

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, 10 October 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: Helene Thompson, Antoinette le Roux

West Coast Bird Club: Anna Dernier, Jenny Edmonds

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal, Elaine Odendal

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff

Hermanus Bird Club: Barbara Palmer, Graham Palmer

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

Paarl: Yvonne Weiss

BLSA: Neil Smith (Conservation Division), Bronwyn Maree (BLSA Seabird Division)

Apologies

John Bowman, Brigid de Kock, Royd Frith, Kobus Graaff, Peter Nupen, Dave Whitelaw, Ross Wanless.

Minutes of Previous Meeting (13/06/2008): Agreed with amendment for SABAP2 as indicated in current minutes.

Flamingo Fund Raising Event and Lucky Draw.

This was a WCBF initiative with the clubs combining efforts to raise funds for the Flamingos of Kamfers Dam, during a 4-day visit by Mark Anderson. It proved a big success and Mark was delighted with the response and the opportunity to meet with the clubs and spread the conservation message. Total funds collected amounted to R16,000 (Donations R13,000, Raffle R3,000).

Noted: **BLSA's Bird of the Year in 2010** will be the **Lesser Flamingo**.

Raffle Prize-winners:

- Flight over Kamfers Dam, the Big Hole and a Game Farm: Nico Venter (BirdLife Stellenbosch)
- (2) Framed Flamingo Picture: Heide Wetmore (Somerset West Bird Club).

BLSA Vernon Head report-back from Council Meeting (05/09/2009):

Advisory Committee: BLSA seeks to become more closely involved with the scientific community and benefit from their advice. To this end an Advisory Committee has been formed, comprising;

- Dr. P. Barnard (SANBI),
- Phil Hockey (Percy Fitzpatrick Institute),
- Les Underhill (ADU),
- Kevin Shaw (Cape Nature Conservation),

- Mark Anderson (BLSA Executive Director),
- Neil Smith (BLSA, Manager Conservation Division) (committee secretary),
- Ross Wanless (BLSA, Seabird Division).

Owl Awards: There are two awards in this category - (1) the Owl Award which recognises outstanding contribution to BLSA and Conservation by an individual or organisation and is awarded annually. The number of Owl Awards will be limited to a maximum of 11 in any one year; and (2) the Eagle Owl Award which is for outstanding voluntary contribution by an individual (a) to BLSA and Conservation at a national level and (b) to BLSA at an organisational level. There will be a maximum of 2 Eagle Owl awards annually.

Gill Memorial Award: The highest award that BLSA makes to an individual for contribution to ornithology in Southern Africa. The Awards Committee for the Gill will comprise BLSA Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Executive Director plus a representative from the Fitz and the ADU.

A criteria document is being drawn by up and will be circulated to the Forum.

Action: Sylvia

Birding Big Day 2009 (27 Nov / 28 Nov.): BBD has two new categories this year: (1) Garden Birds. The aim is to encourage people to spend 24 hours observing birds in their gardens/garden nurseries and submit their records on-line <http://gardens.org.za>

SABAP2

For serious birders who are registered as atlasers with the project.

Finances: In a healthier state. Mark is doing excellent work with fund-raising and brought in R800,000 in one week. The musical CATS could raise R750,000, with the proceeds of the opening night in Johannesburg going to BLSA. IBA's in South Africa will be show-cased on the night, with girls dressed up to represent individual IBA's.

Membership Database: Resolution of problems being experienced with the new system is on top of the agenda. The Executive Council (EXCO) has asked Mark to find someone suitably qualified to assist Sadie.

SOS Save our Seabirds Festival (12-18 October): The event is being run by BLSA's Seabird Division and the Department of Environmental Affairs in association with the Two Oceans Aquarium at the V&A Waterfront. It coincides with, and is BLSA's contribution to, National Marine Week. All of the events (excl. the 2-night pelagic) have been generously sponsored. The culmination will be the handing over of a cheque for R100,000 by the Plastics Federation to the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute to launch the Marine IBA's research project (see Marine IBA's-page 3). BLSA's marine education programme for schools will be launched nationally during Marine Week.

Birding Calendar: AO raised the problem of so many events being concentrated into the month of October, i.e. Stanford Glendower Bird Fair, Sasol Agulhas NP Birding Weekend, SOS Week, and suggested that the organisers be invited to move some of the events away from October.

African Penguin Champion: The African Penguin has been selected as the BirdLife Species Champion. BLSA will receive R1.5-million over the next three years from the Charl van der Merwe Trust to conduct urgent research work on the African Penguin.

Presentation: (Bronwen Maree for Ross Wanless)

- African Penguin. The African Penguin is in trouble. A case example is Dyer Island where penguin numbers dropped from approximately 23,000 pairs in the late 1970's to fewer than 5,000 pairs in the early 2000's. Global population of the species has plummeted from around 4-million pairs at the turn of last century to 160,000 pairs in the mid-1980's. Only 30,000 pairs bred in 2008. The population

now stands at less than 0.5% of its former size and the species has been moved from Vulnerable to Endangered on the Red Data list.

Underlying causes under research are:

- Lack of food - overfishing and eastward shift of main prey (sardines)
- Predation by sharks and seals
- Chronic and acute oiling
- Disease outbreaks
- Displacement from breeding colonies by seals
- Something else?

Research shows that lack of food is the primary cause of decline in penguin numbers. Based on statistics over the last 50 years, Namibian sardine catches declined until in 2002 no sardines were caught. Penguin numbers followed the same trend. In South Africa, over the past 20 years, sardine catches have moved progressively eastwards from Cape Point/Hout Bay waters to east of Cape Agulhas. The anomaly is that the penguin colonies are found mostly along our west coast, with a small colony east of Port Elizabeth. There is therefore a total mismatch of where the penguin colonies are and where their primary food source is located. The effect of these changes on the population is that it has declined from approximately 58,000 pairs in 2004 to approximately 22,000 pairs in 2008.

A solution is to create marine protected areas where fishing is banned. St. Croix Island (Eastern Cape), where the bay was closed off to fishing in 2009, is a test case. In the 2008 breeding season, penguins travelled far distances to find food but after closure it was found they travelled much less, mostly staying within the closed area to catch fish. The issue is food availability. To take this concept forward and gain government backing and legislation, hard science must be undertaken. This will be politically challenging, with strong opposition from the fishing industry and MCM.

The R1.5-million Charl van der Merwe grant to BLSA will be used to undertake research and produce the models to convince the fishing industry and MCM to do the right thing.

TW: Given the problem that there are few off-shore islands along the east coast, penguins could be encouraged to colonise coastal mainland, provided protected areas can be established.

Marine IBA's: Extending Important Bird Areas into the Marine Environment.

Marine IBA's are part of BirdLife International's IBA programme, which aims to identify and protect a network of sites that are important for the long term viability of naturally occurring bird populations across their geographical range. Identification and designation of Marine IBA's will be on the basis of a standardised set of international criteria. Four potential ways have been identified in which the process can be adapted and extended to take account of aspects of seabird life-cycles that are, or may be, appropriate for site-based conservation:

- Non-breeding (coastal) concentrations
- Migratory bottlenecks
- Seaward extensions of breeding colonies
- Areas for pelagic species, where seabirds usually gather in large numbers
- The R100,000 SOS grant will be used to finance post-doctorate research for 1 year at the Fitz.

TW: emphasised the importance of including major “roosting sites” in the assessment.

VH: This is a project for the Western Cape in which club members can become involved.

CONSERVATION

Environmental Threats - Update / Review

West Coast: A report prepared by Keith Harrison has been circulated and is attached to the file record of these minutes. KH notes that the extent of developments in progress and planned along the West Coast, including applications for mining exploration, wind farms and solar energy plants, housing and port developments, is now beyond the scope of an individual club to contest or monitor and should be taken to NGO level. He recommends that BLSA examine the possibility of basing a person on the West Coast to keep abreast of developments and asks that VH takes this to Council.

Action: Vernon.

Verlorenvlei (IBA SA103)/Moutonshoek Tungsten Mine: The situation is very serious. There is a concentration of activity by the DME along the Cape West Coast, with prospecting applications being filed for mining and failure on the part of the DME to ensure compliance with the legal process. BLSA has forwarded a letter of objection to DME in respect of Verlorenvlei.

Flaminkvlei/Cerebos (IBA SA104): The scoping report has been rejected by the newly named Dept. of Water and Environmental Affairs (DWEA-previously DEAT), with one of the reasons given being the outstanding issue of Ramsar status for the lower Berg River.

Ramsar Application (Tony Williams): The developer called a meeting of interested parties to see how Ramsar status could be fast tracked. The lower Berg River and salt works meet all the criteria of a Ramsar site, but two previous applications have failed due to there being no Environmental Management Plan or Management Authority in place. The meeting was convened to form a coalition / forum to take this forward but failed to reach consensus. Further canvassing will be done to involve all sections of the community.

- Due process for Ramsar must then be followed.
- Cape Nature is the responsible authority for preparing the application, which goes forward to DWEA for submission to Ramsar.

VH: WCBF would like to be involved in the input for the Ramsar application. Carolyn ah Shene (BLSA) can be called on for legal assistance.

TW: put on record that the developer has offered to give 1% of proceeds from sales ongoing to sustain environmental goals at Flaminkvlei.

Saldahna Bay & Langebaan Lagoon (IBA SA105): All applications for extending the Saldahna ore harbour have been temporarily suspended and the Western Cape Government has ordered the setting up of an Environmental Management Framework for the region, with R1.5 million available to carry out research and produce the report. In addition, DWEA has established a national Ramsar Management Committee to look into the proper management of the region's Ramsar sites. This is a direct result of BLSA's lobbying and advocacy over three years, together with its partners on the West Coast (West Coast Bird Club, Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve and West Coast National Park), and the screening of the 50/50 exposé in 2008.

Other Issues.

Bantamsklip-Proposed Nuclear Power Station: Eskom and National Government have earmarked Bantamsklip on the south-western Overberg coast as the preferred site for the next nuclear power plant. The site lies within an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot. Bantamsklip beach is found on Groot Hagelkraal farm, a registered SA Nature Foundation Natural Heritage Site. The chief concern for birds would be the pylon and power line hazard. BLSA, WCBF and local Clubs have registered as IAP's. Website:

www.savebantamsklip.org

Strandfontein (VH reporting for Dave Whitelaw).

- Hyacinth problem: There are two initiatives to deal with the hyacinth - (a) a machine that sucks in water with the hyacinth and slices the plant matter and (b) manual clearance. The City is appointing an individual to compile a "hyacinth eradication plan" for Cape Town.
- Fishing community: Meetings have been held with the fishing community to sort out problems. It must be remembered that approximately four times more fishermen use the area compared with birders. A funding proposal has been submitted to the TMF for the construction of a boardwalk along the dune ridge.
- House Crows: Louise Stafford of Cape Nature is confident that the problem related to the importation of the poison Stalicide will be resolved soon. The major concern now is funding. The Government has turned down a request for funding and Louise is pursuing other avenues. DW has offered to approach BLSA and RSPB, if she is unsuccessful.

Action: Dave Whitelaw.

(DW - an incoming report is that the eradication programme has re-commenced).

WESTERN CAPE BIRDING ROUTES (Anton Odendal)

It has become clear that Birding Routes are not sustainable if reliant on external funding. This must be sourced at national / provincial / local level. Proposed Birding Routes are being featured on the website and, as funding becomes available, we will proceed with brochures, etc. Dept. of Tourism has indicated they would be interested in sponsoring signage.

Bird Guide Training: September 2010 is earmarked for the next round of training. We have people locally who are prepared to fund the training.

Website: www.westerncapebirding.co.za Going well, with 18 new visitors a day over six months.

Pictures are needed. Mini-websites: Clubs can be put on the site at minimal cost and are invited to contact Anton for details.

FINANCES (Brian Dennis)

- R7,000 received from BLSA for facilitating Forum meetings, etc.
- Expenditure YTD: R1,420
- Balance of funds: R5,880

GENERAL

Kirstenbosch Biodiversity Expo (Anne Gray): CBC had a stand at the 2008 and 2009 expo's, where the focus was on the Birds of Kirstenbosch. BLSA's Bird of the Year was introduced using the poster. A video was run covering the conservation programme at Strandfontein. CBC membership was publicised. The benefit to CBC was networking with other NGO's at the show.

Expo 2010 (end March). 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. The focus of the expo will be on the conservation work done by exhibitors, showing not only what is being done environmentally but also its social and economic value, so communicating the value of biodiversity conservation to the target audience (Learners Grades 6 -12) and creating awareness. The objective will be to give learners some direction for a career in conservation. CBC will participate and other Clubs are invited to get involved. Also, Estate Manager Augustine Morkel is keen to run an event at Kirstenbosch with birders. Vernon will follow this up with Augustine.

Action: Vernon.

Golf Day at Hermanus (Anton Odendal): BLO will host a Golf Day at Hermanus Golf Club on 6 May 2010 during National Bird Week. National Parks will be invited to put up bird related projects and participants will be judged by an independent panel of judges. People will be invited to sponsor a putting green, tee or other (e.g. R1,500 to sponsor a green). Glendower has offered to sponsor the lounge. A "25 Photos" competition will be run. Prizes are needed. The event will be advertised in Africa Birds & Birding. The goal is to raise funds and promote membership, starting small with a 50/50 scheme -make R50,000 or sign up 50 members. Beneficiaries must be identified. Paarl Bird Sanctuary (Yvonne Weiss): Should one need to contact the works manager, Cedric Morkel, the number is 082 823 2454.

Bird Hides/ Facilities (Tony Williams)

- Intaka Island: A new eco educational centre is being built, using the services of the avitourism consultant for Cape Nature.
- Rocher Pan: Two new hides are being constructed plus a viewing platform.
- CNC: RM20 has been allocated for sites along the Flamingo Birding Route and in the Cederberg, Grootvadersbosch, Anysberg, De Mond, Salmonsdam - e.g. putting in accommodation, bird hides and nature trails.

VH: Kleinmond Estuary: Two hides are going up plus boardwalks and security gates, sponsored by Arabella.

AD: Velddrif: Will be suggesting screens rather than a closed hide because of key control problems.

AO: A decision has been taken that no new hides will be constructed outside protected areas because of vandalism.

WCBF meetings calendar 2010

13 February

12 June

9 October

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 13 February 2010, at Helderberg Nature Reserve (SWBC hosting).