

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 26 February 2005, at the ***Tygerberg Nature Reserve.***

Vernon Head, chaired the Meeting, and welcomed Monika Forner, newly appointed secretary of West Coast Bird Club.

Those Present

Cape Bird Club – Vernon Head, Peter Brunwin, 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

Minutes of previous meeting (09/10/2004): **Agreed**

BLSA

National Bird Week (1-7 May)

National Bird Week is planned as an annual event, which will take place in the first week of May every year. The goal is to celebrate birds on a national basis, with education, activities and publicity focusing on birds, birding and conservation. The general public, individuals, teams and especially the youth and schools will be encouraged to participate. Peter Sullivan, CEO of Independent Newspapers, who also sits on the BLSA Board, will assist with getting the event into the media. The event has the support of the Minister of Education.

National Rarities Committee

A new central National Rarities committee, supported by Regional Rarities committees, is being formed. Use will be made of modern technologies for fast reporting and verification.

Canned Birding Courses

Courses are being developed and will be available by mid 2005

Stanford Birding Fair 2005

The Stanford Birding Fair will take place this year from 6 - 9 October. It is hoped that this will become an annual event in the birding calendar. WCBF supports the concept of a Birding Fair and would like to find ways of working with Anton towards its success. Outcomes of the 2004 event will be built on. Anton has extended an invitation to schedule a forum meeting at Stanford on Saturday 8 October.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

Avian Botulism (Dirk van Driel)

Dirk updated the forum on outbreaks of Avian Botulism occurring in the Western Cape this summer, in particular the outbreak at Intaka Island. He stressed the importance of early alert and asked that Club members remain aware and report any sightings of dead or ailing birds in wetland areas to the authorities in charge or to him. With the hot summer conditions prevailing, high evaporation of water and subsequent mud flats developing around water bodies; the conditions are conducive to outbreaks.

The bacteria, botulinum avium, is endemic to water bodies and activates when conditions are right and protein is present. Carcasses of dead birds will trigger an outbreak. Once infected, birds will die within 24

hours and essential to the containment of the outbreak is the immediate removal and incineration of carcasses. A simple incinerator constructed from a drum is effective.

Dirk has advanced the theory that botulism and cholera are enhanced by human activities. One common denominator that stands out is poultry farms, with the discarding of dead chickens, eggs and manure in open dumps on which ibis, gulls and other birds feed. They get infected and spread the disease when they return to their roosting grounds. Water birds in particular are vulnerable. A prime example of possible cause and effect, monitored now over a number of years, is Slent Farm, where the adjacent poultry farm has an open dump. Birds forage there and return to the Slent Farm dam. Within hours, some will show signs of infection and die. Dirk maintains that all localities where large quantities of decomposing organic material occur are potential hazards. Management and education are needed and Nature Conservation officials should be empowered to enter suspect premises and enforce regulations. It was noted that, generally speaking, large commercial poultry operators do comply with regulations and enforce controls and that problem operators tend to be the smaller independents.

Symptoms of avian botulism displayed are birds struggling to walk and swim, paralysis of legs and wings, neck and head flopping. Signs in dead birds are legs extended backwards, wings slightly open, necks and heads drawn back.

House Crows (Dave Whitelaw)

Dave expressed serious reservations regarding the possibility of getting the House Crow problem under control. House Crow numbers at Crossroads are estimated to be in the region of 2,500+. Numbers are increasing in both the Northern and Southern suburbs of Cape Town and the bird has been seen in Paarl. Africa Bird Club through BLSA provided R10,000 sponsorship for an eradication programme, but +/-R25,000 a year will be needed for 5 years. BLSA has undertaken to try to source funding. Dirk suggested that, where numbers are small as at present in Paarl, it might be possible to trap the crows, by enticing one or more with food into a simple cage with drop door. Given a few days, the trapped birds would settle down and their presence with food would attract more to enter the cage.

Funding of ADU Projects

BLSA sees the ADU as the scientific arm of the Society and funding will be sought specifically to support, CAR, CWAC and SAFRING.

Steenberg Road Extension (Peter Brunwin)

A new road proposal has been tabled by Cape Town City Council that again threatens the future existence of Zandvlei Nature Reserve. The proposal would appear to be a substitution for the Southern Greenfields section of the R300 Ring Road (the same section that was contested last year by environmental bodies), if the latter is rejected. The difference is that, unlike the R300 proposal, which was not supported by City Council, the Steenberg Road proposal has been put forward by Council and is likely to be more difficult to contest.

The proposed extension to Steenberg Road from Main Road to Prince George Drive would pass through the northern section of the Nature Reserve and destroy the viability of the existing land part of the reserve. The City insists that the proposed road link is imperative to the success of the Capricorn development and the south-eastern Peninsula. However, there is a viable alternative to this routing in the upgrading and widening of Military Road, where road reserves have been provided on both sides. Also, the proposed Steenberg Road extension would create another major road junction on Prince George Drive within 400 meters of the existing Military Road/Prince George Drive junction.

Comments and registration as "Interested and Affected Parties" must be lodged with the consultants before 28 February 2005. Dirk pointed out that it is numbers that count when it comes to the consideration of objections of this nature. Bird clubs, environmental bodies and individuals have responded and it was felt that an objection from WCBF, representing more than 2,000 members, would certainly carry weight.

The Chairman will register an objection on behalf of the forum. **Action:** Vernon.

WEST COAST ISSUES (Keith Harrison)

Kite Surfers at Langebaan

Kite surfers have been causing problems all along Langebaan lagoon. In inexperienced hands, kite surfing is dangerous and a menace - yachts have been de-masted, radars pulled off boats by entangled lines, birds and animals scared on Schaapen by downed kites being pulled across the island. Over the Christmas period, a kite surfing school took over Seeberg hide, using it as their base. Sylvia had witnessed kite surfers coming right into the bay alongside Geelbek hide, putting up waders in large numbers every few minutes and disrupting feeding.

Pierre Nel (*National Enforcement Officer for SANP*) is working on re-zoning of the Langebaan Area, but there is a plan to make Langebaan the "Water Sports" capital of South Africa and there is not enough space to keep the various users separate. Monika indicated that an uneasy relationship exists between Langebaan Local Authority and SANP, who are seen to be unco-operative and restrictive.

Velddrif Environmental Centre

The first submission has been sent to the Municipality and was favourably received.

Proposed West Coast Wader Weekend

It is proposed that an annual West Coast Wader Weekend be launched in 2006. This would be based upon the West Coast National Park, because accommodation and facilities are available in the Langebaan area. The event would need to take place before 10 April, as the waders leave about that time. Proposed dates are 18/19 March or 1/2 April, when there will be morning tides at Geelbek.

(The Forum considered the March weekend to be the better option.)

Preliminary talks have been held with Edward Adonis of WCNP. They are keen and have booked the dates for the proposed weekends. Current birding facilities in the Park would not be sufficient for +/-100 birders and other areas would have to be specially opened, with the assistance of the Honorary Rangers to see that sensitive parts are not disturbed. Dave Longland, Chairman of Honorary Rangers, is enthusiastic, as it is now the responsibility of the Rangers to attract more visitors to the Park.

Langebaan Tourism is behind the project and has the capacity to handle bookings and enquiries. The Wader Weekend can be the platform for involving other role-players in the area, such as West Coast Fossil Park, Lower Berg Wetlands and boat trips.

In order for the project to succeed, it is essential for the birding fraternity to come on board. BLSA has offered support with advertising in Africa Birds and Birding and prizes. The ADU could use the opportunity to meet people who do observations for them and "market themselves" to birders in general with an exhibition, lectures and acting as guides. The support of the Western Cape bird clubs will be necessary, with promotion to their members and the scheduling of Autumn camps in that weekend.

(Agreed: WCBF considers a West Coast Wader Weekend to be an exciting and progressive concept and it has the full support of Forum).

Toxic Waste Site on West Coast

A site close to the R27 between Velddrif and Vredenburg is being proposed. Keith will attend a public meeting on 3 March 2005.

Marcus Island-Saldanha Causeway

The problem of access to the island has been resolved. It is only required to register at the National Ports Authority security gate.

Attacks near Vredenburg Bird Hide

Keith warned that birders should take care when visiting the hide at the golf course, as attacks had occurred.

Melkplaas on the Berg River

Objections have been sent in regarding a proposed development on Melkplaas.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 28 May 2005, at 12h00 (venue to be advised)