



CAPE BIRD CLUB : KAAPSE VOELWAARNEMERSKLUB

NEWSLETTER - NUUSBRIEF

MERCY FITZPATRICK INSTITUTE
AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
RONDEBOSCH.

No 109 NR
March 1974 Maart

Will members please note that the Cape Bird Club's permanent address is now P.O. Box 5022, Cape Town 8000. In future please use this address for all communications including subscriptions and items for the Newsletter.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

If this newsletter is of less bulk than the past few, it is because No. 108 which should have gone out in January with the notices about February/March events was not ready in time, so this rather treads on its heels. It is the editors' intention to send one off every second month, accompanied by information about meetings etc. for the two following months, so one is due in March...and here it is. Subsequent Newsletters are to be expected in May, July, September and November and their bulk will depend to a great extent on you.

HELP! Alan Morris, who usually staples, folds and places in envelopes, each Newsletter, assisted by Mrs Morris, and of late Philip Tongue, would be delighted if members living in the Bergvliet area would offer their services to help in this tedious but necessary job. The next issue will be ready for stapling etc. about mid-May. Please phone him at 72-4150 in the evening and offer.

MORE MEMBERS TOO...The more members the Club has the more it can do for you and for birds. It is one of the few organisations where pleasure and duty combine...if you believe that we have a duty to protect birds as well as enjoy them. It is almost certain that every member has a friend who is interested in birds and who would enjoy our meetings and excursions, and whose subscription would add to our capacity for conservation work, and whose name on the members' list would strengthen our influence and power. A leaflet about the aims, objects and activities of the Club accompanies this Newsletter. Please pass it to someone who might fall for it! He won't regret the day he sends his first subscription, and neither will the Hon. Treasurer!

The Newsletters of the Eastern Cape Wild Bird Society are now being sent to the Central Lending Library in Wale Street and will be found together with our own Newsletter in the Information room on the first floor...NOT in the Art room as at first proposed. Members are urged to read them; there is always something interesting going on in other areas.

The report in Newsletter No. 108 that contact was to be made and maintained with the OUTENIQUA NATURALISTS' CLUB has brought a cordial response from Miss Maisie Hamer, who offers to send a copy of the newsletters of that Club to us...we have asked that she shall have them directed to the Central Library also, so that all members may see them. She also asks that any members visiting Knysna with slides and/or the materials and willingness to speak should inform her, as the Club is always interested in hearing speakers about birds. So if anyone would like to give a talk there, the contact is Miss Maisie Hamer, 3 Georges Flats, Knysna.

EDITOR · R. K. SCHMIDT "STRIEGAU" LYMPLIGH RD PLUMSTEAD CAPE
REDAKTEUR · LYMPLIGHWEG PLUMSTEAD KAAP.

A HABITAT REGISTER. The British Trust for Ornithology has announced that it is to set about the production of a Register of Ornithological Habitats, described by its Director as an Ornithological Doooms-day Book. The aim is to identify within the 10km squares of the national grid on the official survey maps, all those areas which are especially good for birds, whether in the breeding season, in winter or at times of passage. Fieldworkers will be asked to record on special forms details of the habitats, the bird species present and the numbers involved. The register will obviously be of great value for conservation planning at all levels as data will be readily available when completed to assess the local, regional or national importance of any site.

This preliminary note is given here because of the obvious value of such a register to any organisation interested in conservation, and because the compilation of one would be a task eminently suited to such an institution as the Cape Bird Club. However to set about starting one as a local project would be futile unless it was part of a national scheme...perhaps the idea might commend itself to the SAOS, especially as it is one where the help of non-professionals could be utilised.

A NOTE FOR INDUSTRIALISTS. Again turning to Britain for news, it is noted that 250 acres of gravel pits which have been managed by the Nottinghamshire County Trust as a nature reserve for the past ten years, under an agreement with the Gravel Company, has now been offered much greater interest and co-operation from the Company which has formed a Management Committee with representatives of itself, the Nature Conservancy and the County Trust, and has drawn up proposals for the creation of islands etc. with promises of generous contributions. When may we, in the Cape, expect ANY form of support or co-operation from any industrial concern?

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS. This is your broadsheet. The editors would welcome something from you. One heading under which almost all members could contribute is HOLIDAYS. It is impossible to travel without noticing something of interest in the bird world or visiting some place where birds are to be seen. Or, if you don't want to write about your own adventures, what about criticising the Newsletter? We don't know what most members think about it and even if we mightn't like what we hear, it would help us. The Editors write a lot of it themselves and this editor (PT) is reminded of an occasion when Sir Thomas Beecham, the eminent British orchestral conductor was reprimanded by the New York Press for singing too audibly from the rostrum at the Metropolitan Opera House. His reply was that what was going on on the stage was so inaudible that he felt it was time the audience heard some singing at least. Which as the Mad Hatter said "is exactly the case with mine". "Press day" may be taken as about the 10th of each second month; that is to say for the May issue, about May 10th...though the earlier the better.

THE GREATER SALDANHA BAY PLAN. A precis of the Memorandum submitted by the Conservation Sub-committee of the South African Ornithological Society is given on another page of this Newsletter. It would be a splendid thing if this new committee of the SAOS succeeded in the vital object of preserving this unique and irreplaceable national asset for all time, and thus obtained for South Africa the distinction of being one of the first countries to do more than merely pay lip-service to conservation when a vast commercial enterprise is launched. The very commercial interests at present threatening its establishment would, once it WAS established, take great pride in both the reserve and their own foresight.

A KILL AT LAMBERTS BAY. A serious oiling incident was reported at Bird Island, Lamberts Bay, on January 21; not on this occasion due to crude petroleum but to what appeared to be an effluent from the fish canning factory, as there was a thick coating of a white oily substance on the water which smelt strongly of fish. A spokesman from the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute who saw the oiled birds reported that anything up to 10 000 were killed, mostly cormorants, although a first count (there were later kills after this was made) indicated about 5 000 cormorants and about 700

gannets affected. This is one of the worst oiling disasters in our area and it is to be hoped that something will be done to prevent its recurrence. Events like this serve to emphasize the urgent need of those with the welfare of birds at heart...and why are we members of the Cape Bird Club, if we are not just those kind of people?...to keep an eye on their surroundings and report anything they feel is wrong...quite apart from wholesale slaughter like this...to the Secretary...or to any Committee member.

Now that the Club has a central P.O. Box, it is easy enough to post a postcard. The new Conservation Group will do its best to make a fuss about it.

CLUB ACTIVITIES

The new season began on February 15 with films and a talk about the Galapagos Islands from Errol Whittall, a speaker who has addressed us in the past, so that those who remember his earlier talks knew what to expect. This remote group of Pacific islands (where Darwin first crystallised his ideas of the importance of natural selection) with their remarkable fauna...especially the marine iguanas...have of recent years become one of the more intellectual tourist areas, visited regularly by those tour operators offering something different. There is much to see and much to think about here, and Mr. Whittall has done both.

Members might like to know that about three years ago a very readable bird book; title GALAPAGOS was published. The author Brian Nelson and his wife spent some months on one of the islands studying Gannets and Boobies. One of the unusual features of this book is that it must be the only bird book ever published that contains a photograph of a female nude...Mrs Nelson. (PT)

EXCURSION TO PAARL SEWAGE WORKS. 24th FEBRUARY.

Sunday the 24th brought withit another of the excessively hot days that had been inhibiting exertion in Cape Town for some time, and this, coupled with clashes with two other open-air organisations, was probably the cause of the moderate numbers that came to this always interesting, if somewhat smelly, place. The following list of birds seen was compiled for us by John Martin.

786	Cape Sparrow	609	Sedge Warbler
94	Shoveller	238	Treble-banded Sandplover
81	Sacred Ibis	253	Little Stint
50	Reed Cormorant	61	Cattle Egret
506	Rock Martin	245	Blacksmith Plover
154	Steppe Buzzard	843	Common Waxbill
316	Cape Turtle Dove	96	Yellowbill Duck
707	Fiscal Shrike	90	Shelduck
495	White-throated	103	Maccoa Duck
	Swallow	102	Pochard
210	Moorhen	89	Egyptian Goose
651	Karoo Robin	646	Levaillant's Cisticola
54	Grey Heron	98	Cape Teal (Wigeon)
208	Purple Gallinule	242	Coot
304	White-winged Lake	502	Greater Striped Swallow
	Tern	397	Malachite Kingfisher
52	Darter	251	Curlew Sandpiper
6	Little Grebe	258	Common Sandpiper
	(Dabchick)	59	Little Egret
418	Hoopoe	703	Cape Longclaw
686	Cape Wagtail	314	Red Eyed Dove
270	Stilt	553	Olive Thrush (Cape Thrush)

To which Alan Morris added Black Crake (203).
There were no European Swallows here.

THOUGHTS AT CAPE POINT

Because the Cape of Good Hope is world-renowned for its historical and marine associations ... to say nothing of the Cape Triangulars prized in the philatelic world... and because the area that encloses it is a nature reserve, the Cape Divisional Council must have a difficult time in assessing priorities. It is obvious that tourists

must visit the Cape and how to provide for the multitude of visitors yet preserve a fair balance with the needs of its natural inhabitants presents problems that are not easy to solve. A first impression might lead one to believe that this was mainly a recreation area, yet the presence of three game rangers does much to contradict that impression.

Yet, having visited the reserve regularly for about twenty years, there are certain matters where I feel something less might be done for tourists and, as a consequence, more for the wildlife.

Take, for example, access by motor cars. Now a single motor car can banish the feeling of wildness from anywhere, and the smell of petrol fumes is one that many people like to get away from. Yet the coast of the reserve is open for almost its whole length to those very machines. Not only access to the coast, but along its very beaches, for motorists (I am one myself) are a pushing lot and take pleasure...some of them do...in forcing their vehicle to remote places, just to get away from people. Over the years, many tracks have thus been pushed over the veld to the shore and more and more beach habitat has been disturbed and used to the great disadvantage to the shore-nesting birds.

The ubiquity and numbers of motor vehicles and the recent development of beach-buggies have quickly turned a potential danger into a serious threat. When people have to walk along the beach for their bathing, fishing and picnics, they do not do so in great numbers, for not many people relish a long struggle with sand. This goes a long way to allow shore-nesters enough beach on which to rear their broods. But the advent of the motor car makes all beaches open to many people, and, what is worse, whilst people on foot may pass a nest without disturbing it, the rapidly moving motor car frightens the birds off, and may pass to and fro for hours, so that the eggs never get a chance. This is not an idle statement of fancy, but is one of sober fact, and shore nesting birds are suddenly in great danger of extinction in many parts of the world. Here is where a nature reserve should...no must...be a nature reserve, and do all it can to protect its own birds. The only way to do this is, unfortunately for the visitors, to keep them away from certain beaches where birds are known to nest.

Fifteen years ago, I walked from Olifants Bay to the mouth of the Lagoon and we found eight oyster-catchers and about ten White-fronted sand plovers nests. Today you will not find one along that stretch, and, as was pointed out in Newsletter 108, will not find any beyond the Lagoon unless something is done to preserve them from disturbance.

Then, take another matter. One of the most devastating of the new hobbies is spear-fishing. Let me quote from ORYX, the journal of the Fauna Preservation Society of London. "Hans Hass, pioneer of underwater fishing, says that mechanised spear guns have turned what was once a difficult sport into a massacre. Revisiting the Great Barrier Reef, Tahiti and Jamaica he found that the fish were gone, and in many other parts of the world the tale is the same...the Mediterranean has long been notorious". The World Wildlife Fund has called for an end to the "useless and insensate massacre of fish" that occurs every year.

Though. It should be obvious that spear fishing represents the diametrical opposite of everything a nature reserve stands for. Fishing for food, yes. Fishing for the pleasure of killing, not under any circumstances by people calling themselves civilized; but in a nature reserve...well; what are we coming to?

A third matter is disturbance in general. In a reserve there ought to be quite a large area from which the public are permanently excluded...just to give all the wildlife a chance. Outside the reserves there is no part of the whole country where wild things are free from disturbance.

At Cape Point then, just such a respite from it should be made available.

And lastly, education. What opportunities we are missing, with all those tourists here...in this remote and beautiful place, surrounded by the ocean with few of the works of man to be seen! The National Parks in the USA take great trouble to put information boards everywhere where the public congregate; sometimes it is the geology, sometimes the vegetation, others the birds or animals...but always something from which the visitor can learn about nature.

I do not think, then, that I am asking for more than the reserve deserves when I ask for (1) the closing to motor cars of all but the tarred roads, and the enforcement of the rules about driving off them (2) a total ban, at once, on spear fishing (3) provision of a substantial area of open veld, reserved ONLY for its natural inhabitants and lastly (4) proceeding quickly with the construction of that FIELD MUSEUM, discussed some time ago and dropped...the area by the restaurant is ideal and we need it. In addition, some discreetly placed information boards about the plants, animals and birds. Buffels Bay and Olifantsbos for these; plenty of both birds and visitors to learn about them here.

That there is a new spirit about in official circles is evidenced by the recent inauguration of the Council for the Habitat, which the State President opened. Here we have some lovely habitat, and unlimited opportunities to use it for the good of all life on earth. What about it, Divisional Council?

Philip Tongue

AN IMPORTANT MEETING

The Inaugural Meeting of the Council for the Habitat.

The Transito Hotel Newlands was the scene on Tuesday March 5 of what could well be the most important meeting for those concerned with conservation, that has ever taken place in the Cape. At least 40 delegates and a large number of observers, of which your joint editor was one, attended a full-day session which was given over to the official formation of the new Council for the Habitat.

It was most auspiciously opened by the State President, an event which showed that the meeting was taken seriously by the government, which does not lavish the presence of the head of the state on trivialities. This was followed, after an interval for tea, by an address by the Secretary to the Department of Planning and Environment, Dr. P.S. Rautenbach...another sign of the times... with a promise of a grant of R10 000 to the new Council. It is clear that the message of the past few years has been heeded in government circles; something for which one can not be too greatly relieved, for it has become clear that the problems, just realised by the majority of us, can to a large extent, only be solved by Government action...though the determination, identification and documentation of those problems gives scope for all of us.

Then Professor B.R. Roberts of the University of the OFS spoke with great authority and conviction of the dilemma we have landed ourselves in through the perpetuation of the myth of the conquest of nature, the wasteful use of Earth's only too finite resources, and the coming over-population of the planet, with demands that will still further deplete irreplaceable materials. It is presumptuous for me to say it, but it is necessary to say, that Prof. Roberts knows his subject, has read the best authorities and brings a dedicated approach to what is already Earth's most intractable problem. Had any of us needed further convincing that the meeting was necessary they would not have done so by the time he had finished.

The remainder of the meeting was spent in the tiresome business of agreeing a Constitution, happily interrupted after half an hour by an adjournment for an excellent lunch.

The Constitution was finally agreed about an hour before the time set for the termination of the meeting, after which a number of matters were offered for the newly-born Raad to get its milk teeth into...and pretty indigestible ones they are too! The Garden Route Freeway...Langebaan Lagoon... the vital need for more marine reserves, and the stricter enforcement of the existing protection

laws. In this connection Mr. Tim Condon reported that a tanker which spilled a considerable amount of oil in Durban harbour recently was fined the crippling sum of R50, whereas, for a similar offence at Miami a fine of 18 000 US dollars had been imposed.

Enough here to occupy the Executive Committee for some time; it will be interesting to see what effect the display of official support has in the future.

This is quite clearly an organisation of national importance, and enormous potential. Its objective, as stated in its Constitution is "to promote consultation, co-operation and co-ordinated action between its member organisations, State bodies and any other bodies in all matters pertaining to the utilisation of the environment, with a view to ensuring its maximum conservation". It has been set in motion with most of the tools it needs for such a task and it is surely up to all of us to support it.

With this object in view, your Committee will be asked to join, at its next meeting on March 25, and the writer has no doubt that it will do so.

THE GREATER SALDANHA PLAN AND LANGEBAAN LAGOON
A Public discussion on 27 February 1974

A public discussion of the official plans for development in the Saldanha Bay area took place during the morning of Tuesday 27th February in the auditorium of the H.F. Verwoerd Building. The terms of reference were such that the panel were to listen to, and note, comments from the floor, but not to answer any questions. All interested organisations submitted memoranda, which it is hoped will influence future planning.

The Conservation Sub-committee of the S.African Ornithological Society submitted a memorandum, a précis of which now follows.

- 1) The Sub-committee in general supported the Plan as issued by the Department of Planning and Environment insofar as consideration had been shown for the environmental situation. It regards the Langebaan Lagoon as the most important area of its kind in South Africa for migrant waders, and considers that ANY development in the southern part of the Lagoon will be detrimental to the bird life. It strongly recommends that as an adjunct to the Department of Planning's proposed conservation area, that the whole of the southern part of the Lagoon be given complete protection and be developed as a nature reserve.
- 2) It stressed the national and international importance of the Lagoon, and pointed out that the number of summer migrants exceeds 88 000 birds, and that the winter population is in the region of 29 500. This great number of water birds is not matched in any other part of South Africa and is mainly due to the rich invertebrate fauna of the southern part, which itself is due to the constant deposition of organic material from the reedbeds and salmarshes bordering the Lagoon. It mentioned that the migrant birds come from all over Northern Europe and Asia, as well as several African countries. Much expense and effort have been devoted to developing areas for conservation of these birds in the northern hemisphere, so that South Africa has a responsibility to international conservation to protect these birds whilst they are within her territorial boundaries.
- 3) It recommended that the southern part of the Lagoon, plus the surrounding land enclosed by existing roads which skirt it at that end and the mudflats and marshes south of a line drawn from about 1km south of Church Haven, across to Bottelary Farm should be included. This will thus include the reedbeds mentioned in (2) plus the main feeding areas of the waders and flamingoes. It asked that a fence should be erected along the dry land boundaries and that the lagoon boundary should be marked by a line of buoys.

- 4) It proposed that the area thus defined should be officially declared a nature reserve under the jurisdiction of the Nature Conservation Department of the Cape Provincial Administration, especially since the proposal falls within that Department's official policy for the area. Public access should be restricted, but it strongly recommended that a system of nature walks and observation towers were constructed for the public's benefit. Perhaps, it added, special consideration might be given to local residents, subject to strict conservation safeguards.
- 5) The Sub-committee emphasised that the construction of any bridges across the Lagoon's mouth might impede the flow of the tide on which the whole ecology of the southern part depends, and that the most careful consideration of this should be given when any bridges were designed. Since the main flow of the tide sweeps past the tip of the Donkergat peninsula, where a commercial harbour is envisaged, the most stringent anti-pollution measures should be taken to ensure that no pollutants entered the proposed reserve.
- 6) It was suggested that an Advisory Board should be established, consisting of scientists, and including ecologists, which would advise on all aspects of development in the Greater Saldanha area.

The concluding paragraph of the Memorandum must be quoted in full. "The SAOS Conservation Sub-committee recommends that, because of its rich birdlife, the southern part of Langebaan Lagoon be declared a fully protected nature reserve, within the Department of Planning's proposed conservation area. The adoption of this recommendation will lead to the safeguarding of a natural amenity of national and international importance. It is considered that the above proposals do not conflict with the Greater Saldanha Plan issued by the Department of Planning and Environment, and will allow the use of the northern part of the Lagoon for water sports and other recreational activities and for strictly limited residential development."

THE C.B.C'S CONSERVATION SUB-COMMITTEE'S
FIRST MEETING

This has been a period of important meetings and the first one held by the newly appointed conservation sub-committee of the Cape Bird Club is no less so than the two public ones chronicled in these pages.

The CBC Committee, at a special meeting held on January 28, appointed a sub-committee, as reported in Newsletter 108, which, on account of the delays inevitable in voluntary organisations, was not able to hold a meeting until March 4.

Its first recommendations, still to be ratified by the full committee at its next meeting on March 25, were these.

- a) that the term CBC Conservation Sub-committee was too cumbersome and that a short title was essential, especially for public use. The name Bird Conservation Group was accepted.
- b) that, again for public use an "emblem" was required. This to be a bird that could be used much as "Bokkie" is used by the forestry people, as a spokesman for birdlife as a whole. As the Cape Robin is known familiarly as Jan Frederik, and is a distinctive animal, this was proposed.
- c) A permanent ADDRESS is essential now that the public is to be more involved. This has already been attended to and members are asked to use this address for all communications: P.O. Box 5022, CAPE TOWN, 8000.
- d) That members could be more deeply involved in the Group's future activities was undeniable, and that many would like to involve themselves was regarded as true. With this in

view, they would shortly be asked to fill in a questionnaire so that we should know where to find help when it was needed. The kind of help envisaged ranged from legal and accountancy services through gardening...i.e. tree-planting, habitat improvement etc... to hard work such as fencing, digging and carpentering.

e) Various areas of conservation interest were considered, but of these and for plans for the future, members must await further Newsletters.

PT.

A SELF-PERPETUATING OLIGARCHY?

A few years ago both the National Trust and the Automobile Association, in Britain, got into serious public trouble because it was alleged, their committees were re-electing themselves at each Annual General Meeting, and thus perpetuating a closed shop so far as management was concerned. Whilst there undoubtedly was good reason, in both cases, for that complaint, it must be appreciated that it is a danger implicit in all associations run by a committee.

Members invariably suffer from apathy and so long as their association provides what it says it will provide, and everyone is happy, the provisions in the Constitution are overlooked. As soon as someone is not happy, then a witch-hunt starts and a great deal of unpleasantness sets in until a new committee is installed... with a lot of hard words and ill-feeling all round...and after a time, things go on in the same way...only there has been an infusion of new blood and new ideas. Obviously the thing to aim for in a well-run association is a series of bloodless revolutions...which is quite possible. The Owl Club of Cape Town (which has nothing at all to do with birds) has a committee on which no one is permitted to sit for more than a year or two; in consequence it is continually fed with new ideas...stability being provided by its one permanent official, the Secretary-Treasurer.

Let us look at the Bird Club's Constitution for a moment. Sect 5, para 3 provides "The Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, and six Committee Members shall be elected at each Annual General Meeting and they shall hold office until the next Annual General Meeting". Para 4... "Nominations for Membership of the Committee shall be in writing and be signed by Members proposing and seconding, and the Member nominated must signify his acceptance by signing the nomination" and para 5 says "Nominations must be handed to the Hon. Secretary or posted to reach him at least three weeks before the date of the Annual General Meeting".

What all this is leading up to is that members have a positive duty to see that the Committee is replenished with newcomers. This implies no criticism of the present Committee, but that it is only by replenishing it that the Club may keep itself abreast of the times. This reminder is published in this issue of the Newsletter well in advance of the next AGM. Your Committee would welcome nominations...even the best of servants are happy to be given a rest...It would, in addition, be heartened at the receipt of such evidence that Members took a real interest in their Club.

PT.

PHALAROPES AT TAMATIE VLEI

In the last issue of the Newsletter it was stated that "other experienced people have seen these birds and reported them as Red-necked Phalaropes (272)". Mr. Peter Frost informed the editor the other day that they quite positively Red-necked, adding for the benefit of the editor (in this instance PT) that the Red-necked has a very fine bill and its back is noticeably streaked, whereas the Grey's bill is heavier, often has a yellowish base, and its back is uniform. Whilst identification at the distance they are usually seen is difficult with binoculars, Mr. Frost was using a 60-times telescope...not that anyone would doubt his expertise!.

THE CAPE BIRD CLUB

PROGRAMME FOR MARCH AND APRIL

EXCURSIONS

March 30 and 31 - Camp at Bottelary.

Last year we had to cancel this camp because of lack of toilet facilities. However, the Club has overcome this problem!

Members can only camp on the Saturday and Sunday. Fires are only permitted in the authorised fireplace and members are requested to take all refuse home for disposal. All drinking water must be taken.

The farm is 28 miles from Darling along the new gravel road to Langebaan and is 6 miles from Langebaan.

There is a small name plate on the gate.

April 27 - Saturday afternoon excursion to Tamatie Vlei.

Please meet at the gate at 2.30 p.m. on Baden-Powell Drive about 100 yards beyond the Zeekoe Vlei outlet. This is a good area for local water and bush birds.

EVENING MEETING

Friday April 19 in the Zoology Lecture Theatre at 8.15 p.m.

Mr. Nico Myburgh will be screening a selection of his very excellent slides. An evening by Mr. Myburgh is not to be missed.

Alan Morris
Hon. Secretary 72-4150