

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Minutes at Helderberg Nature Reserve Environment Centre, Somerset West, on Sat. 21 February 2009.

Vernon Head – Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard – Minutes.

Present

Cape Bird Club: Vernon Head, Anne Gray. Sylvia Ledgard, Jo Hobbs, Otto Schmidt.

BirdLife Stellenbosch: Willene van der Merwe

Tygerberg Bird Club: Dirk van Driel

BirdLife Walker Bay: Royd Frith

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff

Hermanus Bird Club: Barbara Palmer, John Bowman, Lee Burman

Somerset West Bird Club: John Carter, Brian Dennis, Jill Mortimer, Freya Brett, Rose Mills.

West Coast Bird Club: Anna Dernier, Jan Kotze, Keith Harrison

BLSA: Neil Smith (Conservation Division)

Welcome: Extended to;

- Tony Williams (ornithological consultant for Flaminkvlei Development)

Apologies

Anton Odendal, Brigid de Kock, Ben Kakebeeke, Dave Whitelaw, Japie Claassen

Minutes of Previous Meeting (22/11/2008): Accepted.

BLSA (Vernon Head)

Strategy

Re-positioning: The big issue is to re-position BLSA as the foremost conservation NGO in South Africa. The conservation of birds must be the main thrust and will underpin all strategic planning going forward. The IBA programme will be central to planning. Specialists in promotions and advertising have been engaged to analyse what needs to be done to grow the Society. Membership is a key issue. To have political leverage, attract funding and be able to do more for conservation, the Society must increase its membership. The goal is to rapidly grow the membership from the current 8,000 to 100,000.

Re-branding: To this end, branding is important. BLSA will be looking at forming partnerships with major companies and relevant organisations (like Cape Union Mart) to market the BirdLife brand and increase public awareness of the organisation. The idea is to throw the membership net much wider and attract nature lovers generally and conservation minded people (e.g. subscribers to Africa Birds and Birding). Membership opportunities will be offered through a range of merchandise, bird books, competitions, etc.

National Bird Week (4 -10 May 2009).

The Cape Robin-Chat is the Bird of the Year. There is an opportunity to target the gardening community and Clubs can give thought to this in their local area. Sadie Halbhuber is the co-ordinator. Material will be ready by the end of February. FB reported that Helderberg Nature Reserve would run a week of birding and exhibitions that would be extended for the whole month.

Birding World Cup

Shelved for the present.

Western Cape Regional Office

VH will be seeking funding. JM questioned whether we need a regional office. VH believes BLSA needs a base in the Western Cape and this will become important to the organisation in the future.

BLSA AGM (Phalaborwa, 21 March 2009)

A number of members will be attending from the Western Cape.

BLSA Finances.

JC highlighted the issue that BLSA is dependent on outside funding and questioned how this would affect their finances in the current economic downturn. VH responded that BLSA needs the right people to find funds. The opportunity for enhancing the bequest programme is under investigation and the highly successful RSPB bequest programme is being looked at with a view to implementing a similar plan. BLSA has sufficient funds to keep going and business advisers will help steer the organisation through the economic downturn.

National Seabird Week (October) (Vernon Head)

Will be scheduled to coincide annually with National Marine Week. It is highly relevant to the Western Cape and is a concept that WCBF can get behind as a conservation thrust. People and organisations with vested interests can be brought on board. The goal would be to raise funds for research programmes related to marine birds. VH will be talking to the Fitz to do a week of lectures on marine birds. VH asked the Forum to:

- Put forward ideas
- Volunteer/suggest names of persons to serve on a steering/working committee.

Action: WCBF members

Albatross Task Force: Meidad Goren has done a presentation to the Prince of Wales, which will receive worldwide exposure, on the work being done with fisheries and on fishing vessels in South Africa and Namibia to reduce the by-catch of Seabirds, primarily Albatrosses and Petrels. Interaction with the fishing industry, education and mitigation measures at sea are resulting in a massive reduction in the number of Seabirds being killed.

IBA Assessments

Assessments have been completed for the 24 IBA's in the Western Cape.

SABAP2

At the date of the December Council meeting, 17,340 pentads had been completed and 400,000 records submitted. More people were coming on board, but there was a long way to go. Special mention was made of the Western Cape for their active contributions.

CONSERVATION

Environmental Threats-National

Luneberg/Wakkerstroom (IBA SA020): Legal issues are proceeding in the anti-mining campaign and are expected to be concluded by mid 2009.

Kamfers Dam, Kimberley (input from Mark Anderson): Flamingos are breeding for the second consecutive year on the artificially created island in Kamfers Dam. There are currently +/-3,000 chicks and 7,000 or more adults are still incubating eggs. The tally could be +/-15,000 chicks against 9,000 last year. This is significant, as Lesser Flamingos do not breed successfully every year at other breeding colonies (for example, breeding success is achieved on average every 10 years at Etosha Pan in Namibia). This is the first record of flamingos breeding on an artificial island and the first time that Lesser Flamingos have bred in South Africa. There are only six breeding sites in the world - three in southern Africa (Etosha Pan, Sua Pan and now

Kamfers Dam), one in east Africa (Lake Natron) and two small sites in India. The southern Africa Lesser Flamingo population is estimated to be in the region of 150,000 and has been declining for several decades. It is listed as “near threatened” in Red Data records locally and internationally. The breeding success at Kamfers Dam could reverse the trend. An aerial survey count of Lesser Flamingos at Kamfers Dam revealed +/- 83,000 individuals.

Major threats at Kamfers Dam are deteriorating water quality, as a result of raw sewage entering the dam, and a proposed massive housing development located on the property, adjacent to Kamfers Dam, just 230m from the water’s edge. The “Save the Flamingo Association” (StFA) is addressing both threats and Mark Anderson is representing BLSA on the StFA committee.

The proposed Northgate housing development envisages 65,000 houses, shopping centres, etc. These are not RDP houses and the cheapest unit will cost approx. R500,000. The EIA for the development was severely flawed, mainly because alternative sites were not evaluated. Despite this, the DEAT (Northern Cape) gave the development a positive RoD. The RoD is being appealed and the Department’s decision is awaited.

WCBF can assist by encouraging the Western Cape clubs/branches/members to sign the StFA petition and donate funds towards the cause of ensuring the conservation of Kamfers Dam flamingos. Details on www.savetheflamingo.co.za

Proposed Flamingo Talk Roadshow (VH): Radio show talks by Mark Anderson on the Kamfers Dam issue have generated a lot of interest and Mark has been invited to present these talks to clubs in Gauteng as fund raising events for the conservation of flamingos, with attendees paying R100 per head. Anton Odendal has proposed that Western Cape clubs follow suit. It was agreed that the idea would be pursued with a view to bringing Mark down at end August to visit clubs. R100/head could be a target fee, but it was felt that members should have the option to make voluntary donations. It was suggested that Mark’s airfare be paid out of WCBF funds. **Action: WCBF**

Environmental Threats – Regional

Flaminkvlei/Cerebos, Velddrif, Berg River Estuary (IBA SA104) Neil Smith/Tony Williams: NS presented an overview of the siting of the proposed development. Areas designated for development are;

- (1) the site adjacent to the Cerebos salt works, previously the farm Flaminkvlei, and
- (2) a site opposite the Cerebos factory adjacent to the salt pans. A small strip on the edge of the pans to the east is also on the plan for a limited number of houses.

The area is on the flight path of 20,000 Cape Cormorants, classified as “vulnerable”. Up to 56,000 birds have been counted at roosting sites. In addition, 10,000 Common Terns use the area for roosting. The area provides habitat for near-threatened species Lesser Flamingo, Chestnut-banded Plover and Caspian Tern.

Cerebos is ceasing mining operations and Flaminkvlei developer Chris Muller has put in an offer to purchase the whole of the property, but is awaiting the outcome of the RoD. Re-zoning is underway to change the boundaries of the urban edge, but the Municipality is being challenged as the correct procedure was not followed.

NS noted that the area that would be left generally untouched is where the greatest number of flamingos and cormorants are. The proposed Flaminkvlei site (1) is very saline and least used by birds and as such could be considered the most expendable. Site (1) would, therefore, not be unacceptable on the development plan, but the concern is that a precedent will have been created by permitting development on the estuary, which could have a cumulative effect all the way up the coast. NS’s view is that site (2) alongside the salt pans opposite the factory should be rejected. JK commented that the developer would not be interested in purchasing the Cerebos property, if he could not develop that site.

Cerebos: Cerebos is contracted to rehabilitate the site if mining ceases. They would almost certainly rehabilitate to grass, which would ultimately become salt marsh, unsuitable for waders and shorebirds. If Flaminkvlei Development goes ahead with purchasing the property, it is their intention to continue commercial salt mining on the pans by forming a BEE company and contracting out mining rights. Jan Kotze has already signed a MoU with the developer to process salt, once mineral rights are secured.

Comments: Tony Williams noted that the developer had reduced the area proposed for development by 50%. They would retain the salt works if they could get a return. Water would be pumped into the pans, valuable sites for waders would be maintained and roosting berms and platforms incorporated for cormorants and terns. In discussions with Phil Hockey, Phil had indicated that it would be disastrous for waterbirds, if the salt pans were to go. Keith raised the question of disturbance to birds as a result of increased recreational activity on the river. Tony is of the opinion that birds are generally tolerant of this activity, but no boating would be permitted beyond Flaminkvlei.

NS summarised the options, as follows:

- (1) Maintain the salt works as a working operation.
- (2) Discontinue salt mining and allow Cerebos to rehabilitate the site.
- (3) Leave area to east of bridge off the development plan.
- (4) Go with the developer's plan as proposed.

VH cautioned against being reactionary for the sake of it. Environmental friendly solutions should be sought that would have the least negative impact on the biodiversity of the estuary. DvD noted that the Western Cape had already lost 50% of its wetlands. From a BLSA perspective, NS would want to ensure that the 20,000 Cape Cormorants are disturbed as little as possible.

Agreed that NS be given the mandate to convene a panel of environmental organisations/experts to debate the issues and come up with recommendations for discussion with the developer. **Action: Neil Smith**

Langebaan Lagoon (IBA SA105): Feedback is awaited from the office of the Minister of Environmental Affairs to a directive by Ramsar regarding the state of the lagoon and proposed developments.

Saldahna: Proposed Expansion of Harbour and Iron Ore Terminal (Keith Harrison): It appears that the Port Authorities are renegeing on the Letter of Agreement and are preparing to disband the local Environment Committee.

Verlorenvlei IBA SA103) (KH): A game farm development is being planned. WCBC has registered for the EIA.

Mineral Exploration, West Coast (KH): Prospecting for phosphate is taking place from Britannia Bay to Elandsbaai.

Lourens River Estuary: Tern Roost (Jill Mortimer). This has reference to the pending development of housing and industry on the AECl site and the purchase for development of state-owned beach-land by Heartland Properties (property arm of AECl). The estuary is the roosting site of thousands of terns. At a recent bird club outing, there were approximately 10,000 terns on site. Gordon Scholtz does ringing at the estuary and has recorded birds from Finland and Estonia. It is clear that the Lourens River Estuary is a very important roost and Cape Nature and DEAT must take responsibility. Gordon attends the AECl meetings. The roost will be featured during Seabird Week.

House Crows (VH for Dave Whitelaw): Cape Nature has recommenced baiting and the strike last month at Nyanga killed 300 birds. A low profile is being maintained. WCBF is sending a letter to the Regional Director of the Dept. of Agriculture in support of the local authority's application for an exemption to allow the import of the poison Starlicide into the Western Cape.

FINANCES (Brian Dennis)

The Treasurer presented the Financial Report of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2008.

Key items:

- Balance B/F from 2007: R3,700
- BLSA funding for 2008: R7,000
- Expenditure: R4,400
- Surplus at year-end: R6,300
- Main items of expenditure: Venue expenses and car claims.
- Average cost of each Forum meeting: R1,200.
- BLSA funding of R7,000 for 2009 to be applied for.

GENERAL

Registration for Income Tax: CBC, TBC and OBC have registered. Hermanus, Walker Bay and WCBC are in the process.

Birding Weekends in the Western Cape 2009: The programme of events for 2009, prepared by Anton Odendal, has been circulated to Clubs. Anton has appealed for Club support of these weekends, which work well as club camps/outings.

Details and contact numbers will be posted on www.westerncapebirding.co.za

Stanford Glendower Bird Fair (2-4 Oct.): Will co-ordinate with ride on the back of the Overberg Nature Festival this year.

DATES OF NEXT MEETING:

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 13 June 2009, at Durbanville Nature Reserve (10h30 for 11h00)