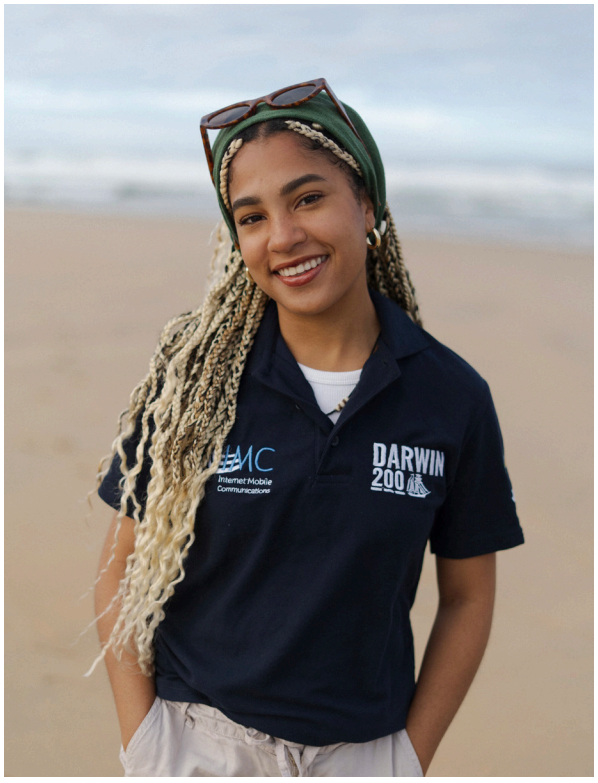
The Lake We Share

In partnership with Cape Nature and Gift of the Givers

Sharona Shnayder

Report 1 of 3



Report 1

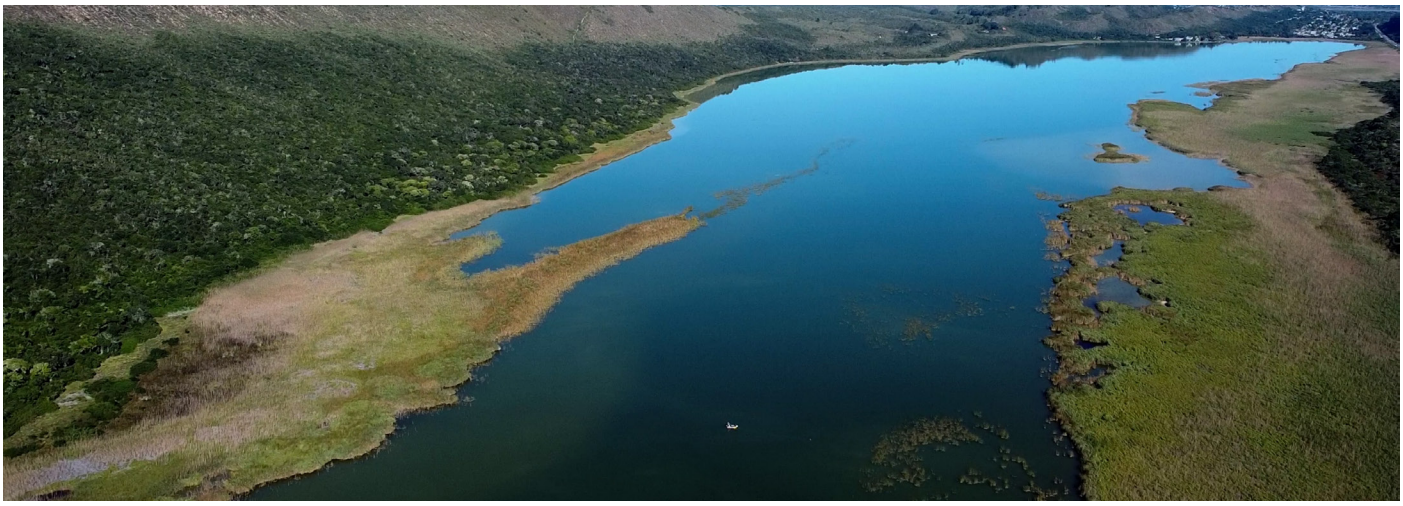
Groenvlei Before the Invasion

Can a lake ever recover from something it never saw coming? Groenvlei—once known for its pristine waters and biodiversity, is now struggling under the weight of an invader: the common carp (Cyprinus Carpio). But this isn't just a story about fish. It's a story about people, purpose, and the power of local action.

Nestled in the Garden Route National Park, the lake once thrived with native fish like the Estuarine Round Herring(Gilchristella Aestuaria) and the Cape Silverside(Atherina Breviceps). Alongside these fish were endemic plant species and vibrant birdlife that rely on the lakes clarity and vegetation. For generations, the ecosystem sustained traditional, small-scale fishing livelihoods and supported a vibrant, interconnected lake system. However, the illegal introduction of carp through recreational fishing disrupted this equilibrium. This bottom-feeding species---ranked among the world's 100 worst alien species--has been slowly wreaking havoc in Groenvlei. It's methods are by way of stirring up sediment, increasing water turbidity, uprooting native vegetation, and outcompeting indigenous fish. But the ecological change didn't happen in isolation.

As the ecosystem degraded, the once-transparent lake turned murky, and traditional fishing became harder to sustain. Then during the COVID-19 pandemic social changes were brought into the mix. Once job opportunities vanished, many families lost access to consistent income and nutrition. Food insecurity grew, occupations were disrupted, and even oral histories began to echo a deep contrast between the lake's past and present.

Yet, what we've discovered is that the revival begins with remembrance. To restore Groenvlei and the community alongside it, we must first understand what it once was. Thanks to extensive research by Freshwater Ichthyologist Dr. Ben van der Waal, we know there are over 60,000 carp currently in the lake with their growth compounded by the species' prolific breeding: female carp can spawn several times a year, releasing thousands of eggs each cycle. Their rapid reproduction makes them one of the most invasive freshwater species in the world. As a result, it became evident that the target of the project would not be of eradication but mitigation. It is now through a society focused circular economy of removal and redirection that the lake is beginning to heal while providing a critical resource to the local community in need. Honoring the historic cultural connection between the people and the lake.



This Darwin Leader project was made possible by:

https://giftofthegivers.org/

CapeNature

Conserve. Explore. Experience.

https://www.capenature.co.za/

Thanks to all partners and sponsors that made the DARWIN200 2023-25 Global Voyage Possible.

www.darwin200.com/sponsors

artwork platform. systems

Avangrid Foundation

Bank of Telecom®

BMS Microscopes

CCSL

CREDITFORCE Limited

Darwin centre

The Don Hanson Schools Program Charitable Foundation

ecoflix

Exploring by the seat of your pants

fourth element

Friends of the British Overseas Territories

IMC Internet Mobile Communications

jarvis HOMES SINCE 1649 jarvishomes.com

Jrnyz.io by SMARTVISIT

Maker Buoy

Mensa

ocean conservation trust

Photocentric

Ramilisol

REDFERN

OOSTERSCHELDE

SETTLE GLOBAL SOLUTIONS

TPP Principled Recruitment For Work That Matters

ELEVATION PROMOTIONAL MARKETING

zero six zero