



Building Brighter Futures Together

November 2025 Newsletter

From clean water to conservation, youth leadership to livelihoods, The Babanango Foundation continues to grow impact across communities and the natural world. In this edition, we celebrate milestones that bring people and nature closer, from new boreholes and flourishing gardens to inspiring young conservationists and a thriving leopard project. Step inside and discover how collaboration is shaping a brighter, more sustainable future for all.



Clean Water, Brighter Futures: Borehole handover

The month of July marked a significant milestone in our ongoing commitment to community development and water access. We had the honour of officially handing over five boreholes to the Mayor of Zululand District Municipality, Cllr. Michael Khumalo.

To ensure their long-term sustainability and formal accountability, the boreholes were handed over to the Zululand District Municipality (ZDM). This handover allows ZDM to take over operational responsibility including the appointment of dedicated maintenance officers to oversee the continued functionality and upkeep of the boreholes — ensuring that this critical infrastructure remains reliable and serves the surrounding communities for years to come.

The event was attended by senior leadership and representatives from the Zululand Municipality, Ulundi Municipality, Abaqulusi Municipality, Emcakwini, Esibongweni and Thembalihle Community Trusts as well as Traditional Council from Nobamba, KwaNsimbi and Lukhwazi.



Guardians of nature: Youth Lead the Way

In celebration of Youth Month, the Foundation launched the “Guardians of Nature” competition to spark conservation leadership among young people. The response was overwhelming, with more than 50 entries received from youth aged 15 to 24 across surrounding communities. Nineteen finalists were selected for an immersive day at Babanango Outdoor Education, where they engaged in wildlife learning, leadership and outdoor adventures. The day was filled with energy, curiosity, and a deep sense of responsibility toward the environment.

One participant captured the spirit of the initiative, saying, **“We are the future of conservation.”**



The enthusiasm shown confirmed that the seeds of environmental leadership are alive and growing in Babanango’s next generation.

Restoring Balance: ERT on the Move

Over the past three months, the Ecological Restoration Team (ERT) has focused on critical follow-up work, including herbicide treatments to prevent regrowth of invasive species. The recent rains and last September’s fire have triggered the germination of many dormant wattle seeds, leading to a resurgence of some alien plants. Despite these challenges, the team has successfully maintained and cleared over 290 hectares of invasive species since early June.

will turn its attention to virgin timber stands while also chipping and mulching large volumes of unwanted biomass. These efforts continue to advance our rehabilitation goals and restore balance to our environment.



Looking ahead to spring, the ERT

From the Hills of Mazakaneni to the Heart of Conservation

By Sandile Ngcobo

My name is Sandile Ngcobo, and I come from the beautiful hills of Mazakaneni in Babanango. Today, I stand proud as a wildlife photographer — but my journey here has not been an easy one. It began in 2017, when Babanango Game Reserve (BGR) launched its ambitious conservation project on land deeply tied to my community's heritage. Like many, I watched with curiosity, unsure what opportunities might come our way. Then in 2021, everything changed. BGR and The Babanango Foundation, in partnership with Wild Shots Outreach, invited youth from local communities to train in wildlife photography. I seized that opportunity. Before then, I had never set foot inside a reserve — yet there I was, camera in hand, discovering a passion I never knew I had.

Photography became more than a skill; it became my voice in conservation — my “combo on conservancy,” a blend of storytelling and love for nature. Each image I captured told a story of beauty, resilience, and hope. After completing my training, I faced a challenge: I had the passion but no equipment or income to pursue it. Then, in a remarkable act of kindness, someone believed in my dream and gifted me the tools I needed to continue — a gesture that changed everything. With that support, I began working with the Foundation, learning from experienced photographers and refining my craft. Today, my dream is to share the magic of Babanango's wildlife with the world and inspire other young people to see themselves as part of conservation.



My journey is still unfolding, but one thing is certain: from the heart of Babanango, my story — and the stories I capture — will travel far beyond our hills, carrying a message of opportunity, resilience, and hope.

Growing Together: Community gardens

Food security remains a key pillar of the Foundation's work. With irrigation systems now in place, community gardens are flourishing with spinach, cabbage, beetroot, onions, and lettuce. The Mthashane

Garden proudly delivered its first harvest of fresh produce to local lodges, marking the beginning of a new cycle of opportunity for local growers.



What started as a food security initiative is quickly becoming an avenue for both nutrition and economic empowerment.



Thulubheke: Turning Timber into Opportunity

The Thulubheke Community Project continues to be a shining example of how conservation and livelihoods can go hand in hand. Since its launch in January, more than 50 hectares of timber have been cleared, removing over 300 tonnes of biomass — the equivalent of 30 truckloads. For local families, this has created a steady source of income, while for the Reserve it has reduced a dangerous fire hazard. The project is proving that communities and conservation can thrive together.



Siphesihle Maphisa: Crafting a Future with Beads

My name is Siphesihle Maphisa, and I was born and raised in ZuluRock Village, where I am proud to continue living today. In March 2025, I had the incredible opportunity to attend an art and craft skills training in beadwork, generously sponsored by The Babanango Foundation.



This training was a turning point in my life. It allowed me to showcase my talent and creativity. Alongside other trained beadworkers, I was honoured to design a variety of items, which also included making bespoke beaded lapels for Babanango Game Reserve. This project not only sharpened my beadwork skills but also inspired me to push the boundaries of my creativity.

Looking ahead, my dream is to train others in beadwork and eventually establish a school dedicated to arts and crafts in our community. Such an initiative will provide a platform



for skills development and ensure that beadwork orders are delivered professionally and on time.

I also aspire to expand my design portfolio, drawing inspiration from both nature and culture, and creating unique and meaningful beadwork pieces.

What started with the support of The Babanango Foundation has ignited a vision for the future—one where beadwork is not only a form of cultural expression but also a source of opportunity for many in my village.

Commitment, passion and support

From boreholes and community development to big cats, every story shared here reflects the power of collaboration. None of these successes would be possible without the commitment of our partners, the passion of our communities, and the support of friends who believe in our mission. Together, we are shaping a future where conservation, community, and opportunity grow side by side.

*Stay connected
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our website and
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