

Western Cape Birding Forum

Now represents 17 clubs with more than 2,000 members in the Western Cape.

Minutes at Helderberg Nature Reserve, Somerset West, Saturday, 16 February 2013.

Vernon Head - Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard - Minutes.

Present

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

Somerset West Bird Club: John Carter, Brian Dennis, Jill Mortimer, Freya Brett, Denise Rizzo.

Hermanus Bird Club: Cherry Mills, Lee Berman.

Somerset West Bird Club: Brian Dennis, Sakkie Krynauw, Caroline Crump, Freya Brett.

Stanford Bird Club (previously **BirdLife Walker Bay**): Peter Hochfelden

Tygerberg Bird Club: Brian Vanderwalt.

West Coast Bird Club: Keith and Colin de Kock.

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal.

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff.

BLSA: Dale Wright.

SABAP2: Peter Nupen.

Tony Williams (Ornithologist).

Apologies

Mariana Delpont, Jo Hobbs, Jenny Lodge, Barbara Palmer, Otto Schmidt, Yvonne Weiss.

Congratulations: The Chairman congratulated newly appointed Chairpersons Peter Hochfelden (Stanford Bird Club) and Colin de Kock (West Coast Bird Club).

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting (6/10/2012). Agreed.

2. Record of Note: Phil Hockey.

The Chairman paid tribute to the late Prof. Phil Hockey, Director of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute. Phil was a friend of the bird clubs, a respected ornithologist and scientist and a passionate birdwatcher. He was able to cross the bridge between the academics and birders and make science accessible to the birding community. He lived life through his passion and was a wonderful role model. The Forum observed a minute's silence in his honour.

Note: Peter Ryan has been appointed as Acting Director of the Fitz.

3. Western Cape Birding Forum - Suggested Name Change.

The Forum considered the suggestion by Mark Anderson that the name "Western Cape Bird Conservation Forum" might more correctly define the focus of the Forum. The name as currently stated was agreed at the inaugural meeting of the Regional Forum of Bird Clubs on 25 October 2003 and has been around for 10 years. It was considered at that meeting that the term "Birding" covered the range of activities associated with the bird clubs and the birding community.

- Unanimously agreed that there was not reasonable cause to change the name.

4. Regional Conservation Programme Update (Dale Wright).

The report covers Dale's planned activities and focus for 2013. They are:

(1) Finalising Important Bird Area assessments:

- By year-end, assessments for all 26 IBAs in the Western Cape will be completed and 8 out of 10 IBAs for the Eastern Cape.
Comment (BvW): Link atlasing pentads to IBAs. (DWr): The majority of IBAs in the Western Cape has atlasing cards. We are looking at forming “My Bird Patches” for terrestrial IBAs.

(2) False Bay Ecology Park MoU actions:

- Corporate fundraising.
- Community and student projects.

(3) Developing Stewardship programmes:

- Verlorenvlei Estuary project: WESSA and BLSA submitting a joint funding proposal for stewardship of the site.
- Overberg Wheat-belt project: MoU between BLSA and Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust to collaborate on conservation projects and raise funds for stewardship and conservation work in the region.
- Partnering with CapeNature and other conservation agencies to assist with stewardship and conservation work.

Comment (DWh): The relationship between habitat and large terrestrial birds (e.g. Renosterveld and Denham's Bustard) needs to be looked at. (DWr): Proposals are being formulated.

(4) Establishing Local Conservation Groups:

- Engaging with bird clubs in the Western and Eastern Cape to form LCGs to assist with IBA assessments and monitoring of IBA-related and other conservation projects.
Comment (PN): An idea might be to invite bird club members to accompany Dale on an IBA assessment/monitoring exercise. This could lead to further involvement.

(5) Engaging new audiences:

- Exposing new and different audiences to the activity of birds, birding and bird conservation.

Additional activities:

- Fynbos Endemic Bird Project: Dr. Alan Lee's work continues on documenting the status, ecology and vulnerability to climate change of the six birds endemic to the Fynbos biome. He is currently looking at the connection between the Cape Sugar Bird and Fynbos. Fundraising options have been discussed with Dr. Phoebe Barnard (SANBI).
- World Wetlands Day 2013 took place on 2 February. Material including posters, leaflets and interactive games for children could be downloaded from the Ramsar website. Bird clubs had the opportunity to get involved by visiting schools and spreading the message of wetland conservation and the importance of wetland habitat to bird conservation.
Note (VH): We are encouraging the Director of Environment and Conservation to expand the department's portfolio to incorporate Wetlands. Next year we hope to get Government to partner a drive on Wetlands.

5. Proposed Fund-Raising Initiative: WCBF GOLF DAY. (Anton Odendal).

Issues to be considered:

- An enormous amount of work is involved.

- Essential that a professional marketer is engaged to handle.
- Ideally should include known players.
- Prizes are the biggest issue. Big prizes are needed to draw contestants - R30,000, R40,000, R60,000/hole.
- Need a golf club on board as a sponsor.
- Based on quotations for BLO Golf Day this year, sponsors are wanting 15%-20% commission on profits.
- Catering and eats are further considerations.
- October with SOS would be good.
Noted it is necessary to book a golf course a year in advance.

6. False Bay Ecology Park / Strandfontein (IBA SA 116) (Dave Whitelaw).

- **IBA Pilot Site-Application for Funding:** We are working with Grant Thornton to draw up a corporate funding proposal for the False Bay Ecology Park. Sponsorship offers corporate benefits in terms of Income Tax reductions and BEE points. Grant Thornton emphasises that the environment must not be the platform on which the proposal is based; it must be education and skills training. The Cape Town Environmental Education Trust (CTEET) will be a major partner with implementing the False Bay Ecology Park project, managing aspects of the skills development and environmental education programmes.
- **“Birdathon” Fun Walk:** BirdLife South Africa in partnership with the City of Cape Town and Cape Bird Club will be hosting a Fun Walk event at the Strandfontein Birding Area on 13 April. The fun event will include a short quiz which participants will answer en route as they bird and learn about birds. The primary target audience is members of the Cape Flats communities surrounding the reserve. The purpose is to raise awareness of conservation in urban areas and build an association with the IBA in the minds of the community.

7. Conservation - Species Concerns.

(1) Swift Tern Mortality at V&A Waterfront (DWh): There are more than 200 Swift Tern nests on top of the Gateway building. Bruce Dyer reports that there used to be over 200 Hartlaub Gull nests there. Waterfront Management have agreed not to do any maintenance work on these buildings when the Swift Terns are nesting. (TW): The problem is guano build-up. (KH) Have solved the problem by putting rubber mats on roofs. Birds will only use a site for 2-3 years.

Note (VH): SOS can be a major event every year at the Waterfront. Nedbank and Dept. of the Environment will go in with us at the presentation to V&A Management. It could be useful to have: - Stats of birds breeding at the Waterfront. Dave will get figures from Bruce Dyer. **Action:** D Wh.

Suggestions why birds are important (e.g. sound of seagulls at the Waterfront) - Tony to think about this.
Action: Tony Williams.

(2) Cormorants (DWh): CapeNature has an expensive database on all the species. There is evidence that numbers are declining for all of the species. (KH): Rob Crawford has the data and is the person to talk to.

(3) Knysna Warblers in the Cape Peninsula (DWh): The City has removed brambles and the question is whether the Knysna Warbler is still there; would like to see a student research the issue. (DWr): SABAP2 distribution does not show a decline generally. It is important to direct most effort into birds in trouble.

(4) Bird Collisions on Power Lines-Rawsonville (Kobus Graaff): This has reference to the report from a farmer in the area that Blue Cranes and Herons were being killed on power lines because the bird deterrent flappers attached by Eskom were falling off. Kobus contacted an official at Eskom, Dirk Marthinus, who was able to throw some light on the position. He is aware only of a problem with flappers at the farm “Pokkraal”

where the line with flappers ran over a dam and was considered dangerous. This line has been relocated. The smaller flappers are easily damaged by strong winds in the area and Eskom is replacing them with large coloured balls that are stronger and can be seen by birds. He has asked for contact details of the Rawsonville farmer.

8. Inataka Island

(1) Feedback on Bird Festival. The event ran for 5 days (19-23 Nov.) during Birding Big Day week. A number of different school and community groups were exposed to birdwatching, birdringing demonstrations with discussions around why we ring birds and messages regarding bird conservation. Lectures on citizen science projects and bird and wetland conservation were presented. The ADU and local bird clubs were involved. Initiatives such as this can be used to expose a wider audience to birds and bird conservation. This year, Dale will be collaborating with Inataka Island again and running a small festival with a number of schools during National Bird Week 20 - 24 May 2013.

(2) Concerns re Management of the Wetland. Concerns have been raised by the bird clubs regarding the algae infestation on the water and the virtual absence of water birds. It was suggested that there is a lack of interest or will on the part of the Century City Property Owners Association to address the issue and the health of the wetland. A letter was addressed to the Inataka Island Environmental Committee and received response from Alan Liebenberg of the CCPOA.

Comments:

- (KH): All waterways have a problem with weed and algae infestation. The only solution is to physically clear the weed.
- (TW): Century City residents have a legal obligation to maintain the wetland. They employ a fresh water consultant to assist in monitoring and managing water quality.
- Question: Does the consultant have expertise in the removal of algae?
As an aside, AG mentioned the availability of a book "*Easy Identification of some SA Wetland Plants*" by Dr. Carin van Ginkel of the Dept. of Water Affairs. Contact: stanley@wrc.org.za
- (BvW): Dirk van Driel is a water quality expert and could be called on to assess.
- The letter from Alan Liebenberg outlines the goals and objectives of the environmental management plan for Inataka Island, the problems currently being experienced and the action taken. It does not give time-lines as to when it is expected to have the problem sorted out. Tony to ask for specifics from the Environmental Committee. **Action:** Tony Williams.

(**Note:** TW advises it is believed that a key problem for the abandonment of nesting sites has been predation by mongoose. Seven mongoose have been removed. The heronry has been redesigned to prevent predators from accessing the platforms from the water. A water quality check is scheduled in April).

9. Paarl Bird Sanctuary (Yvonne Weiss).

- The Sand Island hide was destroyed by arson and some of the reed-beds and riverine vegetation devastated. The reed-beds are beginning to recover.
- The Drakenstein Municipality has rejected the idea of a security fence along the railway line. It would cost R10-million and could not have lasted. The Railway authorities are building a concrete wall from the Mbekweni (Wellington) end to protect the line.
- The toilet block, which had been totally trashed, has been repaired and the entrance is now inside the works security fence.
- Comments have been made by birders about the amount and condition of the water in the back-up ponds - the primary function of the plant is to handle the ever increasing amount of waste being dealt

with in the valley.

Security: A new security firm has been deployed. The gates on the northern side of the site will be locked at 17h00 for security reasons and visitors are asked to make sure they are signed in at the front gate.

Senior Superintendent Cedric Morkel has retired after 36 years of service and has been co-opted on to the PBS Advisory Committee. He is willing to take a group of adult birders around the treatment works to explain the intricacies of such an extensive plant.

Note: Bird Clubs The Drakenstein Municipality will host a meeting of WCBF on June 8 in their new boardroom.

Comment (TW): The Municipality is planning a landfill site close to PBS.

10. West Coast Update (Keith Harrison).

The report covers:

(1) **Mining Concerns.** Keith is of the opinion that the extent of mineral prospecting and proposed mining activity on the West Coast represent a greater threat to the environment than do renewable energy facilities. They involve:

- Rare Earth minerals, strategic for modern industry.
- Heavy minerals: Coastal sands, Namaqua sands.
- Phosphates
- Limestone
- Silica Sand

Along with prospecting and mining go applications for processing and refining plants.

(2) **Proclamation of Preserved Areas.** With the proclamation of the Integrated Coastal Management Act (ICMA), all the recognised birding sites on the West Coast from Rietvlei to the Olifants Estuary, including Dassen Island, will have in place Estuary Management Fora or Protected Area Association Committees. All marine IBAs have been placed under the Estuary Management Fora . The estuaries will have managers in situ, set up by CapeNature. The function of these bodies is to advise on problems and projects and it will be necessary to work through them on all matters related to the PPAs.

(3) **Renewable Energy.**

- Hopefield Wind Energy Farm has commenced with employing workers.
- The EIAs for Saldahna Solar Energy facilities have been passed.
- Koeberg Nuclear Plant: With so many independent producers, a serious concern has arisen regarding the control of energy feed into the Grid.

Comment (TW): There used to be regular meetings with the Wind Energy Group but this is not happening now.

(DWr): Anything like this must be channelled to Sam Ralston (email energy@birdlife.org.za Cell 083 673 3948).

(4) **West Coast National Park.**

- Seeberg hide needs replacement, resetting and redesign.
- Sand banks moving south.
- Moving sands at Seeberg place uncertainty on the proposed building of the Klein Mooimaak Camp.

- The future of Abrahamskraal is threatened by reed growth. There may be only one season of viewing left.

11. SABAP2 Update (Peter Nupen).

(1) **National:** To date, country-wide 82,824 Full Protocol Cards (FPCs) have been submitted to the ADU's database. In effect, approximately 1,500 cards are being added every month. Pentad coverage now stands at 66.38%, which means that nearly two thirds of the whole of RSA, Lesotho and Swaziland have at least one FPC.

(2) **Western Cape:** Of the 1,837 pentads, 1,535 have at least one FPC, equating to 83.6% of land coverage in the region. The majority of the outstanding 302 unatlased pentads are a long way from any major town and many are almost inaccessible in rugged mountainous territory. Importantly, 63% of the pentads atlased have at least two FPCs and 27.8% have at least four FPCs.

Les Underhill has stressed the importance of;

- diligently produced FPC checklists, adhering to the protocol of at least 2 hours of solid atlasing in a pentad,
- going wide - wall-to-wall coverage and
- going deep - repeated atlasing of pentads already covered. It is only with depth of coverage by year and by month, i.e. hundreds of checklists for a pentad, that it will be possible to detect changes in species composition on an annual basis and be able to develop early warning systems of change.

12. Overberg Update (Anton Odendal).

(1) **Fernkloof Educational Project:** Fernkloof and 8 other Environmental Agencies and NGOs have developed 12 metal bird educational posters and it is expected these will be unveiled at Fernkloof Nature Reserve in June. Lecture packs for teachers and parents and activity packs for children to support the posters are also being developed and staff members of the Eco-Schools in the region are doing curriculum based research for this purpose. In July/August, they will go to the Education Department. Three private schools are currently involved and from 2014, the plan is to get public schools involved. 50% of the profit from BLO Golf Day 2012 is being used for this project.

(2) **"Flight for Birders" Bird Identification and Conservation Courses:** Five courses have been run this year at Hermanus, Malmesbury, Intaka Island, for SANParks at Newlands Forest, and Somerset West. A further three courses are planned in May: a second course at Intaka Island, at Knysna and George. The profile of the courses is extending from largely Bird Friendly Establishments and Tourism offices to conservation NGO's and members of the bird-watching public.

Comment (PN): Could a slot be included for SABAP 2? - Yes, on a rotational basis if PN can do a 15-slide overview on Power Point. **Action:** Peter Nupen.

(3) **MOU between BLO and CapeNature:** The Overberg Division of CapeNature has invited BLO to sign a MOU in order to assist the organisation with some of its conservation work in Nature Reserves and Stewardship Sites. The terms of the MOU are being negotiated together with Dale Wright but in principle will apply to CWAC, Coastal CWAC, Baseline Data Collection and Monitoring of Conservation Priority Species. BLO will get members involved and move outings and weekend camps to support the above.

Comment (DWr): This is an exciting model which we can develop and use - a concept similar to Local Conservation Groups.

(4) **Website and Visitor Stats:** Incorporating more articles and trip reports. Visits to the site have tripled, averaging 62/day, with 25% from overseas. Upgrading for Twitter and Facebook.

13. BOTSOC and KIRSTENBOSCH CENTENARY YEAR (Anne Gray).

CBC and TBC are offering 2 hour bird walks at Kirstenbosch as their contribution to the centenary year. A number of walks are scheduled during the year and will be led by experienced birders from both clubs.

14. BLSA Events & Projects (Vernon Head).

(1) **SOS Festival:** The SOS event is growing year by year. We will seek funding from Government to go national this year. VH has met with Clubs with a view to decentralising the event. WCBC has put together a funding proposal, which VH will take to Government. Stanford Bird Club is also putting together a proposal.

- (CdK): Last year, WCBC joined up with the Fossil Park to promote SOS. This year, the Club wants to link fully with SOS, but a week later than the main event. The plan is to get kids in schools exposed to environmental issues, clean-ups, etc. Five or six towns will participate. We are hoping to get local tourist offices involved and the Shelley Point golf club.
- (KH): Keith highlighted the disadvantage that kids in rural schools on the West Coast experience with getting to events arranged locally and their limitations in terms of basic materials. At a “living workshop” conducted by Dale at the Engelbrecht Primary School at Elands Bay to mark World Wetlands Day, some children did not even have writing materials. There are schools that have no access to public transport at all. Where there is transport, the cost is unaffordable for parents. An example is Aurora. The local school only goes up to Grade 9; thereafter, children who want to go to matric level must commute to Piketberg at a cost of R150 return.

Future Plans for SOS (VH): SOS in its 5th year will be the biggest marine environmental event in the world. The photographic competition is now the biggest in the world. An American BirdLife organisation is planning to hold a conference in Cape Town in 2014 and Cape Town is shortlisted for the 2015 World Seabird Conference.

(2) **Flock at Sea 2013 (1-5 March):** 1,100 birders have booked to join “Flock at Sea” on board MSC Starlight Cruises Opera. We are applying for a Guinness Book of Records entry. A helicopter with banners will fly over the harbour at departure and ETV will capture the event for the evening news.

19 expert bird guides will be on board and Peter Harrison MBE and other top speakers will present talks.

(3) Nominations for BirdLife South Africa Awards:

- Austin Roberts Memorial Award. This is a new award, established to honour people who have made a significant contribution to bird conservation in South Africa. It is open to professionals in the conservation field and to non-professionals who have voluntarily applied their time, skills and talents to the benefit of bird conservation. Nominations will close on 2 September 2014.
- Gill Memorial Award. Nominations are invited for 2014. Closing date is 2 September 2014.

(4) **“African Birdlife” Magazine:** Two editions of the newly launched BLSA magazine have been published. The magazine has been very well received and is considered equal in content and quality to Africa Birds & Birding which it has replaced.

(5) Marketing;

- The “Hourglass” adverts, depicting animations of the Wattled Crane, African Skimmer and African Penguin will be shown on ETV and eNCA this year. The schedule is: 28 Feb 2013, 1 June 2013, 31 July 2013, 1 Nov 2013, 31 Dec 2013.
- The logo and branding for the Flufftail Festival is being developed. The event, launched on 2 February to coincide with World Wetlands Day, will highlight the importance of wetlands and their conservation.

(6) **Environmental Education Programme:** BLSA is developing an Environmental Education programme for schools, which aims to create fun activities around birds and the environment and will fit into the school curriculum.

Comment (DWh): Late Frank Wygold’s laboratory. Dave has approached CapeNature with a view to having the laboratory re-housed at Strandfontein.

(7) **Bird of the Year 2013 and National Bird Week (20-24 May)**. The focus this year is on wetlands, with the critically endangered White-winged Flufftail, a wetland specialist, selected as Bird of the Year. Wetlands are one of South Africa's most threatened habitats and water is one of its scarcest resources. The White-winged Flufftail will be used as a "wetland ambassador" for wetland and wetland bird conservation. Bird of the Year 2013 is sponsored by Eskom. Poster, lesson plans and activities will be available soon.

Important Note: WCBF emphasises that it is critical that Bird of the Year is linked into the school curriculum and resources are in hand by November of the previous year. Once the curriculum is set, it is too late. Dale will follow up. **Action:** Dale Wright.

Note on Educational Programmes:

- Kids in Parks: Discontinued.
- Youth Environmental School: Discontinued
- (BvD): The problem is transport. Only more affluent schools can participate.
- Eco Schools Programme: Ongoing. WESSA manages the programme.
- Careers Day Expo: BLSA participates. Individual groups of learners are addressed.

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 8 June 2013, at Paarl Bird Sanctuary (Drakenstein Municipality Boardroom).