

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Minutes from the Meeting on 23 February 2008, at **Helderberg Nature Reserve Environment Centre, Somerset West.**

Vernon Head – Chaired the Meeting. Welcome was extended to first time attending Dave de Beer and Melanie Honicke (OBC) and Rose Mills (SWBC).

Sylvia Ledgard – Minutes.

Present

Cape Bird Club: Vernon Head, Anne Gray, Sylvia Ledgard, Dave Whitelaw, Jo Hobbs

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal, Dave de Beer, Melanie Honicke

BirdLife Stellenbosch: Willene van der Merwe

BirdLife Walker Bay: Elsa Gebhard

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff

Hermanus Bird Club: John Bowler, Lee Burman

Somerset West Bird Club: John Carter, Brian Dennis, Ben Kakebeeke, Rose Mills, Freya Brett

West Coast Bird Club: Jan Kotze, Keith Harrison

Paarl: Yvonne Weiss

ADU: Les Underhill

Apologies

Brigid de Kock, Lesley Teare, Elsa Gebhard, Royd Frith, Otto Schmidt.

Minutes of Previous Meeting (29/09/2007): Accepted.

APPOINTMENT OF WCBF OFFICE BEARERS

Office bearers reaffirmed for the two-year term 2008 and 2009 are:

Chairman: Vernon Head

Vice-Chairman: John Carter

Secretary: Sylvia Ledgard

Treasurer: Brian Dennis

Conservation: Dave Whitelaw

WCBF FINANCES (Brian Dennis)

The Treasurer presented the financial report of income and expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2007. Key items:

- BLSA funding (2007): 7,000
- Expenditure: 4,611
- Surplus at year-end: 3,763
- The main items of expenditure related to Venue and Car Claims for Forum meetings.
- The average cost per Forum Meeting was 1,200
- WCBF funds are held within the SWBC account for reasons of practicality and cost saving.

Agreed that we request further funding of R7,000 for 2008 from BLSA.

Action: Brian. *Note: Brian has confirmed that funding was requested and has been received.*

CONSERVATION. Environmental Threats/Habitat Loss

West Coast (K. Harrison)

The West Coast Peninsula has been designated at Government level to be the No. 1 national growth point over the next 15 - 20 years. Increased port facilities are required in the Western Cape, with projected increases in the traffic of containers (527%); dry goods (332%), liquid bulk (646%, break bulk (39%). Saldahna is a natural harbour, with 24-hour year-round access, no real weather or tide problems, and no inflowing river. Infrastructure is present. The land is flat and there is space to develop. It is estimated that population levels will increase from 86,000 to 230,000 in the Saldahna Municipal region alone (this does not include Velddrif).

Environmental threats are already evident and will be ongoing. BLSA's Conservation Division has designated the area stretching from Langebaan to Velddrif as potentially the most stressed in the country. WCBC, with the support of BLSA's Legal Division, is currently registered as an I&AP for 18 E.I.A's. On-going monitoring and awareness of incoming development proposals will be crucial and Keith called on WCBF branches/clubs to give their backing by registering as I&AP's. **Action:** Clubs

Development projects in the pipeline:

West Coast National Park and Islands (impinging upon IBA SA 105)

- **Extension of Iron Ore Terminal at Saldahna (from 30MTA to 92MTA):** Details of this project are recorded in WCBF Minutes dated 9 June and 29 Sept 2007. The port will have a container terminal, ship repair, bulk oil and desalination facilities and supporting industrial areas. This will go ahead, as Saldahna is the only viable option for the project. Our goal must be to ensure that it does so within the framework of existing legislation to protect the environment. The volume of silt that will be generated as a result of dredging the bay to deepen the harbour 7.5-18.0 million cubic meters, depending on how far the harbour extends outward (if the latter, it would take it into Big Bay) how it will be disposed of and the effect on the tidal flow into Langebaan Lagoon, remains a source of concern. There is a reduced risk of oil pollution as the facility will handle bunker oil, not crude, and risk management procedures are in place. A 3-year contract has been signed between the National Ports Authority (NPA) and Oil Pollution Control SA, which has equipment and facilities on site.
- **Baja Sardinia (at the Langebaan entrance to WCNP):** Refer to Minutes dated 29 Sept 2007.
- **A hotel and 100+ residential erven are planned.** Development of the site was rejected by a Cape High Court ruling in 1999. It is a RAMSAR site up to the high tide mark and is protected as a National Park. DEAT has served papers under the National Environment Management Act. The case hangs on a High Court ruling now as to whether the site is in or outside the urban fringe; if outside, the developer would have to pay costs to go to court.
- **BLSA's Legal Division:** has sent a report on the Langebaan/Saldahna situation to the Ramsar Secretariat in South Africa and this has been accepted by the Africa Desk in Switzerland. The Ramsar Secretariat will liaise with the relevant Government departments before proceeding with an investigation.
- **Rest Camp in WCNP:** SA National Parks is planning to build a rest camp with associated infrastructure at Kraalbaai, which will comprise 10 x 4-bed cabins.
- **Lower Berg River Wetlands (IBA SA 104):** This is a 24,500ha IBA, which includes Velddrif, Laaiplek and the farms on either side of the river, and is unprotected. At present, there is no

development east of Velddrif and the R27.

Development plans for this region include:

- **Flaminkvlei:** A marina hotel and 600 residential erven, to be built on stilts below the 50-year floodline, a school and cemetery, desalination plant and Aquaculture project, plus 1-5 low density residences on a “nature reserve” at the Old River Mouth and Lagoon.
- **Note:** Notification has since been received that Cerebos at Velddrif has been sold to Flaminkvlei Development. This means that the whole of CWAC Berg 2 (the heart of the IBA) is planned for developing. In addition, the inland section of the pans by the R27 to the fence that divides them from Swartjiesbaai pans is included.
- **De Plaat:** 600 residential erven. DEAT has restricted development to above the 50-year floodline.
- **Kruispad and Melkplaas (upstream):** 5 low density residences on each farm.
- **Laaiplek:** Atlantic Shore/Wave - 700 erven north of Laaiplek between the R27 and the beach.
- **Desalination plant** proposed to supply Dwarskersbos and coast.

West Coast Peninsula

- **Tortoise Reserve, Paternoster:** This is a positive development. The objective is ultimately to link all the “nature reserves” springing up on the peninsula. The Tortoise Reserve is to be the first and central point.
- **Trekoskraal (10km of coast on the Vredenburg peninsula between Jacob’s Bay and Cape Columbine):** Residential and resort development with hotel planned. The area has been allowed degrade in order to facilitate rezoning. It has isolated botanical communities, reptiles and at least 100 bird species.
- **Paternoster:** Extension to sewage and storm water systems to make “bird friendly”. An EIA will be done.
- **St, Helena Heights:** Residential developments planned in the vicinity of the hotel. Plots sold before rezoning.
- **St. Helena Hills (3,343ha on top of the hill):** 3,345 residential erven, hotel and vineyards planned. There is no access to the area, so little is known about it.

Hermanus River / Bot River Lagoon (Lee Burman)

It has come to the attention of Hermanus Bird Club that there is a proposal to build a commercial airfield on Farm 42 on the Hermanus River, which will run parallel with and in close proximity to the Lamloch Swamp, part of the Bot River basin. The flight path of aircraft will be directly aligned with the swamp and there will be hangers and refuelling facilities. The swamp is an important breeding and feeding area for numerous bird species. Hermanus Bird Club has raised objections with the developers. HBC and BLSA have registered as I&AP’s.

Wakkerstroom and Grasslands a National threat.

Prospecting permits have been issued by the Dept. of Minerals & Energy to the Delta Mining Corporation for the exploration of coal and torbanite in the Wakkerstroom region. This is the most serious environmental threat this grassland and wetland region has ever faced. BLSA is totally committed to fighting mining in Wakkerstroom and has been joined by other major Conservation NGO’s and civil society in their determination to challenge the issuing of the permits and have them declared null and void. BLSA, along with

these organisations, is seeking funds to litigate on the matter. An appeal has been sent to branches and affiliates to support the fund. **EIA Strategy Workshop**

With so many environmental issues arising, it becomes difficult to know how best to address them. Some discussion was had as to the efficacy of individual clubs registering as I&AP's rather than the combined voice of WCBF. Should clubs register for all EIA's or only those within their locality?

Dave expressed the view that it was necessary to become selective as it was not possible to address every issue. Keith felt we would lose credibility locally if we did not do so and people would stop reporting potential threats to us. Vernon noted that it is incumbent on clubs and birding interest groups in the Western Cape to manage regional issues and, in matters of national crisis, the Forum should give support to show solidarity.

Agreed that the time had come to convene a strategy workshop, with Carolyn Ah Shene (BLSA Policy & Advocacy) attending, to resolve these and other issues associated with threats to the environment.

CONSERVATION: Other Issues

House Crows: Dave Whitelaw reported that the project team will no longer pursue dialogue with the SPCA Ethics Committee on the matter of House Crow elimination. In principle, the SPCA is against the use of the toxin (Starlicide). They have also highlighted the fact that it is not registered for use in South Africa. It is target specific and has proved effective in Durban, with the House Crow population down from 5,000 to 15 birds. Registration of a product can take several years and Guy Preston is trying to get exemption from the Department of Agriculture. Regardless, it is the intention to proceed with the programme in Cape Town.

Tern Roost-Lourens River: No further developments. Gordon Scholtz sits on the committee with AECI.

Raptor/Owl Rehabilitation Centres: Vernon discussed the question of BLSA accreditation with Neil Smith (Conservation Manager). The current policy is that BLSA does not get involved with rehabilitation centres, because of concerns. Some centres are suspect and are not used only for rehabilitation. Vernon proposes that the Forum formulates a policy and a mandate, which he can take to Council. The Region could vet a centre first, with Cape Nature as a starting point, and then be responsible for monitoring and follow-up. In the case of Eleze Kemp's owl hospital in Tulbach, it is suggested that Jill Mortimer follows this through and we take this particular case forward with a firm proposal.

Action: Jill Mortimer

Planned Killing of Birds-Stanford: The Birkenhead Brewery has planted vines and was using firecrackers to deter Starlings. Neighbours complained about noise pollution and mist-netting was introduced. The concern is that other birds are also trapped. Mist-nets can only be used with permission of Cape Nature and they propose setting up a forum to discuss the issue. Nothing further will be done this season. Dave will liaise with Mike Ford.

Anton advised that he had a meeting with wine farmers some years ago to discuss mitigating measures, such as those used in Europe. Anton will be meeting with SA Fruit Farmers Assoc. to find answers/proposals and get BLSA involved. Gerhard Verdoorn will formulate a draft strategy, giving farmers various options.

BIRDING ROUTES (Anton Odendal)

The West Coast Birding Route (Flamingo Birding Route) was launched in November 2007. Initially, a steering committee was formed, followed now with the appointment of a management committee. This has proved to be a successful formula and will be taken forward for developing the other birding routes. Coming up this year are birding routes for the Overberg, Eden and Garden Route, with the Karoo coming on board by November 2009. A website has been established. Map Studio is producing comprehensive provincial maps - all maps will have the same format. Subject to funding, bird guide training will commence in September. The Winelands Birding Route will be taken forward after the BLSA AGM (March 16). BLSA Birding Routes will be signing an M.O.U with Cape Town Routes Unlimited, followed by Provincial and District Municipalities. Other birding routes being planned are Eastern Cape, O.F.S., Witwatersrand and Gauteng.

REGIONAL FORUMS

Vernon attended a meeting of bird clubs in the Eastern Cape to advise on the process of forming a Regional Forum, based on what has been done in the Western Cape. The Eastern Cape Birding Forum was launched and a generic concept will be developed for the formation of Regional Forums.

'FLIGHT FOR BEGINNERS' COURSE (Anton Odendal)

The plan is to extend this programme to a wider audience, as part of BLSA's strategy to change the demographics of its membership. Different provinces will be targeted over a 10-year period.

SABAP2

John Carter expressed concern at the low level of coverage so far achieved. The number of active participants is small. It is his experience that people are afraid of maps and lack the necessary map reading skills. The workshops are helpful. Currently, there are 600 registered participants, but only 151 are active observers. There are 17,000 pentads to be mapped. So far, 5% have been chronicled in a 2% timeframe of the programme. Les Underhill is confident that the momentum will increase. Western Cape has reached 10% coverage.

IBA WORKSHOP

Neil Smith (BLSA Conservation Manager) will be conducting a workshop on Sunday morning, 6 April, at the Kristo Pienaar Centre at Tygerberg Nature Reserve. The programme agenda has been circulated.

PAARL BIRD SANCTUARY (Yvonne Weiss)

There was an incident on December 8, in which a visitor to the sanctuary was robbed. He claimed that he had been stabbed. The Advisory Committee saw the Mayor's representative with a view to stepping up security. This was achieved, with regular patrols of the entire sanctuary undertaken on an hourly basis during the day. City Protection is engaged under contract, which extends to end June. The new supervisor is Yolanda Hess. The supervisor and attendants are responsible for seven sewage works and work at all of them. The squatters are due to move. Toilets have been built on the new site, but the necessary infrastructure must still be put in. Fencing will be erected at the sanctuary to deter re-entry once the squatters have moved.

BLSA MATTERS

AGM 2008 (12-16 March, to be hosted by BirdLife Overberg, at Hermanus): Anton reported that there had been problems with setting up the event. Responses were slow. The pricing structure for the functions was reduced to R500. A good programme had been put together with a variety of specialist outings, including pelagic and Dyer Island cruises, Great White Shark cage diving, bird photography, hiking in Fernkloof, self-drive or guided outings, and Avitourism and 'Clean Marine' workshops. There would be the Mayor's cocktail party, gala dinner and auction. The Gill Memorial Medal and Eagle and Owl Awards would be presented. Anton appealed for people to support the event.

Issues Arising from Strategy Workshop and Council Meeting (Feb. 2008): (Vernon Head) Marketing Strategy-Vodacom Sponsorship: Vodacom has offered substantial funding for a marketing analysis and advertising campaign to re-position BLSA as a leading NGO in the country. BLSA will present the outcomes of the strategy workshop to Vodacom's communication company, Magna Carta, who will prepare a comprehensive communication strategy document for Council. Fund raising was a major issue. John C. noted that BLSA carried a deficit of R400,000 against budget at year-end. It was clear that the Society needed to go in a different direction to find funding.

Conservation Advisory Committee: Council had accepted an offer by WWF-SA to host the setting up of a conservation advisory committee, comprising conservationists and ornithologists, which would give BLSA professional guidance in conservation.

Membership: It was of key importance that BLSA expanded its membership and big changes were in the offing. There was a clear need to look at different options for membership of BLSA and Council would be

asked to ratify recommendations at the Council meeting in March. Massive redevelopment of the Membership system was being priced and a formal sponsor would be sought.

Sasol Birdlife SA National Bird Week (5-11 May 2008): Theme “Myths and Legends of Owls”.

Co-ordinator: Sadie Wolheim. The objective is to change the perception regarding owls in different cultures. A briefing document had been sent to branches and branches/bird clubs who submitted their Bird Week plans to Sadie would receive supporting finance of R1,060. A lesson plan pack, including posters, would be sent to every Branch. There would be a candle lighting ceremony on Saturday 3 May - “Light a Candle for the Owl” - which would mark the official launch of National Bird Week. Branches/clubs were asked to follow suit. Also planned was a “Big Walk for Owls”.

Regional Co-ordinators: There was general consensus that there was lack of capacity at Regional level. Under consideration was the appointment of a paid staff member to co-ordinate the activities of a region. Funding would be difficult to secure for these positions, but possibly the person could be linked to projects in the area.

“Save the Seabirds” Week: Vernon advised that this event was being planned to take place from 3-9 November 2008.

12th Pan African Ornithological Congress (PAOC): (7-12 Sept 2008) (Les Underhill)

The Congress takes place in Africa every four years. In 1996, it was in Ghana, 2000 Uganda, 2004 Tunisia and this year the ADU will host the event in South Africa. Venue: Goudini Spa Conference Centre. There will be 7 plenary sessions and 5 papers on a theme. The registration fee for the full package, inclusive of accommodation and meals, is R5,000. It was not viable to accept bookings on a day-visitor basis. The Congress would be beneficial to birders whose interest extended beyond birding. Cape Bird Club will assist with transporting delegates from and to the airport. Anyone who can show people around and help with early morning guiding will be appreciated.

SANCCOB (Les Underhill)

SANCCOB has run into financial problems and the CEO and Fundraiser are in the process of being retrenched. Simon Stuart is Chairman of the Board and Venessa Strauss will now be responsible for managing the Centre.

Agreed that SANCCOB will be invited to join WCBF

DATES OF FORTHCOMING MEETINGS:

Venue: Durbanville Nature Reserve for both meetings.

Saturday, 26 July 2008,

Saturday, 22 November 2008.