

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Extract Minutes at Saturday, 5 October 2013, at Municipal Board Room, Queen Victoria Street, Stanford.

Vernon Head - Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard - Minutes.

Present

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

Hermanus Bird Club: Barbara Palmer, Craig Holmes.

West Coast Bird Club: Colin de Kock.

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal, Elaine Odendal.

BLSA: Mark Anderson (CEO).

BLSA: Western Cape Dale Wright.

SABAP2: Peter Nupen.

Guest Speaker: Keir Lynch (CapeNature-Overberg, Conservation Services Officer, Biodiversity Stewardship Programme).

1. PRESENTATION - (Keir Lynch).

MoU: A Partnership between the Overberg Division of CapeNature and BirdLife Overberg to promote conservation and increase awareness of Avifauna within the CapeNature Overberg Area

A MoU has been signed through which BLO will assist CN with bird counts and bird monitoring of conservation priority species at selected reserves and stewardship sites in the Overberg area. BLO will utilise opportunities to grow their membership and increase conservation awareness within their membership base.

Keir illustrated the geographic scope of the Overberg area and defined the Protected Areas Network, incorporating CapeNature, SANParks, Stewardship Sites, Conservancies and Private Nature Reserves. Six BirdLife Important Bird Areas are recognised:

- Overberg Wheatbelt (SA115),
- Botrivierlei and Kleinmond Estuary (SA118),
- De Hoop Nature Reserve (SA119),
- Dyer Island Nature Reserve (SA120),
- Heuningness River and Estuary (SA121),
- Overstrand (SA124).

The agreement will be limited initially to the following sites:

- Provincial Nature Reserves - De Hoop,
- Walker Bay,
- Quoin Point,
- De Mond,
- Salmonsdam;

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Biodiversity Stewardship Sites requiring baseline data collection within the Overberg Area. Renosterveld conservation priorities which need to go under formal protection were touched on.

The MoU recognises that both organisations have shared interests and commitment to biodiversity conservation and that the effectiveness of conservation activities can be increased through a co-operative partnership. The agreement formalises the objectives and terms of reference. A Joint Committee will manage the objectives and determine priorities which will feed into the expansion of the MoU, to be updated annually. These are:

- Baseline Data Collection on selected Provincial Reserves managed by CN within the Overberg area and on selected Biodiversity Stewardship Sites in the area.
- Baseline Data Collection will include CWAC, Coastal CWAC, My Bird Patch, SABAP2 and the monitoring of conservation priority and threatened species.
- Field rangers will accompany volunteers to ensure protocols are adhered to and to facilitate knowledge sharing.
- Providing training and facilitating knowledge sharing between CN and BLO.
- Increasing conservation education and awareness within communities in line with the shared interests of CN and BLO.

Comments

- (MA): It is commendable that BirdLife Overberg has put together this partnership for biodiversity conservation with CapeNature. It provides a model that can be replicated across other areas.
- (PN): Where are the field rangers who will be involved in the project derived from?
- (KL): Existing field ranger staff on site will be utilised; most have been with CN for many years. To date, they have been involved mainly with vegetation but the intention is to increase their awareness of birds and involvement in monitoring.
- (AO): "Flight for Birders" courses are being attended by field rangers.
- (KL): SABAP2 is now the driving force that is being used. It is also the intention to work in smaller patches, e.g. My Bird Patch - and to revive the Birds in Reserves project. (Noted that co-ordinator Doug Harebottle has been retrenched but work at the ADU will be continued by interns).

2. BIRDLIFE South Africa UPDATE - (Mark Anderson).

(1) BirdLife International World Congress. The World Congress was held in Canada in June to determine the organisation's conservation strategy for the next seven years. It was attended by representatives from almost all of BirdLife's 121 global partners. BirdLife South Africa received one of seven Partnership Awards, mainly for contributions to species conservation and the protection of IBAs in South Africa. The Charl van der Merwe Trust was recognised with the presentation of a Conservation Achievement Award for its support of the endangered African Penguin.

Mark Anderson screened a short video clip featuring BirdLife International's conservation efforts in threatened habitats of the world - diminishing forests, oceans (featuring the Albatross Task Force), migratory bird passage of the Sahel, etc. BLI is pioneering a new way of conservation for the future - working with the population for a sustainable and better life for both people and wild life.

(2) Awareness. We have a marketing team that meets regularly. The involvement and creativity of the Jupiter Drawing Room is invaluable. Birds, bird conservation and BirdLife South Africa are promoted through a

variety of media. Successful awareness campaigns have been launched: Billboards at airports and in shopping centres sponsored by Continental Media, the Hour Glass campaign, Flock and SOS.

(3) Communication includes BirdLife South Africa's website which is undergoing a major revamp, due to go live soon, a monthly e-Newsletter, the CEO's weekly Update, Facebook Page and Facebook Group, media releases and radio interviews, and the magazine African Birdlife.

(4) Magazine African Birdlife. This was an important decision. Six editions have been produced so far and the magazine goes from strength to strength. The Nov / Dec edition will have 8 extra pages.

(5) Events. Significant events have been "Flock at Sea" in which 1,200 birders participated and the "Save our Seabirds" (SOS) Festival, Sasol Bird Fair, Bird of the Year 2013 *the White-winged Flufftail* and the 2013 Owl Awards. Local Bird Club events of note include the Stanford Bird Fair organised by the Stanford Bird Club. Birding Big Day will be held on 23 November.

(6) "Flock in the 'Berg" 2014 (AGM and LAB). Venue: Mont Aux Sources in the Drakensberg. The event will incorporate a two-day ornithological conference to be known as LAB (Learning about Birds), which will be co-hosted by BirdLife South Africa and the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute. We want to encourage birders to participate. There will be lectures by the country's top ornithologists. Scientific and popular papers will be presented. International speakers will be John Croxall CBE (chair of the Global Seabird Programme) and Alison Stattersfield (previously Head of Red Data List development at BirdLife International). The programme will include opportunities for birding with the specialists. Dates: AGM 15 March, LAB 23-24 March.

Comments:

(CdK): The cost of travel is a problem when trying to draw members from more distant locations.

(MA): We want to try moving Flock around to make it accessible. An idea may be to hire a mini-bus.

(VH) The bus could carry branding, say, "WCBF goes to Flock in the "Berg" or as appropriate.

(7) Conservation. Important conservation programmes include:

(a) Seabirds - the Albatross Task Force working at sea with the Fisheries and other role players for the mitigation of seabird mortality. This hugely successful intervention, with more than 80% reduction in albatross and petrel mortalities, must be replicated in the terrestrial environment.

(b) The "Preventing Extinctions Programme" - supported by Species Champions and Species Guardians. Species involved are the African Penguin, White-winged Flufftail, Southern Bald Ibis, Secretary Bird, Taita Falcon, Ground Hornbill and Black Harrier.

(c) Other conservation priorities are vultures, bustards and larks.

(8) IBA Programme. The programme is designed to identify and protect a network of sites that are critical for the survival of naturally occurring bird species. We have four Regional Conservation Managers who focus on the IBAs in their province. To date, assessments have been completed for nearly 42% of South Africa's 122 IBAs. The stewardship programme and local conservation groups are coming on board to help protect the sites. The first ever IBA Status Report for South Africa will be completed this month and will portray the current state of the country's IBA network.

(9) SABAP2. BirdLife continues to support SABAP2 - a collaborative project of the ADU, SANBI and BLSA. This is the country's most important bird monitoring project.

(10) Birds and Renewable Energy. BirdLife South Africa supports the responsible development of a renewable energy industry in South Africa. The forecast is 20,000 wind turbines across the country. The danger of poorly planned renewable energy facilities can have a negative impact on birds and the environment and it is important to identify areas where developments can be encouraged and those that must be recognised as no-go. BirdLife South Africa is helping to influence these decisions.

(11) Future Challenges. The future holds challenges in respect of the rate of industrial and mining development, where these have the potential to impact negatively on bird populations and sites.

(12) Owl Awards 2013 (Vernon Head). This was a “Green Carpet” event held at Misty Hills Country Hotel in Johannesburg. VIPs and Sponsors attended. Recipients of this year’s awards were:

(a) Eagle-Owl award: Eve Gracie.

(b) Owl Awards: Robbie Aspelng, Helen Biram, Dept. of Environmental Affairs: Biodiversity & Conservation, Trevor Hardaker, Monika O’Leary, Adam Riley, the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, Karin van de Venter, Roger Wanless.

(c) Owlet Award: Tommy Buckham

For citations, refer to the BLSA website.

(13) “Save our Seabirds” Festival-SOS 2013 (7-13 Oct.) (Vernon Head). Features of this year’s festival include:

- The “Oceans of Life” marine photographic competition, with first prize a trip for two to Spitsbergen, sponsored by Oryx Worldwide Photographic Expeditions and One Ocean Expeditions, valued at R150,000, and first prize in the Youth Category an EOS 7D camera. 18-135mm IS lens kit plus accessories sponsored by Canon, valued at R21, 000.
- The Marine Conservation lecture series with speakers Prof. Colin Attwood (Dept. of Zoology, UCT), Emeritus Prof. George Branch (UCT) and Mike Gunton (Creative Director of the BBC Natural History Unit).
- Penguin satellite tracking.
- SOSExplore Quest Competition, an Interactive mobi-site game with great prizes for 12-21 year olds.
- Raffle for a pelagic trip, sponsored by Zest for Birds.
- Green Matters careers expo.

Roll-out to other Locations: SOS will be launched in Durban this year at the uShaka Marine World, with the 2012 “Oceans of Life” photographic exhibition, an evening cocktail function and lectures. It was envisaged that satellite events would be rolled out to the West Coast and Overberg but funding came through too late and the issue will have to be re-visited next year. Nevertheless, the Stanford Bird Club is hosting the 9th annual De Hoop Stretton’s Stanford Bird Fair to link in with the SOS festival.

Flufftail Festival: It is the intention to grow SOS, using the same model. Eskom has come on board to fund the Flufftail Festival in July 2014.

3. REGIONAL CONSERVATION & IBA UPDATE-Western Cape (Dale Wright).

(1) IBA Assessments

- 13 Assessments completed for the Western Cape and a further four in progress.
- 5 Assessments completed for the Eastern Cape.
- On track to complete assessments for almost all of the 23 Western Cape IBAs by the end of 2013.

(2) Local Conservation Groups.

- A growing number of bird clubs are adopting a more formal conservation mandate.
- The Plettenberg Bay LCG has begun operations. Projects underway are:
 - (a) Supporting a schools education programme;
 - (b) Initiating MyBirdPatch monitoring sites in key areas in the potential Tsitsikamma IBA expansion

area;

(c) Raising awareness regarding the Keurboom River's Kelp Gull colony.

- BirdLife Eastern Cape is looking to form a LCG. They have commenced a monitoring project at the Maitland mouth to establish bird numbers and have committed to undertaking beach clean-up and monitoring/survey work along the Maitland-Gamtoos coast in early 2014.

(3) Funding

- (a) Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project: A funding application to WWF-SA and Nedbank's Green Trust was successful and BLSA will be managing a project to secure the Verlorenvlei estuary and Moutonshoek catchment protected areas. Dale will be overseeing the project and will be responsible for an incumbent to be employed to undertake the project.
- (b) Overberg Region: Funding proposal accepted for a collaborative project between BLSA and the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust to support funding of stewardship programmes in the region. An information booklet will be produced aimed at educating farmers on the important fauna and flora of the region and on land management practices to improve the landscape for biodiversity.

(4) Marketing the IBA Programme and BirdLife South Africa.

Dale continues to conduct public presentations and radio interviews and write articles for selected magazines and newsletters. He has assisted with applications for BFE establishments in the Western Cape to promote BLSA and bird-watching in the region.

(5) Representation.

Dale sits on a number of forums and committees, representing BLSA and providing input on bird related conservation matters.

(6) **IBA Signboards.** Dale calls on all Western Cape bird clubs to consider supporting the erection of informational signboards at IBAs across the country. The Tygerberg Bird Club has agreed to fund an IBA signboard at the Rietvlei wetland IBA. Club chairpersons should contact Dale in this connection.

Awareness. Planning has started for a second False Bay Ecology Park (FBEP) "Birdathon" Fun Walk following the success of the first. (VH): The intention is to attach an event of this nature to IBAs which will form part of the package we present to potential sponsors.

Research. Dale is co-supervising a Stellenbosch University Conservation Ecology Honours student who is developing a Fire management Plan for the FBEP as part of course requirements.

National IBA Programme. IBA brochures have been produced for a number of Provinces, providing information on key habitats, species and threats found in respective Provinces. These are being distributed to involved and interested groups.

4. FALSE BY ECOLOGY PARK/STRANDFONTEIN (IBA SA116)

(1) **IBA Pilot Site-Progress Report on Funding** (Dale Wright). The corporate funding proposal has been completed and has been translated into a Power Point presentation which will be taken to potential donors in October. A second proposal for infrastructure developments is being prepared for submission to the Dept. of Trade & Industry.

(2) **Management Plan** (Dave Whitelaw): Council has agreed to a permanent post for a Manager. Erica Essig has elected to stay with FBEP. We will now try to get agreement for a permanent Foreman post.

(3) **Quad Bikes** (Dave Whitelaw): Quad bikes at Strandfontein are an intermittent problem. Fencing is not a viable proposition.

5. CONSERVATION CONCERNS

WEST COAST UPDATE (Keith Harrison). Colin presented key points from Keith's report.

(1) Public Resort on Langebaan Lagoon. SANParks proposes to construct a rest camp at Klein Mooimaak on the Langebaan lagoon, comprising 15 chalets and 20 tent sites, with the possibility also of a caravan park, plus an upgrade of the existing Kraalbaai Day Visitors' site. The site chosen is on the eastern edge of the lagoon and will be zoned for "low intensity leisure" which allows motorised activity in that section of the lagoon. The location of the Klein Mooimaak Rest Camp will impact directly on wader activity from Seeberg to the southern end of the lagoon. The Public Participation Process has commenced. Bird clubs are urged to register as IAPs by sending an email to Monique Sham of Khula Environment Consultants at moniquesham@gmail.com

(2) Mining Concerns.

(a) Oliphants Estuary (IBA SA099). A beach mining operation for Heavy Minerals has commenced north of the estuary. This is a 5-year project with prospects of extension as the main mineral body lies offshore; it is claimed wave action would recharge the beach. The concern is that there are other applications along the coast that could lead to beach mining.

(b) Verlorenvlei. The Berg River Municipality has rejected the re-zoning for prospecting.

(3) Appointment of Rangers.

- Oliphants Estuary: CapeNature is looking to fund a Ranger position.
- Verlorenvlei: Funding for a Ranger and registration as a Protected Area has been led by BLSA.
- Lower Berg River Wetlands: Selection of a Ranger completed and appointee will be in place before the summer season.

(4) Lower Berg River Wetlands (IBA SA104).

Ramsar site application progressing. Will be from the Carinus Bridge to the Berg River Bridge. - It is hoped that the volunteer policing boat can be accompanied by the Ranger once a month to inspect the whole length of the river. - De Plaat Hide to be removed by the District Municipality because of its dangerous state. - A prototype buoy to be tested soon and then navigation through the sensitive area of De Plaat can be marked. - Water quality. Continuous monitoring of sites producing excellent results. DWA to find a laboratory able to handle samples ranging from sea to fresh water. - Research. Two Sensory Ecologists from the UK have been working on survival rates of endemic plover eggs in the Berg River Salt Pans using camera traps. Of 56 nests monitored, only five hatched; the major predator was Pied Crows.

(5) West Coast National Park (IBA SA105). - Jet Skis.

Control measures introduced. - Kiteboarders. Signage erected on the 'Town' beaches to separate the kiteboarders from other beach users. If successful, it is hoped to introduce control over kiteboarders using Shark Bay where birds are being disturbed at Seeberg hide.

- Shark Bay development. There could be an out of court settlement. - Expansion of National Park. (a) Hopefield: the Park will manage the area of the Wind Farm not being utilized for turbines (b) North/South corridor, joining the Park to Milnerton along the coast will add 40,000ha to the Park. Public Participation Process commencing.

(6) Saldanha Area. (a) New EIAs for major projects include: Crude oil storage (11-million barrels); LPG storage (17,000 tonnes); 3 Wind farms; 1 Solar farm; Cement factory; Titanium smelter (Heavy minerals); Rare Earth minerals processing plant; Chlorine and Alkali factory; two Reverse Osmosis desalination plants; Major Port Upgrade to handle 83MTA - siltation from dredging will damage wader feeding areas. (b) Salmon farming being planned in the Saldanha area. The process will wash out vast amounts of silt and the lagoon would take major impact. The mussel farm would be wiped out.

(7) Hopefield Wind Farm. Underway, with +/- 30 turbines up.

OTHER CONSERVATION ISSUES (Dave Whitelaw)

(1) Phillipi Wetlands. The City is planning a major development in the area. Problems of the area are crime, pollution, water quality and low morale among farmers. We want to get a Conservancy going.

(2) Knysna Warbler. It is recognised that the Knysna Warbler is in a state of decline on the Peninsula. The main cause is a change in habitat structure due to the encroachment of forest into the thicket vegetation that they need. An investigation is underway to assess the number of remaining birds so as to monitor the population. We are talking with Tony Rebelo to see what can be done to make the habitat more amenable.

6. OVERBERG UPDATE (Anton Odendal)

(1) MoU with Overberg Division of CapeNature (refer to "Presentation" on page 1).

(2) Educational Posters: Educational posters are up at Dent gardens in Somerset West and at the Pearly Beach information centre; still to do at Fernkloof Nature Reserve. BirdLife Plettenberg Bay will be sponsoring a poster at Nature's Valley and a poster is going up at Intaka Island.

(3) Website: Page loads on the website have more than tripled and the site is now well positioned to market the Western Cape as a top birding destination. The Birdfinder is in operation. 26% of daily visitors are international. We are on Facebook and will be looking at Twitter.

(4) BLO Golf Day 2014 will be held at the Arabella golf course on 19 March 2014. The event will be themed "Giving Black Harriers Wings" and will be aimed at raising funds for research and educational projects in support of the Black Harrier.

(5) Desk Calendar 2014: BLO has developed a full colour 15-page desk calendar focusing on some of the threatened bird species of South Africa. A description of the conservation threats facing each specific bird is given on the reverse of the page. Proceeds will go to the Black Harrier projects.

(6) "Flight for Birders" Courses: A course is scheduled to take place at Intaka Island on 16/17 November. Courses planned in early 2014 are: George 23/24 January, Plettenberg Bay 30/31 January, again at Intaka Island 15/16 February, Hermanus 21/22 February.

7. SABAP2 UPDATE (Peter Nupen).

(1) **National:** To date, 93,388 Full Protocol Cards have been submitted to the SABAP2 database at the ADU. This means that 5,322 FPCs have been submitted since the last WCBF meeting on 8 June. Indications remain that 30-40 cards are being submitted daily which puts us well on track to reach the major goal of 100,000 FPCs. Pentad coverage of the 17,318 blocks now stands at 12,332 or 71.21% of the whole country. This is up from 68.7%, showing that 544 new pentads were covered in the last four months – a great achievement as virgin pentads are difficult to come by due to their remoteness, often in high and difficult to reach mountain ranges or way off the beaten track in the Northern Cape.

(2) **Western Cape:** Of the 1,837 pentads, 1,560 have at least one atlas card which equates to 84.9% of the Western Cape, 1,215 pentads have at least two cards (66.1% coverage) and 538 pentads have at least seven cards (29.3%). In terms of total cards reported on, the Western Cape leads the whole country in each respective category, which is a great achievement. Two "Atlas Bashes" to remote areas have taken place in the last four months, one to Loeriesfontein in the Western Cape and one to Brandtvlei straddling the Northern and Western Cape.

Feedback on atlasing is now automated. It is important that the momentum continues as the project is now close to achieving 100% coverage. (MA) Automation is good but it is a concern that feedback to participants may suffer. PN will follow through with the ADU.

Action: Peter Nupen

8. ADU RE-STRUCTURING (Dave Whitelaw).

The ADU was informed earlier this year that their financial model was unsustainable and re-structuring had become a necessity. The outcome was that four long-serving members of staff have been retrenched, among them Doug Harebottle and Donella Young, closely involved co-ordinators of citizen science projects. The operational roles which are fundamental to the functioning of the ADU remain. These are the development and maintenance of the information systems, the leadership of SAFRING and the administrative and financial oversight of projects. The ADU will be using interns to support projects. These are short-term engagements and training and continuity will be lost. No one was consulted and it is feared that the biological sciences are becoming less important at UCT. The question is how do we approach this? - the problem is funding. Concerns for the future are other key personnel who are integral to SABAP2 and SAFRING. (MA) The demise of the ADU cannot be contemplated. We must find ways of making the operation sustainable.

9. GENERAL

(1) Proposed Drakenstein Ecopark. John Fincham has submitted a concept document for the establishment of a Drakenstein Park by linking the Paarl Bird Sanctuary with the Wellington pans, the clean Berg River, Paarl Mountain and other features for use primarily as an income generating holistic example that sets a benchmark of high quality environmental management. John had had discussions with Paarl Environmental Councillor, Dr. Lourens du Toit, and it has been suggested that the concept could include the Paarl Arboretum along the bank of the Berg River through the town as a green belt linking with the Ecopark. DW will liaise with John in this connection.

Action: Dave Whitelaw

(2) SA Wetland Society. At the last meeting, Anne Gray reported on proposals put forward by the Society for moving towards the accreditation of practitioners in the Wetland Community of Practice in South Africa. Tony Williams reports that the Wetland Society is negotiating with the South African Council for Scientific Professions and hopes to make an announcement after their AGM. Tony has registered as a member of SACNASP.

(3) Proposed "Frank Wygold Eco Education Award". DW proposed that a BLSA Eco Education Award be established named after Frank Wygold for individuals making a notable contribution to Eco Education. VH felt this might be better placed as a WCBF award. For consideration.

Action: Vernon Head.

10. WCBF MEETINGS CALENDAR 2014

- **08 February**
- **07 June**
- **27 September.**