

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Minutes at Durbanville Nature Reserve, Durbanville on Saturday, 13 June 2009.

Vernon Head – Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard – Minutes.

Present

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

BirdLife Stellenbosch: Willene van der Merwe

Tygerberg Bird Club: Brian Vanderwalt, Helene Thompson

BirdLife Overberg: Dave de Beer, Anton Odendal, Elaine Odendal

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff

Hermanus Bird Club: Barbara Palmer, Lee Burman

Somerset West Bird Club: John Carter, Brian Dennis, Ben Kakebeeke.

Paarl: Yvonne Weiss

BLSA: Neil Smith (Conservation Division)

SABAP 2: Peter Nupen

Apologies

John Bowman, Brigid de Kock, Royd Frith, Otto Schmidt

Minutes of Previous Meeting (21/02/2008): Accepted, with amendment in respect of the number of pentads covered for SABAP2 as at December 2008. Numbers quoted related to the country overall, being 3914 pentads completed out of a total of 17340.

Additional items for Agenda:

- (1) Ramsar status for Berg River estuary (KH)
- (2) Proposed nuclear power station at Bantamsklip (AO)
- (3) Management Plan for Kleinrivier estuary (LB)
- (4) Update on Western Cape Birding Routes (AO)
- (5) Bird club events for Die Burger newspaper.

Congratulations: HeleneThompson informed the meeting that Brian Vanderwalt had been elected Honorary President of Tygerberg Bird Club.

The Forum congratulates Brian on this well deserved appointment.

BLSA Vernon Head report-back from Council Meeting (6/6/09):

New Division

A new Marketing & Membership division has been created to grow membership. Manager: Duncan Pritchard.

New BLSA Logo

A more informal "African feel" logo is being launched, with the catch-line "Giving Conservation Wings". The logo is intended to identify BLSA as the NGO for the Conservation of Birds. Club logos, while still retaining their own identity, will change to conform to the BirdLife brand.

Branding in the Marketplace

Partnerships are being formed with Cape Union Mart and like organisations to market BLSA by attaching the BirdLife brand to products and promotions.

AAA School of Advertising

Final year students will be challenged to present a creative marketing strategy for growing BLSA, with emphasis on bringing in the youth.

Membership

The new membership system is starting to fall into place and co-ordinator Sadie Halbhuber has reported that, when fully operational, it will considerably enhance service to members. The membership fee for BLSA will increase by R10 for Ordinary members from 1 July, with no increase for Seniors or Students.

Owl and Eagle Owl Awards

Criteria and design have been reviewed. The design will be upmarket. Only 12 Owl awards and two Eagle Owl awards a year will be made.

The latter will be for (i) outstanding contribution to conservation and (ii) outstanding contribution to BLSA.

S.A. Lists Committee: The committee is now fully operational. BLSA will attach themselves to a birdlist which covers all of South Africa. Changes and updates will be announced every year and the list will become the official list for South Africa.

Funds

Mark Anderson and others have been working hard to raise funds. Mark brought in R800k over 10 days, plus R1.5m from one donor, specifically for the conservation of the African Penguin. This sort of sponsorship will enable BLSA to make a real impact for conservation. AO commented that it is to Mark's credit that he has been able to raise funds of this order in the present economic climate.

Wine Estates: KH suggested that wine estates that have subscribed to the Biodiversity & Wine Initiative (BWI) could be a possible source of donations for BLSA. He feels many would be happy to contribute in return for birdlists being compiled for their estates. NS asked members present to forward contact details of wine estates that he could approach. Action: Forum members.

National Bird Week (4-10 May 2009).

Bird of the year: Cape Robin-Chat

There was general consensus that the material provided was first-class and arrived in good time. It was reduced in quantity, as the main sponsor Sasol cut back heavily. Noted, clubs were not informed of this.- Clubs request that they be informed not later than February what the total NBW package will involve, so that they can communicate with schools in time for the year's curriculum.

Nieuwoudtville: PN thanked CBC on behalf of the ADU for sponsorship to go to Nieuwoudtville. This followed a request from the Hantam Reserve for Doug Harebottle to give bird ringing demonstrations and talks to High Schools in the area (grades 10/11/12). The visit took place during NBW and proved very successful.

Somerset West BK: Freya Brett put on a month-long exhibition at the Helderberg Nature Reserve, promoting NBW. Hundreds of school-children were pulled in.

Overberg: AO: Contributed to the roll-out with radio talk shows. The response was huge, with over 100 e-mails being received. Information is still being disseminated.

West Coast: AD Missed Bird Week proper but conducted a programme with school pupils subsequently.

TBC: HT Antoinette le Roux, who manages TBC's educational programme, had been away but would be taking the programme through to the end of the year.

CBC: AG Still distributing material to schools that visited the Biodiversity Exhibition at Kirstenbosch.

IBA's

The Western Cape is fully covered. Next year, re-assessments will need to be done. Mark is seeking to have large national companies become custodians of IBA's close to their operations. **Strandfontein:** DW reported that City of Cape Town has extended its contract to contribute to the employment of a conservator at Strandfontein.

SABAP2 Peter Nupen)

Atlasing is proceeding well in the Western Cape, with 772 pentads covered out of a total of 1,828. This equates to 42.2% coverage of the region, the highest in the country. National coverage is 26%. W. Cape leads also in the number of virgin pentads covered and, with 3,864 cards entered, in the number of cards. The "chameleon challenge" has been launched, whereby points are scored for the number of pentads re-visited - pentads change colour based on the number of visits. The idea is to encourage winter atlasing to get the blocks covered. New software has been developed for SABAP2, which, in conjunction with Christine, can facilitate viewing of pentads not covered.

Vernon commended Peter on recent atlasing workshops in Somerset West and Cape Town, which were well attended. Clubs can arrange for a workshop with Peter. CBC will feature an article in Promerops, designed to show how easy it is to get started and to draw in people who are not computer literate.

CONSERVATION

Verlorenvlei (IBA SA103): Neil Smith outlined the serious threat to Verlorenvlei (a Ramsar site) and the Verloren Valley arising from the application by Bongani Minerals (49% owned by French company Balta Minerals) for tungsten mining rights in the Verloren Valley. The planned development is a massive 50ha deep open-cast mine, the site covering an area of 555ha of fertile farming land. The mine, with a possible lifespan of only 20 years, will destroy the valley and the vlei. The implications are huge for Verlorenvlei, which is one of the largest natural coastal wetlands in the Western Cape, supporting 189 species of birds, 77 of which are waterbirds. There is a very high risk of ground and surface water contamination. One of the rivers likely to be polluted with toxic chemicals is the Krom Antonies River, which supplies the bulk of water to the Verlorenvlei estuary. All or most of the water replenishing the vlei would be diverted to the mine's use. The depth of the excavation would be deeper than ground-water level, leading to further draining off. The mine would take water from three rivers, with implications for the fruit and vegetable growing farming industry in the valley. Productive and valuable farming land would be lost, along with farm workers' jobs. The damage to Verlorenvlei and the valley would be irreversible.

On 12 June, a meeting took place with the DME to hear objections. Representatives of the mining company and IAAP's were present, but discussions took place in separate rooms. The DME will decide whether mining rights will be granted. BLSA has requested a specialist study and will assess results as a prerequisite to asking RAMSAR to intervene.

This is an almost identical scenario to that of Wakkerstroom and Neil urged all the clubs to independently oppose the development and register a major objection with Jimmy Walsh (hilltopcottage@telkomsa.net). This would be over and above objections already registered by WCBF and BLSA.

Action: Forum members

DW noted that the implications of the proposed new NEMA are very concerning. Historically, DEAT has had jurisdiction in matters of environmental protection, with input as appropriate from DME. The new act separates mining issues for EIA's and puts them directly under the DME. The DME's track record is not good in this respect

Berg River Estuary IBA SA104

- Flaminkvlei: Still awaiting answers from Government departments. DW commented that the issue of the urban boundary having been moved is a fallacious argument. Officially, re-zoning has not taken place - the transfer of farms does not constitute an extension of the urban boundary.

- Cerebos: NS emphasised the importance of maintaining the salt works to ensure the retention of Red Data species. JK confirmed that it is the developer's intention to continue commercial salt mining on the pans by contracting out (refer WCBF Minutes 21/2/09) and that he himself had already signed a MOU to this effect.
- De Plaat (KH): The proposed development would be above the 100-year floodline. The developer would construct boardwalks and a bird hide.
- Ramsar status for Berg River Estuary: A Berg River Management Association is being formed and it is proposed that application be made to have the Berg River Estuary declared a RAMSAR site.

Langebaan Lagoon IBA SA105 (Keith Hasrrison)

- 50/50 Insert (8 June): BLSA, in conjunction with WCBC and the Cape West Coast Biosphere, co-ordinated a feature on 50/50, covering the current threats to Langebaan Lagoon. This was followed by a studio debate with officials from DEAT.
- "State of the Lagoon": The 12-year study by Barry Watkins reveals that all is not well in the lagoon. Resident waders have declined significantly in recent years. The Saldahna Bay Water Trust is looking for funding to research Langebaan and determine the reason for the decline. Surveys to date have been conducted only on Saldahna.
- Proposed Shark Bay (Bahia Sardinia) development: The developer, Ricardo Scarpelini, is pursuing his application for environmental authorisation to proceed with the development. The project has been re-named "Shark Bay" and Scarpelini is preparing a Final Scoping Report to drive the process forward.
- Nuclear Power Plant-Bantamsklip (Anton Odendal): There is a proposal to build a nuclear power station at Bantamsklip, together with the power lines. NS indicated that it is his understanding that this has been abandoned. The question of power lines, or any Eskom project, can always be referred to Neil, as he has contacts at Eskom. DW indicated that there are three locations being looked at: Bantamsklip (but there is a problem with the geology of the area), Koeberg and West Coast. Eskom and Government are involved. NS will get hold of Eskom and find out.

Action: Neil Smith

Wakkerstroom

No further developments regarding the mining rights issue. AO remarked that new management at the centre has turned Wakkerstroom around and it is starting to make a profit.

Estuary Management Plan-Klein River (Lee Burman)

The development of management plans for estuaries in the Western Cape is a recent initiative co-ordinated by the C.A.P.E. Estuaries Programme, hosted by CapeNature, and supported by a number of government departments, including Water Affairs and Marine & Coastal Management.

The preparation of an Estuary Management Plan for the Klein River is one of six pilot projects that will inform development of a national estuarine management protocol for South Africa.

The Klein River is regarded as the 5th most important estuary in the country and preliminary meetings were held to identify issues that need to be addressed and the stakeholders involved (refer WCBF minutes 22/11/2008). A Forum has been established which consists of Government and Municipal representatives and representatives of various interest groups. Lee Burman will represent Hermanus Bird Club on the Forum. The Forum is a timely development in the light also of a number of development proposals in the pipeline for municipal land adjoining the estuary, which could exacerbate existing problems of pollution and siltation.

Species Concerns

House Crows: (Dave Whitelaw) The eradication programme has been suspended, as the budget exceeds R200,000 and at that level must go to open tender. That cannot be done as the poison Stalicide has not been registered for use in South Africa and CapeNature have in effect been acting illegally. CapeNature must now pursue the issue of registration with the National Department of Agriculture in Pretoria. NS asked for the information to be passed through to him, so that BLSA can go to Government in Pretoria.

Action: Dave Whitelaw / Neil Smith

“Quackers”: KH expressed concern regarding the increasing numbers of exotic ducks on the Berg River and asked what the official position is with regard to getting rid of them? DW advised that it is a Local Authority responsibility, in this case the Berg River Municipality. CapeNature can also be called on and Louise Trafford, whose brief is alien species, is the person to talk to. NS informed that a workshop is being put together to discuss problem species.

FUND RAISING INITIATIVE – FLAMINGOS OF KAMFERS BAY

WCBF clubs will host Mark Anderson for a week-long visit in August, during which time he will visit bird clubs in the area to address members and friends on the status of Kamfers Dam and its population of Lesser Flamingos. Mark represents BLSA on the “Save the Flamingo” Association and he will be asking clubs to support this important conservation effort by donating to the campaign to stop the proposed housing and shopping development on the shores of Kamfers Dam. Hosting clubs are:

- August 25: Cape Bird Club (with Tygerberg Bird Club)
- August 26: BirdLife Overberg (with Hermanus Bird Club and BirdLife Walker Bay)
- August 27: BirdLife Stellenbosch (with Somerset West Bird Club)
- August 28: West Coast Bird Club

Raffle: A combined raffle will be run to boost fund raising for the event. The draw will take place at the WCBF meeting in October. Ticket price R10. Mark has offered the following prizes:

- 1st Prize: Helicopter flight over Kamfers Dam (30 min. flight over Kamfers Dam, the Big Hole and a local game farm. Offer valid for 12 months).
- 2nd Prize: Framed Flamingo picture.

“SAVE OUR SEABIRDS” (SOS) WEEK 12 - 16 October (Vernon Head)

SOS will be marketed as a WCBF initiative, with all the bird clubs involved. The idea is to “piggy-back” on the activities of National Marine Week. The programme is being put together by Vernon, Mel Tripp and Ross Wanless and input is invited from the bird clubs.

It is hoped to raise R100k to launch a conservation project with the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute for research on coastal seabirds. The objective would be to identify and document IBA's in the marine environment and to use these sites as justification for establishing new or reinforcing protection of existing Marine Protected Areas. This would link also into Seabird atlas. There is a good possibility that this funding will come from the S.A. Plastics Association, which wants to become involved in marine cleaning programmes. The Two Oceans Aquarium has been booked for a full week without charge. Programme events will include talks by leading lecturers from the Fitz and ADU, a photographic competition with the theme coastal and pelagic birds, which will be open to all the photographic clubs and the birding community, a cheese and wine evening (120 people) which we hope to offer free, and a gala cocktail party (280 people) with awards on the final night. We need sponsors for both functions and members are asked to assist with looking for funders (could be branded as, say, a “Delheim Evening”). The week's events will include an overnight pelagic cruise and a birding trip to Robben Island.

This has the potential to become an annual event, focusing on Western Cape birds. It could roll over into next year with a different theme, say, at Kirstenbosch, showcasing Fynbos birds.

WESTERN CAPE BIRDING ROUTES (Anton Odendal)

The following covers highlights from Anton's report. Full report under separate cover.

Website www.westerncapebirding.co.za The website is beginning to work well, with international enquiries and reservations coming in. Advertisements are being taken for accommodation establishments, tour operators, birding destinations, etc. The site is averaging 12 new visitors daily. An on-line wine shop will be launched in collaboration with HPF and cellardoorprice.com. and Birding Routes will get publicity from wine sales. BirdLife Overberg is creating a club site within the larger site and other clubs are welcome to come on board once the BLO site is operational. Forum members are invited to forward news items from their areas and are requested to assist with identifying potential advertisers and sponsors/donors.

Western Cape Birding Routes: Sponsorships, donors and partners are being developed. An MOU is in place with Cape Town Routes Unlimited and R20k has been committed for publicity material for each of the six sub-routes. CTRU has agreed that WCBR can "piggy-back" on them for the Indaba, the Windhoek Travel Fair, Chelsea Flower Show, etc. More corporate partners are needed and Forum members are asked to assist in this regard. Further projects/tasks in the pipeline: refer to full report.

Routes

Flamingo Birding Route (Cape West Coast): Central region going well. Attention now being given to development of northern and southern areas. Requests being received to extend the birding route, with Lamberts Bay coming on track. "Flight for Beginners" courses being organised for;

- (i) Darling/Yzerfontein/Malmesbury/Atlantis,
- (ii) Morreesburg/Piketberg/Porterville,
- (iii) Citrusdal, Clanwilliam, Vredendal/Lutzville/Vanrhynsdorp.

F4B Courses: KH complimented Anton on the positive energy and momentum being generated through the F4B courses. This is the platform for identifying new routes and forming new clubs. Flamingo Birding Route
Pamphlets: KH reported that there were insufficient pamphlets at the Indaba at Durban. AO responded that money was not made available by BLSA and it is clear that we will have to find our own.

Overberg Birding Route: Launching revised bird checklist and birding brochure at the Stanford Glendower Bird Fair in October. F4B courses conducted in Grabouw, Betty's Bay, Hermanus and the Agulhas National Park, the latter culminating in the formation of BirdLife Strandveld as a satellite branch of BLO. Further courses scheduled for Greyton, Danger Point peninsula and Swellendam.

Karoo Birding Route (will include Tanqua): Negotiations started.

Eden Birding Route (Cape Garden Route): A project steering committee established.

Winelands Birding Route: No formal negotiations started yet.

Peninsula Birding Route: Will be easiest to develop as infrastructure already in place, particularly with regard to the Cape and Tygerberg Bird Clubs.

Bird Guide Training: BLSA has finally been accredited as a training service provider by Theta and we can now proceed with full training and accreditation of guides. The F4B courses are being used to identify potential trainees. Several potential sponsors have expressed interest in sponsoring students/employees. This is a month-long residential course and will cost about R17k. Applicants will only be considered if there is assurance of ongoing mentoring and supervision. Forum members are requested to identify potential sponsors.

FINANCES (Brian Dennis)

- Application has been made for BLSA funding of R7,000 for 2009.
- R2,600 was paid out of Forum funds for Mark Anderson's airfare.
- Balance of funds = R2,000.

GENERAL

“Die Burger” Birding Diary: (AO) Entries will be discontinued, as the editor appears to be more interested in publishing entertainment notices and in addition AO is experiencing difficulty in receiving input in time from clubs. VH will talk to Peter Sullivan to see if we can get a slot in the Argus.

Action: VH

WCNP - Abrahamskraal Bird Hide: This recently constructed hide was created to enhance the birding infrastructure of the Park and to control pedestrian access to this important freshwater habitat. Very positive feedback has been received from visiting birders. There is still a need to clear reeds for soft walk-ins.

AG reported that 5,000 birdlists have been printed and are available at the gates.

Forthcoming Birding Weekends

- “Feathers, Fossils & Flowers”, Velddrif: 28-30 Aug.
- Stanford Glendower Bird Fair: 2-4 Oct.
- Sasol Agulhas Birding Weekend: 30 Oct.-1 Nov.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 10 October 2009, at Durbanville Nature Reserve (9.30am for 10.00am).
CBC hosting.