

# ***Western Cape Birding Forum***

***Now represents 8 clubs with more than 2,000 members in the Western Cape.***

Below are the minutes from the Meeting on 10 February 2007, at the **Helderberg Nature Reserve Environment Centre, Somerset West**,

---

**Vernon Head**, chaired the Meeting. Welcome was extended to first time attending - Japie Claassen (Chairman Witzenberg), Jan Kotze (Chairman WCBC), Mike MacNaught (Hermanus), Doug Newman (BLSA).

**Sylvia Ledgard** – Minutes.

## ***Those Present***

**Cape Bird Club** – Vernon Head, Jo Hobbs, Otto Schmidt, Anne Gray, Dave Whitelaw, Sylvia Ledgard.

**Tygerberg Club** – Dirk van Driel, Brigid de Kock.

**Somerset West Bird Club** – John Carter, Brian Dennis, Freya Brett, Jill Mortimer, Denise Rizzo

**BirdLife Overberg** – Anton Odendal

**Hermanus Bird Club** – John Bowman, Mike MacNaught

**Witzenberg Bird Club** – Japie Claassen

**BirdLife Stellenbosch** – Willene van der Merwe

**West Coast Bird Club** – Jan Kotze, Keith Harrison

**BirdLife Walker Bay** – Elsa Gebhard.

**BLSA** – Doug Newman.

## ***Apologies***

Elaine Odendal, Nico Venter, Yvonne Weiss, Les Underhill.

---

Minutes of previous meeting (4/11/2006): **Agreed**

## **Short History of WCBF**

For the benefit of new members of the Forum, the Chairman outlined its history:

- In March 2002, TBC, SWBC, CBC and Hermanus met informally to find a way of working together and co-ordinating efforts on conservation projects and club activities. This evolved and in September 2003, WCBC and OBC joined to consider forming a Forum of Bird Clubs in the region. In October 2003, the Western Cape Birding Forum was formally inaugurated.
- BLSA was at that time forming regional nodes of Bird Clubs and gave its support to the newly formed WCBF, which comprised both BLSA branches and independent clubs. Funding was provided to facilitate meetings.
- Since then, newly formed clubs BirdLife Walker Bay, BirdLife Worcester and BirdLife Stellenbosch and already established clubs, Witzenberg Bird Club and Wm. Quinton Karoo Bird Club have joined the Forum. WCBF now represents more than 2,000 members of Bird Clubs in the region and has become a significant voice for the conservation of birds and their habitats.

## **WCBF Finances (Brian Dennis)**

Brian presented the Financial Report of Income & Expenditure for the year ended 31/12/2006.

**Income:**

We did not request additional sponsorship funding from BLSA in 2006, as we had sufficient funds in the account.

**Expenditure:**

Main expenses were Venue costs (R1,644) and Travel claims (R1,438). R650 was donated to Helderberg Environmental Centre's birding weekend, forming part of National Bird Week, and used to bus in local children.

This left a small surplus at year-end of R1,364. Out of this will come a contribution of R1,000 towards the expenses of the SAA Cape Town Flower Show 2006 at Lourensford.

A request has been submitted to BLSA for R7,000, being an annual allowance to facilitate Forum meetings.

**BLSA**

Anne Gray attended the BOM meeting in February and reported back on matters of interest.

**SABAP2**

Logistical and contractual problems between SANBI and ADU have delayed the launch dates of the project to mid-March. The Steering Committee has been formed and is due to meet for the first time on 15 February. It is this committee that must give final approval to the project design and take ownership of it. The committee represents BLSA, SANBI, ADU, academic interests and nature conservation interests. Doug Harebottle has been appointed SABAP2 Project Manager.

**IBA's**

- IBA's are areas declared as being important for birds for specific reasons, based on international criteria. This may mean important for a particular species, or there may be a large congregation of several species, or a large number of one species, or most importantly one or more red data species in an area.
- IBA assessments are underway. The assessment process has been introduced to branches in Kwazulu-Natal, Free State, Gauteng and Eastern Cape. Conservation Manager Neil Smith will be visiting the Western Cape to explain the process. IBA monitoring must be completed by the end of 2008. This is considered to be one of the most important aspects of the Conservation Division and full participation of all stakeholders will be required.

**Regional and National Rarities Committees have now been established.**

- The function of Rarities Committees is to examine records of bird species that do not normally occur in Southern Africa or are out of their normal distribution range within the region.
- The Rarities Committees have been established at regional level, with committee members having been elected by BirdLife members in the region. One member of each regional committee has been elected to serve on the National Rarities Committee.

**Elected members are:**

- **Western Cape Regional Rarities Committee:**  
Callan Cohen, David Winter, Rob Leslie, Mike Buckham, Rob Martin, Barrie Rose, Cliff Dorse.
- **National Rarities Committee:**  
John Graham, Trevor Hardaker, Adam Riley, Keith Barnes, Dave Hodinott, Andy Sutherland, Athol Marchant, Phil Whittington, Etienne Marais, Neil Smith (*chairperson for co-ordination only*).
- **Southern African List Committee:**  
This committee decides which birds appear on the Southern African list. The committee comprises mainly taxonomic specialists who examine the latest scientific information available, particularly with

respect to the splitting or lumping of species. Their role is to produce the official bird list for the Southern African region.

- **List Committee:** Tim Crowe, Peter Ryan, Richard Dean, Ian Sinclair, Keith Barnes, Rauri Bowie, Phil Hockey, Neil Smith (*administration only*).

### **Gill Memorial Award**

This prestigious national award is made annually at BLSA's AGM. Ian Sinclair has been proposed for the award in 2008 and Vernon Head and Les Underhill are preparing a citation.

### **Owl Awards**

The award recognises outstanding contributions to BLSA. These awards are presented at a ceremony in Johannesburg. When the AGM is held in another province, an award is given to someone in that province. In 2008, the AGM will be held in the Overberg and Anton asked for nominations to be put forward for the province. CBC would be proposing Frank Wygold, in recognition of his work at the West Coast Field Study Centre. Dave Whitelaw and Vernon are preparing a citation.

### **National Bird Week (30 April - 5 May 2007)**

BLSA will be providing material to support NBW, particularly in schools. This would reach Clubs in time for the launch, but arrangements should go ahead in advance.

### **Helderberg Environment Centre – NBW 2006 (Freya Brett)**

In this context, Freya reported back on the programme that had been put in place at the Helderberg Environment Centre for NBW 2006. 25 Children (Gr. 7, 12-13 year old's) were bused in to participate in a birding weekend. They were exposed to birds and why they are important to us. Assignments were given and the children participated in a bird ringing session. At the end of the weekend, each was given a certificate.

### **BLSA Branch Membership**

Noted that West Coast Bird Club has applied for full branch membership of BLSA and is awaiting formal acceptance.

## **EDUCATION**

A number of Bird Clubs in the region are involved with environmental education for young people. Anton proposed that a workshop be held to share ideas. Freya had looked at the new school curriculum and believed it had many strong points, with environmental education and social responsibility being an integral part.

- Agreed that an Education Workshop will be convened to precede the next WCBF general meeting.

## **CONSERVATION ISSUES**

### **House Crows (Dave Whitelaw)**

International funding of R400,000, channeled through BLSA, is in the bank to commence the 3-4 year eradication programme. The local SPCA supports the programme, but a hitch in the process is that the national body is not happy. The issue of concern is that the toxin, to be used in the bait, takes three to four days to kill the bird. The lapsed interval means that the birds do not associate the condition with the bait site. There is no pain or suffering to the bird - the heart stops. Dave has been in contact with Naude of Onderstepoort, who has undertaken to prepare a report and send it to the NSPCA. Doug Newman will follow up with Gerhard.

This is a good time to start the programme, as the breeding season is over and the crows will start to flock at the main roosting sites. Baiting at the sites would eliminate large numbers and the remainder would have to be dealt with afterwards. The poison is specific to the Corvidae family and degrades quickly.

### **Lourens River Tern Roost (Dirk van Driel)**

Meetings have been held with a number of interested parties at the Kynock site. Currently, the fence is still

there and Heartlands is keeping people off the site. They will not be able to maintain this indefinitely, as land is sold off and new people move in. In effect, a new city is being planned, which will accommodate 150,000 people. Land is being sold off to developers as it is being worked over. EIA's will be called for each development.

- It is down to WCBF to monitor and react. Rudy Schats is keeping an eye on developments and Dirk is the liaison person for WCBF.
- Farm 790, adjacent to the beach, is the core of the matter. Heartlands has been trying to get this farm transferred to CapeNature, but is getting no response from government departments. Dirk's view is that ideally the whole stretch of beach from the Lourens River mouth to the Eerste River mouth should be protected. It was important that the Forum should not be viewed as a pressure group. We cannot oppose the development, but should rather formulate a set of proposals and compromises. Anton urged Dirk to call on Carolyn Ah Shane (BLSA-Policy & Advocacy) for assistance in formulating a document. **Action:** Dirk

#### **Club Responses to Property Development Threats** (Keith Harrison)

Keith appealed to all the Clubs to register as I&AP's when developments are underway that pose a serious threat to the environment. In these situations, it is numbers that count. In this context, he mentioned the positive role played by BLSA through their Policy & Advocacy division in helping to resolve the grey water issue at Verlorenvlei. A matter now giving rise to serious concern is the extension of the ore terminal at Saldahna to increase capacity from 30-million tons this year to 90-million. The entrance to Saldahna Bay would be dredged just past Marcus Island. With nowhere to put the dredge, the coastline would be affected all the way up to West Coast National Park.

#### **Fish Kill at Rietvlei** (Dirk van Driel)

Following the huge die-off of fish at Rietvlei on Boxing Day, Dirk was asked by City Council to assess whether it was safe to remove the fish. There seems little doubt that oxygen depletion in the water led to the ecological disaster. On the same day, apparently unrelated, many thousands of dead crustacean larvae washed up on the beach at Milnerton. The City will initiate a research project to determine the causes of the fish kill and what must be done to prevent a re-occurrence. Rietvlei is of concern to WCBF as it has been, amidst rapid urbanisation, a habitat for birds, especially those feeding on fish.

- Agreed that WCBF wishes to be involved in this effort and Dirk will prepare a letter to City Council.  
**Action:** Dirk

#### **Steenbras Dam** (Dirk van Driel)

The avian botulism problem in regard to the Kelp Gulls has been reduced. Tony Williams is monitoring.

#### **Bird Flu** (Keith Harrison)

An outbreak of the H5N1 strain of bird flu has been reported in Suffolk, England, on the Bernard Matthews turkey-rearing site. The source has been identified as dead turkeys brought in for processing from Hungary, where bird flu has been found. There is no evidence of the virus having been brought in by wild birds.

#### **WESTERN CAPE BIRDING ROUTE** (Anton Odendal)

The economic value of avitourism is huge and growing. South African birders spend more than R150-million annually on birding. This excludes income from foreign birders visiting the country. In the USA, birding is worth more than 311-billion US dollars annually.

Anton screened a Power Point presentation on proposals, strategy and timetable for the launch of the Western Cape Birding Route, starting with the Overberg and West Coast.

It is expected that 35-million people will be coming to South Africa for the 2010 World Cup. This offers an exceptional opportunity to develop birding routes and expose the media to our birds, IBA's and other birding

sites. The Western Cape has a lot to offer birders: excellent sites, endemics, penguin colony, waders, pelagics, etc.

Six routes are proposed for the Western Cape:

**Phase 1 (2006 - 2007):** Start of planning and implementation:

1. Overberg (1 Feb. 07) - route already partially operational.
2. West Coast (1 Nov. 06) - inaugural meetings held.

**Phase 2 (2007- 2008):**

3. Winelands (1 April 07)
4. Garden Route & Route 62 (Klein Karoo) (1 July 07)

**Phase 3 (2007- 2008)**

5. Cape Peninsula (1 Sept. 07)
6. The Great Karoo & Tanqua (1 Jan. 08)

**Phase 4: Integrating for 2010**

We are looking at a budget of R5-million to develop the Western Cape Birding Routes. We have start-up funding from Holland and will be seeking additional sponsorship through BirdLife International partners. The plan is to get going so that, if results are forthcoming, we may get sponsorship for the whole.

The development plan is based on the four pillars of birding routes: Sites, Resources, Accommodation, Bird Guides. A logo bird will be developed for WCBR.

**Sites - Cape West Coast:** (\*) denotes IBA)

- West Coast National Park and islands (\*)
- Lamberts Bay Bird Island (\*)
- Berg River mouth and Velddrif wetlands (\*)
- Verlorenvlei (\*)
- Olifants River estuary (\*)
- Rocher Pan
- Dassen Island (\*)
- Robben Island (\*)

**Events to Support WCBR**

- Beginners ID course
- Shorebirds ID course
- WCNP Wader Bash
- BLSA National Bird Week
- Environment days
- BLSA Birding Big Day
- Birding Route Weekend (every year)
- Training local bird guides

**Bird Guide Training:** 28-day, full-time, Theta accredited course with on-going mentoring for 1 year. Offers employment opportunities and upliftment to local communities. Course cost: R10,500 (fee includes board & lodging, tuition, training manual, follow-up mentoring, field guide, binoculars.) Sponsorship being sought. Bird Clubs asked to identify potential candidates from disadvantaged groups for training as local guides. Guides would be trained for local conditions. Specialist tour guides would also be deployed. It was the intention to train at least 25 guides per year in the Western Cape, 15 for each route.

**Action:** Clubs

- **Question** – John questioned the viability of so many trained guides, whether it was a full-time job, and whether there was likely to be conflict in reserves with park-employed guides.
- **Answer** – Anton agreed we would need to be realistic, look at the localities and spread guides over areas. Some already trained guides were in full-time employment and developing a client base. Others were employed by National Parks and bird guiding complimented their given job. Guiding and educating combined well.
- **Question** – Keith asked who was responsible for paying tour operator fees.
- **Answer** – Brian suggested it was the employer who normally paid.
- **Question** – John queried whether local and district municipalities got involved.
- **Answer** – Anton replied that, as results were shown, they became more and more involved.

**Product (Resources) Development:**

- Checklists (*generic format used throughout country*)
- Local bird guides
- Promotional material
- Posters
- Birding Route signage (*will use for marketing and mementos*)
- Leaflet (*phase 1-concertino-fold, basic leaflet guiding birders to key sites-largely for local market*)
- Website (*phase 2*)
- Glossy brochure (*phase 3-largely for international market*)

**Marketing:**

- BLSA Avitourism
- BirdLife Travel
- “Africa Birds & Birding” feature
- Media (local, regional, national)
- International Bird Fairs

**BirdLife Travel:** An agency specialising in birding travel. Possibly, a base office would be set up for each route.

**Travel Shows and Bird Fairs:** Collaborative marketing of Birding Routes at travel shows, such as Indaba, Getaway. Represented by BLSA Avitourism at annual bird fairs in Britain, Holland, Taiwan, Rio Grande, etc.

**Development of Infrastructure**

- Birder Friendly Establishments (BFE's) (+/-10 for each route)
- BLSA Accredited signage for BFE's
- Bird hides
- Boardwalks

### **Importance of BLSA Branches**

The driving force behind Birding Routes:

- Managing events, fund raising, marketing, IBA assessment/monitoring, EIA's, etc.
- Representatives on Steering Committee (*identify critical partners*)
- BLSA Avitourism
- Tourism associations
- BLSA branches
- Enviro clubs
- SANParks + Hon. Rangers + CapeNature
- Other consulting agencies
- Local/District Municipalities
- Organised business, and or others, as appropriate

### **Project Schedule**

- 21/11/06 Steering committee meeting
- 10/12/06 Proposal and budget
- 04/07 Interviews-stakeholders
- 05/07 Checklist and leaflet
- 07/07 Train local bird guides
- 08/07 Register BFE's
- 09/07 Website and brochure
- 10/07 Official launch

**Clean Marine Project Power Point Presentation:** Carried over to future meeting.

---

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING:** Saturday, 9 June 2007, at Durbanville Nature Reserve:

- 10h00 Education workshop
- 12h00 Forum meeting