

Western Cape Birding Forum

Represents 7 clubs with more than 2,000 members in the Western Cape.

Below are the minutes from the Meeting on 28 May 2005, at the ***Blaauberg Environment Centre***

John Carter, chaired the Meeting, and welcomed Paul Slabbert, Chairman of BirdLife Walker Bay, who was attending the Forum for the first time

Those Present

Cape Bird Club – Peter Brunwin, Anne Gray, Sylvia Ledgard, Dave Whitelaw.

Tygerberg Club – Lesley Teare, Brian van der Walt, Dirk van Driel.

Somerset West Bird Club – Ben Kakebeeke, Brian Dennis, Jill Mortimer.

West Coast Bird Club – Keith Harrison, Monika Forner

Hermanus Bird Club – Mike Ford

Apologies

Vernon Head, Mike Ford, Kobus Graaff

Tribute

The Chairman paid tribute to Kirsten Louw, who had played a significant role in birding activities in the region and would be sorely missed. He expressed the Forum's condolences to Kirsten's family on his tragic death.

Minutes of previous meeting (26/02/2005): **Agreed**

Matters arising

- National Rarities: Formulation of the committee and management protocols are being established.
- Regional Rarities: Kirsten Louw handled the co-ordination and administration of this committee. A successor must be found.
- Canned Birding Courses: These are CD in-house courses for beginners that BLSA has developed for use by BirdLife branches. Subjects are bird identification, birds of prey, waders, etc.
- Additional items for Agenda
- Kleinrivierlei/Hermanus Lagoon (raised by Mike Ford)
- Avian Botulism document (Dirk van Driel)

WCBF - Rotation of Chairman and Secretary

At the inaugural meeting of WCBF in October 2003, it was determined that the offices of Chairman and Secretary would be rotated annually between member clubs. The practicality of this arrangement came up for review. It was determined that a tenure of 2 years would offer more scope and continuity, allowing for the fact that the Forum meets only four times annually.

It was agreed that present office bearers would retain office until the end of this year and appointments would be reviewed at the first meeting of 2006.

BLSA

Funding of Regional Forums

BLSA has offered funding of R7,000 per annum to individual Regional Forums to cover expenses related to the convening of meetings, i.e. travel, venue hire, catering, etc. Vernon will be asked to get clarity as to whether these funds can be used also in other areas of Forum activity, such as projects. **Action:** Vernon

It was agreed in principle to accept the BLSA contribution, providing there were no over-riding problems.

Appointment of Hon. Treasurer: John Carter was elected as Hon. Treasurer and given the brief to set up a bank account for the Forum.

(**Note:** Subsequently, it was decided that Somerset West Bird Club Treasurer, Nigel Dennis, would be better placed to take on this role and manage the account. A separate bank account will not be opened at this stage and WCBF funds will be managed through the Somerset West Bird Club account.)

Sylvia will send minutes to Karen Marx, formalising Nigel's appointment and arrangements for the bank account. **Action:** Sylvia

National Bird Week (1 - 7 May)

NBW was launched this year to lay the foundation of what will become an annual event in South Africa. Overall results exceeded expectations with evidence also of a new awareness and enthusiasm for birding having been created all over the country. At least 8.5 million people were reached through TV, radio, local and national newspapers and magazines. Between 100,000 and 150,000 children were exposed to NBW in schools and 5,000 entries were received for the "Bird Count" competition. SMS donations for bird conservation programmes brought in R2,800 from 560 calls.

A criticism was that the event was thrust upon Clubs at short notice. Schools approached to participate were mostly keen but unable to fit it into their calendar. It is recommended that BLSA liaise with the Department of Education to ensure that NBW gets written into the school curriculum. **Action:** BLSA

Events Organised by Clubs

- Public invited to attend a talk and outing/s at popular and accessible birding venues.
- Presentations in schools related to a local bird conservation issue. In one case, a raptor from a rehabilitation centre was taken to schools.
- Wits Bird Club held a "bird party" on the last day. This was a fun evening, which included a bird quiz, a wine auction and a raffle. R8,000 was raised for the Cape Parrot Working Group.
- CBC: Anne Gray contacted schools in the Southern Suburbs. 13 schools participated and 6 junior members made independent approaches. Bishops was active - they featured a DVD on the "Fascinating World of Birds" - and SACS and Herschel did well. LEAP Science & Maths School in Langa was among the most rewarding, with the whole school participating and 172 entries in the Bird Count competition; students also sent in drawings and photographs.
- TBC: Put a CD together for Eversdal Primary School - response was good.

Overberg

- Organised a public meeting, involving BOTSOC and Garden Clubs, with the purpose of investigating how the 1,000's of backyard birders can be accommodated and brought on board.
- "Praat saam" radio talk presented by Anton.

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- 11 localities expressed interest in forming a club as a result of media broadcasting. Among them were Paarl, Oostenberg and Upington.

Walker Bay

Concentrated on two primary schools. Aim was to involve 100% of the children in Stanford - used competition entry forms and checklists. 500 Children participated. Paul wrote the curriculum for that week. The "African Queen" took the 40 best entrants on a river birding cruise.

WCBF agreed:

- 1) Clubs will be in a better position to become more fully involved in NBW 2006, provided earlier briefing and materials are received up front.
- 2) Clubs will organise and run events in their own areas.
- 3) Planning will start early, with the event on the agenda for the next Forum meeting to allow co-ordination and sharing of ideas.

S.A Bird Atlas Project (SABAP)

The present Atlas is 10 years old and work will start on a new Atlas in January. BLSA and the ADU will have joint ownership of the project and are looking at technology partners to come in.

New Bird Club

The Witzenberg Bird Club is being formed to cover Ceres, Wolseley, Tulbach, Koue Bokkeveld. It will be affiliated with BLSA and possibly also with Cape Bird Club.

WEST COAST (Keith Harrison)

Flamingo Vlei on Berg River Estuary

The farm has been sold to a lady from Venda. Keith will see her when she takes ownership to find out what her intention is. (Note: The sale of the farm was held up at the signing stage, so access for birders is still okay. Keith will monitor and report back on any changes.)

Environmental Centre in Bokkom Avenue, Velddrif

The process has reached the stage that floor plans must be submitted and a letter sent to people in the neighbourhood, advising them of the proposed development. Parking could be a problem.

Bird Guide Sponsorship

The Berg River Tourist Association will sponsor the training of a bird guide.

Toxic Waste Dump on West Coast

The proposed site close to the R27 between Velddrif and Vredenburg would cover 40 hectares plus 10 hectares of services. It would be 5 meters below ground and 15 meters above ground. A second public meeting will be held at Saldahna on 9 June.

- BLSA has registered as an "interested party".
- The Berg River Municipality is against the proposal.

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- Cerebos is dealing with the matter at director level. There is the implication of potential underground leakage into the salt pans.
- Adjacent farmers are objecting.

Comment: Dirk van Driel. Dirk worked in toxic waste sites for 2 years. The problem is that, if there is no official waste site, people will dump into the veld. Regional toxic waste sites are needed. The proposed site is too close to town and there is the issue of ground water being contaminated. The site must be at least 5 km from a major river, as a shallow aquifer will move towards a main water body. A tangible, sensible alternative must be found, as it is not sufficient simply to say "No".

Replied Keith: The problem is that none of the possible alternative proposals is suitable, i.e.

- next to Blouwaterbaai, Saldahna: too shallow
- next to current dump at Vredenburg: limited life
- next to harbour: private property

It was important to see that the authorities follow the correct procedures. An EIA has been started.

Action: WCBF to register as an "interested party".

Berg Catchment Management Agency

A process has been started to put the surveillance and monitoring mechanisms in place with regard to extraction of water from the Berg River. Keith has been invited to attend the first public meeting of the Western Cape Reconciliation Study and Berg CMA Process. The Berg River Catchment is just a small part of the area which covers the catchment areas of the Western Cape and the Cape Town Metropole. The purpose of the Study and CMA Process is for the area to manage, run, fund and develop the water resources of the Western Cape in future instead of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. The same will happen all over the country. Birders' interests will come into the environmental/conservation sector and it would be appropriate that we should be represented centrally.

West Coast National Park "Big Birding Day"

The SANParks Honorary Rangers of West Coast National Park, in conjunction with BirdLife South Africa, are organising a birding weekend to coincide with Birding Big Day on 4th and 5th November. The registration fee will cover night drives, boat trips to Malgas Island, guided trips to the best birding sites in the park, plus overnight in the park. All funds raised will go to birding projects in the Park.

Note: The Honorary Rangers have been given an area of land in the Park to establish a caravan site. This is approximately 1km south of Seeberg hide.

Proposed West Coast Wader Weekend (March/April)

Keith is waiting on WCNP coming back to him on this. It is proving hard work to get it going.

OVERBERG

Training of Local Bird Guides in the Western Cape (Anton Odendal)

BirdLife Overberg will be presenting the first training course in the Western Cape between 10 October and 4 November 2005 for local bird guides. The course is for individuals from previously disadvantaged communities. It is a 27-day residential course presented by the training staff of BLSA and is Theta accredited.

Some 150 local bird guides have already been trained for other parts of the country and most are now gainfully employed. A decision was taken last year to only accept candidates who are already employed by institutions such as game reserves, lodges, publicity and tourist organisations, and local authorities, or who could work under the supervision of bird clubs, conservation agencies, publicity bureaus, etc.

The course will take place at the educational centre on Mosaic Farm on the Kleinriver estuary near Stanford. Anyone interested in nominating or sponsoring candidates should contact Anton. Course fee R10,000.

Stanford Birding Fair (Paul Slabbert)

The 2005 Stanford Birding Fair will be co-ordinated by BirdLife Walker Bay and Stanford Tourism and will take place from Thursday 6-Sunday 9 October. It is planned that the Birding Fair will become an annual event in the Western Cape, pulling in people locally and from abroad. Its success will be a direct result of the support that it receives from Western Cape bird clubs. Paul asked if clubs would commit to making it a success by setting aside the first weekend in October as a fixed date in their calendars. Birding Fairs are already held in Johannesburg, Kwazulu-Natal and Mpumalanga and it is planned that this will become a national event held on the same date all round.

Agreed: The Forum pledged support to involve their Club memberships in making the Birding Fair a regular happening in the Western Cape. The meeting of the Forum in the latter half of the year will, as far as possible, be scheduled to coincide with the Fair.

A full programme of events is planned for the 2005 Fair, involving bird watching outings, bird talks and demonstrations, competitions, a children's programme, making this a family affair around birding, and varied other activities organised by the Stanford community. The successes of the 2004 Fair will be built on and expanded and the shortcomings addressed.

Registration will entitle participants to engage in all advertised events but a prior booking will be needed for the dinner. Day visitors will be able to take part by paying for individual events.

Adequate accommodation (350 beds) is available in Stanford and tourism development is on-going, including also Gansbaai, De Kelders and Hermanus. There will also be a campsite.

Fund Raising Raffle for Cape Parrot

The Cape Parrot Project is in need of sustainable financial support and BirdLife Overberg has decided to raise funds for the CPP and conservation of the bird. Overberg artist Tertia Knaap donated an original painting of the Cape Parrot, which is being raffled nationally by BLSA for R10 a ticket. Anton and Elaine Odendal are attempting to sell at least 5,000 tickets and Clubs are asked to assist by selling tickets at their Club meetings. The draw will be made at the Stanford Birding Fair on October 9.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

House Crows (Dave Whitelaw)

A portfolio has been sent to BLSA covering the status of the House Crow in Cape Town and environs, together with a project plan for eradication and funding requirements. The proposal is for a 5-year programme, drawn up together with Dalton Gibb and Kevin Shaw. The budget requirement is R90,000 to employ someone for four months in the year, plus assistants for clean-up operations and transport. BLSA anticipates they will be able to raise funding, but, if the amount of funding available is an issue, Kwazulu-Natal would necessarily be prioritised in terms of the number of BirdLife branches in the region.

Peregrine Falcons at Tygervalley Waterfront (Lesley Teare)

The Bellville Planning Department is considering an application for a five-storey high-rise building in the Tygervalley Waterfront. The proposed building would be on a piece of land next to a Peregrine Falcon nesting site, which has been occupied by the falcons for many years, possibly for decades. Andrew Jenkins of the Western Cape Raptor Research Programme at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute has confirmed that this is one of the few breeding roosts of Peregrine Falcon in the Greater Cape Town area. The development would require blasting into the rock face right next to the roost before construction could commence. This, together with the lengthy construction process, would cause serious disturbance to the falcons, almost certainly resulting in their abandoning the site.

TBC, CBC, Andrew Jenkins for the Fitz and Koos de Goede for Raptor Conservation have lodged their concerns with Council. These will be referred to the applicant for comment and further recommendation to Council. Thereafter, there will be a right of appeal.

4 X 4s Back on Beaches (Peter Brunwin)

In December 2004, the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, revoked the total ban without permit of 4 X 4 vehicles on beaches. Disabled persons would now be able to obtain permits to access beaches using off-road vehicles. In addition, participants in organised angling competitions could apply for sanction from the South African Angling Federation and the relevant local or provincial authority or manager of a protected area to drive on a beach for angling purposes. This opens up the way for widespread abuse. No restrictions or recommendations are given on the permit, especially that no vehicles be allowed on beaches during the mid-summer peak oystercatcher nesting season; nor is there any requirement for supervision of angling competitions to monitor whether responsible use is being made of the beaches.

In April, a critical commentary on the new provisions, written by environmentalist Jerry Buirski, was published in the press under the heading "It seems that pressure from anglers is behind the return of 4 X4s on our beaches." Peter supported the criticisms in a subsequent letter to the editor.

The problem is a national one and Peter recommended that BLSA approach the Minister to ask that;

1. "Competition" is defined, so that it can be monitored.
2. No-go areas are put in place.
3. Timing restrictions are imposed for protected areas.

Action: Vernon/BLSA

Avian Botulism Document (Dirk Van Driel)

Dirk tabled the draft of a manual he has written, titled "Avian Botulism - The Disease, its Control and Management". The document has been produced for Cape Town, but can be used countrywide. Its aims are:

- to encourage and enhance public awareness of the disease;
- to enable people to recognise the disease and inform them of what to do; and
- to ensure that co-operation is maintained and strengthened.

The manual is intended primarily for organisations and public bodies that deal with Avian Botulism. Important contact details will be given. An initial print quantity of 3,000 - 4,000 is proposed. Recommended that, in addition to the manual, an abbreviated version be produced as a z-fold leaflet for distribution around localities where there are large waterbodies, such as Zeekoevlei, and to bird clubs. **Action:** Dirk

Opening of Kleinriviervlei (Hermanus lagoon) (Mike Ford, in absentia by e-mail)

Mike raises the issue of the artificial opening of the vlei after torrential rains in April this year. In theory, this was done under the supervision of Cape Nature Conservation, but hundreds of coots were swept out to sea and drowned, as happened at Botrivierlei last year and at the lagoon 5 years previously. Ostensibly, the reason was that houses near the Kleinrivier in Stanford were in danger of being flooded. These houses are built below the floodline and this is the third time in 8 years that the vlei has been artificially drained almost dry in winter, when it should be filling up to last the whole season. The result is that no waterfowl are breeding there and the ecology of the vlei is radically changed.

Paul Slabbert: The management of the vlei falls under Hermanus. Boathouses below the floodline were converted into houses. The bottom line is that political pressure is involved.

Dirk van Driel: If an estuary is opened when the sea is rough, marine sand is lifted and brought into the estuary, thereby changing the topography. It is illegal to affect a river in this way and we have the legal means to resist. We need to check who the relevant authority is. If it is CNC, they answer to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. We can write to Rashied Kahn and demand that CNC take responsibility and give them the ammunition to do so. Dirk will liaise with Mike Ford to draft a letter. **Action:** Dirk/Mike

Bird Strikes on Wires (Brian Vanderwalt)

Bird strikes have been occurring on wires across the salt pans at Velddrif. Koos de Goede and Raptor Research are liaising with Eskom to put up flappers. Brian asked that he be contacted if anyone is aware of incidences of bird strikes.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Saturday 8 October 2005, at 12h00, in Municipal Boardroom, Stanford.