

Western Cape Birding Forum

Represents 7 clubs with more than 2,000 members in the Western Cape.

Below are extracts from the minutes from the Meeting on 26 June 2004, at the **Kristo Pienaar Centre, Tygerberg Nature Reserve.**

Vernon Head, chaired the Meeting, and extended a warm welcome to all.

Those Present

Cape Bird Club – Vernon Head, Callan Cohen, Anne Gray, Sylvia Ledgard, Kirsten Louw, Peter Nupen, Dave Whitelaw.

Tygerberg Bird Club – Mariana Delpont, Dirk van Driel, Pat MacGuinness, Lesley Teare, Brian Van der Walt, Ralph Wordon.

Somerset West Bird Club – John Carter, Brian Dennis, Ben Kakebeeke.

West Coast Bird Club – Keith Harrison, John Fannin.

Hermanus Bird Club – Mike Ford, Elaine Odendal.

Birdlife Overberg – Anton Odendal.

Guests

Jan Fourie (*Chairman, BLSA*)

Les Underhill (*President BLSA and Director of ADU*)

Samantha Peterson (*Seabird Conservation Programme*)

Jan Fourie, Chairman of BLSA, when he addressed the meeting, emphasised the view that **Western Cape Birding Forum (WCBF)**, representing seven clubs with 2,000 members in the Western Cape, is a significant forum and an important part of the birding family in South Africa. This is the 75th anniversary year of BirdLife South Africa and a special one in its history.

He emphasised that the Society's vision and primary purpose is to conserve birds and their habitats. It must ensure that important habitats are identified and programmes put in place to ensure their survival. This is the over-riding objective, so that birds will still be there in the future for our children to enjoy. In all undertakings and commitments, the question to be asked first is "What's in it for the birds?"

The challenges that BLSA faces are:

- *Core funding:* Currently there are 35 people engaged in projects and Secretariat functions.
- *Sustainability fund:* The aim is to build this fund up to R2.5 million
- *Communications:* The intention is to involve all stakeholders, develop partnerships to pool strengths and avoid duplication.
- *Capacity building:* The Society wants to encourage the development of more bird clubs.
- *Membership:* The membership in South Africa is 11000, but 120000 or more are interested in birds.
- *Partnerships:* BLSA has strong partnerships with ADU, BirdLife International, WWF, EWT, Eskom, Sasol, Anglo, Oppenheimer/De Beers and others.
- *Transparency:* It is critical that information is disseminated, so that members have an opportunity to challenge and become involved in the process of decision making.
- *Branding:* The BirdLife International brand is a world brand. If a membership of 50,000 -100,000 can be achieved, the Society will have a voice.

- *Fun*: A challenge to WCBF is to find a project in the Cape on which to start research, say, the Spectacled Petrel.
- *Passion*: If a passion can be instilled for the organisation and for birds in South Africa, the Society will achieve its vision.

Les Underhill – comment;

Les stated the ADU's primary purpose is to undertake research and create the measures and audits to collate, evaluate and curate the data in such a way, that the whole is far greater than the individual parts and can be used to ensure the conservation of birds. He noted that BLSA would take up the CAR project and find funding.

Samantha Peterson – Seabird Conservation Programme;

BLSA'S Seabird Programme is based at the Fitzpatrick Institute. Samantha is the Manager/Co-ordinator of this programme.

Many species of seabird are endemic to Southern Africa. The surrounding coastal waters are foraging area for 11 of the 21 albatross species, that are currently threatened with extinction, mainly as a result of global longline fishing operations. The extent to which the trawl fishery industry has contributed is unknown. South Africa recently ratified the Agreement on Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) and is finalising the National Plan of Action for reducing the incidental catch of seabirds (NPOA-Seabirds).

The aim is to ensure that best-practice fishing methods are employed. Education and awareness in the industry are vital to the success of the programme.

Scientific observers working on board fishing vessels are a vital link between conservationists and the fishing industry. South Africa's observer programme has 20% coverage of fishing vessels, which means that 80% of the vessels are operating without an observer. Also, monitoring can be done only on registered vessels. We have no control over illegal fishing operations.

African Penguins have declined by 90% in the past 100 years. A recent joint BLSA/ADU publication of the Seabird Programme showed that without rehabilitation efforts a third of the global population could have been lost to oiling. The Civil Liability Convention (1991) has now been ratified, which guarantees that rehabilitation costs are covered in the case of uninsured oil spills.

Over 10% of the global population of the African Penguin is flipper banded.

A new National Policy for the conservation of Seabirds and Seals in South Africa is in the process of review. BLSA has been asked to make recommendations and is involved in an advisory capacity. The control, conditions and responsibility for import permits will feature in the legislation.

Avitourism

The concept of BLSA Birding Routes was initiated in Kwazulu-Natal. At present there are only six registered in the Western Cape. The potential is enormous. The spin-off is job creation. BirdLife Travel has started a travel agency based at Wakkerstroom and handles national and international enquiries. Definitely, an overall success story.

BLSA Accreditation of BFE's (Birder Friendly Enterprises): Sue Anderson has the full list of accredited enterprises. Accreditation is given on the basis of a set of fixed criteria and a "BLSA Accredited" plaque is provided. The enterprise is furnished with information on sites, birding guides and checklists. Cost of accreditation is R250 and R240/year to advertise in the BLSA magazine.

The Overberg Birding Route is to be launched, the first BLSA Birding Route in the Western Cape.

The next phase of development of birding routes in the Western Cape will be the Garden Route, followed by Route 62 (Klein Karoo) and then the West Coast. It is envisaged that all the routes will link up.

Bird Tour Guides in the Western Cape:

Callan Cohen representing the views and concerns of 30 - 35 bird tour guides in the Western Cape, said

very few have avitourism links in the country, and quite a number are not part of BLSA. There is a feeling in the industry, that BLSA is moving away from conservation into avitourism and in effect going into direct competition with established operators.

BLSA's intention is not to compete with existing operators, but rather to supplement them. Avitourism is a very important strategic initiative to create sources of funding for the Society.

Proposal for the West Coast Bird Centre

There is already a West Coast Bird Route. We need to build on this. The Berg River is the centre of a diversity of habitats on the West Coast - Sea Shore, Estuary, River, Strandveld, Sandveld, Namaqualand, Mountain. The Lower Berg River is a declared IBA.

Environmental Centre would provide:

- An out-station for scientists, working in the field, for the protection of the wetlands and surrounding habitats.
- Opportunities for domestic and international tourism.
- Job creation (staffing, sales, boat trips, sightseeing with guides from the local community)
- Education and training for schools and local people
- A facility for a museum and the sale of cultural crafts
- Properties are available for redevelopment
- There is an established hospitality trade in the region.

The above is broadly the idea of the West Coast Bird Club.

New BirdLife Branch: Cape Flats

BLSA is seeking to develop branches in previously disadvantaged areas. The Edith Stevens project could be the catalyst. Sasol would sponsor such a club, affiliated to BLSA, for books and one set of binoculars.

BLSA matters

Canned Beginner Courses – A beginners birding course based on 12 modules.

Birding Big Day (November 2004 – to celebrate BLSA's 75th anniversary year and the 20th Birding Big Day, it is planned to get 1,000,000 birders involved.

CONSERVATION and other issues – R300 (N21) Toll Road commented on, in a summary report on the impact the road would have on the Southern Greenfields section. A joint letter, signed by Les Underhill for ADU, Morne du Plessis for Fitzpatrick Institute and Callan Cohen - Scientific Portfolio - CBC, refutes the bird specialist report.

Bird Rehabilitation Centres;

Some are not up to scratch, the question is whether some form of BLSA accreditation should be applied

West Coast National Park Proposal;

"Elevating the Birding Status of West Coast National Park" is a development plan for a new birding infrastructure in the park.

1080 Poison

The following concern was tabled of behalf of Hannes Kleynhans and Tony Tree. Hannes used to work for CNC and did a thesis on control of problem animals.

Hannes indicated that the issue of 1080 is a very complex one from several standpoints - technical toxicology, conservation politics, emotions, animal behaviour and absolute conservation. The background is that farmers wanted a poison they could use legally on Jackal and Caracal. SA Woolgrowers and Cape Wools contacted Nature Conservation's problem animal specialists, who approached the EWT. Prof. Gerhard Verdoorn of the Poison Working Group recommended Compound 1080 and some R400,000 was spent

trying to develop bait that was species specific. A small group of scientists (problem animal specialists) queried the poison and are campaigning against it's being legalised.

Facts quoted by Hannes are:

- 1080 causes secondary poisoning of most species, including birds
- There is no antidote
- Accumulative effects have been found in birds
- Skeletal muscle damage has been found in birds
- It kills in a drawn out and cruel way
- EWT wants to use the poison in a Single Lethal Dose bait, a method that has been a failure in Animal Damage Control.

Education Projects

CBC, TBC and West Coast have on - going programmes. Different sectors of the Western Cape have different needs and the Clubs' involvement is specific to those sectors. Jan mentioned that Pretoria put modules together (eg. on Wetlands), then shared them. Vernon asked whether BLSA would be able to put together a canned programme of educational tools for children.