

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Minutes from the Meeting on 27 July 2008, at **Durbanville Nature Reserve, Durbanville.**

Vernon Head – Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard – Minutes.

Present

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

BirdLife Overberg: Melanie Honicke

BirdLife Stellenbosch: Willene van der Merwe, Nico Venter

BirdLife Walker Bay: Elsa Gebhard

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff

Hermanus Bird Club: John Bowman, Lee Burman

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

West Coast Bird Club: Jan Kotze, Keith Harrison

Welcome: Extended to;

- Carolyn ah Shene (***BLSA-Policy & Advocacy Division***),
- Stanley Tshitwamulomoni (***DEAT, with responsibility for RAMSAR in South Africa***),
- Tony Williams (***ornithological consultant for EIA for proposed Flaminkvlei/Cerebos development, Velddrif***) and
- Gerhard Verdoorn (***visiting***).

Apologies

Royd Frith, Yvonne Weiss, Mariana Delport.

Minutes of Previous Meeting (23/02/2008): Accepted.

EIA STRATEGY WORKSHOP AND RAMSAR OVERVIEW

The main focus of this meeting was to seek guidance on how best to approach the matter of EIA's and to formulate a Forum strategy for future action.

EIA Process (Carolyn ah Shene)

Carolyn presented an outline of the process involved, based on BirdLife International guidelines. In essence, when a potential threat or problem is identified:

- (1) It must be determined whether it will affect an IBA.
- (2) If 'Yes', investigate the accuracy of the information about the threat - obtain official confirmation.
- (3) Local bird club or EIA officer does an initial evaluation of the potential impact on birds and habitat.
- (4) If a significant impact is expected, the decision is taken to intervene.
- For criteria for (3) and (4), refer to the Power Point presentation sent separately.

Intervention Process Agreed by WCBF:

Local issues: Local club gets EIA information and presents this to the Forum (by e-mail or at a Forum meeting, if timing appropriate).

- Local club registers as IAP, plus
- Refers same to WCBF Conservation officer, who registers on behalf of the Forum, plus
- Refers same to BLSA (Carolyn ah Shene or Neil Smith-Conservation Division.)

National issues: (e.g. Wakkerstroom, Kamfers Dam): All clubs support BLSA.

EIA Process-Comments and Questions:

- When registering as IAP's, numbers are important. The more people represented, the more weight it will carry. This is where WCBF can make an impact, representing as it does the Bird Clubs of the Western Cape with a membership in excess of 2,000 (actual 2,200). It was felt that it would not be effective for all clubs to register individually for all EIA's, including those outside their area. This could be overkill. Lee Burman, from experience in Local Council, supported this view. The intervention process, as stated above, should be followed.

- Threats to sites not listed as IBA's. Follow the same process as above.
- Depending on the campaign, it must be decided whether to totally oppose or look for mitigation measures.
- Identify social implications - how will the community be affected? This could be a basis for objection.
- Develop a list of expert witnesses.
- Get in at the first stage. A site visit is essential.
- Accuracy is important. Be certain of the facts. Inaccurate information reduces the value of an objection.
- When registering, insist on the Public Information Document.

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Stanley Tshitwamulomoni).

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (especially as Waterfowl Habitat) was signed on 2 February 1971 in Iran. South Africa as a signatory to the convention has committed itself to ensuring the conservation and wise use of all its wetlands. It is important to note that Ramsar in itself is not legally binding in South Africa, but the administrative authority in South Africa DEAT is obliged in the spirit of the agreement to protect its wetlands and Ramsar sites in particular by applying the legal tools of the country (e.g. Protected Areas Act).

Designating a Ramsar site: Member countries select wetlands for designation on account of their international importance, on the basis of one or more of the following criteria:

- Ecology (e.g. rare or unusual wetland type in the region)
- Botany (e.g. particular plant species)
- Zoology (e.g. supports large number of waterbirds)
- Hydrology (e.g. important for water purification).

Nominating a Ramsar site: The process of designating and nominating a site for Ramsar is initiated by the administrative authority under whose jurisdiction it falls (e.g. Provincial Authority). This involves completing a Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) and formulating a comprehensive management plan for the site which will

ensure that its ecological characteristics are maintained. The administrative authority must show that it has the capacity to implement and sustain the plan. DEAT requires a commitment in writing to this effect before processing the proposal. If approved by Parliament, the application is forwarded to the Ramsar Bureau and the site is added to the Ramsar list.

Notes:

- (1) Management plan: Ramsar is not binding outside the boundaries designated in the original management plan. It is critical, when preparing the plan, to look not only inside the catchment area, but outside the fence as well. It should be recorded what the site is linked to (e.g. a river system or other feature), degradation of which would affect the site.
- (2) Letter of commitment: Written undertaking to maintain a nominated site was not previously required by DEAT. This is now a prerequisite for all new sites, but the department is looking at bringing in already listed sites as well.

Ramsar site: Once listed, the Provincial Authority becomes the management authority for the site. Sites within areas that are not managed by a Provincial or other Authority can still be listed by creating joint administrative control with other interested parties.

Montreux Record: Should a Ramsar site's ecological character decline, it is listed on the Montreux Record. Sites listed on the Record are prioritised for national and international conservation attention. There are two sites on the Record in South Africa - Orange River Mouth and Blesbokspruit. Hence the importance of being sure of the ability to maintain a wetland before designating it a Ramsar site.

Threat to a Ramsar or other important wetland site: In the eventuality of a serious threat, a report is submitted to the Ramsar Office of DEAT, which may call for a formal report from the management authority. Ramsar communicates details of the threat to the International Secretariat for support and appropriate action. A current example is the threat to the Langebaan Lagoon arising from the proposed expansion of the iron ore harbour at Saldahna (see Conservation-Regional Issues below).

IBA Assessments

Neil Smith (BLSA Conservation Division) has provided participating Clubs with a CD covering IBA background and processes, as detailed in the workshop in April;

- 1. IBA's in South Africa -Aims, Strategy & Monitoring Techniques (a summary).
- 2. IBA Atlas-South Africa. Includes IBA co-ordinates, habitat descriptions, key species, etc. for listed IBA's. The provision of co-ordinates will overcome the problem of defining the precise boundaries of an IBA.
- 3. Framework Document for Global IBA monitoring (a background document).

Initial assessments: The goal is to complete initial assessments by the end of the year. Examples of assessment documentation were provided at the earlier workshop. Forms can be downloaded from the BLSA website www.birdlife.org.za. Neil Smith is now based at Somerset West and can be contacted for guidance and assistance on conservation@birdlife.org.za. Dave Whitelaw is co-ordinating assessments for the Western Cape. Participating Clubs are as indicated in WCBF Minutes dated 29 September 2007, with the exception that BirdLife Stellenbosch replaces SWBC for the Eastern False Bay Mountains.

Action: Clubs

IBA Application: Anton Odendal advises that application is being made for the entire Overstrand Municipal area, plus the N2 area at Bot River (which includes the three small rivers) to become a single IBA (i.e. from Rooiels to Die Dam and from the sea to the N2).

SABAP2

John Carter reported that progress is slow, but the number of participants had increased from 150 to 267 and ¼-million records had been submitted. 20% of the Western Cape had been covered. **CONSERVATION.**

National Issues

Luneberg/Wakkerstroom Mining Threat (IBA SA020 Grassland Biosphere Reserve) (Carolyn).

The Mpumalanga regional office of DME (department of Minerals & Energy) has issued mining permits to Delta Mining for the extraction of coal and torbanite on Luneberg/Wakkerstroom. The effect of this would be irreversible damage to the grasslands. These permits were granted without consultation with relevant provincial authorities as required by NEMA (National Environmental Management Act) or with affected local farmers and landowners.

BLSA is contesting the legality of the process, with support also from Ekangala Grassland Trust, WWF-SA, BOTSOC, WESSA and EWT. The first High Court application has been heard, with the second application scheduled for hearing in August. Legal costs for both applications will be R400,000, to which BLSA has contributed R220,000 (contributions and donations from branches and clubs), with the balance coming from WWF and others.

It is anticipated that further costs to reach finalisation will be in the region of R300,000-R350,000. Delta Mining has not defended the first application and the chances of success are considered good. Costs will be awarded to BLSA, if successful. The outcome is geared to revoking the mining permits already granted and having the region, including the wetlands, declared a protected area. This would prevent any mining company from applying for prospecting and mining licences for this area in the future.

Regional Issues

Langebaan Lagoon (IBA SA105). Threats to this Ramsar site include:

- 1. Proposed Saldahna Iron Ore Port Expansion. Main concern is the long-term effect that blasting and dredging of the harbour would have on the tidal flow and fragile ecosystem of the lagoon.
- 2. Sewage flowing into part of the lagoon and Saldahna Bay that cannot be washed out because of the closed water system created by the initial port construction.
- 3. Baja Sardinia development: EIA has been temporarily halted. A meeting was held with Dr. Michael Knight of the SANParks Board to discuss possible purchase of the land from the developer for incorporation into West Coast National Park. The project is at a very sensitive stage and details of the future strategy cannot be divulged at this stage.
- 4. WCNP Proposed Rest Camp at Kraalbaai. BLSA opposes any form of development within this Ramsar site and has appealed to SANParks to urgently seek an alternative site.
- 5. BLSA has lodged an application with Ramsar for intervention on Langebaan. The Secretariat has accepted the application and requested information from the SA Government on the state of the lagoon. SANParks (WCNP) is required to forward a report to the Minister of Environmental Affairs as a matter of urgency.

Flaminkvlei/Cerebos Development, Velddrif (Lower Berg River Wetlands) (IBA SA104).

The massive development proposal for this area will impact directly on the whole of the 24,500ha IBA. This is considered to be the most important wetland in South Africa that does not have legislative protection. The river system and salt works support huge numbers of cormorants, terns, flamingo's and migratory waders, including near-threatened species - Lesser Flamingo, Cape Cormorant, Caspian Tern and Chestnut-banded Plover.

With the sale also of Cerebos salt works to the developer, the area designated for development would include the heart of the IBA and all of the key sites covered by CWAC. WCBC, CBC and BLSA have

registered as IAP's in the EIA process and calls have been made for as many clubs as possible to do likewise.

EIA: Tony Williams, ornithological consultant appointed by the developer, presented a background to the EIA in progress and developments to date:

- The developer Flaminkvlei Development bought the farm adjacent to the Cerebos salt works - Flaminkvlei - and put in an offer for the whole of the Cerebos property to enable them to use the area under salt. The offer was accepted.
- Cerebos is relocating to the Eastern Cape. It manages 305ha of saltpans and falls under the department of Minerals & Energy for salt mining. As such, it is obliged to rehabilitate the site if mining ceases. The likelihood is that it would be rehabilitated to grass and valuable roosting sites would be lost to the birds. If grass rehabilitation were successful, the area would probably become salt marsh - not suitable for waders and shorebirds.
- After discussions with Keith Harrison and Jan Kotze, Tony went back to the developers to revise the proposed plans for rehabilitation. The new proposal is that they would pump sea water into the pans. Over a period of three years, the water would become more saline - important for waders. Berms for roosting and much of the water would remain.
- There is a plan to construct bird viewing hides with one-way glass from which a captive flock of flamingo's and other birds could be viewed. There would be on-site information on birds in wetlands.
- Tony has presented the developer with a 22-point environmental plan (*see separate attachment) covering:
 1. Planning and management of the wetland
 2. Direct management of the saltpans
 3. Avi-tourism
 4. Conservation

Questions arising – Rehabilitation: Dave Whitelaw asked whether proposals for rehabilitation were open to negotiation with Cerebos. WF would like to give input.

- Feeding of captive flamingo's: This would involve artificial feeding.
- Breeding flamingo's: Keith Harrison commented that no development should take place east of the bridge, as the salt had been there for 40 years and the soil would have to be moved out because of the stench. This is where building is proposed.
- The developers would encourage land owners to continue mining salt.
- Monitoring changes in bird use of the area, as proposed in the 22-point plan: Local bird club would be asked to carry out monthly checks on bird populations and keep the property agent informed on what was happening.

Opinion: Tony asked whether the Forum wanted to retain the saltpans or look at rehabilitation. Vernon expressed caution at this stage, as the project was still in the development phase and we could not see the whole picture. How much control would we have once it was rolling and rezoning was underway? The Forum wished to remain actively involved and keep the dialogue going with Tony. We needed to be realistic and seek creative solutions. Vernon would put the proposals to BLSA and give feedback to the Forum. **Action:** Vernon

Cerebos Pollution of Pans-Current Problem (Jan Kotze): an reported that there is serious pollution of the pans, with plant-life dying along the edges. The Local Council has sent a letter to Cerebos and the District Municipality is getting involved. Dave Whitelaw will liaise with Jan and write to Cerebos on behalf of the

Forum.

Action: Dave

Bot River Lagoon-Proposed Airfield (John Bowman/Lee Burman):

Nothing happening officially, but earthworks has started.

Strandfontein (Dave Whitelaw).

- Environmental Centre: The City Council has given R50,000 for the Centre.
- Hyacinth is a major problem in the pans. An attempt is being made to dredge it out by draining the pans and using manpower and heavy equipment. Jan suggested the use of herbicides, but Dave is reluctant to go that route.
- The management of the typha reed is working.

BLSA matters

Appointment of Executive Director. Final interviews were underway. (It was subsequently announced that Mark Anderson had been appointed as the new Executive Director of BLSA.)

Membership Strategy Plan. The administration of the membership database and marketing of membership are seen as two separate issues and appointments are being made on this basis. Ntombi Stungu has been appointed to administer the database. Sponsorship is being sought to develop a new membership database system. Systems being used by other organisations are being looked at, rather than going the route of a tailor-made system.

“Save the Seabirds” Week (03 - 9/11/08). This first-time event will focus on education and creating awareness of our seabirds and the need to conserve them. School children will be brought to the Two Oceans Aquarium, where they will be educated on the marine environment and educators will go to schools along the coast, using the Two Oceans education van, with living examples from the marine environment. CBC, together with the Albatross Task Force (BLSA), will host two days of sea scoping from Cape Point. The event is being sponsored by Two Oceans Aquarium, CBC, WWF and Middelvlei Wine Estate.

Birding World Cup 2009: BLSA has the full backing of Council to proceed with BWC 2009, which will be used as a tool to promote bird conservation in South Africa. A professional organising team has been put together. The venue is being finalised and sponsorship sought.

Proposed Regional Office in Cape Town. Proposals are on the table to open a BLSA office in Cape Town.

National Bird Week (5 -11 May 2008): “Light a Candle for the Owl” Club Feedback:

- CBC: A digital presentation was put together and talks and shows given to 30 classes in various schools in the Southern Suburbs. The programme is on-going through the year, as further requests have been received from schools.
- TBC: Brigid reported that the DVD and promotional material were once again received too late. Information and material must be received by the beginning of the year.
- BLO: Involved the schools in the area and there was an evening “lighting of candles for the Owls”.
- SWBC: Sponsored children for a week at the Helderberg NR Environment Centre.
- HBC: Put up owl boxes.
- WCBC: Organised an educational morning, which was attended by 266 children from 13 schools. Spiers Raptor Rehabilitation Centre came up with birds.

Western Cape Birding Routes

Melanie Honicke reported for Anton that a public meeting was held in Knysna and a steering committee appointed for the Garden Route and Route 62. Two BirdLife branches, SANParks, Cape Nature, tourism offices and the District Municipality were represented. The co-ordinator is Mark Dixon.

Anton reports that:

- “Flight for Beginners Course”: Generating a lot of interest among non-birders, who hopefully will sign up for BirdLife membership.
- “Attracting Birds to Gardens”: Mariana Delpont did a presentation for the club on the subject, which was very well received, and a case study is being done for the website.
- WCBF FINANCES (Brian Dennis).
Year to date:
BLSA funding (2008): R7,000
Expenditure: R1,200 (fuel/catering costs for meetings)
R 800 (IBA workshop)
Reimbursement of Fuel Costs: Agreed that the mileage allowance for attending meetings would be increased to R1 per km.

12th PAOC (7-12 Sept 2008).

CBC will man a welcome desk at the airport and has organised transport for delegates from Cape Town to Goudini. Worcester and other clubs can get involved.

OTHER MATTERS

“**Three F's Weekend**”. WCBC and the Flamingo Birding Route were organising a “Feathers, Fossils & Flowers” weekend at Velddrif (22-24 August). Bird clubs were invited to enrol teams of four to participate in a competition to identify birds and flowers. The programme would include expert speakers and a visit to the digs at the Fossil Park.

Guide on “Birds of Walker Bay” (John Bowman): Hermanus Bird Club has completed a guide on the birds of Walker Bay, which is now available for sale.

Black Sparrowhawk Monitoring: Ann Koeslag has requested feedback from any areas in the Western Cape where birders spot Black Sparrowhawks that have been ringed. Information needed is the colour combination and sequence of rings on the leg and which leg. Contact: annkoeslag@cybersmart.co.za. Ann would appreciate if this could be mentioned in Club newsletters.

Paarl Bird Sanctuary: Yvonne Weiss reports that a viewing platform has been erected, which looks out over the sanctuary, the works and the Drakenstein mountains. Major construction is taking place in the treatment works to cope with the demands of Paarl's growing population.

Owl Rehabilitation Hospital, Tulbach: Vernon has put this on the agenda for the next BLSA Council Meeting.

DATES OF NEXT MEETING:

Venue: Saturday, 22 November 2008, Durbanville Nature Reserve