

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Meeting at Helderberg Nature Reserve, Somerset West on Saturday, 04 February 2012.

Vernon Head - Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard - Minutes.

Present

Cape Bird Club: Vernon Head, Sylvia Ledgard, Anne Gray, Dave Whitelaw, Shaun Overmeyer, Otto Schmidt, Julian Hare.

Somerset West Bird Club: John Carter, Brian Dennis, Jill Mortimer, Freya Brett, Denise Rizzo.

Tygerberg Bird Club: Gerald Wingate, Brian Vanderwalt.

West Coast Bird Club: Keith Harrison, Angus Stewart.

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal.

BLSA: Dale Wright (Regional Conservation Manager, Western Cape).

SANParks: Jenny Lodge (Cluster Hon. Rangers - Western Cape).

Also attending

Janette du Toit (CEO - West Coast Biosphere Reserve), Tony Williams.

Apologies

Lee Burman, Kobus Graaff, Jo Hobbs, Peter Nupen, Barbara Palmer, Yvonne Weiss.

Welcome

Vernon welcomed all.

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (01/10/2011): Agreed with the additional note under SANCCOB that Cheryl Campbell has undertaken not only the hatching of African Penguin chicks but also hand-rearing of these and abandoned chicks rescued from the islands.

2. BLSA APPOINTMENT

Regional Conservation Manager-Western Cape. Dale Wright Vernon welcomed Dale to the Forum meeting. This is a Rupert Fellow of Conservation appointment and represents an important milestone for conservation in the Western Cape. Dale has an MSc in Conservation Biology from the Fitz. He gained conservation experience in a reserve in Tanzania and has latterly been involved with the WWF Biodiversity and Wine Initiative. Dale outlined his conservation objectives and focus for the Western Cape as:

- (1) The IBA Initiative: Reviewing the IBA network, determining critical areas and undertaking Assessments.
- (2) Building partnerships between BLSA, the Birding Community and NGOs in the Western Cape.
- (3) Looking at Wind Farm developments.
- (4) Growing the conservation of birds in the Western Cape.

Cycle Bird Survey-Fynbos Species: Dale highlighted the 3-month survey by cycle currently being undertaken by Dr. Alan Lee of the "Bird and Climate Change" team, which will cover 2,300km of Fynbos across the driest and highest sections of the Western Cape. The purpose is to create a new database on the presence of endemic and threatened bird species in relation to their vulnerability to climate change. UCT, the Fitz, SANBI and BLSA are sponsoring the project. The database will enable the effects of climate change to be monitored and will also show altitude shifts.

(Note: BLSA has been successful in securing funding from the Table Mountain Fund which will support Dale's work in the Western Cape).

Comments:

(JL): There is an area of Fynbos in the Tanqua Karoo which should not be overlooked. New IBAs need to be identified. (DW): Data analysis and field experience will be used to identify new IBAs.

(TW): It should be noted that the key IBAs in the Western Cape are not necessarily Fynbos or Mountain related but are located primarily in Coastal and Wetland areas.

(BvdW): IBAs in some areas are duplicated as Biosphere Reserves. Will Dale be liaising with the Biosphere in this respect? (KH): There is a Biosphere director on each reserve. It is suggested they be asked to sift out anything that has a bird element and forward to Dale for a monthly meeting.

3. CAPE WEST COAST BIOSPHERE RESERVE (CWCBR)

On 8 December, the Western Cape Reserves Bill was signed into law. In addition, the Draft Discussion Document for the Environmental Management Framework is out for discussion. Some realignment of current thinking and practices will be needed to work with these various regulations to make them successful and maintain sustainable development. Six or seven Biosphere Reserves have been or are being set up in the Western Cape including West Coast, Cederberg, Winelands, Kogelberg, Gauritz and Eden. The CWCBR stretches from Milnerton in the south to Rocherpan in the north and covers 378,000 ha of terrestrial area and 50,000 ha of marine including all the off-shore islands to the Berg River and 5km off shore. It contains 4 IBAs: Rietvlei, Dassen, Langebaan and Berg River.

The Biospheres have a voice into Government Departments and communities and are seeking synergy with other bodies (e.g. BLSA). If, for instance, they say that an area of land is critical for migrating birds, they have the ear of Government. Stewardship programmes are run to protect areas of land.

Janette du Toit, CEO of the CWCBR, outlined the scope and function of the Biosphere Reserves.

1) Legislation: Governed by the Biosphere Reserves Act as promulgated under the Planning Act. Every Biosphere must have a spatial plan that Local Municipalities are required to enforce.

2) What are Biosphere Reserves?: - Areas of terrestrial and marine ecosystems that are internationally recognised within the framework of the UNESCO programme on MAB (Man and the Biosphere) for promoting and developing a balanced relationship between man and nature. They are nominated by national governments and remain under their jurisdiction. There are 553 Biosphere Reserves worldwide in 107 countries (22 in South Africa) and collectively form the World Network of Biodiversity Reserves (WNBR).

3) How did the Biosphere Reserve concept start? - In 1968 UNESCO organised the Biosphere Conference", the first inter-governmental conference, to examine how to reconcile the conservation and use of natural resources (foreshadowing present day sustainable development). The Conference resulted in the launching the UNESCO MAB Programme in 1970.

4) Functions of Biosphere Reserves. Three main functions:

- Conservation - contribute to the conservation of eco-systems, landscapes, species and genetic variation;
- Development - foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable;
- Logistic support - for research, monitoring, education, training and information exchange.

5) Biosphere Reserve zones. There are three inter-related zones. (1) Core: pristine area such as a nature reserve or national park - legally protected by strongest available legislation; (2) Buffer: limited use area where the only permitted activities/uses are those that do not impede conservation, especially of Core; (3) Transition: for sustainable development of resources.

6) Criteria for designation as a Biosphere Reserve.

- Must be of significance for biological diversity;
- Organisational arrangements must be in place for the involvement of a suitable range of public authorities, local communities and private interests in the design and carrying out of the functions of a Biosphere Reserve.

7) Process for obtaining UNESCO acceptance:

- The area must be recognised as an important example for sustainable development;
- Secure approval of National and Provincial Government;
- Meet the criteria for designation; (4) Submit to UNESCO MAB Programme.

8) Management Structure: The Biospheres operate under a Board of Directors made up of Local and District Government representatives, Technical advisors, Core representative, Buffer representative, Transition representative and Directors of portfolios. Implementation of Board directives and decisions is carried out by the CEO and team comprising a Conservation Stewardship Manager, Conservation Officers, Education officer, Interns, Communications Officer and Tourism Officer. The executive team makes recommendations to the Board on what is important to preserve in the Biosphere Reserve.

9) National Co-ordinating Body comes together once a year under the Department of Environmental Affairs. Comment (VH): We can involve our National IBA Manager and Regional Conservation Manager at these meetings.

4. IBA PROGRAMME (Shaun Overmeyer).

IBA Assessments: A preliminary exercise was carried out at Strandfontein and another is planned for Bird Island. KH will be doing an environmental plan for Rocherpan for IBA assessment.

Funding of IBAs: (VH) We are actively seeking to raise money for IBAs and will be kicking off with Strandfontein as a pilot project. A MOU is in place with the City of Cape Town, BLSA and the NCC (Nature Conservation Corporation) to secure corporate sponsorship for Strandfontein. Naming and advertising rights have been granted. The NCC, a leading environmental consultancy, will facilitate marketing the site to a corporate. They will offer a management plan that will enable the corporate to comply with statutory requirements for environmental responsibility. Once funding is secured, the NCC will provide monitoring and practical services on site to ensure commitments are met. In effect, BLSA will be sub-contracting to the NCC for site security, fencing, alien clearance, education, etc. The arrangement, free of charge, will be worth R1 million+ annually to BLSA, If successful, the programme will be rolled out to other IBAs.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS/PROBLEMS West Coast (KH).

(1) Verlorenvlei

(a) Moutonshoek: Tungsten mining - no new developments.

(b) The Vlei:

- Reed problem - urgent control measures needed;
- No public access to the vlei other than by the bridge.
- Ore Line: The extension of the harbour at Saldahna means that the number of trains using the Saldahna Sishen railway line will increase to one train per hour, day and night, over Verlorenvlei and through the town of Elands Bay. Elands Bay is the only town on the 861 km line affected and urgent representations are being made to Transnet for engagement with stakeholders.

(2) Saldahna/Langebaan

(a) Increase in Iron Ore capacity to 90 MTA. Five mining houses have approached Transnet to see what line capacity they have for transportation. Must look at bird specific areas before line plan is done.

Any dredging at Saldahna will cause siltration of heavy metals into Langebaan lagoon and destroy the feeding grounds for small waders.

(b) Feasibility study from Mine to Port completed. 13 Options are under consideration, including: new port at Olifants River mouth; new inland berth at Saldahna; oil terminal at St. Helena Bay; oil terminal on Marcus Island causeway.

(c) AfriSam Cement Plant in the Saldahna IDZ, connected by a 11km conveyor from the limestone mine near Jacobs Bay - there is a trade off with a 542 ha reserve along the limestone ridge, the only example of this habitat conserved.

(d) Reverse Osmosis Plant being planned for water for Saldahna, primarily for domestic use. The preferred option for siting the plant is on the coast in Danger Bay where brine can be discharged into the sea and dispersed. A second option to discharge into "Big Bay" is considered unacceptable as this would in time destroy the natural fauna of Langebaan lagoon.

(TW): There is a proposal for a desalination plant to pump brine.

(e) Oliphantskop, Langebaan Quarry - Verreaux's Eagles concern: A development plan for 1,284 erven around the quarry is at the EIA stage. A 300 metre buffer zone is mitigation for the eagles. The owner should ensure the safety of humans and animals. A secure fence is required, later maintained by the Residents Association. This could be financed by a 2% levy on the initial sale price with levies on subsequent sales placed in a trust to maintain the fence.

(TW): With all the development in the area, the birds' foraging territory will diminish and they may move.

(KH): There are dassies in the quarry and it is a safe place for the eagles.

(JN): There are phenomenal fossils in the quarry. Suggest that KH get the Heritage Society on side.

(3) Berg River

(a) Cape Cormorants: A specialist study undertaken following complaints about the smell caused by Cape Cormorants roosting along the river, shows that the smell is not a quano problem but results from the normal processing of salt.

(b) Candida problem: Candida has smothered the Hotel Mud Flats and is growing also at De Plaat. The feeding areas for small waders have gone.

(DW): With the opening of the Berg River dam, we said the river would not get the flushing action and silt would build up.

(KH): The National Dept. of Water Affairs is using the Berg River for the national data base survey from source to mouth. The Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve could get students to do a similar study.

(c) Proposed River Zoning: The Estuary Management Forum has prepared suggested by-laws for river use and boating safety to be discussed with the Berg River Municipality.

(4) Renewable Energy

(a) Wind Farms-West Coast (KH): There is a complete hold on all wind farm applications west of the R27 plus Langefontein and Berg River (7 farms). SA Civil Aviation Authority regulations stipulate there should be no turbines within 35 km of an airport - the SA Airforce Base at Langebaanweg. There are concerns about interference with radar, navigation and security systems and the safety risk posed to aircraft operations at the Langebaanweg Military Low Flying Training Area.

(b) Wind Farms-Overberg (AO): Stuart Shearer has lodged several appeals against applications. A disturbing development is that applicants are bringing in legal opinion to make BLO and other parties liable for costs if applications are rejected as a result of appeals. This cannot be handled at club level and BLO will have to withdraw its name and pass this over to BLSA.

(DW): This runs contrary to Public Participation processes.

(c) Solar Energy: (KH) The emphasis seems to have swung to Photovoltaic systems, with four applications since January.

(5) Other Environmental Concerns

(a) Rooiels (IBA) (AO): BLO received a letter from Carin Malan who has had a long battle with the local

Manager of CapeNature regarding windsurfers, gyrocopters and dog walkers on Rooiels beach. An alternative contact with CapeNature has been found and they will look at putting up a control gate.

(b) Kiteboards at Seeberg (Langebaan) (BvdW): It has long been a concern that kiteboarders are coming into the area of the lagoon around the Seeberg hide, seriously disrupting feeding waders. The area is off limits for kiteboarding. Brian encountered a situation with an individual who informed him he had permission to launch from inside the park.

Jenny Lodge confirmed that this area falls into the central area of the lagoon (B zone) which permits entry of non-motorised craft only. Activities such as fishing, swimming, power boats, jet skis, kiteboards, etc. are permitted only at the northern end of the lagoon (A zone). Jenny will take up the matter with the Park Manager.

Action: Jenny Lodge

(JL and KH) followed up with WCNP. Agreed action: Birders to report offenders on the spot, taking note of canopy colour and any other identification details; a photograph would be helpful. Contact number 022 772 214 - WCNP office at Langebaan, which is open over weekends and is in radio contact with Park Rangers on duty, or report incident at the gate. A Park Ranger will intercept offenders when they come ashore and fine them on the spot.)

(c) Paarl Sewage Works: There is concern regarding developments taking place on site. DW will check what is happening.

Action: Dave Whitelaw

(Feedback from Yvonne Weiss is that the works are undergoing major re- construction to handle the increasing load of sewage. This has required a fence around the works to reduce theft. Certain ponds are infested with lettuce and there has been a problem obtaining herbicide. The manager is still committed to the bird sanctuary and will do all he can to maintain it.)

6. STRANDFONTEIN (DW).

(a) The proclamation to declare False Bay as a formal provincial Nature Reserve is on the Prime Minister's desk for signing. The False Bay Nature Reserve extends as far as Wolwegat and will incorporate Strandfontein.

(b) A MOU has been signed between the City, BLSA and the NCC (see: 4. IBA Programme).

(c) The ranger, Victoria, has resigned and will be going to Tygerberg Nature Reserve.

(d) Hyacinth problem (DW): Hyacinth clearance remains an on-going battle. A swan-neck cutter is being used and is proving very effective. (JL): A reed clearing machine can be hired. One is available from the Garden Route. (DW): The problem is cost of transportation. The City is not prepared to put money into what they consider as short-term projects.

6.1. SPECIES CONCERNS

(1) Cape Cormorants on Berg River (see: Environmental Threats).

(2) House Crows (DW): The eradication programme is proceeding well. The original estimate of numbers was 5,000 and at the last count, 4,500 had been eliminated. Re-populations or new populations should continue to be reported to Louise Stafford louise.stafford@capetown.gov.za

(3) Pied Crows (DW): There has been a report of a website advertising services to kill Pied Crows and other "problem" predators. While it is acknowledged that the increase in the Pied Crow population in the Western Cape is a concern, there is something disturbing about the approach advocated:

- The Pied Crow is an indigenous species;
- A number of erroneous claims are made on the website;
- To suggest solving the Pied Crow problem by shooting them is the wrong approach.

Action: It is suggested that BLSA makes a position statement that the organisation is not in favour of this sort of intervention. It can lead to uncontrolled killing of wildlife deemed to be problematic. Research is needed on the impact of the abundance of Pied Crows on biodiversity in general and on the agricultural economy. This could be an important PhD project with conservation implications.

7. FRACKING IN THE KAROO - Update (DW).

The story becomes difficult. In the USA, Barack Obama states that it is important to get gas out of the ground. In South Africa, Trevor Manuel in his National Development Plan says that it is the way to go - "Shale gas could power half of South Africa". There is a groundswell of opposition to fracking in other countries. In the USA and elsewhere, shale gas deposits are proving to have been vastly over-estimated. In SA, the moratorium on exploration licences remains in force but this probably applies only to future applications, not those already granted. We await the report of the task team appointed by the Government to investigate the possible impact of fracking in the Karoo. Minister of Mineral Resources, Susan Shabangu, is resisting revealing who is on the task team and releasing copies of documentation relating to their investigations. (Note: In a ruling by the North Gauteng High Court, Pretoria, the Minister has been required to release the information. Members of the task team are representatives from: Dept. of Mineral Resources, Petroleum Industry of South Africa, Dept. of Energy, Dept. of Science and Technology, Dept. of Environmental Affairs, Dept. of Water Affairs, Dept. of Economic Development, Dept. of Trade and Development).

8. SABAP2 (Western Cape update forwarded by Peter Nupen).

Out of the 1,836 pentads in the Western Cape:

- 1,426 pentads now have at least one Full Protocol Card (FPC) = 77.7% of ground coverage of the Province,
- 1, 010 pentads have at least two FPCs = 55% of ground coverage, and
- 428 pentads have seven or more FPCs = nearly 25% of ground coverage.

Atlasers in the Western Cape have accumulated 13,390 FPCs, incurring some 30,000 hours of atlasing - an outstanding achievement for our citizen scientists.

The atlasing trip to the Knersvlakte was a spectacular success (see article in the latest Africa Birds & Birding magazine).

9. OVERBERG UPDATE (Anton Odendal).

(1) **Cape Winelands Birding Route:** The bird checklist and birdfinder brochure have been completed for the Cape Winelands District Municipal region. New birding route descriptions for both the Overberg and Winelands have been loaded on the website. Links have been created between the sites, enabling research to be done on individual destinations with access also to trip reports, sightings, articles, etc.

(2) **Educational Brochures:** There have been requests over the past year to adapt the old Overberg educational brochures to become resources focused on the Western Cape Province. These have been completed and are available for bulk distribution at R1.50 per copy (plus mailing costs, if applicable). The following brochures are available: (a) Common Garden Birds of the Western Cape; (b) Common Birds of the Fynbos Habitats; (c) Common Waterbirds of the Western Cape; (d) Common Birds of the Western Cape Seashore. Supplies are going into the four ports of entry into the country and tourism officers have been trained in all regions. The development and printing of these brochures was done through proceeds from BLO Golf Day 2011. Applications are being made to the West Coast District Municipality for funding reprints but budgets are tight, Eden is going bankrupt and there is no hope of funding from the Karoo.

Bird Clubs: We need Bird Clubs to get these simple guides into schools/eco schools. email Anton if you have contacts. (Action: Bird Clubs). Groups of farmers - e.g. True-Cape - want to put the brochures into farm schools.

(TW): We need Afrikaans translations. (AO): Trying to generate funds for this.

(3) **"Flight for Birders" courses:** A course in Hermanus attracted 47 participants and 25 in Piketberg. Forthcoming courses are planned for Stilbaai. Niewoudville and Ceres. It is interesting to note that people

from the city are attending. Two thirds of attendees are from Cape Nature, the Biospheres, Tourism offices and Birder Friendly Establishments.

(4) **BLO Charity Golf Day 2012:** The third annual BLO Golf Day is scheduled for 23 February and will again take place at Hermanus Golf Club. It is hoped to have R50,000 in prizes. Funds raised will be for the development and dissemination of birding resources. The model for the day is now established.

Presentation to Anton Odendal: After many years on the Board of BirdLife South Africa, Anton has resigned. He is resigning also as Chairman of BirdLife Overberg. Vernon in his capacity as Chairman of BLSA and WCBF, presented Anton with a gift from BLSA and thanked him for his involvement in the development of birding routes in the Western Cape, his contribution to eco-education in the Overberg and the development of BLO.

10. PROPOSED WCBF GOLF DAY (Vernon Head)

It is proposed that WCBF uses BLO's model to run a similar event in Cape Town as a fund raising initiative. AO is drawing up guidelines which could be used to kick-start the event. He warned that it is an enormously time-consuming effort and needs a team of committed people. VH said the plan would be to take on professionals to handle this.

11. WCBF FINANCES (Brian Dennis)

The Financial Report of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2011 is attached to these Minutes.

12. BLSA MATTERS (Vernon Head)

(1) **Flock 2012** (16-18 March) is on schedule in Port Elizabeth. The host club BirdLife Eastern Cape has organised a number of events, activities and birding outings around the BLSA AGM (17 March). Flock will be preceded by a two-day ornithological conference funded by the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute - "Frontiers in South African Ornithology". It is hoped next year to have this event at sea (Cape Town to Walvis Bay). We are in talks with Starlight Cruises.

(2) Marketing

(a) **Launch of Hour-Glass Campaign:** Four different versions will be launched on ETV at the end of the month. This is free advertising and time slots are not prescribed. The hour-glass advert with the African Penguin was included in two issues of TIME magazine in December. These adverts will also appear in Go, Weg, Africa Birds & Birding, Africa Geographic and iMaverick (the online newspaper).

(b) **Freshlyground "For the Birds" tour:** Freshlyground will be taking the event country-wide.

(3) **Golden Bird Patrons:** R1-million was raised last year and it is hoped the same will be achieved this year. Fund-raising functions are held to bring donors on board and it has a snowball effect. BLSA, the Everard Read Gallery and Charles Greig Jewellers will be hosting an "In the Pink" evening on Valentine's Day for +/- 50 couples at Circa on Jellicoe. The event will include a flamingo art exhibition (Jeremy Houghton's art), a talk on flamingos, a display of pink jewellery and watches, pink canapés and pink French champagne. There will be a lucky prize draw for a R33,000 Frederique Constant watch and a R10,000 voucher. A similar event was held at Satchi and a wine lunch at Wolmaran's Estate.

(4) **Bird of the Year 2012:** Will be launched at the BLSA AGM. The African Fish Eagle is "Bird of the Year" with a theme around raptors and wetlands.

(5) **Sasol Field Guides:** Sasol 4 includes BLSA membership forms. Struik have given us a free supply of the previous edition (in Afrikaans) for distribution to eco-schools, nature reserves, etc. Dale Wright can be contacted in this connection westerncape@birdlife.org.za

(6) **Proposed "Green Garden" Campaign:** We are at the early stages of conceptualising a campaign to include a "green garden" model in home buying. Jupiter Drawing Room-Utopia will put together the entire project free of charge. It is envisaged that estate agencies, garden nurseries and bird clubs would be involved. The goal would be to create a conservation concept through gardens over the next 10 years.

(7) **Revised BLSA Constitution:** BLSA is awaiting ratification by the relevant government departments, i.e. Dept. for Social Development (to ensure NPO status is not compromised by virtue of the re-draft) and SARS

(to ensure PBO tax status is not compromised). Their written approval must be received before BLSA can formally adopt the revised Constitution.

13. BUILDING A NEW APPROACH TO BIRD EDUCATION (Shaun Overmeyer & Dave Whitelaw)

Bird Conservation through Education.

At the last WCBF meeting, Shaun expressed the view that not enough was being done to get the conservation message through at grass-roots level. BLSA events take place in the more affluent areas and need to be taken into under-served localities, e.g. hold an event at Athlone Stadium, instead of the Waterfront. Shaun and Dave were tasked with researching and putting together a proposal to bring to the next meeting.

They presented a far-reaching and ambitious proposal to take conservation education into schools and communities. Research has shown that it is critical to get youth involved with conservation awareness from an early age. BLSA needs a cohesive national Bird Education programme in schools that will engage the enthusiasm of pupils and the commitment of teachers. How to take conservation and environmental education into communities is the question.

- Mobile unit: It is proposed that we have a mobile pantechnicon-type van, kitted out with educational technology and material and with an educator on board. Toyota will make their van available in the short-term. The cost of such a unit would be between R1.5- R3-million plus on-going maintenance.
- Eco Lab.: Frank Wygold has a phenomenal set-up that demonstrates how an eco-system works. He has agreed that we can take this into the field and an initial trial run has been arranged at Edith Stevens.
- Primary Science Programme: Get this into schools.

Comments:

(VH): We could tie this in with a road map to go to the IBAs to educate local communities. Question: Is there a green version of this unit?

(BvdW): The problem has always been getting kids to a venue. TBC's Education officer has avenues that can be used to get into schools.

(FB): We must plan ahead to go into the school curriculum. Schools have to apply six months ahead for outings.

(SO): The programme can include extramural activities such as an eco or adventure club.

14. RECORD OF NOTE: John Carter has informed WCBF that he is stepping down as Chairman of the Somerset West Bird Club. Vernon thanked John for his contribution over the years. He has served as Chairman of SWBC for 11 years and was a founder member of WCBF.

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 9 June 2012, at Durbanville Nature Reserve.