

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 9 October 2004, at the ***The Municipal Offices, Stanford.***

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

Those Present

Cape Bird Club – Vernon Head, Anne Gray, Sylvia Ledgard, Peter Nupen, Mel Tripp.

Tygerberg Club – Mariana Delport, Dirk van Driel.

Somerset West Bird Club – Ben Kakebeeke, Brian Dennis, Jill Mortimer.

West Coast Bird Club – Keith Harrison, John Fannin

BirdLife Overberg – Anton Odendal

Hermanus Bird Club – Mike Ford

BirdLife Worcester – Kobus Graaf

BirdLife Walker Bay – Val Crocker

Guests

ADU – Les Underhill, Dieter Oschadleus

BLSA – Gerhard Verdoorn (Director), Karen Marx (Business Manager)

Minutes of previous meeting (26/06/2004): Agreed

Welcome

Vernon extended a welcome from the forum to Gerhard Verdoorn and Karen Marx, who were in attendance for the Stanford Birding Fair and the launch of the Overberg Birding Route. Also welcomed to the forum were Kobus Graaf (Worcester), in attendance for the first time, and Val Crocker of the newly formed BirdLife Walker Bay.

Glendower Scotch Whisky

Glendower has indicated their intention to align themselves with sponsorship of bird conservation and birding in South Africa. As sponsors of the Stanford Birding Fair, they were present at the start of the meeting to meet the representatives of the Bird Clubs.

ADDRESS (Gerhard Verdoorn)

Gerhard presented an overview of his vision and strategy for BirdLife SA, going forward. The Society's efforts will focus on the conservation of birds and their habitats and it is his intention to move the Society forward rapidly as one of South Africa's foremost conservation bodies.

The main focal activities will be:

- Research and conservation
- Tourism development
- Bird guide training

- Youth education
- Avian awareness
- Membership
- Business development
- Africa partnership development

Avi-conservation

Research projects will be linked to the ADU, Percy Fitzpatrick Institute and other scientific bodies and museums. These will focus on species conservation, site and habitat conservation, surveys and monitoring. Alliances will be sought with industry and partnerships will be developed.

South African Eco Regions: Karoo (Succulent and Nama), Fynbos, Savanna, Forest, Grassland, Montane, Coastal. The strategy will be to move away from purely species based conservation and start working on Eco Region sites. IBA's, Protected Areas, Farming Communities and Conservancies will come into the equation. For each region, threatened and endemic species of birds will be identified and a flagship species (e.g. Cape Sugarbird for the fynbos biome of the Western Cape).

Avi-Tourism

BLSA Travel will be grown, with the development of Birding Routes and the involvement of local communities. Training of bird guides will be part of the package.

Avi-Education

This will involve policy and curriculum development, the development of education tools (e.g. packaged courses), the convening of eco schools and the launch in May next year of the BLSA National Youth Birding Week, which has the backing of the Department of Education and DEAT.

Awareness

The aim is to establish BirdLife SA in the minds of all South Africans as leaders in conservation. Publicity is the key and the goal is to feature the BLSA brand as the most prominent in South Africa in the field of conservation. Partnerships are being sought with the media, with access to a range of nature, outdoors and conservation oriented magazines, the press, radio and television. Birding events will be widely marketed - Birding Big Day and Bird Fairs. BLSA branded avian products will be marketed and sold. SA Airlink boxes are being branded and will carry information on BirdLife SA. The website will be further developed.

Membership

BLSA is currently the second largest NGO, next to BOTSOC. The goal is to become the largest, with 1-million members by 2006. Membership benefits will include rewards and benefits when using the membership card.

Business

The framework has been established and will continue to be monitored for good governance of the Society in the areas of policy and decision making, financial and asset management, human resources development, sponsor relationships and marketing.

Africa Partnerships

Links will be expanded with like-minded organisations in the rest of Africa. Two of the EWT working groups have approached BLSA to use the African partnership as a conduit for expanding their operation.

LAUNCH OF OVERBERG BIRDING ROUTES (Anton Odendal)

The Overberg Birding Routes featured in the October/November edition of Africa Birds and Birding and so far 53 hits had been recorded with genuine enquiries from people who want to come in.

The Overberg Routes Finder and Checklist were ready. By February 2006, 15 bird guides, spread over the region, would be trained. Bird guide training had been offered also to nature guides.

Anton has been asked to assist in developing birding routes on the Garden Route and in the Cedarberg next year.

The Overberg would participate in Birding Big Day and the BLSA national youth week planned for April/May 2005. Five habitat specific checklists of common birds for the local region were in production with local sponsorship and would be ready for BBD. Schools would be invited to take part and a 5km Fun Walk would be organised through various habitats. It was hoped to get 1,000 people to participate.

BirdLife Overberg had an ongoing programme to form satellite branches in network clusters of towns/villages to enable these communities to become involved in avi-tourism and the conservation of important bird areas at a local level. BirdLife Worcester had already been formed and was close to becoming an independent branch. A new satellite branch of BirdLife Overberg was launched to coincide with the Stanford Birding Fair and the launch of the Overberg Birding Routes. This was BirdLife Walker Bay, which would serve the coastal villages of Stanford, Gansbaai, Kleinbaai and Franskraal as well as the inland areas up to Baardskeerdersbos and Elim. The area included CNC Reserves such as Walker Bay, Dyer Island and Salmonsdam, some conservancies and privately owned conserved areas and several other unprotected areas such as the Kleinriver estuary and areas of threatened Renosterveld. It was anticipated that, among others, clusters would in future be formed around the towns of Kleinmond, Villiersdorp, Greyton, Swellendam and Bredasdorp.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

Avian Cholera and Botulism

Les Underhill: Avian cholera is causing grave concern among conservationists. The current outbreak on Dyer Island is the third of its kind on the island in the last three breeding seasons, and is becoming an ornithological crisis. It is severely hampering efforts to secure the future of the Cape Cormorant, which is already classified as "near-threatened" (70% decline). In 2002, the disease killed more than 7,000 Cape Cormorants and last year 1,700 adult birds died. The disease hits during peak breeding time and at present there are 33,000 active nests on Dyer Island. Cape Cormorants seem to be particularly vulnerable to avian cholera, but there are many other factors involved in their decline.

The disease is a bacterial infection that occurs in the upper respiratory tract and usually kills birds within six to 24 hours. There is no known cure and dead birds can harbour the bacteria in their bodies for up to three months after dying. The only method of control is to collect and incinerate the carcasses. The cause of the disease and how it spreads is not known and no common thread has been found. We need a task team to look at the problem and seek out the causes.

Dyer Island is one of the most sensitive and, in conservation terms, significant off-shore islands for breeding seabirds on the South African coastline. It is the only known location in the southern hemisphere for the Leach's Storm Petrel and has recently been re-colonised by a few Roseate Terns. The African Penguin population on the island has declined from 20,000 to 2,000 and the predation of seals on the population is being monitored. Penguins are not affected by avian cholera.

Anton suggested that we ask RSPB specialists who come out on sabbaticals to look at problem areas. We can make connections and create international networks through BLSA.

Vernon asked how bird clubs can assist and Les will prepare a dossier of coastal bird projects in which clubs can get involved. Action: Les Underhill

Gerhard is preparing an Avian Mortality report form and birders throughout the country will be asked to participate by sending in data, which it is hoped can be used to start introducing mitigation actions.

Dr. Dirk van Driel: Dirk is the Manager of Hydrobiology, Scientific Services, at the City of Cape Town. As a birder, he gets involved with counting birds at sewage works and has seen them going down with the effects of botulism and cholera.

Avian botulism and cholera are worldwide problems and thousands of birds can die in an outbreak. Waterbirds are particularly vulnerable. These diseases occur naturally, but he believes are enhanced by human activities. All localities where large quantities of decomposing organic material occur are potential hazards, such as waste disposal sites, sewage treatment works, dairies and feedlots. Dirk suggests that one common denominator seems to stand out, namely poultry farms. Farmers discard dead chickens and eggs, along with manure, on which gulls, ibises and other birds feed. They become infected and spread the disease when returning to their roosts. An example of this is Slent Farm near Wellington, where Judy New has been keeping a record for a number of years. The farm has two dams. 150 Kelp Gulls roost on the one, along with Hartlaubs Gulls, ibises and storks. Next door to Slent is a poultry farm with a large heap of poultry dung that attracts gulls, ibises, pelicans and storks. Bacteria in the dung, particularly the toxic Botulism C that causes paralysis in birds, is picked up and carried back to roosting sites. Botulism survives in the mud of wetlands and is activated once it gets protein (e.g. dead birds). Mid-summer to mid-winter is the active period.

There are many poultry farms around Cape Town, plus sewage works, abattoirs, pig farms, etc, all generating huge quantities of solid waste. The problem is one of disposal. Solid waste disposal is regulated in terms of the Nature Conservation Act, but not the means to monitor and enforce compliance. Nature conservation officials should be able to enter suspect premises and help rectify potential problems. No regulations exist to enforce measures for ensuring that birds and other animals do not come into contact with solid waste matter. Dirk suggests that BLSA is best positioned to enter into negotiations with the government to promulgate such regulation.

Gerhard said that we already have sufficient data to project the magnitude of the problem to Government. The approach should be first to set up workshops with farmers and other bodies involved and also Water Affairs and the Health Department, get them on board as partners and then go to Government. BLSA can offer advice and help. He is already working with Rainbow Chickens on these lines. Anton proposed a regular newsletter to get the message out to members. Chicken farms could be the starting point, but any place where organic material accumulates would be included. Education is needed (e.g. dead birds must be incinerated, not put into the refuse). Vernon suggested that there might be an opportunity for BLSA accreditation of operations.

Indian House Crow

Kevin Shaw (CNC) is running the eradication programme. Funding is needed to sustain it. He has received an initial R10,000 from BLSA, but approximately R25,000 a year will be needed over four years to get the problem under control. Les cautioned on public perception and the importance of informing the public of what the problem is. Karen offered Secretariat help with publicity.

Funding of CAR (ADU)

Karen Marx confirmed that it is BLSA's intention to get involved with CAR and Jan Fourie is seeking funds for the project. Mercedes Benz and the National Road Agency are potential targets for fund raising.

Pellet Guns

A flood of Chinese-made pellet guns have come into the country and no licence is needed. Gerhard is working with the SA Game Hunters & Firearms Association to get control. Regulations exist which make it illegal to discharge a firearm in a built-up area, whether or not the owner is a licence holder. A folder is being produced for buyers that spells out the do's and don't's of gun ownership. Buyers will be asked to sign and commit to abiding by the rules. It is proposed to outlaw the sale of guns by anyone who is not a regular firearms dealer.

In terms of the Conservation Ordinance, a licence is needed to hunt. The minimum age is 18 years. In the case of pellet guns, 90% of owners are children and their use of the guns is illegal. A citizen regulated system of control is needed in respect of infringements. The issue will be circulated via SA Birdclub Forum. An additional problem is catapults, which are being sold by informal vendors all over the place. Gerhard's view is that the only answer is a public campaign - get the issue into the newspapers and kill the market.

"Save the Albatross" Vuka Awards Entry

Mel Tripp has entered the Vuka Awards competition with a feature highlighting the plight of the Albatross. His inspiration was to show the beauty and tragedy of the birds and use the power of the TV medium to get the message across. Finalists will be selected at the end of October. If in the finals, the feature will be flighted at any time on DSTV Multichoice/M-Net channels over the following 10 months. The BLSA website will follow through with a similar photograph and the message to join the Society or make a donation now.

1080 POISON

The issue of the use by farmers of 1080 Poison to kill Jackal and Caracal was raised at the last forum meeting and has been aired via sabirdclubforum and capebirdnet. Gerhard, in his work with EWT and the Poison Working Group, was at the centre of research and efforts to find a solution to the heavy predation on sheep by Black-backed Jackal, stray dogs and Caracal. Farmers suffer a 20%-22% loss of stock. The great majority of farmers, many of whom are conservation conscious, want to work within the law. A variety of mitigation measures are tried - fencing, lamb pens, kraaling sheep, protection collars, protection dogs, Blesbok, donkeys. If predation continues and livelihoods are at stake, desperate farmers resort to gin traps, cage traps, shooting and poison baits (small and carcasses). The latter also take out non-target species. Irresponsible farmers have been known to use extremely toxic poisons and chemicals.

To address the problem and assist farmers, the Poison Working Group looked at alternative poisons. 1080 came out of a forum workshop and was introduced to displace other more dangerous poisons. The 1080 compound has been shown to be the most effective, with the least damage to the environment. It can kill a jackal with a small dose and the chemical breaks down in the ground within 3 or 4 days. No poison is selective. The method of application is important and farmers would need to be educated on how to use it.

It takes years to bring a new pesticide to the market. The Agricultural Department must prove that it works with least damage to the environment before it can be registered. The SPCA and others objected to 1080 and it is now in the hands of the Cape Woolgrowers Association to progress the matter further. It remains to be seen whether it will get registered. If and when it does, it would give farmers a legal alternative to more dangerous chemicals and the Woolgrowers Association and the Agricultural Department would monitor its use.

WEST COAST CENTRE FOR BIRDS AND BIRDING

The proposal for a West Coast Centre was discussed at BOM and the project has the full support of BLSA. **Keith Harrison** will need confirmation of BLSA's backing in writing to take to the politicians. Then, steps can be taken to go ahead.

BLSA ISSUES

Birding Big Day 2004

The format remains the same, with the introduction also of a new category "Early Birder. This is designed to involve schoolchildren, but anyone can enter. To qualify, entrants must see and report by SMS (or otherwise) the first five birds they see on the day. Big prizes are on offer. "Early Birder" is a precursor to a Youth Birding Week in April/May 2005. A special prize is on offer this year for first-time entrants. Wild life enthusiasts, who are not BLSA members, are being targeted. For 100 birds recorded, the prize is 1 year's free membership of BLSA.

IBA's

The question has been raised as to where we are going with IBA's. The IBA site document has been published and attempts have been made to get going with monitoring. A problem that has been highlighted is that IBA's are not necessarily official conservation areas and many are on private land.

Gerhard: IBA's will be a major platform for conservation and avi-tourism and the basis of all development plans in BLSA. A policy document will be produced over the next few months. Site

support groups for IBA's will be important and observation guidelines are being drawn up.

National Rarities Committee

A new Rarities Committee, supported by Regional committees, will be up and running by March 2005. Regional committees will submit data collected to a central point for updating the national record. It is essential for conservation that data is scientifically and accurately recorded. An education programme will be launched for this purpose. Les and the ADU can assist by drawing up guidelines. Action: Les

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 26 February 2005, at 12h00 at Kristo Pienaar Centre, Tygerberg Nature Reserve.