

## **Frolicking With Frogs In The Eastern Cape**

Its not often one gets to go out at night and be ankle deep in authentic local mud, without a beauty therapist in sight! Armed with a net and a head torch, how about trying the latest draw card at The Dunes Country House in St Francis Bay - an Eastern Cape frog safari?

Offering the first frog safari in this particular area, the initiative was started by Brent and Chantelle Cook, owners of The Dunes Country House in St Francis Bay. As environmentally committed custodians of a 600-hectare nature reserve and vast ancient sand dune system, Brent and Chantelle are continually on a mission to manage the resources in their care responsibly. As part of a long-term project, they were in the process of removing an area of alien vegetation along one border of the property, when suspicions were raised that it might well be part of an underlying wetland system. As time went on and the removal became more extensive, it started to attract a number of new residents, primarily different frog species and one particularly rare sand toad, confirming the success of a wetland rehabilitation in progress.

Wetlands are some of the most vulnerable areas in Southern Africa, affected directly by climate change and reduced rainfall patterns. The presence of alien trees has caused major problems along the Garden Route, severely affecting the underground water table and encouraging drought conditions to develop.

An international campaign known as 'Amphibian Ark' has been established to support and promote the survival of the worlds' frogs and toads ([www.amphibianark.org](http://www.amphibianark.org)). South Africa is one of the countries involved in helping to raise awareness around the challenges facing modern amphibians, primarily caused by habitat loss and pollution. And with 2010 being the International Year Of Biodiversity, wetland conservation campaigns are being promoted globally.

The Eastern Cape frog safari season is year round, though frogs are less active in winter, so to take full advantage a trip is better planned in the warmer months from September to April. Many frogs and toads are already on the endangered list, and they are known as indicator species being extremely sensitive to pollution and a good indicator of healthy eco systems. Proceeds from the frog safari are donated to ongoing conservation of the St Francis Bay wetlands. What better reason to put on gum boots and get down and dirty for a good cause!

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