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Greenpop's Eden Festival of Action 2019 has concluded and it was a great success!

On Saturday the 22nd of June, we welcomed our first group of participants starting the 3 weeks of action at the Eden Festival of Action at Wild Spirit Lodge in Nature's Valley. It has been an impactful time filled with tree-planting, alien vegetation clearing, eco-education, and fun, inspirational activities.

With the slogan of 'here to grow, here to build', the mission at the heart of Greenpop's annual Festival of Action aims to inspire people to get active, not anxious about the future of our planet. As is the nature of most of our work, this is centred around the planting of indigenous trees. This year, like last, we are focusing our efforts on The Garden Route, in response to the 2017 Knysna fires that burned much of the forests. Our goal was to plant 4500 trees in the area over the course of three weeks, and we exceeded that by planting 5000 indigenous trees!

Reforestation

We planted trees at a few different locations within the Garden Route over this 3-week project. The sites selected were the Heartland's School of Self Sufficiency, Garden Route Botanical Garden's and Wild Spirit Backpackers Lodge. Our first big planting day was at Heartland School of Self-Sufficiency. It was our second time planting at this site and it was amazing to see how much the 1780 trees we planted last year have grown. It was especially exciting for the attendees and team who participated in last year's festival to witness the results of their hard work. The Keurboom trees, a pioneer species, showed particular growth and have grown 2 meters in the last year. The area was originally covered with eucalyptus and pine trees which burnt down in the 2017 fires. Invasive bracken fern took hold and had to be cleared before the reforestation activities started. We successfully planted 1500 trees at Heartlands.

The planting site at Wild Spirit was originally covered in invasive Eucalyptus and Black Wattle trees and these were cleared to make way for 1500 indigenous trees. Wild Spirit is on the edge of the Tsitsikamma forest and so this reforestation project serves to expand the native forest and habitat. The forest is home to many important key species including the Leopard, Vervet Monkey, Bushbuck, Large-Spotted Genet and the Clawless Otter.

We had a fantastic community effort in week two of the programme at the Garden Route Botanical Gardens on George and with the support of volunteers from Cape Nature and 29 open day participants, we planted a whopping 1000 trees - our biggest day of planting yet!

Panel Discussion with eco-restoration expert, filmmaker and ecologist John D. Liu A Dialogue session - Restoring Ecosystems and Self

In week 3 at the Eden Festival of Action, we hosted ecologist, filmmaker and educator John D. Liu after years of research into ecosystem restoration. He is working to instigate a worldwide movement around the creation of Ecosystem Restoration Camps and was interested in joining us in the Garden Route as he feels that the model we are using could be key in the development of his vision for these camps. We were also extremely excited to host him and learn from him as an expert in the field. We celebrated the opportunity to learn from John last Thursday when we held a talk and panel with him and 4 other experts: Matthew Koehorst of Six Kingdoms, permaculture expert Timothy Wigley, Siyabulela Sokomani of Shoots and Roots and Anna Breytenbach of AnimalSpirit with our Head of Programmes Zoë Gauld-Angelucci moderating the discussion. We harvested questions from our audience of keen environmentalists, and the discussions that arose around the themes of mass reforestation, sustainable farming and the importance of cultural inclusivity in environmental action were highly inspiring. John stated "What I love about Greenpop is that it looks like an ecological restoration camp" - an exciting statement as Greenpop looks towards ongoing restoration projects. As the UN Environment has declared the decade of restoration John D. Liu's words of "We either restore the earth or we face the consequences." ring true to new data that has recently emerged showing that planting trees is one of the simplest and best ways to mitigate the effects of climate breakdown.

We hope that the people who attended the panel discussion - our team, our participants, our hosts at Wild Spirit Backpackers Lodge and everyone who came to visit for the day - will walk away and feel empowered to continue these conversations and action in their own lives, and within their own communities.

Workshops at The Craggs Primary School

The participants also had the opportunity to partake in a variety of activities at The Craggs Primary School in Plettenberg Bay last week. We painted our first Art for Awareness mural of the festival on-site at the school, in collaboration with the students there. The project began with a workshop in partnership with Nature's Valley Trust which included a walk to the beach in search of first-hand inspiration. The participants then made drawings of the marine life that is found in the kelp biome and these drawings were incorporated into the mural design by artist Chris Auret. Chris facilitated the experience and encouraged the students to find creative inspiration within our beautiful marine ecosystems as well as within themselves. The mural should serve as a permanent reminder to the children of Plettenberg Bay, and the wider community, of the beauty, value and importance of our marine ecosystems. Chris will also be facilitating the painting of two further murals throughout the festival: one at George Botanical Gardens (which is already underway) and the other at Buffelsbaai Caravan Park. Together, we've painted 60 metres squared of the mural so far.

Candice Mostert of Waste-Ed also hosted a workshop on eco and natural building methods at The Craggs Primary School. She taught attendees how to build using eco-bricks (plastic bottles stuffed with non-recyclable materials) and earth in combination with traditional cob building methods. The participants built a beautiful bench for the school to use for years to come. Together with Waste-Ed, we've been encouraging a zero-waste mindset at the festival, with a recycling station and eco-bricks at the ready. In addition to these workshops, we also planted ten trees at the school as part of our Urban Greening programme. The school's students got involved and we hope that future generations of students will also benefit from a greener learning environment.

Beach Clean Ups with Nature's Valley Trust

In Week 1 and 2, our participants had the opportunity to join Nature's Valley Trust for a beach clean up. Representatives from the trust informed them about the negative effects of microplastics on the environment, with particular emphasis on nurdles - small plastic pellets that are used as building blocks to create larger plastic objects.

Nature's Valley Trust is working to survey the plastics they find in the area, as well as monitoring the people who visit, so they can gain a better understanding of where the plastics are coming from.

Learning about the benefits of plant-based food with ProVeg South Africa

We had an informative plant-based cooking demo and workshop from Risha Naidoo and her team at ProVeg South Africa. They introduced us to plant-based alternatives and showed us how to make some delicious plant-based meals!

Our delicious plant-based meals have been made possible with support from ButtaNut, Urban Vegan, AGT Foods, Eureka Mills, Good Hope Soya Milk, B-well, Soaring Free Superfoods, Outcast Foods, Thyme and Again, Quarry Lake Foods, Royston Farms, Mlimi Farm, and Grain Mill.

A big thank you also to Arise Coffee (the coffee that plants trees) for helping us wake up, strong and ready to dig in!

Art for Awareness - Collaborative Mural Painting with Artist Chris Auret

Within The Art for Awareness programme, we painted three collaborative and eco-educational murals within the Garden Route, under the banner of "To We, From Me" and facilitated and run by artist Chris Auret with assistance from Elsabe Vosloo and Yanna Romano. The murals were then co-created with over 120 people placing their mark and upliftment on the artworks. The mural project started in the first week with an incredible workshop in partnership with Nature's Valley Trust – including a walk to the beach to find ocean objects and inspiration for the mural content. The kids then drew marine life that focused on the kelp biome and these drawings were incorporated into the mural design at

the first mural site at the Craggs Primary School. The school was thrilled with this beautiful artwork inspiring marine conservation. The second mural at the Garden Route Municipality was an incredible design depicting an afro-montane forest scene featuring fauna and flora indigenous to the area with the collaborative muralists all filling in various sections divided by a mandala. The end result is magical! The attendees also all had a great time painting a mural with a message in Buffelsbaai with support from the municipality. The seaside mural encourages viewers to protect our marine ecosystems by not littering and reconsidering plastic.

Thank you so much to B-Earth Eco Paint & Build-It, for supplying us with the resources to create these bright and inspiring artworks. And thank you to Cape Nature & Animal Spirit, for supporting our waste-education and Art for Awareness project.

Workshops

A couple of specialised naturalists joined us to discuss their specific areas of interest. Francois Bekker, otherwise known as Scone, shared his expertise as a mycologist and taught us all about the world of fungi whilst Layla Staegemann gave a number of inspiring talks about the lives of bees and the essential role they play in our ecosystems. Layla is highly skilled in engaging an audience and I know many of our participants, in week two, in particular, left Layla's talk with a newfound love and respect for our winged friends.

Interspecies communicator Anna Breytenbach also encouraged us to connect with our animal spirit and offered an alternative insight into environmental issues. She shared her concerns over the impact we're having on non-human lives and how important it is for us to reconnect with the plants and animals we share our home with. She offered a number of workshops on interspecies communication over the course of the event.

We also had an interactive workshop on social enterprise from Activate Change Drivers, equipping people to be innovative active citizens, influencing and provoking positive change. Blake Dyason hosted The Mind-Blowing Benefits of being a Nature Steward. As the founder of Love our Trails and co-founder of Brownie Points, he inspired attendees to put our planet first.

Scholarships

Thanks to the generosity of Garden Route Rebuild Initiative, Knysna Municipality, Bitou Municipality, and Cape Nature we were able to host 33 local youth during the first week of the Festival of Action through a scholarship scheme. Many of the scholars responded with great feedback after the week. When asked what she learned at the festival, Anikyle Davids from Plettenberg Bay Secondary School answered "I learnt quite a lot. If you care for the earth, for the environment, it doesn't mean you aren't cool or something. It's just that you are trying to make a better life for you, and the next generation to come. And that changing the way you live isn't a bad thing". Sahara Tagunna who is homeschooled answered 'I learnt that together we can make a very very big difference' and Somila Macakela from Murray

High School said 'We must protect our nature'. It was made clear to us throughout the week (particularly during our Speaker Evening where everyone is invited to speak for 5 minutes on a topic of their choice) that all the young people who joined us are already on a firm path to becoming the next generation of change-makers and custodians of our natural planet. We were honoured to be surrounded by so many inspiring and forward-thinking individuals.

During the Eden Festival of Action 2019, we've...

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- Planted 5000 indigenous trees were planted of over 30 species including Yellowwood, Keurboom, Cape Beech, Ironwood, False Ash, Cape Olive and many more.
- Eaten Over 9000 plant-based meals were served by the conscious kitchen team.
- Cleared 3000m² of alien vegetation was cleared at the Wild Spirit Backpackers Lodge & the surrounding area.
- Painted 3 collaborative environmental murals with a total surface area of 104m², by volunteers and led by artist, Chris Auret.
- Hosted 12 open days were held with over 80 volunteers from the local community.
- Saved 70 bags of resources from landfill
- 420 eco-bricks were filled with non-recyclable waste, used to make x2 giant game board sets and x1 ecobrick and earth bench
- 2 beach plastics surveys took place with Nature's Valley Trust at Natures Valley Beach, as part of their ongoing research to understand the nature of the plastics problem on a local level. A total of 715 nurdles, 2365 microplastics, 100 cigarette butts were found!
- 41 scholarship students from the local community joined and participated in the event
- All with over 200 participants.

All with the help of over 200 participants!