

Western Cape Birding Forum

Now represents 17 clubs with more than 2,000 members in the Western Cape.

Minutes at Durbanville Nature Reserve, Durbanville on Saturday, 13 February 2010.

Vernon Head - Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard - Minutes.

Present

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

BirdLife Stellenbosch: Willene van der Merwe, Peet le Roux.

Tygerberg Bird Club: Brian Vanderwalt, Helene Thompson.

West Coast Bird Club: Keith Harrison, Jan Kotze.

BirdLife Berg River: Robyn Kadis.

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal, Elaine Odendal.

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff.

Hermanus Bird Club: Barbara Palmer, Terry Demmer, Mike Ford.

BirdLife Walker Bay: Royd Frith.

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal.

Somerset West Bird Club: John Carter, Brian Dennis, Ben Kakebeeke, Jill Mortimer, Freya Brett.

Paarl: Yvonne Weiss.

BLSA: Mark Anderson, Dr. Ross Wanless.

Also attending: Dr. Tony Williams (for Flaminkvlei Development), Peter Nupen (for SABAP2), John Williams (Save Bantamsklip Association).

Apologies

Brigid de Kock, John Bowman.

Welcome

Extended to newly attending Robyn Kadis, Peet le Roux, Terry Demmer, and visiting BLSA Chief Executive Mark Anderson, Tony Williams and John Williams.

Minutes of Previous Meeting (13/06/2008): Agreed.

Additional items for Agenda: Birdlife Overberg Golf Day (AO)

APPOINTMENT OF WCBF OFFICE BEARERS

Office bearers affirmed for the two-year term 2010 and 2011 are:

- Chairman: Vernon Head
- Vice-Chairman: John Carter
- Secretary: Sylvia Ledgard
- Treasurer: Brian Dennis
- Conservation: Dave Whitelaw

WCBF FINANCES (Brian Dennis)

The Treasurer presented the Financial Report of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2009. Key items:

- Income: R13,360
- Expenditure: R 7 ,479
- Surplus at year-end: R 5,880
- Main items of expenditure: Car claims (R2,819) and Mark Anderson's travel expenses for the Western Cape Flamingo fund raising event (R3,320).
- Average cost of Forum meetings: R1,386
- BLSA funding for 2010 to be applied for.

BLSA

An overview of objectives and achievements for 2009 (Mark Anderson)

Funding remains a critical issue and fundraising was the biggest challenge of the year with the global economic recession and knock-on effect in South Africa.

Nevertheless, important funding was forthcoming from a number of quarters and the overall position is improving. Initiatives which got underway included:

My School My Village My Planet: BLSA is now a beneficiary of this programme which raises money for schools (My School), charitable organisations caring for people (My Village) and organisations that care for and protect the environment (My Planet). BLSA has had good response with over 300 cards having been issued to supporters and some R2,000 raised. There is potential to generate several thousand Rands a year through this initiative.

Legacy Programme: This is an initiative that gives people the opportunity to make a legacy to BLSA in their wills. It has been promoted through a recently developed brochure, in Africa Birds & Birding, through BLSA's E-newsletter, and by talks which Mark has presented to a variety of groups including retirement villages. Golden Bird Patrons, who contribute R100,000 to BLSA's organisational costs - R775,000 contributed overall in 2009.

SMS Competition: A competition "Giving Conservation Wings" is due to be launched.

BLSA Executive Committee. Exco meets monthly to provide financial, legal and business advice to the Executive Director.

Conservation. BLSA has defined its role as conserving birds through conservation of species, protection of important sites, addressing threats to habitats and working with people.

Conservation Divisional Manager: Applications for this position have closed and interviews commence next week. Sponsorship for the position is being sought and the Oppenheimers have indicated interest. (Note: Notification has been received that Dr. Hannelie Smit (Oppenheimer Fellow of Conservation) will take up the position at BLSA on 1/6/2010. Dr. Smit is currently completing a post doctorate in the USA).

BLSA Conservation Advisory Committee: An Advisory Committee has been formed, with representatives from academic institutions and conservation bodies.

IBA Programme: Daniel Marnewick has been appointed Manager of BLSA's IBA Programme. He has hit the ground running and the programme is back on track. The work of BLSA divisions is being aligned to IBA's. The objective is to identify IBA's that best represent key habitats, monitor bird populations in those IBA's and threats to the IBA's. A fundraiser is being planned and Corporates will be invited to become custodians of

IBA's close to their operations by donating funds annually. Some of this will be used for an IBA workshop and the appointment of a dedicated IBA officer.

SABAP2. The rate of accumulation of SABAP2 data now exceeds that of SABAP1 and is starting to reveal how bird distribution has changed over two decades.

National Rarities and List Committees. Following Neil Smith's departure, Trevor Hardaker and Chris Lotz have taken over the chairmanships of these committees. The annual BLSA South African Bird List will be launched at the 2010 AGM.

25th Birding Big Day. BBD was streamlined, with two categories instead of nine, a level playing field for all entrants and a smaller radius to be covered. In this context, the Garden Birds category has huge potential for growth and funding.

National Bird Week 2010. The Lesser Flamingo has been chosen as the bird of the year. Resource material is being produced and will be forwarded to clubs noted that we do not have a major sponsor this year and this will limit what can be done. If anyone knows of a potential sponsor/s, please contact Mark. The flamingo posters are being produced in Cape Town and AG suggested they could be collected directly from Africa Geographic. AG to co-ordinate with Sadie.

Action: AG

International Year of Biodiversity. The United Nations have declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. BLSA must be involved. Posters are needed. AO noted that a generic expo folder is being developed for BLO. CBC already has a poster which will go into all nature reserves - 50 are already out.

- **VH:** Use biodiversity year to promote awareness of birds and plants and connect with nature through gardens. Tie in to develop the new category "Garden Birds". We need a big funder.
- **AG:** Kirstenbosch Biodiversity Expo (25-28 March). CBC has taken a stand at the expo since it's inception three years ago. The event is growing and should be extended to all botanical gardens. It is suggested that a sub-committee be formed to develop the concept - AG to co-ordinate.
- **AO:** A weekend of birding and botany is being planned, possibly for end November.
- **WvdM:** Target retirement villages.
- **FB:** Helderberg Environmental Centre has an eco programme for schools. A workshop is scheduled in March with all co-ordinators present. The opportunity can be used to promote biodiversity year.
- **KH:** WCBC has been asked to take a stand at the Paternoster Fair on Heritage Day.

Membership. The goal is 20,000 - 30,000 members. The organisation has few black members and this is a focal point to be addressed. The membership recruitment campaign in which branches compete for the highest number of members recruited in the year, generated a 10% growth in BLSA membership in 2009. This takes membership to 6,100. The winner is determined on a proportional basis relevant to the current number of members in the club and will be announced in the April/May issue of AB&B. The 2010 competition is now underway, with 4 nights' accommodation for up to 12 people at Sweetwaters Country Club, Mpumalanga, as the prize.

Marketing. Second-year students at Cape Town based AAA School of Advertising undertook a project to re-position BLSA branding within the South African context and increase membership of the organisation. Six groups of students, each with marketing and creative teams, took part. Excellent marketing ideas were put forward. Mel Tripp has been asked to give a presentation on the setting up of a BLSA Marketing Advisory Board based in Cape Town.

Communication. A re-vamped website and electronic newsletter have been launched. The BirdLife Bulletin in Africa Birds & Birding has a new look.

81st BLSA AGM will take place at Wakkerstroom, Mpumalanga, from 19 - 22 March 2010. The event will be hosted by the Gauteng Regional Forum. **SABAP2**

Western Cape (Peter Nupen)

961 out of a total of 1836 pentads have at least one Full Protocol Card, equating to 52.3% of total coverage of the Western Cape, 613 pentads have at least two Full Protocol Cards (33.4% coverage) and 234 have seven or more Full Protocol Cards (12.7% coverage). A total of 6,230 Full Protocol Cards have been submitted, which means that approximately 350,000 square kilometres have been atlased to date. Peter thanked atlasers on behalf of SABAP2 for the enormous effort put in to attain this huge volume of data. The next SABAP2 training course will take place at the Kristo Pienaar Centre in Tygerberg Nature Reserve on Saturday, 8 May.

Atlasing started in July 2007 and there are 2.5 years to go. Virgin pentads are becoming further away and less accessible. Half of the money collected in the SABAP2 category for BBD will be used to enable people to get to virgin or little atlased pentads. Apply to the ADU for funds to cover these pentad expenses, but get the pentads done.

(OS): The cut-off date for SABAP2 at present is July 2012. Funding must be found for next year.

CONSERVATION

A. Environmental Threats/Updates

Bantamsklip-Proposed Nuclear Power Plant: (A presentation by John Williams). The campaign to stop the siting of Eskom's next nuclear power plant at Bantamsklip is being headed up by the "Save Bantamsklip Association". BLSA, WCBF and local Clubs have registered as IAP's. John outlined the basis of the objections:

- Bantamsklip beach is found on Groot Hagelkraal farm, a registered S.A. Nature Foundation Natural Heritage Site. The farm harbours 800 plant species, including 22 Red Data Agulhas Plain endemics. The NPR plant would cover +/- 3 hectares and would be 25 storeys high.
- The Bantamsklip coastline has the highest level of marine biodiversity and endemism found in Southern African coastal waters, due to the upwelling of the cool Benguela current and the associated nutrient productivity. The Agulhas coast, including Dyer Island which is 10km from the site, is scheduled to be declared a World Heritage Site. The endemic kelp ecology of the Dyer Island Marine Sanctuary provides the conditions for spawning of anchovies, pilchards and herring and supports important bird populations, including six Red Data listed species. Bantamsklip lies at the heart of the breeding grounds of the Southern Right Whale and the region has the highest concentration of Great White Sharks in the world. The plant would discharge near boiling water into the sea, which could affect up to 20km of the marine eco system.
- Power lines: There would be 500km of lines, consisting of eight 30-40 meter towers, split over two routes, one stretching to Worcester, the other to Touwsrivier, on the N1. The lines would traverse many biozones and major scenic landscape corridors and would present a hazard to flying birds.
- The EIA process was flawed.

Comments and Questions

(MA): It is important to act now and not wait for the EIA process. Make sure that you have all the information and get legal and scientific opinion now ahead of the process. There is a lot of scientific data already available - get scientists at UCT (Percy Fitzpatrick Institute) and Ross Wanless of BLSA's Seabird Division to comment.

(DW): Social issues carry more weight with Government than biodiversity, when it comes to challenging development proposals. Loss of livelihoods and how people will be affected are important factors and should be emphasised if the proposed plant is going to destroy the fishing and tourism industries.

(MF): Is there an alternative site which is bio-friendly? - Donkergat was proposed but has a fault. Noted that Bantamsklip is not fault free. +/-25 other sites are possible.(Since this meeting, it has been reported that Thyspunt near Cape St Francis has been recommended by EIA consultants as the preferred site for Eskom to build its next nuclear power plant. This follows years of work by the consultants to choose among three sites - Thyspunt in the Eastern Cape, Bantamsklip on the southern Cape coast, and Duynfontein next to the Koeberg. This recommendation does not rule out either of the other two sites being used in the future.)

Uilenkraalsmond Estuary (Anton Odendal): Several estuaries in the Overberg are in trouble as a result of the river mouths silting up and closing off. At Uilenkraalsmond, there has been a huge decline in the number of waders over the last two summers. It is believed this is a result of what's happening in the interior, with two dams having been built and the expansion of vineyards. Water must be released through. A strong stand must be made. MF noted that the same pattern is evident on the Klein River estuary.

(RW): Management plans are being developed for estuaries in the W. Cape. This is an 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 and Coastal Management. Urgent action is needed.

Wind Energy (Anton Odendal): A host of proposed wind farm projects are coming to light in the Overberg region - e.g. Caledon, Greyton, Swellendam, Bredasdorp. EIA processes are being registered without due notification and it appears that the consultants are attempting to short-circuit legislation. BLO, WCBF and BLSA are registering as IAP's. KH drew attention also to the situation developing on the West Coast, with seven applications registered within the Saldanha Bay Municipal area.

(MA): While welcoming the advantages of wind energy over coal-fired, there is great concern at BLSA and EWT regarding where the turbines will be sited. A national workshop of important stakeholders will be convened to assess the problem. Birds are our concern, but the environmental impacts, physical footprint, ascetics and other factors associated with wind energy plants must be taken into account.

West Coast Flaminkvlei/Cerebos (Tony Williams): The development proposals as detailed in earlier minutes remain unchanged, i.e. the saltworks will be maintained, the area to the east of the road, the area of the saltworks factory and the planned commercial and residential areas remain as stated. In effect, previous commitments outside of the residential area remain unchanged.

New proposals are;

- the creation of a wetland reserve, using water from the sewage treatment plant - this would be an extension of the south-west corner of Flaminkvlei, and
- the creation of a Strandveld reserve by linking the present corridor with the adjacent property to the east and allowing agricultural land to revert to Strandveld. Tony noted that the developer will commit 1% of proceeds from all sales on-going to sustain environmental goals at Flaminkvlei.

KH commented that this was in any case a legal requirement. Development cannot proceed until the Ramsar status of the Lower Berg River Wetlands (IBA SA104) has been finalised. Steps are being taken to form a Management Forum as the first step in the process.

Comments (KH): People are opposing the development on the south side of the river; the new urban edge is under debate. The saltworks are a man-made environment and will revert to salt marsh if the development does not take place. This will result in the departure of birdlife.

(JK): Cerebos's main pump has broken and the pans are running dry. They will not be replacing it in the light of their forthcoming departure, but will put in a smaller pump.

Other West Coast Issues (Keith Harrison):

Moutonshoek Tungsten Mine: Moutonshoek and Verlorenvlei must be treated as separate problems. The mining application is being re-submitted due to having missed the cut-off date.

Verlorenvlei (IBA SA103): This is a Ramsar site, management of which is not fully compliant with Ramsar requirements. Awaiting a meeting, facilitated by CSIR, to form a Management Forum, from which a Management Authority will be appointed. An interesting concept being advanced is the defining of an IBA in terms of Core Area (which cannot be touched), Buffer Area (5m contour) and Watershed Area.

Langebaan (IBA SA105):

- Ore Handling Facility can be extended to 60 MTA with more efficient use of existing facilities.
- R.O. plant on hold - suggested that a larger unit that can supply the whole area be built on the coast.
- Health of the Bay report: The construction of the causeway to Marcus Island has resulted in "dead" areas where none of the animals being monitored can survive due to siltation and heavy metals. The report highlighted that there has been a dramatic reduction in endemic waders. Funding is required for research. One theory is that siltation of the feeding areas has led to a huge increase in Mud Prawns which, due to their burrowing habits, are destroying the sea grass communities on which the waders rely.
- Shark Bay: The developer Scarpelini is employing thwarting tactics. The name has been changed again, this time to "Proposed Development on the remainder of Farm Oosterwal No. 292, Langebaan, E12/2/3/2-F2/7-0460/08". This means that we must re-register as IAPs. It is at the Draft EIR stage.
- Mining Applications in the Saldanha Bay Municipal area: Phosphate, Shell (calcium carbonate), Sand and granite.

(VH): An on-site presence is needed on the West Coast to monitor developments.

Strandfontein Bird Area (Dave Whitelaw).

Some progress is being made with clearing the hyacinth using manual labour. There have been incidences of microlite buzzing. We will be trying to ascertain why there has been a decline in the number of waders. The on-site conservator, Victoria, is very active and innovative.

(RW): What is being done with the hyacinth that's being removed? It could potentially be recycled by the Council.

(TW): Strandfontein is the most important moult site in the world for the Cape Shoveller - has there been any displacement? (DW) They are still there in good numbers. The ADU will have the information.

(OS): What has happened with the proposed Environmental Centre? (DW) Security is a problem and Council must come up with a plan. Microphone warning off technology is expensive. CBC will not put in funds until security is in place.

(VH): CBC has taken ownership of Strandfontein as an IBA. The idea is for every Club to develop a caretaker relationship with an IBA. If every Club takes on one IBA, we will cover more than half.

Species Problems

African Penguin (Ross Wanless): Work is progressing to substantiate the concept of marine protected areas and closed off islands where fishing is banned. A paper is due to be published on research undertaken in the St. Croix and Port Elizabeth areas. An "African Penguin Champion" has been found – the Charl van der Merwe Trust has made a R1.5-million grant to BLSA for the research project. A task force has been set up to work with the fishing industry with regard to how the fishing can be managed, particularly in respect of

sardines. The concept of creating a new penguin colony on the South Coast is being investigated. A Wine Estate has indicated they want to fund African Penguin conservation.

(MF) raised the question of predation by Fur Seals. Ross indicated that sub-adult males are the main problem and rogue seals are being taken out. Seals predate on everything and the effect of taking them out is not known. MF mentioned new technology on the market in the form of a pyramid light flasher, which is said to be very effective. MA noted that birds become familiar.

(TW) questioned whether any action was being taken at Lamberts Bay with regard to predation on Gannets. Ross indicated that nothing was being done at this stage other than talking out rogue seals - the problem is that the fish are no longer there.

Starlings (Royd Frith): Starlings are decimating vineyards and solutions are being sought. A booklet written by Eric Holman gives guidelines on how to deal with the problem.

House Crows (Dave Whitelaw): The poison Starlicide has been registered and the Council is proceeding with the eradication programme. A break-through has been found for baiting - the crows take only fresh bait, which was problematic. It has been found they cannot resist pasta. Since December 1,300 have been eliminated.

Estimated population is 10 - 12,000. Of interest is the fact that Durban had 40,000 and now only singles are found; these are being taken out individually.

(MA): Information could come out from the W. Cape. Dave will talk to Louise Stafford (CapeNature) for the process to be documented.

Action: DW

Noted that the International Council on Alien Birds meets in Cape Town next year. The House Crow will be the logo.

WESTERN CAPE BIRDING ROUTES (Anton Odendal)

- Karoo Birding Route: A Karoo website has been launched, which follows the same format as the national website.
- The intention is to get all sites written up and placed on the national Avi-tourism website.
- Peninsula and Winelands Routes: Need to secure sponsors to proceed.
- At a provincial level, Cape Town Routes Unlimited remains an ongoing problem and it is possible that it may fall away after the World Cup.
- BLSA Avi-Tourism Division (MA): While initial funding can be found to open up and establish birding routes, BLSA cannot sustain funding to operate the routes. Few staff are left in Avi-tourism and internet communication is the way to go. BLSA is focusing on the birder friendly establishments.
- Western Cape Birding Website: Clubs are encouraged to forward trip reports and events information. Visits to the site remain high.
- "Flight for Birders" has replaced "Flight for Beginners". The course places greater emphasis on conservation. It has been registered with SANPARKs and Cape Nature and large numbers of staff are attending. We are planning to conduct courses for seven clusters in the Overberg - Caledon / Greyton, Elgin / Grabouw, Kleinmond - Rooiels, Hermanus, Stanford - Danger Point, Bredasdorp / Agulhas, Swellendam. We aim to recruit everyone as BLSA members. There is the possibility that Bredasdorp may become a satellite branch of BirdLife Overberg and Swellendam wants to form an Interest Group. On the West Coast, Darling / Malmesbury want to be covered and Cederberg / Porterville have expressed interest.

EVENTS

- Wetlands Bird Festival (VH): We are looking at the possibility of running an event and will report further.
- TMNP Birding Weekend (AO): The iKapa Hon. Rangers have contacted Anton with a view to convening a birding weekend as was done at WCNP. Cape Point Reserve might be a possible venue. VH asked Anton to put them in touch with CBC.
- Golf Day at Hermanus, 6 May 2010 (AO): Sponsorship is being sought for players. The committee room has been covered and the putting greens, but the lounge (R20,000) is still available - possibly AB&B will take this over. Funds raised will go to the African Penguin. "25 Photos" competition: Prints from prominent photographers will go on-line for voting.
- Percy Fitzpatrick Institute 50th Anniversary (VH): The Fitz celebrates its 50th Anniversary on 22 February and the event will be commemorated in a Cape Argus supplement on 25 February. It was agreed that the Forum will place a congratulatory notice in the supplement. Cost approximately R1,500.

GENERAL

West Coast National Park. BvdW raised the issue of the boardwalk at Seeberg hide, which is in a dangerous state of disrepair and may have to be closed, along with the hide. CBC is looking for funding to have the hide rebuilt with wheelchair friendly access (cost approx. R0.5m).

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 5 June 2010, 9.30am for 10am, at Durbanville Nature Reserve (TBC hosting).