

# Western Cape Birding Forum

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

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**Minutes** of the meeting held at the Loeries Nest Lapa, Ebb & Flow, Wilderness  
Saturday 12 September 2015.

**Vernon Head** - Chaired the Meeting.

**Sylvia Ledgard** - Minutes.

## **Present**

**Cape Bird Club:** Vernon Head, Sylvia Ledgard, Dave Whitelaw, Julian Hare.

**Tygerberg Bird Club:** Brian Vanderwalt.

**BirdLife Overberg:** Anton Odendal.

**BirdLife Plettenberg Bay:** Bruce Ward-Smith, Philip & Barbara Murton, Crystal Paterson,  
Jeanette & George Powter.

**Namaqualand Bird Club:** Salome Willemse.

**Lakes Bird Club:** Pat Nurse, Gail Hanekom, John Bircher.

**Namaqualand Bird Club:** Salome Willemse.

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

**Somerset West Bird Club:** Bryan Butler, Sakkie Krynauw, Elzette Klue.

**Stanford Bird Club:** Peter Hochfelden (representing Walker Bay Bird Fair)

**Cape Nature:** Kevin Shaw (Scientific Services).

**BLSA:** Dale Wright (Reg. Conservation Manager, W. Cape), Sam Ralston (Manager,  
Renewable Energy Division), Mmatjie Mashao (Seabird Programme).

**Visitor:** Tony Williams (Ornithologist).

## **Apologies**

Mike Bridgeford, Bill Naude, Colin de Kock, Kobus Graaff.

**Record of Note:** This meeting of the Western Cape Birding Forum formed part of a weekend conference with representatives from most of the bird clubs of the Western Cape. Family members attended the weekend's events.

**Keynote Address:** "*Birds that Rock and Jump in the Fynbos*" (*Implication of Climate Change for Fynbos Endemic birds*) by Dr. Alan Lee, Post Doctoral Fellow of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute.

**\* Refer to Appendix 1 of these minutes for a record of Alan Lee's address.**

## **1. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

Confirmation of Minutes of Previous Meeting (6/6/2015). Minutes agreed.

## **2. IMPORTANT BIRD & BIODIVERSITY AREAS OF SOUTH AFRICA.** (Dale Wright)

The IBA Programme has successfully completed the assessments and revision of the entire national IBA Network. 124 IBAs were assessed covering over 12 million hectares. The IBA network now consists of 112 IBAs, 98 of global and 14 of regional status. This has been a 4-year project, analysing the state of the habitats, the threats and conservation responses.

- Trigger species have been updated for all of the IBAs.
- IBA Map published and available on-line showing the boundaries of the 112 IBAs.

- Revised IBA Directory for South Africa 2015 published and will be launched this month along with the first ever IBA Status Report which will provide a baseline for future IBA Status and Trend reports. Hard copies of the Directory will be made available – each bird club will get a complimentary copy - and the IBA Programme is developing a marketing and publicity pack for the document which will include revised regional IBA brochures, a national IBA poster for educational purposes and slide templates for use by bird clubs. The Directory gives site descriptions for each IBA, the birds, IBA trigger species, other biodiversity and conservation issues. IBA Prioritisation Process. The next step will be to rank IBAs for conservation action to be taken by BLSA and its partners. This will be done by a process of points scoring based on a “decision tree”.

Status of Western Cape IBAs. Of the 24 IBAs assessed, the majority are unchanged. The major revisions are:

- Bot River IBA renamed the Cape Whale Coast. The IBA stretches from Betty’s Bay to Stanford and incorporates the Bot River Estuary and Klein River Estuary, Stony Point penguin colony and Fernkloof Nature Reserve.
- Creation of the Agulhas Plain-Heuningnes Estuary IBA, incorporating the previous Heuningnes Estuary and Overstrand IBAs and including De Mond Nature Reserve.
- Eastern False Bay Mountains IBA renamed Boland Mountains IBA.

\* Refer to Appendix 2 of these minutes for a listing of the Western Cape IBAs.

Eastern Cape IBAs. Dale noted the following changes:

- Expansion of the Tsitsikama IBA, starting at the Tsitsikama National Park and extending west to include sites at Nature’s Valley, Keurbooms River Nature Reserve & Estuary, Robberg Nature Reserve and Bitou River wetlands of Plettenberg Bay. Renamed Tsitsikama-Plettenberg Bay IBA.
- Karoo Nature Reserve renamed Cambedoo National Park IBA.

**Record of note:** Vernon congratulated Dale on the completion of the IBA project and his important contribution to the revision of the IBA Directory.

### **3. WESTERN CAPE REGIONAL CONSERVATION REPORT (Dale Wright).**

Dale will issue a comprehensive review of his conservation work of the past year in his annual report to the funder (Rupert Nature Foundation). Updates given at the meeting covered:

(1) Protected Area Expansion at Western Cape IBAs:

Verlorenvlei and Moutonshoek: Buy-in from the farmers was a prerequisite to proceed. 11 landowners have signed formal MoUs with CapeNature which will enable the legal process to go ahead to have the Verlorenvlei Estuary proclaimed as a Protected Environment. A “Landowners’ Needs Analysis” has been completed for all landowners surrounding the Verlorenvlei estuary, which will be used to analyse steps to be taken for protection of the estuary.

Cape Estuaries Stewardship Project - Estuary Conservation: The project will focus initially on the Berg River Estuary and Klein River Estuary and is designed to test the types of protection that can be used in the estuarine environment to ultimately secure formal conservation protection. Giselle Murison has been appointed to manage the project. A four point approach will be used:

- Look at landowner issues.
- Negotiate with farmers and other landowners.
- Proceed with proclamation phase.

- Establish maintenance programme.

Catchment and watercourse areas will be looked at as a separate project.

(2) Vergenoeged Waterbird Habitat and Water Quality project:

Dale is working with NCC Environmental Services on this project which is designed to improve the waterbird habitat on farm dams. The project was launched at Vergenoeged Wine Estate in June and a number of partner farms have come on board to pilot test a floating island design for waterbirds.

(3) Overberg Fauna and Flora booklet:

Due to be published and will be used to raise awareness of threatened biodiversity within the Overberg region and provide management guidelines to interested farmers with particular emphasis on preserving the Renosterveld. Dale provided bird descriptions for the text.

(4) False Bay Nature Reserve:

- Funding: Corporate fundraising efforts continue for skills development and education projects. A sponsor has not been found as yet. Dale will be drafting a funding proposal for the City of Cape Town.
- Birdathon Fun Walk 2015: The 3rd annual "Birdathon" at Strandfontein Birding Area attracted 800 participants and has doubled in attendance every year since its inception.
- Academic Research Projects:
  - (i) A UCT MSc student examined the community perceptions of visitors to FBNR and the outcomes of his research will be communicated to reserve management;
  - (ii) A CPUT BTech. student is currently completing a project investigating bird species abundance at FBNR, using long-term bird count data from the Strandfontein Birding Area.

**4. HOTTENTOT BUTTONQUAIL PROJECT** (Dale Wright) - an extension of the Fynbos Endemic Birds Project. Dale is working with Alan Lee on the research project to determine the status of the Hottentot Buttonquail. They will undertake surveys in November and December across the range of the Hottentot Buttonquail, starting in the Hermanus area, to improve knowledge of distribution, habitat preferences and hopefully population density estimates.

Funding: Bird club initiatives are being sought to support funding for the project. BirdLife Overberg raised R30,000 via a member website challenge and other fundraising initiatives. Dale has digital screen prints of four endemic birds and suggested bird clubs could sell them individually or as a set to raise funds with a percentage going to the club. The price would have to be looked at to make them saleable. VH suggested orders should be taken before printing. They could also be printed on t-shirts.

(JH): Consider a limited signed edition. (BvdW): Clubs could buy the prints and then sell by auction.

#### **5. THE CONSERVATION WORK OF THE BIRDLIFE-PLETT/NATURE'S VALLEY TRUST PARTNERSHIP.**

In 2013, Dale initiated the formation of the BirdLife-Plett Local Conservation Group (LCG) in partnership with Nature's Valley Trust and BirdLife South Africa. Terms of Reference were signed with BirdLife South Africa, several other partners were drawn in, and in April 2013 the LCG was launched. The aim of LCGs is to draw local resources together to advance conservation through local bird clubs. Dr. Mark Brown, Planning Director of Nature's Valley Trust, presented the work being done in the area.

#### **Conservation Education.**

A program of conservation and eco education is taken into local schools with a "Birding Masters and Champions" program running in 4 schools. The idea is to link children who show interest and aptitude ("champions") with bird club members ("birding masters") on outings and fun activities to grow their knowledge. An inter-school quiz and competition is planned in November 2015. Mark noted that to get into schools, it is helpful to partner with an NGO that already has access to schools.

## **Ecological Research.**

Partnerships have been set up with the CapeNature Scientific Services and Percy Fitzpatrick Institute to host students engaged in research projects. Projects being worked on are:

- Tsitsikama Fynbos Research program.
- Keurbooms Kelp Gull program.
- Garden Route Shorebird project.
- Fisherman Ecological Impact program (SANParks).

**Tsitsikama Fynbos Research program.** The program focuses on nectar feeding birds. Bird ringing is a big component of the research.

**Kelp Gull Program.** Keurbooms has the largest land-based breeding colony of Kelp Gulls with +/- 5,000 pairs of gulls nesting. A drone was used to carry out surveys. Ringing is an important component of research and has yielded some interesting recoveries. The area of research was the foraging behaviour of Kelp Gulls and what proportion of their food component was anthropogenic (plastic, rope, fishing line, etc.) and what natural food items. Results show that for both breeding and non-breeding adults terrestrial foraging dominates and anthropogenic material constitutes a high proportion of regurgitations (+/- 98%) with plastic making up more than half. An interesting aspect is that food taken to chicks is nearly 80% natural marine based food items. Anthropogenic material was found to be used in Kelp Gull nests, with plastic packaging being the largest component.

- The study enables targeting of communities in relation to the rubbish that is being left.  
Shorebird Project. The focus of the study is disturbance at nests. Many coastal birds nest on the beach, with the breeding season between September and April and high density tourism activities taking place in December. Surveys are being made at Kelp Gull, African Black Oystercatcher and White-fronted Plover nests and measures taken of the effect of human disturbance/traffic (walkers, joggers, dogs).
- It was found that Kelp Gulls have no problem, remaining on the nest or moving off for less than a minute; African Black Oystercatchers are affected and can be off the nest for up to 9 minutes.
- White-fronted Plover: There is cause for concern. A once common species, the population has reduced by 60% in the area. Nests and chicks are not faring well for a variety of reasons. People and dogs walking near the nests are a factor. Public awareness must be engaged by direct interaction. This is being done with the erection of conservation information boards on beaches and there is potential for educational programmes.  
Fisherman Ecological Impact program. Fisherman related debris impacts on both fish stocks and birds. Fishermen constitute 10% of beach users but contribute 39% of the litter. Looking at the relationship between where fishermen are and fishing related debris on the beaches, fishing related items are the largest individual component among plastic, packaging, food, etc. The survey results show who to target. The LCG is assisting by providing bins for fishing items.

**Conservation in Action.** The Plett LCG partnership is contributing to:

- IBA expansion project.
- Plett Hope Spot (Robberg MPA).
- National citizen science projects.
- Beach patrols at Plett and Nature's Valley and litter clean-ups.
- Public awareness campaigns

- Public participation days to educate communities.
- Fishermen's bins
- Conservation notice boards
- Rehabilitation assistance to Tenikwe & Radical Raptors.
- Incoming Plett Birding Route - bird checklists and fun bird hides.
- Starting process to create a new African Penguin colony.

### **The Big Picture.**

- The long-term goal of the LCG partnership's marine and coastal work is a formal link between the two Marine Protected Areas - Tsitsikama (the oldest in S.A, proclaimed in 1964) and Robberg - thus creating protection for the whole of the bay.
- The long-term goal of the education and community work is better educated and mobilised communities that understand the environment they live in and how the choices they make affect it.

### **6. KNYSNA HOPE SPOT** an Update (Pat Nurse).

The Knysna Hope Spot was launched in December 2014. In January 2015, the first Hope Spot committee meeting was convened by Vernon Gibbs-Hall of Eden District Municipality. The success of the launch was accepted and the way forward looked at. It was agreed that this should be in the form of environmental education for both teachers and scholars with poverty alleviation the desired outcome.

SANParks has been trying to work with various schools' environmental clubs but there is generally a difficulty with access to schools. Meetings have been held with the Education Department with a view to running a marine programme targeting Grade 7 learners in Knysna. It is hoped to be able to host one Grade 7 class per week throughout 2016. Knysna Basin Project is keen to come in on this and has drafted a "Wave of Change" proposal to enable Knysna to take ownership of their environment through knowledge, empowering the community to make an impact, and promoting the estuary as a valuable commodity.

Webcam at Heads: Knysna Municipality Environmental Department is hoping to channel some funds linked to the Hope Spot for a webcam at the Heads on the Peregrine Falcon's nest.

The Lakes Bird Club is involved in these initiatives.

Database: Tony Ribbink is collaborating with Done Louw of Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism to develop a database for encouraging tours involving education and activities in the area.

### **7. ENVIRONMENTAL/CONSERVATION CONCERNS.**

#### **WIND AND SOLAR ENERGY.**

(1) Vredenburg (KH). The Vredenburg application for the expansion of the WEF has been withdrawn. Sally Hofmeyr is putting up species maps indicating key species present. This is the only green pentad in the area, having been atlased four times in terms of SABAP2 protocols.

(2) Gouda (KH). This is a disaster with a whole line of turbines at the base of the mountain, directly in the path of migrating birds.

(3) Voëlvlei (TW). WEF applications for developments south of Gouda are a concern. The Ventura application for +/- 100 turbines 10km away from Voëlvlei is one. It is hoped that the inclusion of Voëlvlei in the West Coast IBA will give leverage to stopping the development.

(4) Overhead lines (BvdW). Proposed siting of turbines must take account of overhead cables. It is suggested these should come close to the road and then go underground. This would reduce associated traffic for maintenance. (KH) At Aurora, Vredenburg and Hopefield, there is a net of lines and is something we must start looking at. Action: Sam Ralston

(5) Solar Facility (KH). The EIA has been passed for the construction of a solar facility at Brakkefontein near Mamre.

(6) Pre-construction Monitoring (Sam Ralston). Forum members have expressed concern that there are instances where developers have commenced construction before monitoring data was in (e.g. Gouda). Sam advised that there is massive development pressure. A lot of this is prospecting with possibly only 2% of applications being approved and built. Of 1,127 applications for renewable energy facilities received by the department to date, 914 (30,693 MW) have been finalised, with 94 (12,141 MW) approved for Wind Energy and 379 (18,032 MW) for Solar Energy. Most of the finalised applications are located in the Northern Cape, followed by the Western Cape, then the Eastern Cape. It is not possible to deal with all EIAs. The quality of surveys being undertaken by EIA specialists, poor skills and limited knowledge of the people appointed to do the surveys, have come in for criticism. The blacklisting of specialists is impossible, given the number of surveys and time lags. Updated "Best Practice Guidelines (Wind Energy)" for developers has been issued to ensure EIAs are carried out effectively. It is in reviewing EIAs that problems are identified. The involvement of bird clubs and citizen scientists pre-installation is very important.

(7) Post-construction Monitoring (Sam Ralston). Six site owners are sharing results of post-construction monitoring with BLSA. To date: 3 Verreaux's Eagles have been killed at one site, 15 Amur Falcons, 1 Secretary Bird, 1 Black Harrier, no Waterbirds, Blue Cranes or Vultures.

- Sam will be attending a Birds & Renewable Energy conference in Johannesburg on 15 October.

**WEST COAST ISSUES** (Report submitted by Keith Harrison).

### **(1) Saldahna Bay**

- Re-formation of Saldahna Forum.
- IDZ developments.
- Mining:
  - (a) AfriSam limestone mine and cement factory. Problem: EIA passed but Tortoise Reserve is not included in the offset. Can BLSA use any influence with AfriSam to have this area included?
  - (b) Elandsfontein phosphate mine projected to commence production at the end of 2016.
  - (c) Britannia Bay phosphate deposit and others along Bok River. Interest includes off-shore mining and a possible fertiliser factory. Potential problems for birds.

### **(2) Berg River**

- Kersefontein: Alien clearance restores river and floodplain.
- Water monitoring and chemical analysis finding areas where problems occur.
- Giselle Murison introduced as BLSA's Cape Estuaries Stewardship Project Manager for Berg and Bot Rivers.
- Launching sites gazetted for boating.
- De Plaat hide.
- Flaminkvlei: Another application has come in for rezoning site into town limits.
- West Coast Bird Club preparing SOS/Environmental presentations for West Coast and Sandveldt Schools.

### **(3) West Coast National Park**

- Reeds at Abrahamskraal.
- Upgrade of Seeberg hide.
- Student disturbance at Seeberg hide.

#### **(4) Renewable Energy**

- Vredenburg WEF application withdrawn
- Solar facility near Mamre.
- Landowners in Lower Berg Estuary would like BLSA to give a presentation on all the forms of renewable energy.

**Action: Sam Ralston.**

#### **(5) General**

- Control of Pied Crows: indiscriminate targeting of mammals and birds by small scale farmers.
- MSc student at ADU commencing field work on Berg River saltpans to understand why hatching rate of Chestnut-banded and Kittlitz's Plovers was so poor last year.
- Feeding of wild birds.

#### **8. PROPOSED CUBAs PROJECT** (Dave Whitelaw).

Tony Williams motivated a proposal to identify CUBAs (Critical Urban Bird Areas) with a view to their conservation. CUBAs are sites that are too small for IBA status but are locally important for birds. A working committee has been looking at the feasibility of the project and Dave briefed WCBF on progress. The working committee believes this is an excellent idea and one that would plug the gap between IBAs and other sites. It is proposed that the project be extended beyond urban areas to include other important sites such as farm dams and that the name be changed to LIBAs (Locally Important Bird Areas).

A starting point would be to establish criteria to qualify a site for designation as a CUBA/LIBA. Documented criteria would give status and weight to a CUBA/LIBA in any future objection to proposed development. A provisional set of criteria has been distributed to Forum members and members are asked to review the document and email Dave with feedback/comments to enable the committee to proceed with further planning.

It is hoped that BirdLife South Africa will support the project and that bird clubs and other interested parties will take on the monitoring of sites. The intention is to develop the project with minimum impact on BLSA capacity.

#### **9. OVERBERG UPDATE** (Report submitted by Anton Odendal).

(1) Birding Interest Groups in the Witzenberg Region. In the past, there was a fairly strong interest group at Tulbach and the Witzenberg Bird Club at Ceres. Both of these faded away due to a variety of reasons. Local community members approached Anton when he was doing fieldwork for development of the Witzenberg birdfinder web pages, with a view to trying to revive these groups. Anton estimates there are at least 250 potential BirdLife members in the region.

Actions planned:

- A "Flight for Birders" course was presented at Tulbach and a core of 10 people identified who could potentially drive the establishment of a new group.
- The Ceres Tourism Office has invited Anton and Elaine to do a presentation at the quarterly meeting of their members and product owners (an estimated 50 people) on 15 September.
- The possibility of presenting a "Flight for Birders" course in Ceres during November is being investigated with a view to getting things going in that area.

(2) Birdfinder Web Pages.

Established Pages: The Overstrand, Plett and Cape Town pages are in place and marketing campaigns were run before December, Easter and winter holiday periods featuring the top 10 birding destinations in each of

the areas. With these, 30,000+ views were achieved on Facebook alone and 13,500+ hits on the website. Of the latter, more than 20% were from overseas. Most importantly, there were five times more requests for guiding, information, itineraries, etc. over the December period when compared to December 2013.

Witzenberg: The birdfinder web page for the Witzenberg local municipal region was launched during the second week of July and has achieved the following results:

- Facebook link to web page posted on 20 July: 6,291 views.
- Weekly feature on Ceres posted on 20 July: 3,648 reached.
- Weekly feature on Swaarmoed Pass posted on 26 July: 2,156 reached.
- Weekly feature on the road between Ceres and Tankwa posted on 7 August: 2,850 reached.
- Weekly feature on the Tulbach district posted on 12 August: 1,256 reached.
- Website. Visits to the web page within the first week: 1,873.
- Total visits to the web page: 4,382.

Statistics last drawn on 20 August. Priorities for future development of birdfinder web pages: Cape Agulhas, Bergrivier, George and Langeberg local municipal regions.

(3) Overberg Feedback.

- Workshops presented on LBJs and summer migrants of the Western Cape and these will be followed up by practical outings facilitated by senior birders.
- Research and development work on the birdfinder web page for the Theewaterskloof local municipal region is progressing well and we hope to launch by the end of September.
- Research and development work on the birdfinder web page for the Swellendam local municipal region has commenced and the first phase will be completed by mid-September.

## **10. EVENTS IN THE WESTERN CAPE:**

Walker Bay Bird Fair (Peter Hochfelden). The Walker Bay Bird Fair (WBBF), which originated as the Stanford Bird Fair, was a collaborative undertaking last year of the Stanford and Hermanus bird clubs and marked the start of what is envisaged to become a regional Western Cape bird fair with potentially huge spin-off in funding for conservation. The Rutland Bird Fair in England, which attracts thousands of visitors annually and raises millions in cash, is the inspiration for what can be achieved.

Next year 2016, the Bird Fair will be held at Fernkloof Nature Reserve in Hermanus in the last week of February. Going forward, it is hoped to acquire a permanent site for the fair alongside the Klein River estuary, which would enable incorporation of training, educational and birding facilities. To realise this vision for the Western Cape, buy-in and support are needed from the bird clubs. Clubs can participate in the fair by coming up with initiatives such as selling tickets for raffle prizes. The bulk of income so derived will be ring-fenced for conservation with a percentage going to the club.

Importantly, bird clubs are asked to put the Bird Fair into their calendar of events for the year and encourage members and families to attend. Date: 5 days, 24-28 Feb. 2016.

**Action: Bird Clubs.**

Notes:

- 1) The brand "Walker Bay Bird Fair" is significant and must be carried forward.
- 2) Sponsorship is being sought from a major photographic supplier. This is crucial to taking the event forward.
- 3) We have R18,500 left over from the 2015 fair which will be used for 2016.
- 4) The site has already been booked at Fernkloof.

5) An entrance fee will be charged.

6) Space is needed for growth. A permanent site, as envisaged on the Klein River estuary, will preserve the area and training and educational facilities as a by-product will attract sponsorship more successfully. We are working with local authorities and people involved in conservation.

Dale will go with Giselle to look at the site.

**Action: Dale Wright.**

1. Comment (Crystal Paterson): There must be more extensive advertising of the fair to bring it to the attention of the birding community and the public generally. (PH) WBBF needs a big name sponsor as funds are insufficient for extensive advertising.

2. Bird Club Representation on the Forum. Club committees will appoint a representative, who would normally be the chairperson of the club, to attend Forum meetings. This person will be the formal representative of the club and will be mandated to act and vote on the club's behalf. In the absence of the mandated member, a proxy may be appointed. Other committee members may also attend meetings of the Forum, in particular the member for conservation.

3. Other Attendees at meetings of the Forum:

(a) Relevant BirdLife South Africa staff and especially the Regional Conservation Manager. Voting rights do not apply.

(b) Invited representatives of relevant conservation organisations or scientific institutions or members of the public who are involved in research and conservation work, in order to share expertise and contribute to discussion, understanding and co-operation. Voting rights do not apply.

#### **11. BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA** (Vernon Head).

(1) Club Action in terms of new BLSA Constitution. Bird clubs that have elected to become Affiliate Members of BirdLife South Africa are required to take action as follows:

- Bring their constitutions into line with the new BirdLife South Africa constitution.
- Sign a partnership Affiliation Agreement with BirdLife South Africa.

A first copy of the Affiliation Agreement was sent earlier to the clubs. This is in the process of being revised after further consultation and will be forwarded to bird clubs within the next few weeks.

(2) Flock in Kruger 2016 (10 -12 March). Flock will be held at the Skukuza camp in the Kruger National Park and will include a 2-day LAB conference -"Learning about Birds" (10 & 11 March), co-hosted by BirdLife South Africa and the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute. Discounted rates for accommodation have been negotiated.

(3) Flock at Sea Again 2017 (24 - 28 April). Flock will be held on board the MSC Sinfonia and will follow a route along the continental shelf from Cape Town and back again. BLSA has been able to plot the route which will take the liner into waters right at the edge of the 200 nautical mile EEZ. More than 650 cabins have been booked to date and 680 bookings are needed to secure the voyage exclusively for BirdLife South Africa.

(4) New BLSA Headquarters-Isdell House. The official opening of BirdLife South Africa's new headquarters will take place in November. The property is owned by the BirdLife National Trust and rented for a nominal amount by BirdLife South Africa. The purchase and renovation of Isdell House was sponsored by a number of generous donors specifically for the purpose, so no conservation funding was used for the project. BirdLife South Africa contributed a relatively small cash amount plus the proceeds from the sale of their existing property.

**NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 6 February 2016, at the Helderberg Nature Reserve Environmental Centre, Somerset West.** SWBC will be hosting this meeting.

#### **WCBF MEETINGS CALENDAR 2016**

- 6 February

- 4 June
- 3 September

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*\* Appendix 1 - WCBF Minutes 12/9/2015.*

A record of the address given by Dr. Alan Lee, Postdoctoral Fellow of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, at the meeting of the Western Cape Birding Forum on 12 September 2015.

**“Birds that Rock and Jump in the Fynbos” - A research study on the Implication of Climate Change for Fynbos Endemic birds.**

**Background:** Mountain Fynbos habitat hosts at least 20 range restricted bird species, 6 of which are biome endemics, namely Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape, Victorin’s Warbler, Cape Siskin, Protea Seedeater and Cape Rock-jumper. They are currently listed by IUCN conservation criteria as species of Least Concern. Earlier reviews of their distribution, together with the impacts of climate change, suggest that their conservation criteria are outdated and some of the species may be in danger of extinction. Comparison of ranges and occupancy trends comparing SABAP1 and SABAP2 data indicates that Fynbos species in general are in decline with the 6 endemic species generally the worst off and Cape Rock-jumper and Protea Seedeater faring particularly badly.

Study Project. Through the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute and SANBI, Alan conducted a 2-year research programme starting in 2012 to study the 6 endemic Fynbos species with a view to establishing their status and vulnerability to future climate change. In the first 3 months, he travelled over 2,300 kilometres by bicycle and on foot, stopping every 500 meters and gathering information on endemic Fynbos bird communities in relation to various environmental variables - altitude, vegetation type, topographical situation, plant groups, wind and temperature. Using this information, he evaluated the number of birds of each species. This will create a large database that will provide fundamental information about the ecology of the 6 endemic species, enable the determination of patterns of abundance and dispersal and predict the vulnerability of populations to future climate change. A new study is underway to determine the status of the 7th Fynbos endemic - the Hottentot Buttonquail - listed in the IUCN Red List as “probably Critically Endangered”.

**Factors looked at in the study**

- (1) Climate space: Whether individual species are restricted by the “climate space” they occupy.
- (2) Fires: occurring more regularly in Fynbos dominated regions.
- (3) Tolerance or intolerance to warmer temperatures. The average mean annual temperature in South Africa is 18°F. The Fynbos is cooler at 16°F. A physiological project conducted in 2013 showed that birds start to stress out at 34-35° F, with Fynbos birds having slightly lower tolerance to temperature changes.

**The Status of Fynbos Endemic Birds**

- (1) Cape Sugarbirds have been identified as the most important pollinator of Fynbos proteas. They show high site fidelity and usually return to their breeding sites every year. Between breeding seasons, they move over large distances in search of flowering protea stands. Densities change in response to food availability.
- (2) Orange-breasted Sunbirds feed on nectar from a variety of endemic and exotic plants as well as arthropods and spiders. They are reluctant to leave Fynbos but may do so when displaced by fires. Orange-breasted Sunbirds have shown considerable range contraction between the two Atlas projects, SABAP1 and SABAP2. Given anticipated climate and land-use changes across the biome, OBS faces further range contraction and may meet IUCN “Vulnerable” status in the near future.
- (3) Victorin’s Warblers are insectivorous and inhabit mountain Fynbos from sea level to high altitude. Formerly listed as “possibly vulnerable” in the Red Data Book, It is currently considered to be under no immediate threat.
- (4) Cape Siskin previously categorised as “Near Threatened” and showing high relative range contraction,

may be one of the more adaptable Fynbos endemics, as they have been reported in areas of invasive Rooikrans and occur at the edges of pine and other exotic plantations.

(5) Protea Seedeater shows a large decrease in reported range and occupancy, bringing it close to the critical 20,000 square kilometre mark that would classify it as “Vulnerable”.

(6) Cape Rock-jumpers have been identified as being potentially vulnerable to climate change and projected to decrease in range by 62% by 2085. It is not an altitudinal migrant, hence not found on Table Mountain although the habitat is right. A poor migrant, it is in isolated and small populations. With an apparently large decrease in range that brings it below 20,000 square kilometres, coupled with range fragmentation and increased fire frequency in parts of its range, this species now probably qualifies for a higher IUCN threatened status.

The two species (5) and (6) appear to have suffered an apparent decrease of more than 30% in range and reporting area in the 20 years between SABAP1 and SABAP2.

### **Case study - Cape Rock-jumper.**

Alan conducted a study at the Blue Hills Nature Reserve to determine the vulnerability and adaptability of Cape Rock-jumpers to rising temperatures and whether there is a link between temperature and where they are found. The Cape Rock-jumper favours cooler air temperatures and stresses out at just over 30° F, two to three degrees lower than the average for Fynbos birds. It appears from various angles that their range is limited by climate space. A temperature increase of 0.5°F to 1.0° F would equate to a vertical loss of space of about 100 meters, which isn't a good thing for a bird that prefers mountain tops. An increase of 4° F would mean there would be no comfortable living space for the species. The study noted that Cape Rock-jumpers do not pant when over-heating but control temperature by going into the shade of rocks.

Will the use of micro habitats off-set climate change for this and other species?

- Fynbos is one of the most important biomes for South African birds and hosts seven of South Africa's 18 true endemic bird species.
- Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird and Victorin's Warbler may be vulnerable to climate change effects on vegetation structure.
- Cape Siskin may be the most adaptable due to diversification of its feeding habits.
- Cape Rock-jumper appears to be limited by its climate space-the temperature factor.
- Protea Seedeater - there is no clear reason for its range contraction.
- Hottentot Buttonquail is the subject of a new study.

Few formal studies featuring these species have been published in the last 30 years and most of the information is contained in field guides or from the SABAP projects. Rigorous analysis of existing data and further studies are required for all these species.

Climate change is not a hoax - temperatures are going to get warmer. In the absence of other factors that could explain range and occupancy declines of Fynbos birds, one must conclude that climate change is a factor. After all, the Cape Mountain Fynbos regions are generally not subject to the impacts associated with human population and development. How exactly hotter temperatures may influence behaviour and breeding is now the focus of research of the “Hot Fynbos” project team.