



FRIENDS OF THE BIOSPHERE

2024 - 2025 REPORT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. FOREWORD.....	2
2. INTRODUCTION TO FOB.....	3
2.1 THE GCBR CONNECTION	3
2.2 ABOUT THE FOB PROGRAMME.....	4
2.3 FOB PILOT - JULY 2024 TO SEPTEMBER 2024.....	5
2.4 FOB LAUNCH - OCTOBER 2024.....	6
3. FOB IN REVIEW	7
3.1 PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH.....	7
3.2 OVERVIEW OF HEROES AND FRIENDS.....	11
3.3 FOB IMPACT	23
4. EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION	24



1. FOREWORD

It is with immense pride and gratitude that we present the inaugural Friends of the Biosphere Impact Report 2024 to 2025 to you. It encapsulates the journey of the Friends of the Biosphere Programme (FOB) from conception to the present.

We hope you will immerse yourself in its contents and derive as much inspiration from the FOB as we do. This initiative is proof that there is so much we can all do with innovative thinking and collaboration.

Linda Fletcher & Antonnet Botha

FOB Programme Team



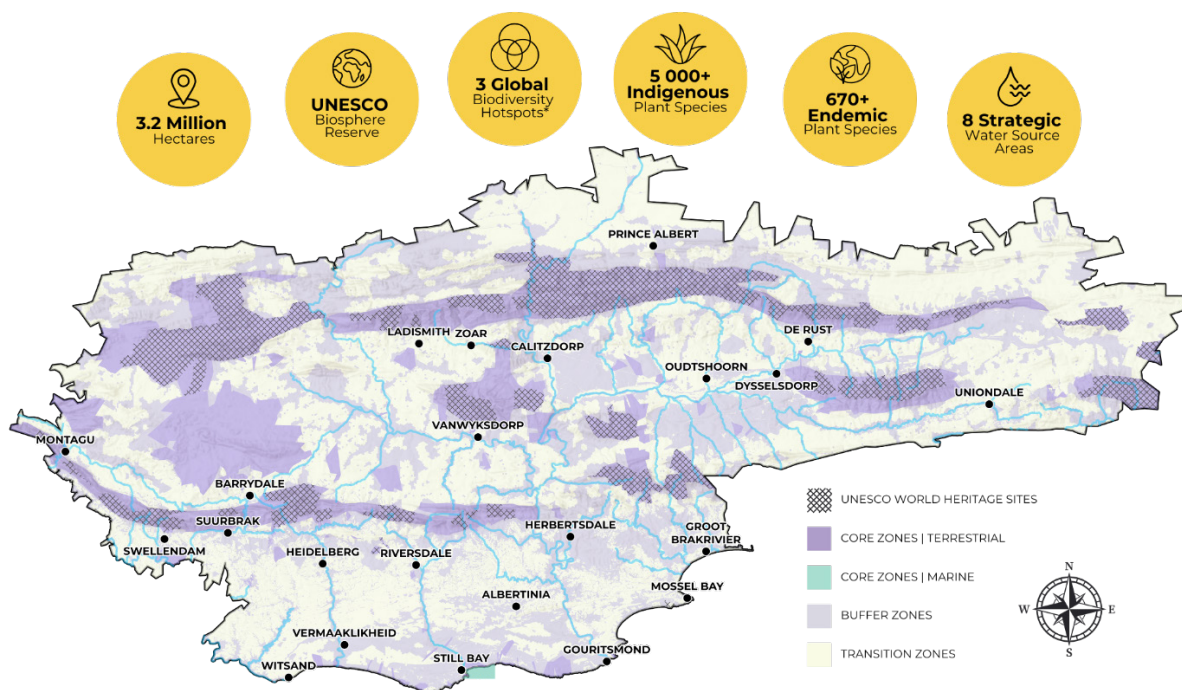


2. INTRODUCTION TO FOB

2.1 THE GCBR CONNECTION

The Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve NPC (GCBR) is an action-oriented, non-profit organisation based in the Western Cape, South Africa. We drive programmes and catalyse initiatives that nurture resilience in nature and communities within the 3.2-million-hectare area that has been designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since 2015.

The Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (Gouritz Region) is incredibly unique as it is the only area in the world where 3 biodiversity hotspots converge which has resulted in rich biodiversity with a high level of endemism, recognising the region as a global treasure.



The GCBR aims to be a catalyst for change towards solving one of our greatest challenges: the disconnect between people and nature. Through numerous partnerships and engagements with peer groups, NGOs, South African government, business and private sectors, donors, landowners, and communities, we:

- Improve ecosystem function and safeguard biodiversity
- Change hearts and minds across the diverse landscape through various education and outreach activities
- Advance sustainable development with a focus on youth and smallholder farmer empowerment

FOB was created as a means for everyone to get involved and contribute to a thriving Gouritz Region, to increase awareness of the significance of the Biosphere Reserve and inspire communities to take action.

Please visit our GCBR website at www.gouritz.com, as well as our other media channels to learn more about the organisation.

 @gouritz  @gouritzbiosphere

2.2 ABOUT THE FOB PROGRAMME

Local businesses supporting local initiatives

FOB connects local businesses with community volunteers to support hands-on, nature-focused projects across the Gouritz Region.

There are many individuals and groups of people doing incredible voluntary work for the environment, and we realised that with a bit of financial support they could make an even greater impact. We also know that there are many businesses who want to give back to their community. FOB connects these two groups in a structured and meaningful way; empowering communities to take ownership of their environmental future with support from the business sector.

Our “Heroes” are the businesses who commit to small, monthly donations to the GCBR. These contributions are pooled by municipal region and turned into small grants that fund the inspiring work of our “Friends”, the local volunteers who lead environmental initiatives on the ground.

Friends can apply for a small grant from several categories, including clean-up initiatives, environmental rehabilitation, citizen science projects, and conservation of indigenous species.

Whether it's clearing trails, planting trees, or raising awareness through murals, the FOB helps amplify local efforts and build stronger connections between people, place, and purpose.

Everyone living or working in the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve can join the movement towards a more sustainable future. Together we are uplifting our towns and caring for this special place we call home.

Visit friends.gouritz.com, as well as our FOB social media channels for more details.

 @friendsofthebiosphere  @biospherefriends

2.3 FOB PILOT - JULY 2024 TO SEPTEMBER 2024

Conception

In 2023, GCBR's Sustainability Manager and Marketing team conceptualised an initiative which could benefit both the community and the environment. The idea was built around getting local businesses to fund local environmental initiatives for the benefit of everyone in their towns. Through various brainstorming sessions, FOB became an obvious choice to pursue.

Development of the FOB framework

The FOB framework was developed, and then finessed, over time, together with a fully functioning, dedicated website, social media channels, and marketing and communication tools. We also refined our internal processes, which has resulted in the development of a standard operating procedure (SOP), brand guideline, and financial framework, including the recent addition of SnapScan facilities that enable reoccurring donations.

Dedicated personnel

The portfolio of the FOB Programme was assigned to the Sustainability Manager, and a Programme Coordinator was appointed to engage with businesses and communities to garner support and participation, manage the small grant contracts and grow the programme using the designed framework.

Piloting the programme

The Programme was piloted between July 2024 and September 2024 in three towns (Riversdale, Barrydale, and Mossel Bay), affording time to test the waters and allowing flexibility to adapt and make improvements.

Networking was imperative during the Pilot period, and both the Programme Manager and Programme Coordinator were actively out and about meeting businesses, introducing FOB through presentations at events.

The Pilot demonstrated that the FOB was met with local support and appreciation by many individuals in the conservation community. We were inspired to continue to an official launch without any misgivings.

2.4 FOB LAUNCH - OCTOBER 2024

When we officially rolled out FOB in October 2024, we weren't entirely sure what to expect, but we were certain that there were people out there who cared deeply about their environment and wanted to do something real. And that's exactly what happened.





3. FOB IN REVIEW

3.1 PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH

Networking and collaboration

Extensive external engagements to introduce the Programme took place, with a focus on building strong relationships with collaborators and champions across the region. We've developed valuable partnerships with local tourism offices, non-profit organisations, conservancies, volunteers, and business owners. By connecting with like-minded individuals and groups, we have shared our vision and garnered collaborative support.

A key priority has been working alongside tourism bodies to promote eco-tourism in the region. These partnerships have helped us link with local destinations and identify dedicated volunteers who are actively improving tourism offerings, such as maintaining and enhancing hiking trails. Their efforts are vital in creating positive experiences in nature for visitors and locals alike.

We've also found great value in partnering with conservancies, who not only do important conservation work but also have strong community networks. Our support, often in the form of small grants, has helped enable real impact on the ground.



Events

In March 2025, we hosted a launch-event in Mossel Bay to introduce a wider group to the work that the GCBR is doing and officially launch the FOB in the area. We welcomed municipal, business, and community leaders to the event and highlighted the importance of conservation in the region, and how we can support local volunteer efforts to grow their impact. Read more about this in our blog [here](#).

Over the past year, we have participated in several events aimed at raising awareness about the FOB Programme. Most notably, we were invited to present at the annual Conservation at Work Symposium, and to the Mossel Bay and Oudtshoorn Business Chambers. These presentations allowed us to engage with a broader audience and connect with businesses and individuals who were previously out of reach.

In addition to the above, we took part in various conservation awareness events across the region, including the Conservation Awareness Day in Mossel Bay and the Cape Floristic Region Partnership Annual Meeting. These events provided valuable opportunities to share our work and passion with like-minded individuals; from conservation professionals to interested members of the public.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive as stakeholders recognise the potential impact FOB can have in their communities. Moreover, these outreaches support increased knowledge and connection to the landscape that enable improved coordination and cross-functional input to drive mutual goals in the Biosphere Region.



Marketing

FOB also serves as a valuable marketing tool to promote the Gouritz Region and provides an easy solution for everyone to participate in and contribute towards GCBR's goals. Tourism offices across the region have shown their support in various ways and are generally excited to spread the message that their towns are located in a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.



The FOB website continues to develop with new blogs, and Friend and Hero content is regularly added. FOB social media pages have grown organically through the development and implementation of an engaging content plan aimed to inform, educate and inspire. Stay in the loop, [subscribe to our newsletter](#).

A GCBR online store was created in 2023, and with the advent of the FOB Programme, provided the perfect opportunity to create apparel specific to FOB and its cause. Browse our products at [GCBR Online Store](#).

In addition to our active social media platforms, we have enjoyed radio airtime, secured a series of adverts in a local weekly newspaper in Oudtshoorn, placed Hero

decals in shop windows, added Hero badges on business webpages, and introduced #ExploreGCBR plaques and FOB table talkers that have been placed in popular restaurants and guesthouses; all of which are designed to inform, stimulate and engage.



3.2 OVERVIEW OF HEROES AND FRIENDS

We have been on a journey to unite passionate individuals and businesses who share our dream of thriving communities and flourishing ecosystems. During this time, local champions stepped forward with ideas, energy, and heart. Together, we supported diverse grassroots projects, from trail clearing and beach clean-ups to school gardens, murals and bird hides. Each one tells its own story of community, commitment, and care for the landscapes we call home.

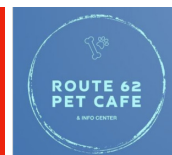
Heroes

Through various networking mechanisms, outreach to businesses, and referrals, 42 businesses have made financial contributions to the Programme amounting to R78,844. We have also received various other sponsorships, such as weekly advertising in a local newspaper, the in-kind benefits of which amount to approximately R9,000.

Our Heroes are the backbone to funding FOB small grants. Various types of businesses have committed to participating; some are making monthly donations ranging from R100 - R1,000, while others have taken more novel approaches, such as the Wildflower Eco-Shop's "Snicker Doodles for Change" campaign where R1 is donated for every delicious vegan snicker doodle sold, or Travellers @DBay who donates R1 per ticket sold at their popular bingo nights.

We extend a big "Thank You" to all the Heroes from across the Gouritz Region for standing with us in pursuit of a sustainable, flourishing future.





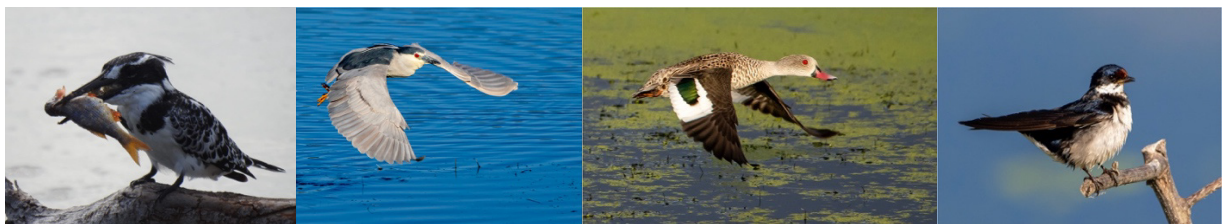
Friends

R76,500 has been awarded through our small grants mechanism to 18 local, volunteer-led Friends Projects, enabling them to enhance nature-positive impacts in their communities.

HESSEQUA REGION

Sunset Ponds Bird Hide

The Sunset Ponds Bird Hide Project has delivered impressive conservation and community benefits, turning a small intervention into a big success. The U3A Stilbaai Bird Group upgraded the hide, reduced disturbances with a new protective fence, and restored habitat for local waterbirds, which has led to a significant increase in bird numbers. 25 more waterbird species were recorded than the previous year, including the return of key breeding species, along with the reappearance of scarce kingfishers.



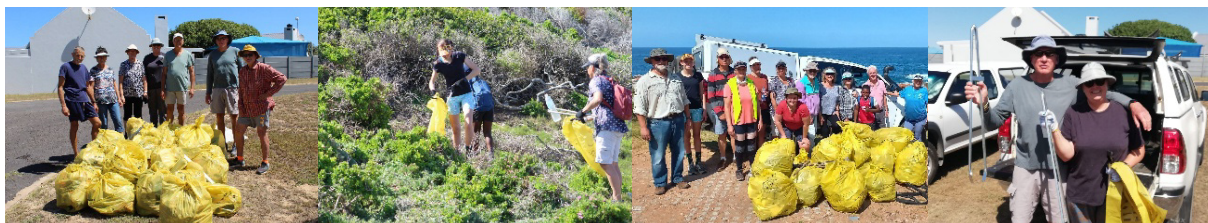
Be Inspired Mural

The Inspired Mural Project has delivered a vibrant boost to environmental awareness and community pride in Heidelberg, transforming a prominent roadside wall into a striking celebration of the region's unique biodiversity. Local Artist, Louise Kluyts, created a captivating mural that showcases indigenous plants and highlights the three global biodiversity hotspots found within the Gouritz Region. The artwork has become a popular selfie-spot, drawing visitors, sparking curiosity, and strengthening environmental education in an engaging, accessible way. By blending art, awareness, and tourism, the Project enriches the local community while creating awareness and deepening appreciation for the natural treasures of the region.



Stilbaai Coastal Clean-Up

The Stilbaai Coastal Clean-up Enhancement Project has strengthened an already dedicated volunteer effort, empowering more than 150 community members to protect their beaches, rivers and natural habitats. The team acquired essential safety gear and tools, enabling cleaner, faster, and safer waste collection. Their ongoing clean-ups have removed tons of litter, safeguarded sensitive ecosystems, and improved the health and beauty of Stilbaai's coast. This Project not only benefits the environment but also inspires strong community pride and stewardship, proving how collective action can create a cleaner, healthier place for all.



Ultra Trail Sleeping Beauty

The Ultra Trail Sleeping Beauty Project has revitalised long-lost mountain trails in the Langeberg Mountains, creating lasting benefits for both the environment and the Riversdale community. Tielman Roos, Anja Louw, the Riversdale Voortrekkers, and local partners restored key paths, some of which have been inaccessible for more than 15 years.

They used the inaugural Ultra Trail Sleeping Beauty event in April 2025 to generate funds for ongoing trail maintenance and invasive alien plant management. The renewed trails now offer safe access to breathtaking fynbos landscapes, forests, and panoramic mountain views, boosting eco-tourism while deepening environmental awareness.



Wild Rescue - Trail and Indigenous Plant Species Rehabilitation (ongoing)

This Project is helping to safeguard Hessequa's unique fynbos while building local capacity for conservation. The initiative focuses on rescuing and nurturing vulnerable indigenous plants along tourism trails, particularly those impacted by recent fires, ensuring their survival through propagation in Wild Rescue's on-site nursery. By employing and mentoring local youth, the Project also provides valuable hands-on skills in plant care, alien species control, and environmental stewardship.



Stilbaai Conservation - Australian Myrtle Removal

The Stilbaai Conservation Trust Hacking Group has made significant strides in protecting the town's indigenous vegetation by tackling the invasive Australian myrtle. This fast-spreading shrub threatens local biodiversity, but the team successfully cleared large infestations using a mulching machine, while carefully protecting surrounding areas. Their efforts created cleared zones of approximately 15 x 15 metres and 7 x 7 metres, and ongoing monitoring and hand-removal of seedlings will prevent re-establishment.



KANNALAND REGION

Stanley's Light hiking Trail Rehabilitation Project

Ladismith Trails Committee took on the immense task of clearing and restoring the full 12km circular Stanley's Light Hiking Trail in the foothills of the Swartberg. With guidance from a committed Steering Committee and the invaluable contribution of local volunteers, the team worked tirelessly to improve trail surfaces, install safety signage and clear overgrown sections.

Their passion and teamwork have brought this route back to life, ensuring safer access for hikers, trail runners, and nature lovers alike.



MOSSEL BAY REGION

Erika Nature

Erika Primary School in Mossel Bay embarked on a Project to create a green space for learners to nurture. Many of these students come from homes and communities without gardens or trees, making this initiative an important step in bringing nature closer to them.

The green space was designed to be used during lunch breaks, school holidays and weekends, providing students with a peaceful environment while also educating them on gardening and environmental care.



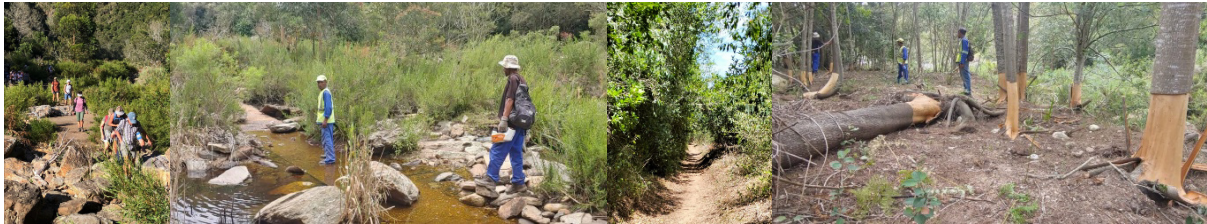
SANTA Crèche Sustainable Food Garden

The Groot Brak River Conservancy dedicated their time to help SANTA Crèche create a food garden filled with nutritious vegetables and fruit trees. The aim of the Project was to provide a food garden which can be used to feed the nearly 60 students at this no-fee Crèche. With over two hundred vegetables seedlings and 10 trees, and a 2 000-litre water tank installed, the garden has been nourishing students since the fourth quarter of 2024.



Wolwedans Dam Hiking Trail and Alien Clearing

The Wolwedans Dam trail, a scenic 3.2km route, is well-loved by residents and visitors alike. From October to December 2024, the Groot Brak River Conservancy embarked on a mission to restore this beloved trail by removing invasive alien vegetation. They specifically targeted Pampas, Black Wattle, Blackwood, and Blue Gum, which were threatening the ecological balance and accessibility of this beautiful landscape.



Dana Bay Conservancy Calendar

Dana Bay Conservancy launched a Project near the end of 2024 to create a calendar which featured captivating photographs of the region. The calendar aimed to serve as both a visual celebration of Dana Bay and a call to action for conservation. With approximately 500 calendars sold, this Project has helped to spread conservation awareness and environmental appreciation in the town, and to raise funds to support their important conservation work.



Fransmanshoek Conservancy Alien Clearing and Restoration Project

Fransmanshoek Conservancy launched a hands-on Project to remove invasive Rooikrans (*Acacia cyclops*) and restore the natural vegetation in a small area in Fransmanshoek. The Project covered 1,778 m², much of which was densely-infested with Rooikrans, and resulted in the complete removal of the invasive biomass and the re-establishment of indigenous plant recovery processes.



Groot Brak Beach Clean-Up (ongoing)

Giving One Another Love & Support (GOALS) are planning a beach clean-up in the Groot Brak River area to help educate approximately 30 children about recycling and cleaning the environment around them. This wonderful initiative is not just about cleaning up the beach, but also about sifting through the litter that has been picked up to identify what can be recycled. GOALS has already hosted one clean-up with the funds provided, and will be hosting another clean-up in 2026



Earth Legacy Foundation Clean Ocean Drive (ongoing)

Earth Legacy Foundation launched the Clean Ocean Drive initiative to conduct targeted clean-ups along the reefs in Mossel Bay. The aim is to reduce the threat of lethal fishing gear to marine life and reduce waste found in the ocean. Removing fishing lines, hooks and sinkers that snag on reefs poses a serious, ongoing hazard to fish, birds and other marine creatures.



Midbrak Conservancy Awareness Campaign (ongoing)

The Midbrak Conservancy launched an awareness campaign to help residents, estate agents, and new homeowners better understand what it means to live in a conservancy. As more people move into the region, the Conservancy hopes to inspire a shared sense of responsibility and pride in protecting the unique natural environment that surrounds them, by using educational flyers and hosting information sessions.



SAPREC Festive Curios (Ongoing)

SAPREC (Seabird and Penguin Rehabilitation Centre) in Mossel Bay launched a festive season initiative to raise funds and highlight the importance of caring for seabirds and penguins, work they do so well in and around Mossel Bay. They have created and sold curios during the busy summer season of 2025 to locals and tourists alike. This ongoing project will assist with their larger fundraising efforts, thereby supporting the important work that they are doing.



OUDTSHOORN REGION

Karoo Gateway Conservancy Signage Project (ongoing)

A long-held vision has finally been realised with the creation of the 18 000 ha Karoo Gateway Conservancy in the Klaarstroom district. To build awareness of this newly established conservancy, the Karoo Gateway Conservancy has launched an initiative to erect conservancy signage. These signs will help residents and visitors recognise when they are entering the Conservancy area, highlighting the importance of the local environment and encouraging people to respect and appreciate their natural surroundings.



SWELLENDAM REGION

Let's Clean Barrydale

The Let's Clean Barrydale Project set out to clean up their town and provide residents with new bins to encourage locals and visitors alike to keep the town free of litter. Driven by a shared sense of responsibility and pride, locals swept streets, cleared riverbanks, and ensured that every corner of their beloved home was free from waste threatening the local ecosystem.

Each Project has ripple effects far beyond its immediate goals. Together, we are nurturing a culture of stewardship that will endure for generations. Here's to the next chapter of discovery, action, and shared pride in our Biosphere Reserve. You can read more detail about each project on our website at [Our Friends' Projects](#) or apply for support for an aligned project at [Friends Small Grant Application](#)



3.3 FOB IMPACT

As this Programme reached the year and a half mark at the end of December 2025, we realised that FOB is catalysing valuable outcomes, such as:

- Invasive alien plant clearing within high conservation value areas riverine, mountain catchment and critical biodiversity areas.
- Safeguarding and promotion of indigenous plant and animal species.
- Removal of tons of litter from rivers and beaches.
- Enhanced environmental awareness and education.
- Establishment of organically grown vegetable gardens that feed underserved communities.
- Establishment of green spaces that enhance urban conservation strategies.

Due to the outcomes emerging from FOB, the team has begun developing systems to efficiently measure and report these impacts.

Whilst the seed funding from our donor enabled GCBR to create and manage FOB, we are encouraged to see that the funds received from Heroes have been able to support the grants paid out to Friends, suggesting that with ongoing effort, this initiative will become self-sustaining.



4. EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION

This report reflects what becomes possible when local efforts are supported and when we trust in people's ability to create meaningful change. Above all, it is a tribute to every Hero who donated, every Friend and volunteer who gave their time, and every supporter who helped share our story. You are the reason this programme is more than an idea. It is a growing movement!

We extend our sincere gratitude to all partners and stakeholders whose commitment, collaboration, and contributions continue to shape the success of the Friends of the Biosphere Programme.

As the programme moves steadily toward self-sufficiency and long-term sustainability, it stands as a gateway for community members to engage with and contribute to the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve's vision of people and nature thriving together.

We are only just getting started, and we look forward with optimism and excitement to what 2026 will bring.

Thank you!

