

# *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, 9 October 2010.

**Vernon Head** - Chaired the Meeting.

**Sylvia Ledgard** - Minutes.

## ***Present***

**Cape Bird Club:** Vernon Head, Anne Gray, Jo Hobbs.

**Hermanus Bird Club:** Terry Demmer.

**Paarl:** Yvonne Weiss

**Somerset West Bird Club:** John Carter, Brian Dennis.

**Tygerberg Bird Club:** Brian van der Walt, Helene Thompson.

**West Coast Bird Club:** Keith Harrison.

## ***Also attending***

Dr Tony Williams (bird collisions), Peter Nupen (SABAP2)

## ***Apologies***

Anton Odendal, Barbara Palmer, Royd Frith, Robyn Kadis, Anne Gray, Jill Mortimer, Ross Wanless.

## ***Welcome***

Vernon welcomed all.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting (05/06/2009):** Agreed with notation that John Carter was present at the meeting.

## **BLSA**

**Vernon Head:** Report-back on Council Meeting (4 Sept. 2010)

AGM Weekend 2011 (March 18-21): The 82nd Annual General Meeting will be hosted by BirdLife Lowveld at Bundu Lodge near Mbombela on Saturday 19 March. The event will be branded "Flock-the Annual Gathering of BirdLife South Africa-Mbombela 2011." The idea is to develop the event into an annual festival of birds and birding.

IBAs: Ernst Retief has been appointed as Service Provider to assist in the IBA Programme. The programme needs to be re-assessed and brought up to date using new tools now available. BLSA must align its IBA Programme with national, provincial and local government biodiversity conservation planning. A top 10 IBA list is being drawn up. Once status hierarchy is established across the country, local funding and curatorship must be sought for individual IBA's. The objective is to involve corporates, NGO's and local authorities in the championing/caretaking process of IBA's. An example is Strandfontein, which will be used as a test case. CBC is putting together a funding document for targeting a corporate. The package will offer branding identity attached to the IBA. Clubs will draw up a list of appropriate corporates to take ownership of IBAs in their area.

TW noted that the listing of IBA's is very much out of date. Rocher Pan, not listed as an IBA, is a case in point. It has the highest proportion of breeding Cape Shovellers anywhere.

- Application can be made for a site to be declared as an IBA, following prescribed criteria and procedures.

**IBA Workshop:** Shaun Overmeyer is a possible candidate for IBA co-ordinator in the Western Cape. An IBA workshop is scheduled to take place in Johannesburg early next year. It would be helpful for Shaun to attend. This should be preceded by a brainstorming workshop in Cape Town to prioritise IBA's and related issues. Vernon asked whether WCBF could pay Shaun's airfare. The proposal was endorsed by the meeting, but it was noted that WCBF's funds are used for funding Forum meetings and the annual allocation of R7,000 from BLSA does not generally cover more than that. In this context, Brian Vanderwalt made the following proposal.

**Proposal for Club Support:** (Brian Vanderwalt) Brian suggested that Clubs contribute to WCBF's funding on the basis of R1 or R2 per member. The proposal was supported by the Forum and Clubs were asked to take it to their committees.

**Birding Big Day 2010 (27 November):** BBD is about raising funds for the conservation of South Africa's threatened birds, including albatrosses and petrels, the African Penguin, bustards and korhaans, and the Southern Bald Ibis. Participants can enter one of three categories:

- Traditional Birding Big Day (27 Nov.)
- Garden Bird (1 hour's observation during any day of the week 20 - 28/11). The objective is to encourage people's interest in birds.
- SABAP2 (during week 20 - 28/11). This follows the very successful launch of the category last year, during which hundreds of lists were submitted.

(JC): BBD has not flown here. People are reticent about finding sponsors.

(VH): Look for small sponsors - small amounts add up.

(BvdW): The concept of getting together is important, e.g. a braai afterwards.

(BvdW): Christmas Bird Count-a proposal A Christmas count is done in America. Would it work here? Brian to get back to Vernon on this.

**Action:** Brian VdW

**Note:** Garden Bird Membership Category. Garden Bird BBD will be the precursor to launching a Membership category for people who love gardening, with a fringe interest in birds. Membership fees will be lower than the standard rate and this category will only receive the BLSA e-Newsletter. BLSA is seeking sponsors, e.g. large garden nurseries. People can be encouraged to grow indigenous to attract birds, butterflies and insects.

- BVdW: Consider having a "Garden for Birds" section at the Kirstenbosch sale.
- VH: A joint venture has been proposed at national level between SANBI and BLSA. The idea is to have mini fairs at Botanical Gardens, bringing birders and gardeners together.
- TW: Use talk shows on radio programmes, getting in local birders to comment.
- JH: Nurseries offer talks for local gardeners.

**National Bird Week 2011 (first week of May):** ACSA have indicated they may sponsor the event and would like the Barn Swallow to be the Bird of the Year. Alternatives open to the Clubs for voting are Cape Vulture, White-backed Vulture, African Fish-Eagle, Bataleur, Marabou Stork. WCBF voted for Barn Swallow. BvdW suggested a Barn Swallow ringing component could be included in the event.

*(Note: Feedback from BLSA is that the vote for Bird of the Year went to the African Fish Eagle).*

- TW suggested that May was not a good month for the event, especially in the Western Cape and with particular reference to wetland birds - waders, flamingos, etc.

VH will clarify with Council.

Action: Vernon

**“Spring is Alive” Birdwatch:** This is an RSPB initiative to monitor specific migrants as they arrive, namely Barn Swallow, White Stork, Common Swift and Common Cuckoo.

It is a web-base project, aimed at promoting bird watching and an interest in conservation among the youth, school children and their families. Notice of the project was received too late to implement.

Position Statement on Wild Birds (e.g. ringing, feeding, invasive birds, lead poisoning, etc): Draft statement to be tabled at December Council meeting.

### **Owl Awards**

Criteria and Values: Recognises outstanding contribution to BLSA and Conservation by an individual or organisation. Owl awards are limited to a maximum of 11 in any one year. The award was too liberally dispensed in the past and must be given and received as something of value, akin to an “Oscar”. An Awards Committee evaluates nominations.

**Nomination:** Dr. Stuart Shearer: Dr. Shearer has been nominated for an Owl Award by BirdLife Overberg. He is an honorary member of BLO and in recent months has been involved in commenting on EIA processes related to applications for the development of wind farms in South Africa in general and in the Overberg in particular. He has assembled a team of experts to assist him in this regard and their work now represents “state of the art” on how such comments should be done.

**Endorsement of Owl Award Nominations by WCBF:** It is not incumbent on Clubs to ask for WCBF endorsement of nominations but it is desirable. The process must be taken more seriously with nominations being brought to the Regional Forums for endorsement and then taken to Council. In the case of Dr. Shearer, WCBF felt unable to endorse the nomination in that Dr. Shearer was not known to anyone present. Nevertheless, in the light of his expert contribution, WCBF does not object to this nomination going forward.

### **Other BLSA Awards**

**Eagle Owl:** For outstanding voluntary contribution by an individual to BLSA and Conservation at an organisational or national level. Maximum two awards annually.

**Gill Memorial Award:** The highest award that BLSA makes. It is given to an individual for extraordinary contribution to ornithology and science. The Gill is not necessarily awarded every year, but has been so in recent years to catch up with a backlog when the award was not made.

**BLSA Finances:** John Carter questioned why the numbers on Financial Reports differed radically from one report to the next, from breakeven in one month to a loss in the next, then revised again in the following months. He was concerned that BLSA was taking on more than they could cope with. VH commented that the auditors tend to be conservative. BLSA relied on funding coming in, but there was reason to believe that breakeven would be achieved this year. BLSA remained the only NGO in the country that was progressing.- VH will arrange with BLSA's Treasurer to make a summary report available for presentation at Forum meetings.

Action: Vernon

### **SABAP2**

Peter Nupen reported that country-wide, there are 810 registered observers, of which 446 are active. To date, 41007 Protocol Cards have been submitted. 7,699 of all Pentads in the country have at least one card, which represents 44.46% coverage of the total surface area of RSA. Western Cape: Of the 1,836 Pentads, 1,163 have at least one Full Protocol Card, representing 63.3% coverage of the Region. Details of all SABAP2 statistics are available on the SABAP2 website <http://sabap2.adu.org.za>

There are only 20 months left until July 2012, when the fieldwork for the second South African Bird Atlas is planned for completion. There is a need for a co-ordinated effort to tackle the more remote parts of the Western Cape where there are large holes that require atlasing. During this remaining period, organised atlasing excursions will be arranged to cover these virgin pentads.

Tomorrow 10/10/2010 coincides with the 350 "no carbon footprint" initiative to raise awareness of global climate change. SABAP2 will participate by atlasing home and/or other local pentads. The aim is to minimise the use of vehicles and atlas on foot to reduce our carbon footprint.

The next SABAP2 workshop will be held at Hermanus on 20 November.

VH thanked Peter for his dedication and on-going efforts as the Regional Co-ordinator for SABAP2.

## CONSERVATION

### Environmental Threats

**Wind Farms:** It is acknowledged that wind energy is a welcome addition to the South African energy mix and is far cleaner than coal fired energy generation. A MOU exists between EWT and BLSA for collaborative work on birds and wind energy. There is concern about the impact that wind farms could have on birds and their habitats, if developed without appropriate consideration of the possible impacts. We can learn from problems experienced in America and Europe. A joint EWT/BLSA "Position Statement on Wind Farms and Birds" has been issued. A workshop, convened by Dr. Rowena Langston (RSPB, UK), was held in Cape Town on 26 August. Important outcomes of the workshop were: (1) A wind sensitivity map to be compiled for South Africa to show where we can/can't have wind farms and (2) EIA guidelines to be drawn up for environmental practitioners. The impact of wind farms is taken very seriously, with 90% of projected developments planned for the Western Cape. Specialist committees/forums are being formed under the auspices of EWT/BLSA to monitor and manage the process.

**Solar Energy:** The impacts of solar energy farms on birds are currently under investigation.

**Species Concerns: House Crows:** Louise Stafford (task team leader for the control of Invasive Alien Species, City of Cape Town) reports that 4,480 House Crows have been killed with Stalicide baiting in the period Dec.2009 - Sept. 2010. Additional funding has been received from the National Working for Water programme, which will enable the task team to be boosted by 10 people. A trap cage has been built as a further measure. Reports have come in of re-populations in some areas that were cleared. - Louise requests that sightings be reported to [Louise.Stafford@capetown.gov.za](mailto:Louise.Stafford@capetown.gov.za)

### Proposed Environmental Sub-Committee

Time constraints prevented discussion. This item will be prioritised for the next WCBF meeting in February.

**Electricity Infrastructure and Birds** presented by Tony Williams.

Tony was commissioned by Eskom to do a two week survey to determine avian sensitivity to electricity infrastructure in the West Coast, with particular reference to Power Lines and Wind Farms. Potential impacts related to electrocution, habitat alteration and collision. Selected survey sites were;

- Berg River crossing at Misverstand-power lines,
- Kamfers Dam-Kimberley-looking at bird diverters,
- Vredenburg-proposed wind farm.

Findings from individual sites are not recorded in these minutes.

Bird eco-groups considered were:

- **Water related:** Seabirds, waterfowl, waders, shorebirds, etc - affected by fog, flight lines, nocturnal movements, flocks

- **Dryland:** Raptors, large waders, passerines (shrubland and woodland), aerial insectivores, nocturnal foragers.

**Outcomes:**

(1) Recommendations to Eskom:

- All new lines require bird evaluation
- Wind farm sites to have prior assessment in terms of potential day, and especially night, impacts on birds.
- All infrastructure to be of no or minimal risk to birds.
- All valley crossings to have bird diverters.
- Wetlands should be avoided and diverters placed on nearby lines.

Development of infrastructure:

- Be discouraged in areas of quality, but unprotected natural vegetation.
- Not approved in conserved areas except in extreme cases.

(2) General recommendations:

- BLSA and avian consultants to require better, especially nocturnal, visible detectors.
- Appropriate day / night risk appraisals to be undertaken with due regard to season / duration.
- Changed appreciation of risk priority for avian eco-groups.
- Follow-up on impacts (funding for this must be in ROD).
- Carcass study. This would be a global first.
- Improved bird information to inform decisions.
- Appraisals to be in context of the region, not just the project site.

Proposed Carcass Study: The aim would be to assess the reliability of current post-collision studies, which are biased towards recording larger birds and by carcass removal by scavengers and invertebrates. This would be suitable for an MSc. It would be simple, inexpensive and short-term.

**Personal Conclusions:**

- Waterbirds along the West Coast are at the greatest immediate risk from wind farm development in RSA.
- The risks are great, so urgent action is needed (i.e. within 6 - 12 months).
- Developers have details. Birding opposition has been minimal and so inadequate information.
- Facts are needed to oppose developments, including numbers, distribution and status of key birds at risk.

Comments (KH): Placing of wind turbines must be adjacent to an Eskom National grid line. South African Civil Aviation Authority has the policy that turbines should not be placed within 35km of an aerodrome because there could be interference with communication, navigation and surveillance systems.

Darling Demo. Farm: No ROD or bird survey was done. Pelicans cross over. There are currently four turbines and these are being extended by a further 16.

SEABIRD DIVISION: Review of Seabird Programme prepared by Ross Wanless and presented by Bronwyn Maree.\* *Refer to attachment for the detailed presentation.*

Comments / Questions Arising:

(PN): Referring to bycatch caps imposed on fishing vessels in South Africa, Peter noted that in New Zealand there is a zero tolerance approach - must be zero bycatch. Also no offal can be discarded at sea. Bronwyn said it was not the intention to impose zero tolerance on South African vessels at this stage. A very good relationship had been achieved with the fishing industry. We needed co-operation so that workable measures could be put in place. In New Zealand, no input was given from the industry and there is a lot of dissatisfaction. Offal management: We are looking for solutions, possibly by shooting it away from the vessel.

(JC): Does Marian Island come under the regulations? - Yes, the measures apply there.

(PN): Islands fall under Regions and are monitored / observed accordingly.

(PN): What is happening with regard to Namibia? - We are getting through to have observers on board.

(TW): What is the situation with regard to Bank Cormorants? - Right now we don't have the funding to address this issue, but it is in the pipeline.

(KH): Could the Tourist industry be approached for funding? - Possibly look at this.

(VH): ATF is an international success story for BirdLife International. It is funded by BLI and there have been no cuts with the economic recession. Bronwyn and the ATF team attended the first World Seabird Conference in Canada. It is hoped that the next Conference will be in Cape Town.

SOS - "Save Our Seabirds" Festival (11-15 October). This is the flagship project for WCBF. The aim is;

(1) to raise funds for scientific research in marine development and

(2) to create public awareness.

The event has huge future potential. The plan is to attach it to the World Seabird Conference. Opportunities exist for international birding cruises. There is buy-in from the hotel industry and Government. The venue for this year's festival is the Iziko South African Museum. Funding has been raised to cover costs - R200,000. Images submitted for the Photographic Competition are of the highest quality.

## FINANCES

Balance on hand: R6,500.

## GENERAL

**Bird Sanctuaries:** Paarl / Wellington: The Drakenstein Municipality is responsible for operations at seven Sewage Works, including Paarl and Wellington. Over many years, they have sanctioned the use of the Paarl Works as a bird sanctuary. John Fincham has suggested there is the opportunity to do something similar at Wellington, where re-development plans are in progress. His proposal is that some 19 disused filtration pans be re-flooded. YW has doubts as to the viability of the proposal, as there was a problem with pollution in these pans and rehabilitation would entail considerable expense. Her understanding is that it is the Municipality's plan to utilise the site for landfill. WCBF will send a letter to the Drakenstein Municipality, outlining John's proposal for consideration.

**Eerste River Diverted:** JC advises that the Eerste River was diverted during the night without the knowledge of the Macassar Sewage Works or the City of Cape Town and reeds are being cut down. VH suggests that Cliff Dorse be contacted.

## WCBF MEETINGS CALENDAR 2011

- 19 February

- 11 June \*
- 10 September \*

\* to be confirmed once BLSA Council dates are known.

#### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

**NEXT MEETING:** Saturday, 19 Feb. 2011, at Helderberg Nature Reserve, Somerset West (SWBC hosting).

*Appendix to WCBF Minutes dated 9/10/2010.*

#### **SEABIRD DIVISION UPDATE (October 2010)**

##### **A case for conservation**

- Seabirds are by far the most threatened group of birds (BirdLife International State of the Worlds Birds 2004)
- The main causes are introduced predators and Fisheries

##### **About the Seabird Division**

- Four staff: one-Seabird Division, three-Albatross Task Force.
- Division's core duties include;
  - ATF work;
  - Marine IBAs;
  - RFMO work and
  - African Penguin work.
- Core Global Seabird Programme work includes the ATF, Marine IBAs and RFMO.
- The Seabird Division Manager oversees the four sections of the Division
- African Penguin work is not funded by the GSP; independently funded by the Charl van der Merwe Trust.
- Constraints: Limited staffing capacity. Marine IBAs and some of the African Penguin work have been outsourced.

##### **Albatross Task Force (ATF)**

##### **Scale of problem:**

- 18 of 22 albatross species are threatened with extinction.
- Global distribution of albatrosses.
- ATF is a BirdLife International project
- Locally based teams work together with fishermen in 'hotspot' areas.
- Achievements - Longline fishery. 1998 - 2005 bycatch figure was 0.5 birds / 1000 hooks. In 2006 bycatch dropped drastically due to foreign vessels being kicked out of our waters. In 2007 they returned and the catch rate went up to approximately 0.35 birds / 1000 hooks. At the beginning of 2008, a vessel-specific bycatch cap was imposed and resulted in a 0.05 birds / 1000 hooks bycatch

rate (the equivalent of what was set out in the National Plan of Action for Seabirds, i.e. 25 birds / year). In 2009, this increased slightly to just over 0.1 birds/ 1000 hooks. Longliners must have mandatory measures in place which are monitored and have reduced seabird bycatch by approximately 80%. Non-compliance will result in withdrawal of a vessel's licence.

**Achievements:** Hake Trawl fishery: In 2004/5, a maximum of 18,000 birds was killed, 70% of which were albatrosses (39% Shy Albatrosses, 29% Blackbrowed Albatrosses and 14% gannets). The birds become entangled on the trawl cables holding the net in the water when they are foraging behind the vessel on fishery discards and are dragged under and drowned. Since 2006, the trawl fishery has put in place mandatory measures to reduce bycatch and this has helped reduce it by approximately 60% (also set at 25 birds/year).

- ATF experiments on new/refined measures still continue.
- We have full co-operation from SA vessels. Foreign vessels are the problem. They must have a SA observer (crew member) on board - fishing industry pays.
- Achievements: Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). Certification of products that are compliant with mitigation measures.

### **Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs)**

Currently work with 3 RFMOs. 3 phase approach has been taken:

- (1) get strong mitigation measures passed;
- (2) strengthen organisation functioning, reporting etc;
- (3) compliance and consequences.

· In the future, it is hoped that ATF work will link more closely with RFMOs to promote new technologies.

### **ATF Research into why birds are killed.**

- Research is done in both the longline and trawl fishery to try to refine and improve current measures, as well as come up with new seabird mitigation measures.
- In the trawl division, Bronwyn Maree worked on an off-setting device (1) to reduce the tangling of the bird-scaring line (the 'toriline') around the trawl cable, (2) to reduce seabird bycatch and improve its efficacy. The device was designed by the Argentinean ATF team and trialled by both teams. Results from both teams were very similar and contributed to achieving the objectives.
- Lisa Mansfield (trawl fishery) is working on the 'rory line', an added 'boom' with streamers to aid in keeping the birds away from the trawl cables. These are placed on the side of the vessel and extend to the area at which the bird-scaring lines begin. The device was developed by a local skipper, Rory Diedricks. Initial results seem positive. The industry is very excited and has taken the initiative to test the device. This work will continue into 2011.
- The Longline continues work on the 'safe-lead'. It has been shown to be safer for crew to use, as well as reducing seabird bycatch. In 2010 and 2011, will test the effect of the 'safe- lead' on the target catch. To date this does not seem to affect the target catch but does reduce the bycatch of turtle and shark, as well as seabirds.

### **Marine IBAs**

- Seed' funding from GSP for Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region - work underway in Reunion
- Included in GEF-application for Seychelles
- Funding for SA programme from Plastics Federation (with Percy FitzPatrick Institute)
- Objectives: Identify 'hotspots' and do seaward extensions from colonies

- Include marine IBAs when planning for Marine Protected Areas
- New WIO funding bid (3rd time lucky?)

### **Penguins**

- Endemic to SA and Namibia
- Around 4 million pairs at turn of last century
- 160,000 pairs in South Africa in 1984
- <26,000 pairs bred in 2009 (5,000 in Namibia)
- ~0.5% of former population size
- Been up-listed from vulnerable to endangered
- BirdLife Species Champion was found to help do work on the penguin: Charl van der Merwe Trust
- Committed >R1.5 million over 3 years
- 2 projects:
  - (1) ATF model - convince industry and MCM to 'do the right thing',
  - (2) Marine IBA model - support research on areas around islands closed to fishing.