they plant these seedlings back into appropriate degraded forest habitat. Through this, they strengthen local social-ecological resilience through creating livelihood opportunities in local communities that are dependent on a healthy ecosystem and their surrounding indigenous forest. The project also engages with schools in the nearby local communities for education drives for children to be agents of positive environmental change and increase appreciation for the indigenous forests and all the species that call these forests home.



# THEORY OF CHANGE

## WITHIN OUR MISTBELT HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT, WE...



PROVIDE FUNDING TO THE CAPE PARROT PROJECT (CPP), A PROJECT OF THE WILD BIRD TRUST

SUPPORT CPP IN FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION BEST PRACTICE



COLLABORATE WITH CPP TO CONDUCT TRANSPARENT AND EFFECTIVE MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING

## SO THE CAPE PARROT PROJECT CAN...

PLANT TREES (ACTIVE RESTORATION)

MANAGE NATURAL REGENERATION (PASSIVE RESTORATION)

MANAGE ALIEN VEGETATION & WILDFIRE

ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

ESTABLISH RESTORATION-RELATED EMPLOYMENT



**GROW TREES**  
IN DEGRADED FOREST PATCHES



**PROTECT FORESTS**  
FROM THREATS SUCH AS DEGRADATION, WILDFIRE, AND ILLEGAL LOGGING

INCREASE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND INCOME



**EMPOWER PEOPLE**  
TO STEWARD THEIR ENVIRONMENT & SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES

## IN ORDER TO...

UPLIFT COMMUNITIES

MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE

INCREASE THE HABITAT OF THE CAPE PARROT

AND RESTORE HEALTHY & SUSTAINABLE FOREST LANDSCAPES

# ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL & GLOBAL GOALS

## UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

Our work contributes to SDGs 13 (Climate Action) and 15 (Life on Land) through the restoration of forest ecosystems which are vital in combatting the impacts of climate change.



## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FORESTS (2017-2030)

Our work contributes to the Strategic Plan's Goal 1: Reverse forest cover loss & Goal 2: Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits by restoring forest ecosystems and working with local communities to identify economic opportunities related to forest restoration and conservation.



## UN DECADE ON ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

Our work contributes to Goal A - The integrity of all ecosystems is enhanced, with an increase of at least 15 per cent in the area, connectivity and integrity of natural ecosystems, supporting healthy and resilient populations of all species - of the UN Decade by strategically planting indigenous trees to restore connectivity to degraded forest ecosystems.



## BONN CHALLENGE

Our work contributes to the Bonn Challenge's goal to bring 350 million hectares of degraded and deforested landscapes into restoration by 2030 by restoring degraded forest landscapes.



## 10 NYDF GOALS

Our work contributes to the global effort aimed at bringing 350 million hectares of land under restoration activities by 2030 #5 "Restore forests" by restoring degraded forest landscapes.



## AFR100

Our work contributes to the AFR100 goal to bring 100 million hectares of land in Africa into restoration by 2030 by restoring degraded forest landscapes.



## DFFE 10 MILLION TREES PROGRAMME

Our work contributes to the DFFE initiative to plant 10,000,000 trees across South Africa to restore degraded forest ecosystems and landscapes.



## KUNMING-MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

Our work contributes to Goal A: Protect and Restore of the KMGBF by restoring degraded forest landscapes and educating local communities on the importance and benefits of protecting natural ecosystems.



# PROJECT LOCATION

The Mistbelt Habitat Restoration Project is located near Hogsback, Amathole District, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

**GPS: 32° 34' 60"S 26° 56' 60"E**

View our interactive map on [explorer.land](https://explorer.land).



# OUR RESTORATION APPROACH

This project utilises the Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) approach, which is the ongoing process of regaining ecological functionality and enhancing human well-being across deforested or degraded forest landscapes. FLR goes beyond merely planting trees; it involves restoring an entire landscape to meet present and future needs, offering multiple benefits and land uses over time.

Greenpop's specific approach to FLR involves ensuring that all species selected for planting are indigenous and endemic to the ecosystem and are sourced locally. Where possible we work with nurseries run by local community members, who collect seed stock from the local forest ecosystems in which we are working. We plant our seedlings in dense clusters, often with taller nurse trees, so as to mimic natural conditions as much as possible and to facilitate natural regeneration. We also support our planting by conducting alien vegetation management to ensure that the indigenous species have the strongest chance of survival.

Funding and implementing actions to restore degraded areas will eventually lead to improved forest management and associated co-benefits, such as:

- Biodiversity conservation by increasing habitat availability for forest-dependent species
- Enhanced soil stability and health
- Improved water regulation
- Increased carbon sequestration
- Economic benefits derived from eco-tourism and sustained forest productivity

Restoring forests and forest landscapes is a vital step in regaining the health and functionality of these ecosystems.



# COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Cape Parrot Project takes a holistic approach to community and stakeholder engagement, ensuring that stakeholders desires and concerns are both taken into account during project design and development. Specific community and stakeholder activities include:

- Meeting with all relevant stakeholders in the planning phase of the restoration work to ensure that activities are appropriately developed in the context of a multi-use landscape.
- Scoping community meetings with executive committee members of the local community to introduce the project, its aims and activities.
- Recruiting, training and employing community members to engage in restoration activities such as alien vegetation management and tree planting.
- Regular feedback meetings with executive community committee to keep community members updated on the status and progress of the project; and
- Establishing community nurseries from which trees for restoration activities can be sourced.

Restoration activities conducted by the Cape Parrot Project (CPP) in the area have generated temporary income-earning opportunities for community members and served as a platform for engagement on environmental matters. In 2021, a community nursery was established, allowing members to gain skills and earn income through the sale of indigenous tree seedlings. This project offers an opportunity for further engagement with the iZingcuka community, centred on ecological restoration. Over the years, we have learned that this community is well-organised and eager to participate, providing a valuable opportunity for this project to exemplify participatory forest restoration. Community members continue to play an active role throughout all stages of the project, from planning to monitoring and we look forward to leveraging existing engagements and the site's proximity to the village to pursue this process. A community liaison has been established to assist with coordination and ongoing community engagements.



# PROJECT OVERVIEW

The primary focus of the Mistbelt Habitat Restoration Project involves activities such as alien vegetation clearing management, community engagement, and the annual planting of up to 5,000 indigenous trees to restore the natural habitat of the endemic Cape Parrot species. Since the project's inception it has expanded to include several of the local Mistbelt forests found in the Amathole region, including Auckland, Bowden, and Wolf River. The addition of these forests has enabled the project to create greater connectivity between the degraded and disparate forest patches that have been steadily degraded over time as a result of industrial and community activities.

Significant areas within these forests have become increasingly degraded due to the spread of alien invasive plants (AIPs), specifically Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*). While this species plays an important role in providing firewood and building materials for local communities, it is an aggressive invader, resulting in various adverse ecological impacts when unmanaged. This informal commercial market has led to the clear-cutting of mature Wattle stands along forest edges and river banks. While the socio-economic value derived from the use of this invasive species is significant, the unmanaged nature of this harvesting threatens to reverse the forest naturalisation underway within these mature Wattle stands and drive aggressive secondary invasion.



# MONITORING & EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Monitoring and Evaluation tools for the project include vegetation, soil, and water monitoring methodologies, satellite data, fixed-point photography, and records maintained by project managers (e.g., purchase and activity records). Vegetation monitoring was conducted by CPP staff using methodologies collaboratively developed by Greenpop and CPP. These methodologies assess vegetation cover and tree growth, including height, basal circumference, and canopy diameter, according to an established schedule. Soil monitoring was performed by external researchers in collaboration with the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of Fort Hare, and CPP staff, and included basic tests to determine water infiltration and percolation rates. Additionally, fixed-point photographs are captured by CPP to visually document changes in the landscape over time. Out of the field, Greenpop is able to access satellite data to determine indicators such as the Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) for the site over time, through the Restor platform.





# 2020-2024 IN NUMBERS

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
<b>TREES PLANTED</b>	2,500	NA	6,000	5,000	5,000	18,500
<b>HA UNDER RESTORATION</b>	1.56	NA	17	3.5	8.41	30.56
<b># OF SPECIES PLANTED</b>	14	NA	14	12	23	23
<b>COMMUNITIES CONSULTED</b>	1	NA	1	2	3	3
<b>LOCAL PEOPLE EMPLOYED</b>	8	NA	8	10	30	30
<b>COMMUNITY NURSARIES</b>	1	NA	1	2	3	3
<b>GROWERS SUPPORTED</b>	14	NA	14	39	43	43
<b>CAPE PARROT SIGHTINGS</b>	93	NA	140	169	200	602



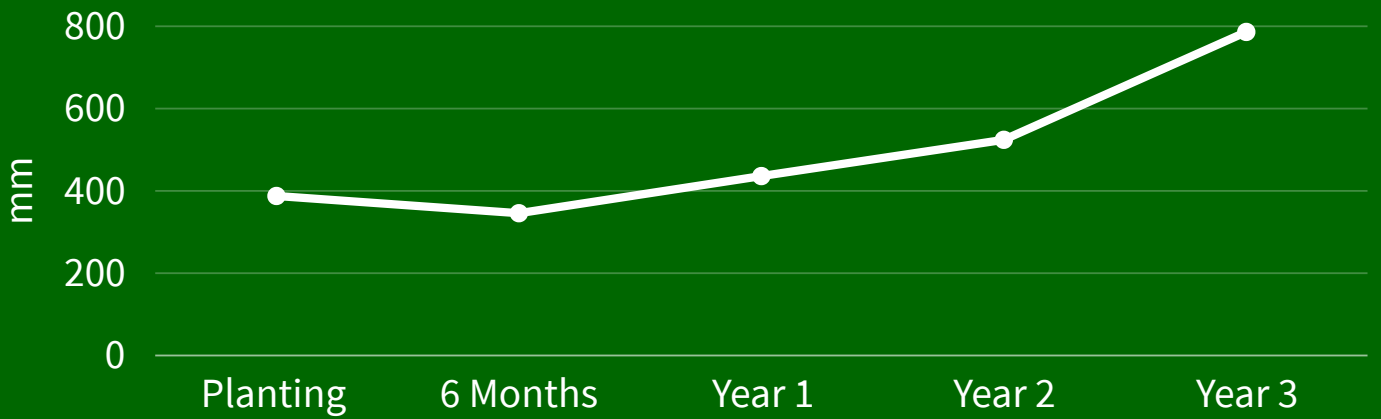
# MONITORING RESULTS ACROSS ALL SITES



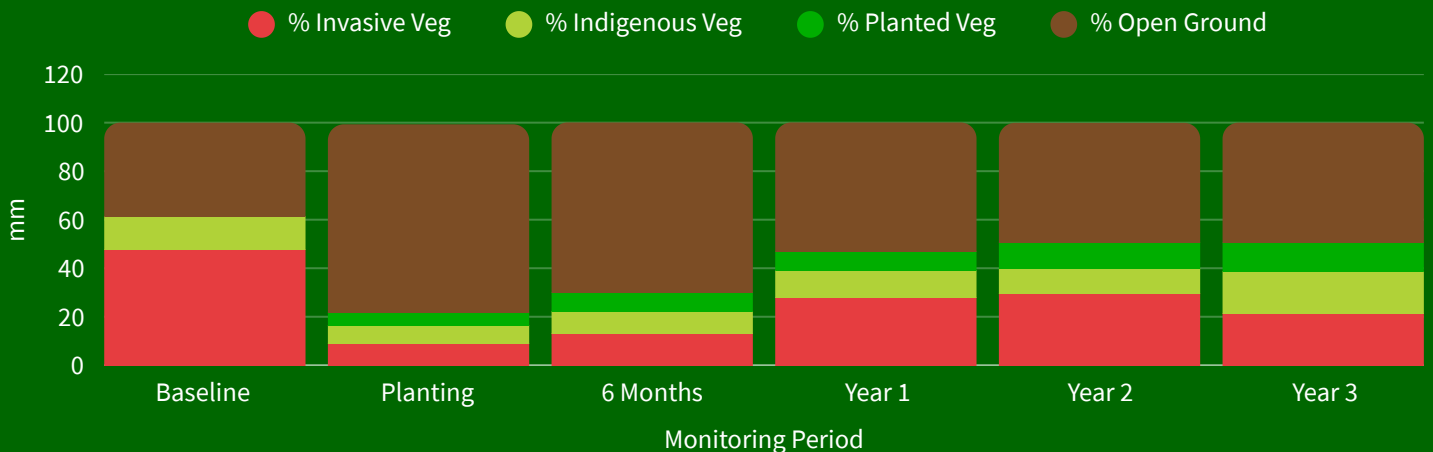
## TREE HEIGHT



## CANOPY DIAMETER



## VEGETATION COVER



# MISTBELT HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT STATUS

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The forest restoration work conducted under this project has resulted in project sites with evident decreases in the density of invasive alien stands, increased growth of planted trees and increased ground cover. These observations are supported by monitoring data which show that the planted tree height and canopy cover have increased and the proportion of invasive species and bare ground cover have decreased since project inception, while the proportion of ground cover comprising indigenous species has increased. These are promising signs of the ecological recovery of the project sites.

Swales created to improve water availability show evidence of moisture retention while the ground cover species planted on swale berms have also taken well and are contributing to promoting soil stability and health on the site.

While the management of alien invasives primarily involves their removal, enough trees have been retained to sustain the nurse stand function they have often played in the ecosystem, and are gradually thinned over subsequent years. Shade intolerant indigenous species planted within created canopy gaps do well, and tend to create pockets of green across the site, which we hope will attract pollinators and seed dispersers to the site as they mature. These clusters also provide a good space to introduce indigenous mycorrhiza into the soil.

The local community has been engaged through every phase of the project, and continues to be, from site scoping and selection through to implementation. With the informal commercial-scale harvesting of mature Black Wattles (amabokoboko) currently rife across the Eastern Cape, this project provides a model for how areas affected by this extractive activity can be rehabilitated following felling activities in conjunction with the communities who are also engaged with/benefit from amabokoboko role players.



# CLOSING WORDS

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE PROJECT

The Mistbelt Forest Restoration Project has been instrumental for the Cape Parrot Project (CPP) in planting 18,500 trees as part of their efforts towards Cape Parrot and Mistbelt Forest habitat conservation. The project facilitates multiple sites within an overarching Mistbelt forest conservation programme, enabling broad and cohesive planning that centres on community engagement. This focus has significantly contributed to the growth of CPP's work and the expansion of the CPP team.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH GREENPOP

CPP has developed a strong relationship with Greenpop, which has facilitated collaborative work and supported CPP's global contributions, such as the Bonn Challenge and the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. Our partnership provides access to resources and supports the development and refinement of our monitoring and evaluation programme.

## HOW THINGS WENT IN 2024

Thanks to the support of our donors, CPP were able to implement a number of restoration activities in 2024. This included addressing the restoration needs of a community site, which is part of a substantial forest area and an important area for Cape Parrots, and providing ongoing employment opportunities for under-resourced communities in Hogsback. Restoration activities in this site had a focus on riparian zone restoration and aimed to promote continuous growth and development of processes, including soil stabilisation, direct seed sowing, and innovations in seedling protection, as well as an improved utilisation of biomass to assist the community with firewood. Community support included steps towards building and strengthening relationships with community leaders, leading to achieving the highest level of community engagement to date, and supporting development work at community-run nurseries.

## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

CPP plan to build on the work completed in 2024 by continue linking existing FFL1 sites through ongoing restoration, focusing on three key Cape Parrot forests in the Hogsback area - Hogsback State, Wolf River, and Auckland Forest Reserve - and conducting ongoing maintenance and monitoring to ensure the continued success of these sites. Furthermore, CPP aim to revamp and rebuild all three community nurseries for better long-term sustainability and to engage with a broader range of stakeholders.



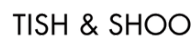
# THANK YOU

## PLEDGE PARTNERS

The Greenpop Foundation is proud to be partnered with the following donors who have all pledged to support our forest restoration work on a monthly/quarterly basis. The consistent and ongoing support from these companies allows us to plan our restoration impacts and financial budgets accurately each year. We couldn't do it all without these partners who have made a pledge towards a greener world.



Naked



Our Teachers. Our Future.



Two-Way Street



# THANK YOU



# THANK YOU

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## NOTEWORTHY DONORS

In 2024, we give special thanks to a few of our notable Pledge Partners who have contributed significantly to our Forest Restoration work. Your support allows us to push the boundaries of impact in the work that we do.



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## INDIVIDUAL AND ONCE-OFF DONORS

And a HUGE thank you to the countless individuals and businesses who supported this programme through once-off donations, monthly donations, Tree Certificates, green gifting purchases, GivenGain campaigns and more in 2024.

Every single donation is seen and appreciated, and we are grateful for all of the trust and support that we receive from our TREEvolutionary community.

Together we have been able to make an incredible impact.