

Establishing a case for a Malotja to Kruger Biodiversity Corridor

**Prof K. Balkwill, University of the Witwatersrand
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The Mpumalanga Spatial Development Framework envisages an ecological corridor from Swaziland to the Kruger National Park, via Songimvelo Game Reserve, Barberton Nature Reserve and Mthethamushe Reserve. Also involved in the corridor is privately owned land in some Conservancies and some State owned land. The recent establishment of the Barberton Nature Reserve has brought the potential corridor closer to reality. However, there are areas within the corridor where aspects of the biodiversity are well known (although disparate and far from complete), and others where there is a marked shortage of knowledge of what occurs where. It is particularly urgent to survey privately owned, unprotected areas as well as state land in the corridor to guide decisions around development and housing needs. This proposal will consolidate records from PRECIS and other relevant herbaria, especially the C.E. Moss Herbarium which includes extensive collections from Songimvelo Game Reserve and ultramafic outcrops in the area, including Malotja and surrounding areas in Swaziland. Modified Whittaker plots have been placed and surveyed on ultramafic areas and surrounding vegetation. These provide a base for comparison to other areas. A bioblitz was undertaken in 2012 with cooperation of the University of the Witwatersrand, the Mpumalanga Plant Specialist Group, the Buffelskloof Herbarium, the owners of a section of Barberton Mountainlands Reserve and Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency. These relationships will be enhanced through a further bioblitz in 2013. Good relations exist with the Crocodile Gorge Conservancy and SAPPI and the Chariesa Conservancy have agreed to be involved. In addition, there is agreement that the Biodiversity Monitors in the K2C area can be involved in biodiversity surveys of the area in exchange for training courses. Craig Symes (birds), Bryan Maritz (amphibians and reptiles), Charlene Bissett (mammals, particularly carnivores) and James Harrison (insects).