

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Extract Minutes at Saturday, 8 June 2013, at Paarl Bird Sanctuary (Drakenstein Municipality Boardroom).

Vernon Head - Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard - Minutes.

Present

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

Paarl Monitoring Group: Yvonne Weiss.

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

Hermanus Bird Club: Cherry Mills, Lee Berman.

Somerset West Bird Club: Brian Dennis, Sakkie Krynauw, Caroline Crump, Bryan Butler.

Stanford Bird Club: Peter Hochfelden, Richard Masson.

Tygerberg Bird Club: Brian Vanderwalt.

West Coast Bird Club: Keith Harrison, Angus Stewart.

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal, Elaine Odendal.

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff.

BLSA Western Cape: Dale Wright.

SABAP2: Peter Nupen.

CapeNature-Scientific Services: Kevin Shaw.

SANCCOB: Margaret Roestoff (Executive Director)

Guest Speaker: Pierre de Villiers (CapeNature-Programme Manager, Marine Protected Areas, Islands and Estuaries, Co-ordinator-Cape Estuaries Programme).

Tony Williams (Ornithologist).

Apologies

None.

1. ESTUARIES AND ESTUARY MANAGEMENT - (Pierre de Villiers).

Pierre presented an overview of Estuary Management in South Africa and how birding groups can contribute - see Appendix 1 for a summary of his presentation.

Points to note:

(1) With the advent of the Cape Programme for estuary management, bird clubs / organisations now have an official structure to report marine problems and stop illegal activity.

Contact details

Pierre can be contacted at CapeNature estuaries@capenature.co.za Cell 083 236 2924). An email starts the paper trail which can then be escalated up the line as necessary.

(2) Participation of BirdLife South Africa and Birding Groups BirdLife South Africa needs to have representation on Estuary Management Fora and Coastal Committees and, where possible, add value (funding for investigations, specialist input, historic data / knowledge, monitoring). Local bird clubs can get involved at EMF level. As a key indicator species, birds provide an early indicator of changes in the health and functioning of an estuary. To this end, regular counts are important (e.g. CWAC), but more frequent counts, preferably on a monthly basis, will help and these should go directly to the local EMF. The classification of an estuary as an IBA or Ramsar site is an important component of Situation Assessments.

- (VH): IBAs are on the table and becoming increasingly relevant in planning. (KS): IBAs are being incorporated in CapeNature's planning. Boundaries need to be defined.
- (PdV): Dale Wright's appointment as Regional Conservation Manager in the Western Cape is proving invaluable in terms of collaboration and partnership with BirdLife South Africa in areas of overlap on a variety of projects and programmes and getting the job done.

Comments

- (PdV): Verlorenvlei estuary is a Ramsar site with protection status. Berg and Bot river estuaries have Ramsar applications pending.
- (BvW): Verlorenvlei is moving towards being proclaimed a Nature Reserve, which will give additional leverage to contest tungsten mining at Moutonshoek. (PdV): Agreement has been given by the Dept. of Mining that prospecting will not be permitted on Ramsar sites.
- (BD): Lourens River (Strand). The estuary with adjoining beach is a Protected Natural Environment site. It supports massive numbers of terns and is a breeding site of the African Black Oystercatcher. It is subject to disturbance by illegal entry. (PdV): A Stewardship Programme has been agreed and we are going to the City to get it underway.
- (VH): Piesang River (Plettenberg): The desalination plant has the potential to drop the water level of the salt pans. The aim is to get the pump source out of the estuary.
- (PN): Club outings can be organised around the estuaries to do bird counts. (AO): BLO has a MoU with CapeNature (Overberg) to assist with counts - this is a model that can be used as a test case.
- (VH): The Cape is fortunate in having structures in place for coastal protection. This is not so in other provinces. Other Regional Forums would benefit from Pierre's presentation and VH will put them in touch with him.

2. REGIONAL CONSERVATION & IBA UPDATE - (Dale Wright).

The report covers:

(1) IBA Assessments

- 13 Assessments finalised for the Western Cape and four for the Eastern Cape.
- On track to complete almost all of the 24 Western Cape IBAs required and five for the Eastern Cape.

(2) Local Conservation Groups. The Plettenberg Bay LCG established and terms of reference and details of activities finalised. This is the first of its kind in South Africa and will serve as a model for other bird clubs.

(3) Marketing the IBA Programme and BirdLife South Africa

- Public presentations
- Radio interviews
- Events
- Writing articles

(4) Research. Links have been established with a number of academic institutions regarding future research projects on conservation issues.

(5) IBA Signboards. The IBA Programme is planning to erect a limited number of informational signboards at IBAs across the country.

- Regional Conservation Managers tasked with identifying suitable sites and co-ordinating this with partners.
- Bird clubs in other regions have shown an interest in funding these signboards at their local IBA.
- Dale calls on Western Cape bird clubs to consider supporting this project. Interested chairpersons to contact Dale.

3. FALSE BAY ECOLOGY PARK (IBA SA116)

(1) Funding

- Funding proposal completed and ready for submission to corporate donors. Presentation being prepared for corporates.
- Funding proposal to be developed to take to the Department of Tourism for improving infrastructure for tourism at FBEP.

(2) “Birdathon” Fun Walk (Sat. 4 May 2013)

BirdLife South Africa partnered with the City of Cape Town and the Cape Bird Club to host a Fun Walk at Strandfontein on Saturday, 4 May 2013.

- Purpose: To introduce the IBA to the local Cape Flats community and build a sense of ownership.
- The event attracted approximately 200 participants.
- Participants completed an environmental education quiz and bird id sheet.
- Other attractions: Interactive presentation on recycling, live bird display, complimentary fish & chips lunch from John Dory's.
- Event was a success and will be repeated every year.
- R1,000 was raised and will be used in the Strandfontein birding area.

4. INTAKA ISLAND (Tony Williams)

(1) Management of the Wetland

The original agreement, arising from the EIA, allowed development of the area on condition that that a wetland was provided for birds. The result was Intaka Island. Half is natural ephemeral pans, half is artificial. Three important aims were:

- To encourage the same diversity of waterbirds as was already breeding on site.
- To naturally filter and purify the water which would be used in the canals at Century City.
- To create a public amenity and enviro-educational facility.

Problems encountered:

- Guano from the breeding platform was affecting the Ph level of the water. Action: Underwater filter pool built beneath the platforms to pump out the guano.
- Reed beds, grown for filtering, have expanded. Action: Will need to reduce in sections by bulldozer.
- Carp got into the system and had to be poisoned. Action: Took out 25,000 tons of carp and re-stocked with indigenous fish.
- An alien weed has been introduced. Action: Taking out
- Sewage leak occurred from the water park. Action: Addressed.

- Water mongooses: The past two years have seen a decline in the number of large waterbirds.
Action: A family of water mongooses was found to be preying on breeding birds and the birds deserted the site. Management has appealed to CapeNature to capture and remove the mongooses. Attempts are being made to predator proof the base of the breeding platforms, but the reed beds remain a problem. (PdV): Electric fencing will keep mongooses out.

Intaka Island has been monitored for 18 years and is providing important information on the effects of urbanisation on bird populations. 130 Species have been recorded, with 60 as regulars. An Environmental Committee meets regularly. The services of a fresh water consultant have been used since inception to assist in monitoring and managing the water quality.

Comments

(PN): Peter met with Intaka Island manager Alan Liebenberg to highlight the concerns of birdwatchers. He emphasised the two points at issue:

(a) The density of phragmites around the ponds seriously limits birdwatching opportunities. This needs to be addressed as Intaka Island is promoted as a birding jewel in the middle of the city.

(b) Algae growth on the water surface stops sunlight getting through and will affect the food source.

- Alan Liebenberg undertook to look into what can be done to make the wetland a more bird friendly environment. Various methods of opening up and harvesting phragmites are being considered. Intensive efforts are underway to remove alien plants that have found their way into the system and to reduce the level of the algae cladophoro.

Noted (TW): The new weed in the waterways, hornwort, is common throughout water bodies in the Cape and has no natural control agent.

(2) Bird Week at Intaka Island (18 to 22 May) (report from DWr).

BirdLife South Africa once again partnered with Intaka Island Eco-centre and the ADU for the second bird week event at Intaka Island. The programme included bird-related eco activities for school children.

Approximately 200 children attended from three primary schools.

5. PAARL BIRD SANCTUARY (Yvonne Weiss)

Upgrades include a security fence around the waste water treatment works. The toilet block and viewing platform are now inside the fence Maintenance of the trees has been taken over by Parks & Gardens. Only one hide remains after the Sand Island hide was burned down but plans are in hand to rebuild. A new security firm has been appointed and visitors must book in and out at the gate. CCTV camera surveillance is incoming (Ronald Brown). Opening times are: weekdays 07h45-18h00, weekends 07h00-18h00.

Enquiries can be made with Joanne (secretary) Tel. 021 807 4766 or Frans Tel. 021 807 7710, Cell 082 418 4571.

Noted: (TW): The Cape Winelands District Municipality has identified an undisturbed wetlands site near PBS as a landfill site. (PdV): No dumping sites or developments are permitted within 100 meters of a floodplain.

(JH): John Fincham has been to see Councillor Louren du Toit. He has shown interest in incorporating the whole of the area, including Paarl Mountain, as a nature area.

(KH): The Cape Winelands Biosphere can be contacted in this connection. Contact: Executive Mayor-Stellenbosch, Tel. 023 348 2301, e-mail mayor@bolanddm.co.za.

6. HOUSE CROWS PROJECT

Invasive Species Co-ordinator for the City of Cape Town, Louise Stafford, reports that the remaining population size is approximately 2,000 birds but it is difficult to determine at this time of the year as the birds are dispersed and not in flocks. Baiting was temporarily discontinued awaiting the arrival of a fresh batch of toxin and efforts will now be renewed. The team of 10 will be doubled up. There have been sightings in the CBD and at the Waterfront which is cause for concern. Louise appeals for all sightings of roosts and nests to be reported so as to prevent the crows from populating new areas Louise.Stafford@capetown.gov.za

Other Invasive Species - **Mallards**.

- PdV asked whether anything is being done to control Mallards.
- (DW): The City is working on this. (TW): 87 taken out this year at Intaka Island.
- (AO): The MoU between Cape Nature (Overberg) and BirdLife Overberg must include the taking out of Mallards.
- (KS): The City is responsible in municipal areas and CapeNature outside. CapeNature has employed an avifaunal co-ordinator on a 3-year contract to look at invasive species.
- (VH): BirdLife South Africa has a position statement on Invasive Species. Send copy to KS.

7. OVERBERG UPDATE (Anton Odendal)

(1) Fernkloof Educational Trail. The design of the 12 educational posters to be erected at Fernkloof Nature Reserve has been completed and will be taken to the project steering committee, consisting of representatives of a variety of conservation agencies in the area, for approval. Other organisations and reserves have started negotiating for the placement of similar posters at their facilities. The text or pictures can be changed to customise.

(2a) Birding Pages on Overstrand Municipality Website. The local municipality has requested the development of birdfinder route descriptions for their website. This is underway and will cover Cape Whale Coast birding from Rooiels to Elim.

(2b) WC Birding Website. The upgrade of the website is nearing completion and will enable more interactive and effective marketing of the Western Cape as a top birding destination. 26% of visits are from overseas.

(3) Flight for Birders Courses. Eight courses have been held so far this year. The courses aim to attract (a) people from conservation and tourism agencies who want to gain a better understanding of birding tourism and (b) novice bird-watchers who want to get involved in the hobby of birding. Average participation at each course was 30 people.

(4) Bird Identification Brochures. New supplies are now available at R1.50 each.

(5) MoU between BLO and the Overberg Division of CapeNature. Negotiations are proceeding and it is expected that the MoU will be signed in the near future.

8. WEST COAST UPDATE (Keith Harrison)

(1) Mining.

- Saldahna: Plans are set to double the ore harbour to accommodate the exporting of heavy and rare earth minerals. Applications are in for both, with funding coming from Russia for titanium mining and from South Korea for rare earths.
- Time lines for mining applications: There is a difference in the time scales for Renewable Energy and Mining applications. The former take 3 years to pass through the EIA stage; the latter 3-5 years from the initial application to the Draft Scoping Report when the public is informed. It is not possible for individuals to keep control of application processes over such a long time and databases should be maintained by environmental NGOs.
- Heavy minerals mining: Bongani Minerals (under a different name) is applying for licences to prospect at locations from Strandfontein to the Lower Berg River.

(2) Berg River.

- An Estuary ranger has been appointed, funded by the Berg River Municipality.
- Ramsar status: The boundary is to be altered, with the site starting at the Carinus Bridge and upstream, the reason being that the area is already a Conservancy and will come under the DEA

through CapeNature, while downstream the river is classed as a harbour and falls under Public Works.

- The De Plaat bird hide (reached by boat) has become dangerous and will be removed.
- Only two out of 25 launching sites are found to have been licensed.
- The Department of Water Affairs is conducting water quality monitoring in the West Coast District Municipality. Hourly testing is taking place for about a year at two sites on the Berg River, monitoring water coming in from the sea and inland. Three-tier monitoring is done: Tier 1-Basic chemistry of the river; Tier 2-Biology of the river (birds, mammals, fish, plants and insects). For this, the assistance of NGOs is needed; Tier 3-anything of significance that requires a study by academics.

(3) Verlorenvlei.

- Illegal large-scale burning of reeds is taking place.

(4) West Coast National Park.

- Kleinmooimaak: Two developments are planned: (a) Re-opening of the caravan and camping site; (b) 10-chalet rest camp. The effect on the Seeberg high tide roost must be determined.
- Abrahamskraal: Reed clearing needed, failing which the site will be unusable.
- Jet skis: An amicable arrangement has been reached between SanParks and the Jet Ski Association. Every rider must be a member of the Association and pass a proficiency test to be graded and licensed. Riders must produce the license when applying for a short term or long term user ticket and will be issued with a coloured numbered jacket so that they can be recognised when on the water. Strict behaviour and route regulations must be complied with. A similar code of practice will be developed with other "high energy" water users.

(5) African Penguins on Dassen Island.

Christina Moseley and Dale Wright met with Keith Harrison and Dirk van Driel (a member of Dassen Island Preserved Area Assoc.) to discuss concerns regarding the persistent reduction in penguin numbers on Dassen Island. The major concern is the impact of the fishing industry on pilchard stocks and the level of monitoring being done. Christina will develop a protocol for low level monitoring of the density of vessels fishing off Dassen Island at night. The PAA wants environmental tourism to be allowed on the island for specialised activities like the Pelican Watch. They would like to see the reintroduction of the 20km fishing exclusion zone around the island.

(6) Cape Fur Seals.

The number counted by aerial survey on Vondeling Island is 50,000 - 80,000. Vondeling does not fall under the WCNP. Only one visit was possible during the summer and 47 rogue seals were culled. A survey is needed of all the islands around the West Coast peninsula. At Bird Island-Lamberts Bay, 500 - 600 gannet juveniles were taken by seals on their fledgling flight this season.

9. SABAP2 UPDATE (Peter Nupen).

On 1 July, SABAP2 will start its 7th year in existence and is proving to be the largest Citizen Science project functioning in Southern Africa.

(1) National: To date, 88,066 Full Protocol Cards have been submitted to the ADU's database. This means that 5,182 FPCs have been submitted since the last update and, with 35-40 cards coming in daily, the milestone target of 100,000 cards should be reached in September. Pentad coverage of 17,318 blocks now stands at 11,788 or 68.7% of the whole country, including Swaziland and Lesotho.

If the sparsely populated Northern Cape were not so large with 5,013 pentads, we could possibly be

registering over 90% coverage. In July, a group of atlasers from the Western Cape will be tackling outstanding pentads around Brandvlei and Pofadder in the Northern Cape.

(2) Western Cape: Of the 1,837 pentads atlased, 1,550 have at least one FPC. 15 Virgin pentads have been atlased in the last four months, bringing Western Cape coverage to 84.4%. A total of 17,987 FPCs have been submitted which equates to approximately 20% of all cards country-wide. 64.6% of the Western Cape has at least two FPCs per pentad, meaning 1,186 of the 1,837 pentads have double coverage, and 528 pentads have at least seven FPCs, providing depth of data for meaningful analysis.

It is significant to note that atlasing can now be done in Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Mocambique can be atlased and it is important to get these FPCs in but as yet there is no adjudication panel set up in that country for vetting the cards.

10. SAVE OUR SEABIRDS (SOS) FESTIVAL (7-13 October 2013) (Vernon Head)

SOS 2013 is BirdLife South Africa's contribution to National Marine Week and is supported by the Dept. of Environmental Affairs-Oceans & Coasts. This year, satellite events will be rolled out to other areas - West Coast and Overberg. The central event will take place at Iziko South African Museums in Cape Town. Highlights will include the Marine Lecture Series with prominent speakers and the "Oceans of Life" Photographic Competition. The latter is now the biggest marine photographic competition in the world. First prize in the Main category is the Oryx Award - a trip for two to the Arctic worth 15,000 US dollars, with a Canon EOS7D camera plus image stabiliser lenses valued at R21,000 as first prize in the newly introduced Youth category. The theme will be Marine Science and why it is important for people to embrace our marine environment. The future goal is to make SOS the biggest marine environment festival in the world. We have been approached by multi-nationals to get involved.

11. BLSA EVENTS & PROJECTS

(1) Appointment of Office Bearers - confirmed at the Annual General Meeting on 4 March 2013:

- President: Dr. Phoebe Barnard
- Chairman: Vernon Head (re-elected)

PN extended congratulations to Vernon on his re-appointment as chairman of BLSA. He is respected throughout the region for his enthusiasm and integrity.

(2) BLSA Awards.

(a) Gill Memorial Medal. The recipient of the Gill Award for 2013 was Dr. Rob Crawford from the Dept. of Environmental Affairs-Oceans & Coasts. Over the past 40 years, Dr. Crawford had fought tirelessly for southern Africa's seabirds and contributed enormously to the understanding of seabird population dynamics and in particular the importance of fisheries and other human impacts on their conservation. Nominations for 2014. Send to Pamela Barrett secretary@birdlife.org.za by 2nd Sept. 2013.

(b) Austin Roberts Memorial Award. This newly created award will honour people who have made a significant contribution to conservation in South Africa. The first award will be made in 2014. Nominations: Send to Pamela Barrett secretary@birdlife.org.za by 2nd Sept. 2013.

(c) Owl Award nominations are invited for 2013. Owl Awards recognise an outstanding contribution to BirdLife South Africa during the previous calendar year. They fall into three categories:

- (i) Owlet award: For individuals under 18 years of age.
- (ii) Owl Award: For organisations and individuals.
- (iii) Eagle-Owl Award: For outstanding voluntary contributions by an individual to BirdLife South Africa at an organisational level.

Send nominations to Nikki McCartney at events@birdlife.org.za by 26 July 2013.

(3) National Bird Week. Noted: National Bird Week has been discontinued. Resources are going into "Bird of the Year" and can be used as needed for a week, month or year.

(4) Bird of the Year 2013 is the White-winged Flufftail, which can be linked to wetlands and World Wetland Day. Materials are ready and can be used by clubs to promote "Bird of the Year" as they wish in their locality.

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 5 October 2013, at Stanford.

Stanford Bird Club will be hosting WCBF as part of the Stanford Bird Fair weekend.