

Autumn

The swallows are gathering on the lines for their epic (zero carbon emissions) journey north. The rains come less often - everyone pays anxious attention to the levels of the dams, harvests food and looks forward to sun-filled days to use their sun stoves.

Lesson of the Season

One of the joys of working for the Midlands Meander is the bullfrog croaking contentedly while you check your emails. Another treat is the Woolly-necked Stork peering through the window during meetings. Right outside our office is a pond, which, when the Admin block at Midmar was built, was part of a water feature which included a splendid sheet of water cascading over the balcony from the office above. Nowadays, the waterfall is dry and the pond left to its own devices.

To celebrate Water Week, we invited the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife staff to join us for some fun in our own back yard. To ensure everyone was in a wild watery mood, Ntombentle and Éidín got them moving – creating ‘a thunder storm’ with sounds and actions and then playing a colourful game called ‘Dead Fish’ which illustrated the effects of pollution on water creatures.

Next Nkanyiso and Julia encouraged everyone to take off their shoes and get their feet wet. After explaining how to use the Mini-SASS system to test the quality of the water, everyone set about hunting, scooping and whooping with delight when a treasure was discovered in the pond. A big bronze dragonfly whizzed overhead, tiny frogs plopped and even a fish was spotted. Everyone loved the water-boatmen and was fascinated by the tiny mayfly nymphs and wiggly tadpoles. We were all surprised to find 13 different species in this small area, obviously the water lilies, sedges and grasses are perfect habitats for thriving pond life.

Then it was time to settle in the shade of the tree where Charlene & Laila narrated a story about a small boy who goes on a journey to discover what is polluting the water near his village. Along the way he meets a taxi driver, who helps him get to the source of the pollution in a township far away. There they meet a community gardener, who has noticed the effect the polluted water has had on her crops and points out a factory which discards chemical waste into the river. Each character was portrayed by one of the Midmar staff who dressed up and acted out their roles to the delight of everyone else. There was no ending to the story – everyone came to the conclusion that the solutions are up to us. We must take action when we see someone polluting water. Water is precious, Water is life!



Our vision is to help Midlands' schools nurture capable, confident, curious children who are sensitive to environmental issues, who have the resilience to cope with a changing world and are able to contribute positively to their communities.



Jeffries discovering the life in our pond

"I grew up in the hills where the river was sweet and I know how important it is to take care of water"

Jeffries Cebekhulu

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Meat Out Day

It's no secret that eating lower on the food chain can have a significant effect on reducing your impact on the planet. On March 20, thousands of caring people around the world hosted events for Meat Out Day - the world's largest grassroots diet education campaign. Activists ask their friends, families, and neighbours to "kick the meat habit" and explore a wholesome, compassionate diet of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The Bugs don't eat animals much anyway, used the opportunity to celebrate the abundance of autumn produce available at the moment.

Bongi was fortunate to be able to gather all her ingredients right outside the kitchen door for a delicious garden salad of green beans, cherry tomatoes, spring onions, butter lettuce, and podded red speckled beans and enjoyed in the shade of a *Celtis africana* tree. Gugu enjoyed a quiche made with fresh farm eggs, a butternut picked in the veggie garden and Underberg cheese beside the mist belt forest (where the Cape Parrots live). Poor Superbug was stuck in Richards Bay, too hot to think, let alone cook, and simply nibbled on a few rice cakes! Isijingi and imifino were on the menu at Icimbi's house – all grown in her garden too. Lucky Snehlanhla was in the 'Berg and shared her feast of roasted brinjal, peppers, onions and pasta with friends and a magnificent view, while Cebo rustled up a scrumptious butternut lasagne for her family.

A meat based diet uses vast amounts of water, lots of fossil fuels and adds greenhouse gasses to the atmosphere. It has never been easier to become a vegetarian, and there have never been more compelling reasons to make that choice as evidence of environmental, social and health impacts of a meat based diet are piling up. Start by supporting Meat Free Mondays and become a "Flexitarian"- before you know it, you'll be helping to save the planet simply by eating more colourful, healthful and enjoyable food.



Lindiwe Mkhize in the fabulous food garden we created for her on 10:10:10 last year. She has eaten fresh vegetables every day this summer and been able to share with her neighbours in Mpophomeni too.

Bug Grub

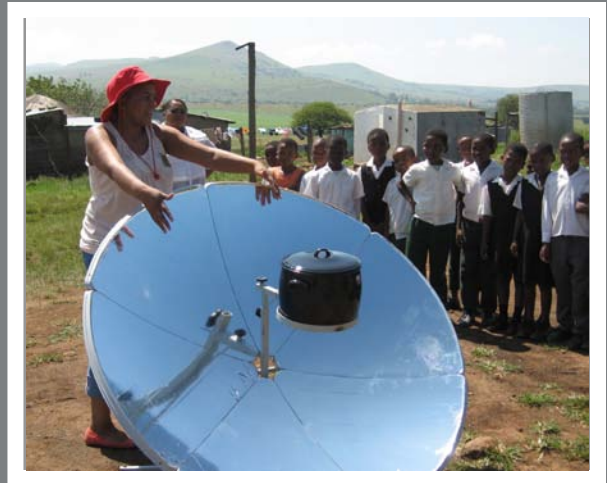
- Eat lower on the food chain
- Local is definitely lekker
- Savour what's in Season
- Include many colours on your plate
- Go gentle on the junk
- Learn to love leftovers
- Support local farmers
- Grow your own
- Ask butterfly@mmaep.co.za for some yummy pumpkin recipes!

School of the Season

When the Bugs arrived at Vrystaat food garden this year they could hardly believe their eyes. They immediately set off on a treasure hunt, discovering tomatoes, tall spinach, beetroot, green peppers, enormous brinjals (see below), and unearthing fat orange pumpkins too!

This little school has many challenges with water, energy and soil so the harvest was nothing short of miraculous after many years of steady effort and lots (and lots) of mulching. The Bugs headed for the kitchen to help the cooks incorporate the vegetable treasures into the usual school lunch of cabbage, potatoes or dried beans cooked on smoky, open fires. The unfamiliar brinjals posed a particular challenge as no one was quite sure what to do with them until the Bugs suggested chopping finely and hiding them in the soup!

On their next visit the Bugs brought along a big surprise – a Solar Cooker donated by Nedbank. With the help of the teachers and a few spanners, Laila set it up and demonstrated how hot it gets by setting a piece of paper on fire, much to everyone's astonishment. In the classroom, Julia and Ntombentle taught a lesson on water which is a precious resource in this area – particularly during winter when the tanks run dry.



After a song about the many uses of water, they learned about the water cycle and were invited outside to see the “water vapour” emerging from the big black pot on the huge silver parabolic cooker, even though it was a cloudy day.

Previously, as part of a nutrition lesson, learners had cooked *imifino* in a small sunstove, but quickly realised that this ‘alien thing’ was a lot different. Laila explained how it was just as dangerous as an ordinary stove and that no one should touch it. The fascinated children quickly established a healthy respect for this strange ‘flying saucer’ and the power of the sun.

“I have never seen this thing. It will be so useful to cook slow things like samp and beans. We can also use it to boil water for tea or washing and save electricity. I want to have one for myself.”

NOKUTHULA KUBEKA - TEACHER



2011 begins in BUG HEAVEN

After an energetic start at our Big Bug Imbizo held at Zulu Falls earlier this year, the Bugs have set about their tasks with expected enthusiasm. Louine is comfortably in position as Queen Bee and we have a new worker Bug too. Cebo Cricket is Julia Colvin, Queen of the Midlands single-track, often spotted whizzing through the plantations or along country roads with her favourite two wheeled companion. After travelling extensively, she is determined to re-grow her Midlands roots, learn to produce food organically and live a wholesome, carbon neutral life. She has a natural affinity for animals and spends much time tending to the needs of furred and feathered creatures.

Four new schools have signed up for a little Bug Magic this year. There is tiny Silindile Primary in Fort Nottingham which has got a good food garden going. Big Injoloba High School, with 918 learners situated beside the uMngeni River in Howick, and Nottingham Road Primary who are keen to learn all about Permaculture. Al Kajee in Mooi River has been an Eco-School for a while and this year we'll be helping ensure they earn their Big International Green Flag.

The Zenzane Enviro Club is a new addition to the Bug family too. Eco-enthusiastic learners from Asithutuke, King's and Nottingham Road schools meet monthly in the Balgowan valley.

We are delighted to be able to spread the Eco-Magic in the Midlands.

**With love from The Bugs:
Siza the Spider,
Superbug, DoodleBug,
Gugu the Grasshopper, Masechaba the
Mayfly, Charles the Chameleon,
iCimbi Caterpillar, Bhekisile the Beetle,
Cebo Cricket & Bongki the Butterfly**

During Autumn we enjoy pink clouds as the sun rises and afternoon walks across golden grasslands - listening to the sound the wind makes ruffling through the tall grass awaiting harvest.

