



CAPE BIRD CLUB Chairman's Report March 2017 – March 2018

Welcome to the annual AGM, our 70th AGM, a very different AGM to what we had planned. Welcome especially to our CEO of BirdLife South Africa, Mark Anderson. Mark, we are honoured by your coming to join us for our AGM in our 70th year. 70 years is quite a milestone – the Cape Bird Club is the second oldest bird club in South Africa – we are pipped by Wits Bird Club by just a few months. We are also one of the largest clubs with our membership at about 740 members.

Sadly our Honorary President Peter Steyn is not with us this evening as he is away with family who are visiting from overseas. We wish him and Jenny a happy and safe family holiday.

Before I even begin on my chairman's report Joy Fish is going to speak to you on the very 'weighty' matter that is going to shade the contents of this report as well as her Treasurer's report. Many of you who have read the emergency newsletter that went out on Sunday will already know what has happened but we feel it important for all of you to know before we proceed any further. Before I hand over to Joy, I do want to say that I have full and continuing confidence in her competency as our Treasurer and in her integrity. She has a human resources background and a B.Comm degree. She is such a willing 'worker' on the committee, absolutely dedicated to her work within the club – and brave It was she who "rescued" the committee after Julian Hare's resignation. After several months of no success in finding a new Treasurer, she stepped in and said that she would transfer from her secretarial portfolio on the committee to the treasurer portfolio.

(Joy Fish, the Honorary Treasurer, outlines the loss through Internet fraud of a substantial amount of the Club's funds – and stresses that the theft is under investigation.)

I will continue with the Chairman's report, now somewhat altered in the light of the financial blow outlined by Joy.

The first thing I would like us to do is to remember for a few moments some members who have passed on during this year.

1. Eric Barnes, died shortly after last year's AGM at which he was honoured with a Promerops award for his long involvement in water bird counts and especially at Wildevoelvie.

2. Ione Vanderwalt, wife of Brian. She was secretary of Tygerberg Bird Club and also a member of the Cape Bird Club. We have all missed her regular smiling presence at our evening meetings.
3. Rob Martin was our last direct link to the original founders of the CBC through his father, John. The Martin family will be remembered for their work on Booted Eagles. Rob's name will live on through the many invaluable observations that he submitted regularly to the club's magazine, Promerops.
4. Patrick Lockart passed away at the age of 97. Pat was a life-long, passionate birder and those who were in the club in the 70s, 80s and 90s will remember him as an enthusiastic outings leader and also a prolific writer for Promerops.

Now some thank yous. So many people work in various ways to keep the cogs of this huge machine turning. We currently have about 70 people involved in some way – from all those high profile activities like editing Promerops, publishing the monthly newsletter, organising camps, outings and guest speakers, etc to those who look after our physical comforts by ensuring we are supplied with refreshments. There is, however, a lot more room for volunteerism in our club where a few members are doing about 75% of the work! I do also want to acknowledge our members who are regularly involved in citizen science activities which are not necessarily related to the club organisation and activities. We are proud of the work they do for conservation.

So ... to everyone who gives willingly and freely of his/her time, talents and knowledge – a huge thank you.

COMMITTEE

There are a few people I would like to thank personally: First I want to thank the members of the main committee who have been such fun to work with and who are so willing to take on more and more: Johan, Joy, Barbara, Gillian, Dave, Linda and Cheryl. Ross Soller resigned in December. In fact, we hardly saw him from August onwards because he obtained a conservation related job in the Northern Cape. We wish him well.

Thanks go to both Johan Schlebusch and Otto Schmidt who have resigned from International Camps Committee which has over the last 8 years organised exciting adventures to such places as Ethiopia, Ecuador, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Uganda last year and most recently Thailand, last month. The trips to Uganda and Thailand both fell into the year of this report. These trips have really been a Cape Bird Club flagship offering. Unless someone steps in to chair this committee, it will probably spell the end of the Cape Bird Club international adventures as we know them. These trips have been affordable to a select few and for some participants were a once in a lifetime adventure – but we others have always been able vicariously to share the adventures through presentations at our evening meetings. We thank both Johan and Otto and the rest of their International Camps committee for having given the club that something extra!

COMMUNICATIONS

The other team I would like to especially mention is our communications team. Fiona Jones has produced three wonderful issues of Promerops. The academics amongst us will be interested to know that in mid-2017 we were approached by EBSCO Information services, a leading provider of research databases, and a research service to academic libraries, to register Promerops, as a magazine with some scientific merit on their data base. Fiona and the committee felt it quite an honour for the Cape Bird Club to be approached by EBSCO Host!

The website under the co-ordination of Joy Fish, Gavin Lawson and his entire team, will never stop being a work in progress and is really looking good. We have had more than 6 000 users so far who have logged on to the website just under 100 000 times, many from people not in the Bird Club. A new section that I urge you all to visit is that on the best places to watch birds in the Western Cape. Thanks to Mel Tripp and his team for undertaking to do this

Many members have expressed concern that our CBC Facebook page is used by non-members to share sightings and their enjoyment of birds, saying that it surely should be reserved for members' use. It is, however, the CBC's stated objective to promote the enjoyment, understanding, study and conservation of birds and their environments to all, so we welcome non-members. It is also an excellent way to advertise CBC activities to non-members. Who knows – they may join the CBC one day! There are 2340 registered users.

The newsletter under the editorship of Cheryl Leslie has revolutionised the rapid dissemination of information to club members when the need arises and, of course, many members now rely on that for their monthly timetable of activities. And, of course, it was via this e-newsletter that we were able to inform you of our huge problem very quickly.

CAMPS and OUTINGS,

We have had four camps since the last AGM and here I thank the leaders by name. In March just after the last AGM, a forest camp at Grootvadersbosch was guided by John Magnier and Pete Nupen. In August Brian Vanderwalt guided a large group which stayed at Rhodene Farm and explored both the Tankwa Karoo and the Ceres area. In September, with the help of Gillian Barnes, Brian also guided the Family Camp to Grootvadersbosch (aimed at promoting a love of birding in young people and children). In November we went further afield to Nature's Valley for more forest birding led by Mel Tripp and Vernon Head. Due to the popularity of these camps early booking is essential.

Our sincere thanks also go to all those who have led outings! Both they and the camp leaders put in a lot of 'homework' – researching the venue, going on a recce a few days prior and then doing everything possible to ensure the success of the outing. Very often they are also the ones who write up the reports for the newsletter, website or Promerops.

Outings , averaging three in most months this past year have taken us to many different venues: Many of these were old favourites like Cape Point for the seabird watch, and West Coast National Park to say 'farewell to the waders'. But there were a few new venues: A visit to De Grendel Wine Estate in Durbanville was arranged by Pete Nupen. Felicity Ellmore organised an 'new' outing to Ganzekraal, unfortunately cancelled because of bad weather – but hopefully it will take place later this year! Mel Tripp introduced a small group to the Orangekloof Trail, accessible only by permit to just 12 people per day. Margaret MacIver led a successful outing on the Klaasenbosch Trail in Constantia. Mel Tripp along with Vince Ward took a fairly large group birding along the sea front near Mouille Point lighthouse - an outing certainly worth repeating. In addition to the usual midweek birding walk venues, there were two very different midweek activities – a fascinating visit to the bio-control unit at Westlake Conservation Centre organised by Jo Hobbs to learn about invasive aliens and a successful succulent workshop run by Alison James.

EVENING MEETINGS

Our evening talks are a very 'rich' part of the club's offerings, both in terms of entertainment and of information / education. We have been entertained and informed by a wonderful array of speakers. We have travelled from Parfuri to Panama, from Namibia to Paarl. We have learned about global warming and its implications for conservation and the contribution of citizen science to conservation. We have also learned about penguins, albatrosses and birds which migrate within the African continent. Many of our speakers have been CBC members – and I thank them for the time they have spent preparing their presentations and then sharing them with us. I also thank the club members who have made suggestions and assisted in sourcing excellent 'outside' speakers.

Two very successful participative evenings in our calendar need to be highlighted: our Quiz and Pizza evening which in December 2017 saw Mike Buckham as our new quizmaster asking some very challenging questions, and the photographic evening during which a number of members shared four of their favourite photographs and told the stories behind them.

We have had four Courses in the last year but really three since the last AGM - In March just a few days prior to the AGM was the Sea Birds course by Ross Wanless , arranged specially for those going on Flock. In July Dale Wright taught participants all about forest birding (really fitting seeing that three of our camps were forest camps). There was a joint course with Tygerberg Bird Club on using the Birdlasser App. Heather Howell ran a most successful beginners' course over three weekends in September.

Please remember the committee welcomes your ideas for outings, camps, speakers, courses, etc.

CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION

There will be no separate conservation committee report this evening. Dave will write a full conservation report in the next Promerops. I am reporting on just four projects in which members of the main committee and the Conservation committee are involved. The theft of our funds may compromise the forward movement of our projects for a time – and the more is the pity as we were just getting going with the four special projects outlined below:

TMAK – the project to build breeding banks for martins and kingfishers was introduced to you at last year's AGM. Sadly four months into the year, we realised it was failing to get off the ground. The young intern we were employing through CTEET was employed on a 50/50 basis, to implement the project but was then unable to spend as much as 50% of his time on our CBC project as a consequence of other urgent problems at Strandfontein. Then he resigned to take up better remunerated employment. So it was back to the drawing board for us. We decided to employ the Nature Conservation Company to complete the background research into existing breeding walls / banks both here and internationally, and then to utilise their expertise to oversee the practical details of the project. After receiving their scoping report, we obtained the go-ahead from City of Cape Town and the manager of the False Bay Ecology Park. We instructed the NCC to proceed with the construction of three artificial breeding walls and erect three breeding towers made from water tanks. They were busy sourcing materials when, unfortunately, we had to place this project on hold pending the outcome of investigations into the theft of funds.

The Birdathon (jointly run by Birdlife South Africa and City of Cape Town and Cape Bird Club) continues to be an important event in our year calendar. The 2017 Birdathon last April saw a plateauing of the numbers. This was welcome as we could not have coped with many more walkers than we had in 2016. The Club was active in the organisation of the event, and members manned the viewing sites as well as the question tables and also an activity table for children at the end of the walk. This year, due to unpredictable weather and the ongoing drought, it has been decided to hold the Birdathon in September.

While the Birdathon at Strandfontein is very worthwhile in that it introduces large numbers from local communities (and especially the youth) to an important natural resource and recreational space right on their doorstep, we, as a committee had been feeling that we needed to be doing something more educational in addition. Following the last simulation exercise arranged by Friends of Princessvlei (at which bird club members were the 'bird experts') we were approached by a teacher at Floreat Primary School in Steenberg to help her to start a bird club at her school. Johan Schlebusch and I started this in October last year as a pilot project with a group of about 15 Grade 6s. This year the group has grown to include 34 Grade 6s and 7s. There have been classroom sessions as well as outings to Strandfontein, Rondevlei and Zandvlei at which we have been assisted by other club members, and these will continue. The enjoyment of the children is palpable! The hope is that this project can be repeated in other schools especially those near Strandfontein.

This Floreat Bird Club project has led to our involvement in another exciting initiative – the PLANTING GARDENS for BIRDS. This is a joint project - with two exciting NGOs, Communitree, a community greening organisation which prioritises the planting of indigenous species in public spaces and school playgrounds, and Incungcu / Stepping Stones, the project started by Bongani Mnisi as part of his doctoral work, (you may remember that a couple of years ago he gave a presentation in this hall), with the idea to create corridors for sunbirds to move from the mountains across the Cape Flats to nature areas like Rondevlei by planting suitable plants in school playgrounds. To work together makes sense – and the project is slowly getting off the ground. Between the three organisations we have ten schools involved, the majority in the Muizenberg / Steenberg area but also one in Mowbray. The learners at the schools will have input in varying degrees with regard to planting, learning about birds and bird monitoring! Club members have already started on home nurseries, growing seedlings for Communitree, to be planted in public spaces and school playgrounds. How refreshing the enthusiasm is of the young leaders in these other partner organisations! We were, however, looking at jointly funding a CTEET intern to be involved with the activities of all three organisations – and this will now also be on hold.

The hyacinth problem at Strandfontein is of great concern as several pans are absolutely clogged with this weed. It is too large a project for the Cape Bird Club to tackle on its own but we do want to assist. Dave Whitelaw recently reported that the Conservation Committee is hopeful of some action this year as a practical plan is currently being devised between the City of Cape Town staff at the Sewage Works with the Bird Club to remove the water hyacinth from two of the three most heavily infested pans (S3 and S7). Sadly, this project too may be compromised by the misappropriation of our funds.

FLOCK AND WESTERN CAPE BIRDING FORUM

A number of Cape Bird Club members (about 65) were very fortunate to have been able to attend that exciting 'Flock at Sea Again!' and BirdLife AGM in May 2017. As Trevor Hardaker said: "If you were NOT on this cruise, you have almost certainly missed out on one of THE most amazing birding events ever to have taken place in southern African birding history!!"

This year for many of our members Flock at the West Coast in March perhaps seemed rather too close to home. Nevertheless, we had a fair turn-out of members at the actual AGM.

AWARDS

Eagle Owl Award – Vernon Head & Gill Memorial Medal – Prof. Ies Underhill

It was our very own Vernon Head who with others came up with the idea of dollying up BirdLife AGMs to become Flock events held over several days. It was with delight that we learned that he had been awarded the Eagle Owl Award in July by BirdLife South Africa

At the Flock at Sea Again AGM in late April last year another CBC member Prof Les Underhill of the ADU at UCT was awarded by BirdLife South Africa its most prestigious award, the Gill Memorial Medal, for his outstanding lifetime contribution to ornithology in southern Africa. He dedicated his award to all those involved in Citizen Science activities.

Promerops Awards

And now we have some of our own awards to make. There are so many who deserve the award – and we, on the main committee, hate having to make choices. This year awards are going to John Fincham, Jo Hobbs, Heather Howell, and Patrick Riley. May I ask them to come and sit a little closer in the front row here....

[I ask that Mark Anderson, as our guest hand over the awards]

CITATIONS

John Fincham and Jo Hobbs

Jo Hobbs and John Fincham have been CBC members for a very long time and have contributed significantly to the club since joining. Tonight, however, we specifically want to recognise them for the pioneering work they have done in educating children at schools around the Paarl Bird Sanctuary on the environment.

Jo and John have given a considerable amount of time to this project, raised funds and liaised with schools and the municipalities to make this project a reality. In the process hundreds of children have enjoyed the excitement of visiting the PBS, gaining an awareness of the importance of this site for the environment and the community, as well as experiencing the wonder of birds.

We commend them for their dedication and perseverance in highlighting the importance of the PBS and hopefully inspiring future environmental champions.

Heather Howell

She too has been involved in Cape Bird Club activities for a very long time – her service to our club included a long stint on the committee (from 2007 to 2014) during which time she served as vice chairman to Vernon Head, holding the reins of leadership many times when he was away on BirdLife matters. Tonight we want to pay tribute to her education work in terms of beginners' birdwatching courses, not only for the club but also for University of the Third Age. She has probably been instrumental in more new members joining the CBC than any other single person. Since the turn of the century she has been running beginner's bird courses twice a year for U3A – that is 18 years – and many of those people joined the CBC and remain active members today. She mooted the idea of a Cape Bird Club beginners course when she found she had so many applicants she simply could not accommodate them in the pensioner courses and also because she had been approached by working

people who wanted Saturday courses – and she has run six CBC Beginners' Courses since 2010. Heather has not just shared her expertise with adults but has over the years been a regular visitor to local schools to give some of her well-loved presentations on a variety of different birds.

Patrick Riley

Patrick Riley, our AV man, wholeheartedly deserves a Promerops Award for his dedicated service not only looking after our audio-visual equipment but for his commitment to being at virtually every evening meeting and every course to oversee the audio-visual side of things. He has been doing this for ten years, first as assistant to Frank Hallett and then, when the Halletts moved away, taking over completely. Probably only the committee (and of course Beryl, his unwaveringly supportive wife) are aware of how much time he spends behind the scenes as well. It is Patrick who researches new equipment when needed and then, after receiving the go-ahead, purchases it. He also spends much time learning all the ins and outs of the equipment, ensuring repairs when necessary. We so appreciate his expertise especially as, despite his patient teaching, we who are all techno cretins just cannot retain all he tells us. Thank you for your dedication (and patience), Patrick.

And that ends my report....