



## 1 SITE VISITS

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Following the thematic discussion breakaway groups, delegates were given the opportunity to visit three of KwaZulu Natal's most successful People and Parks Programme initiatives. These included visiting iSimangaliso Wetland Park, Nselweni Bush Camp, and Somkhanda Game Reserve.

The purpose of these visits was to see examples of successful co-management agreements between communities and parks. The visits were intended to offer inspiration and best practice learning to the delegates. Delegates were given an opportunity to ask questions to community representatives benefiting from the agreements and to the park officials. Information sharing and a tour of each site's tourist attractions were made, allowing delegates to learn and enjoy the offerings of the protected areas.

### 1.1 iSimangaliso Wetland Park

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park was listed as South Africa's first UNESCO World Heritage Site in December 1999 for recognition of its natural beauty and unique biodiversity. The 332 000 hectare Park contains three lake systems, eight interlinking ecosystems, 700 year old fishing traditions, most of South Africa's remaining swamp forests, Africa's largest estuarine system, 526 bird species and 25 000 year-old coastal dunes – among the highest in the world. The name iSimangaliso means miracle and wonder.

The iSimangaliso Authority was set up to manage the Park, created from 16 different parcels of land – a patchwork of state-owned land, commercial forests and former military sites. These sites have exceptional biodiversity, ecological processes and scenic beauty. iSimangaliso also contains four wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

iSimangaliso has 220 kms of coastline, bringing together five ecosystems and ten unique destinations: Maphelane, Lake St Lucia, Cape Vidal and the Eastern Shores, Charters Creek and the Western Shores, False Bay, Sodwana Bay, uMkhuze, Lake Sibaya, Coastal Forest and Kosi Bay.

Park establishment programs have seen the removal of some 12 000 ha of alien plants and commercial forests. Wetland and dune rehabilitation programs, the introduction of game, runway upgrades, the building of new roads, game fences, new water supply and bulk electricity supply systems and substations have all contributed to building the new Park.

During the People and Parks Conference 2010 there was a signing of agreements between land claimants and iSimangaliso which took place on the banks of Lake St Lucia estuary on 30 August 2010. After extensive negotiations, two co-management agreements with community land claimants were signed and eight land-owning communities received their revenue-sharing cheques valued between R40 000 and R299 388. The event was broadcast live on SABC 2's Morning Live show on the Day 2 of the conference.



At the time of the establishment of the Park, it was 100% under claim but 75% of claims have now been settled. Title deeds have passed from the State to these new land-owners with restrictions in title including that the land remains under formal conservation and part of the Park forever. Principles of economic viability, financial sustainability and holistic management are incorporated in the settlement agreements.

## 1.2 Nselweni Bush Camp

The Nselweni Bush Camp was officially handed over to the communities surrounding Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park on the 10th of December 2009. Nselweni bush camp is situated in the Umfolozi sector of the Park. The camp was built as a joint venture with members of the surrounding community and funded in part by the Conservation Levy one pays when visiting the Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park. Ten communities benefit from the building of the bush camp through a beneficiary trust fund set up so that communities bordering the park benefit directly from the bush camp.

The communities chose to save the money earned from the Conservation Levy in order to accumulate enough funds to develop an entrepreneurial project that could create jobs for the community members. Three million rand earned from this revenue and an additional R 4 million rand provided by the Department of Environment provided seed funding to develop the bush lodge. Nselweni is the first community –funded bush lodge in the park.

The Nselweni Bush Camp is one of the most sophisticated examples of good governance in the People and Parks Programme. The Amakhosi, who own and manage the project, admitted that they had to learn to “operate above politics” in order to progress.

## 1.3 Somkhanda Game Reserve

Somkhanda Game Reserve is the fruit of a successful land claim made by the Gumbi community for 20 000 hectares bordering the Pongola Biosphere Reserve. The Somkhanda Game Reserve is located between Mkuze and Pongola towns in KwaZulu-Natal. Somkhanda is a Community Conservation Area born from a community decision to develop a game reserve because the habitat and low rainfall is not good for livestock or agriculture. Some land was also set aside for housing and subsistence farming for the community and they have a partnership in place with the eLan property group, who plan to develop an estate on 200 hectares of land. Money from the estate will go into the management of the reserve.

Advising the Gumbi community (which comprises about 650 families) is the former regional land claims commissioner, Thabi Shange, who is now consulting to communities. The Somkhanda community conservation area is working well because the traditional leaders have come together and are co-operating with one another. They have also put all the financial checks and balances in place, and opened themselves to partnerships that are helping to make a success of their claim.

In partnership with The Green Trust, WWF and The Wildlands Conservation Trust (which specialises in community-based conservation and tourism development), Somkhanda Game Reserve is now open for tourism. In addition to the employment opportunities offered by the



reserve, the community is employed in bush clearing and alien plant control initiatives inside and outside the reserve. A major boost to the reserve was the introduction of Black Rhino through WWF's Black Rhino Range Expansion Project. Through support from the WWF the Somkhanda Game Reserve protects 11 Black Rhino.