



Cape Bird Club Chairman's Report April 2018 – March 2019

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Cape Bird Club, our 71st AGM.

Last year's AGM, many of you will remember, marked our 70th anniversary as a bird club. It should have been a joyful and celebratory occasion but instead was marred by the cloud over our heads, having just discovered that that we had lost an enormous amount of money out of our investment account through internet fraud. In fact, it was an awful evening but this committee which was unanimously re-elected felt so supported by the members of the club. I am sure you are all aware that those "stolen" funds were recovered in full and our various projects put on hold for a couple of months were able to resume as before.

The Cape Bird Club is a very large club – in December the number of members recorded was 755. This number includes family members. On our web page the statement appears: "This is a friendly and informal **club** which welcomes young and old who wish to share their appreciation, understanding and knowledge of birds." Are we reaching both young and old (and those in between)? The other day I was contacted to find out what activities we could offer a twelve-year-old girl – and on replying, I realised, not many on a regular basis. We welcome children at outings and meetings but these activities remain essentially adult! We are reaching out to children in terms of the Family Camp (a once per year opportunity) and then to specific Cape Flats school groups – but what about a regular offering to the twenty or so children who currently are part of the club in their own right? My wish is that we could resurrect the Junior Bird Club run by Heather Howell until a few years ago - but that faltered because children had to rely on parents for transport, and their lives were overtaken by school activities. We also we need someone younger to volunteer to lead something like this. Any ideas and/or volunteers in this direction would be most welcomed! I also question how welcoming do new members find us when they arrive for the first time at an outing or evening meeting?

Constitutional Objectives

The objectives of the CBC as stated in our Constitution are to promote the enjoyment, understanding, study and conservation of birds and their environments, primarily in the geographical regions of the Cape Peninsula and the surrounding western Cape areas. ARE we doing what we are meant to do? I will go through these objectives trying to separate our club activities to fall under a specific heading – rather an artificial breakdown because they are

inextricably linked: Enjoyment leads to learning and learning affects enjoyment and knowledge leads to conservation.

Objective 1 – to promote the ENJOYMENT of birds – our evening meetings certainly do this – but I am going to say more about those in the next section on learning.

OUTINGS

Our outings are fun. They have averaged three in most months this past year and have taken us to many different venues. My perception is that the numbers of people attending outings have grown in the last year; regularly 22 or more join the mid-week outings that used to have only about 12 participants. And Sunday outings can easily have 30 - 40 participants, so many we are now thinking that we need to have 2 or 3 leaders at each outing. Even distant outings such as last month's Farewell to the Waders outing at Langebaan are well-attended. We owe this to several factors – better advertising perhaps, but even more importantly to our outings' leaders! So many thanks to:

Gillian Barnes, Merle Chalton, Felicity Ellmore, Simon Fogarty, Vernon Head, Heather Howell, Margaret Maclver, John Magner, Marilyn Metcalf, Graham Pringle, Peter Steyn, Mel Tripp, Brian Vanderwalt, Vince Ward and Dave Whitelaw.

They are so willing to organise outings venues and share their expertise! They do a lot of 'homework' to ensure the success of the outing, and very often also end up having to write the trip report for the newsletter, website or Promerops.

I also must thank Daryl and Lynette de Beer who have very kindly offered to take on the organisation of the Outings roster; that takes a huge load off me – and I am sure they will come up with new and different ideas for outings and for the running of this most important portfolio.

While not strictly part of the Outings portfolio I would like to thank Linda Hibbin and her team, many of whom are Cape Bird Club members, for the Kirstenbosch walks and their promotion of bird watching as a hobby.

CAMPS

Camps are a major source of enjoyment and learning. Gillian Barnes arranged four camps in this last year. She has done so with quiet efficiency. Thank you, Gillian. Mel Tripp and Simon Fogarty led the first two camps. In May the Breede River Camp saw the 30 participants staying in the smartest accommodation at Breede River Lodge I have experienced with a CBC camp! The August camp was held in the Tanqua Karoo National Park. The 22 participants stayed at the Guesthouse complex. Many got to see the Double-banded Courser but the "bird" of the camp was the Aardvark that kept us all entertained for about fifteen minutes before it disappeared into its burrow – a lifer for many! Thank you to Mel and Simon for their generous and exciting leadership.

The Family camp in September, with 5 families including 10 children participating, presented

huge opportunities for fun and learning about birds and nature. While we would love to continue with Family Camps, we have found that a small group of CBC members (mostly committee) are stretching themselves very thinly with youth projects in the absence of a Youth Co-ordinator. Unless we get more assistance from a wider range of people, this camp may not happen in 2019. This is a great pity as we have had an influx of children joining the club with their parents. The original idea behind these camps was to take families out to enjoy birding together.

The Floreat Camp in October was, for some of the 20 participants, the first time they had been out of Cape Town and they learned so much from the various birding and non-birding activities planned for them. They did not want the fun to stop!

Thank you to the entire team who made possible either one or both “youth” camps.

QUIZ

Our participative Quiz and end-of-year party in December last year, with Mike Buckham again being the quizmaster and asking some very challenging questions, was fun. I think people enjoy this evening because of learning opportunities and also meeting friends and even fellow-members they have not met before (inevitable in so large a club). Thank you, Mike and committee and helpers for settings up the hall and organising the evening.

Objective 2 – To promote the understanding and study of birds

In this last year I believe we have very well fulfilled this objective.

EVENING MEETINGS

Our monthly evening meetings, a very rich part of what we offer, have been informative, thought-provoking and enjoyable. We have been entertained, educated and stretched, by a wonderful array of speakers, starting with that amazingly inspiring 70th anniversary May lecture by Dr Ian McCallum entitled “Hope is a thing with feathers”. We travelled to Uganda and Thailand as Johan Schlebusch and Joy Fish shared with us their experiences on the last two international CBC camps. Dr John Fincham took us to four neighbouring countries to look at birds there. Prof Peter Ryan brought us all down to earth with his talk on the plastic pollution in our oceans. (Is there anyone who attended that talk who doesn’t think twice now about plastics use?) Dr Tony Williams entertained us with his presentation on reptiles as predators of birds. Two talks covered conservation topics – Dr Mark Brown’s presentation on the Nature’s Valley Trust’s conservation programme to secure the future of the African Black Oystercatchers and the White-fronted Plovers, and then Robin Colyn shared with us the excitement of and the technology behind the discovery that the White-winged Flufftail does breed in Mpumalanga at Middelpunt. In a non-bird presentation, Matthew Syphus

entertained us with his and his wife, Mary-Anne's encounters and observations of Cape Clawless Otters in the South Peninsula. Thank you to all our guest speakers! We truly appreciate the time-consuming hours you spend IN preparation and your generosity in sharing your knowledge and experiences with us.

We must not forget to thank the refreshments team, organised by Sylvia Ledgard who after Thursday evening meetings provide us with refreshments and give us the opportunity to chat and share over a cup of coffee.

COURSES

Major sources of learning have been the three courses since the last AGM.

In May Alan Lee enthralled us with his fantastic course on Endemism in Fynbos. The next was the Beginners' Course run over three Saturdays and one Sunday in September – run superbly, as always, by Heather Howell, and drawing many new members into the club. Faansie Peacock, an excellent teacher, in October ran a very entertaining and informative Bushveld Birding course. Many thanks to Johan Schlebusch and his Courses Committee and the refreshments team for organising so well these well attended courses!

Patrick Riley, our audio-visual co-ordinator, adds tremendous value to our evening meetings and at the courses by ensuring we always have good quality visuals and sound and it is thanks to him that this aspect of these educational offerings run as smoothly as they do.

FLOREAT PRIMARY SCHOOL BIRD CLUB

I have already mentioned the two youth camps but here would like to say more about the Floreat Educational Outreach Programme which culminated in the Camp:

Our outreach project at Floreat Primary school continued, culminating its 2018 classroom and local birding activities with a wonderful camp at West Coast National Park. This year, 2019, it took a while to get going again but there have already been a classroom session plus an outing to Rondevlei. Johan is talking later about this outreach project and its expansion. I, however, want to pay tribute to our 'champion' teacher at Floreat Primary, Kristi Jooste. Without her, with her infectious enthusiasm, and indirectly the support of her principal and colleagues we certainly could not have achieved what we have thus far. You will meet her a little later.

Many thanks also to the CBC members who have made our educational outreach initiatives possible – Johan Schlebusch, Priscilla Beeton, Gillian Barnes, Brian Vanderwalt, Melodie Hertslet and Joy Fish. Others have joined us for the field trips so that we have been able to work with smaller groups and we thank them too.

BIRDATHON

The Birdathon is an important part of the CBC's calendar with Dave masterminding our involvement. This was held much later than usual in October 2018 – and we almost blew away on the day! The wind was so strong that Disaster Management moved the exhibitions and exhibitors into the old environmental education building just at the entrance to the sewage works – I am not sure it was any safer there with the corrugated iron roof sheets flapping in the wind! Despite the adverse conditions, the event was relatively well attended, and the Committee thanks to all CBC members who assisted in any way.

Education is part of conservation – as knowledge leads to action and so this brings us to ...

Objective 3 - To promote the conservation of birds and their environment.

Dave will not be delivering a separate Conservation Report this evening. Rather I am mentioning a couple of aspects here – but there will be a full conservation report in the July issue of Promerops in which Dave Whitelaw will cover in more detail conservation work done under the auspices of Cape Bird Club.

STRANDFONTEIN remains the focus of Cape Bird Club's conservation efforts:

The construction part of the TMAK (Terns, Martins and Kingfishers) project at Strandfontein facilitating the breeding of martins and terns, was completed during this year, with Joy Fish as our project manager. NCC Environmental Services successfully built two breeding walls, one near the Julie the Groen Education Centre and the other near to the tern roost picnic area. We originally planned three – but the canal on the west side of the pans dried up completely in the drought so we decided to start with just two and then to assess their success before proceeding with a third. The explanatory signage erected has drawn attention to the project. This is a long-term project. Some birders have observed some martin activity at the banks, but so far there have been no attempts at nest building. We must await next year's breeding season to assess its success.

Anyone who has visited Strandfontein knows the enormous challenges facing this Important Birding Area: the first thing that strikes one is how dry the pans are because of a drastic reduction in water flow to the sewage works. Sadly, of course it also means that the habitat for wading birds is being altered. The next thing one notices is the spread of Typha especially on Pans 1 and 2. Apparently, the only effective control method is removal of the rhizomes and currently there is simply no heavy machinery available to do this. Then there is the overwhelming water hyacinth problem. Dave reports, however, there's a realistic chance that we may be able to eliminate Water Hyacinth thanks to the efforts of Prof. Julie Coetzee of Rhodes University, who has introduced Megamelus, a parasite of this plant. There is an excellent article in this March edition of Promerops about this. There has also

been some mechanical removal of water hyacinth by the conservation manager, Rolivuyo, and Cape Bird Club gave him monetary assistance to repair the boat so this work can continue.

Many thanks to the Conservation Committee and others, both members and non-members who have assisted with the various conservation issues with which the Cape Bird Club is connected. Dave's report will contain more information about these.

The CBC also made a significant donation to the West Coast National Park - to go towards the improvement and maintenance of the hides.

LINKS

Our links continue with Ingcungcu the Stepping Stones Sunbirds in Gardens Project and Ceinwen Smith as well as with Communitree. Some of our members have successfully grown proteas and other indigenous plants in their gardens and on their balconies. We need to pick up on this again and I would like to encourage far more members to get involved in this project where the seedlings are nurtured in your own home and then planted in green areas by the Communitree team.

Many of our members are regularly involved in citizen science activities – we are proud of the work they do for conservation and thank them for holding the name of the Cape Bird Club high. Regular counts, listed in Promerops (with contact telephone numbers), are held at Strandfontein, Wildevoelwei, Paarl Bird Sanctuary, Athlone Waterworks, Zandvlei, Rietvlei, Kirstenbosch. The Zandvlei Hacking group also meets regularly, and there is also the six monthly CAR counts of large terrestrial birds seen from cars. All counts are done in teams – and teams are always looking for new people to assist. In Dave's report you will see that there are more counts starting at other sewage works around Cape Town and so even more volunteers are needed.

Other citizen scientists include out many atlasers who submit sightings records to SABAP and also to other website communities like i-Naturalist.

(Let me take this opportunity to strongly encourage all of you to get involved with the City Nature Challenge. Please register.)

Some of our members volunteer at Sancob and have been assisting with the Lesser Flamingo crisis. The club made monetary donations to both Sancob and World of Birds to help them buy much needed equipment and supplies. There was also a donation by our members of listed items they needed. Sadly, all has not been plain sailing for these flamingo chicks, and many have died. Many of you will have received the pleas of Mark Anderson for more donations as they fear that over 5000 more chicks may have to be rescued from Kamfers Dam which is drying up as the rate of evaporation is presently exceeding the in-flow of water.

Communications:

To ensure our three objectives are attainable our activities must be advertised and promoted – and here we come to our excellent communications team. I believe we are very, very fortunate in the Cape Bird Club to have such excellent communications at hand. Whichever medium members choose to utilise, they can be fairly sure of being kept abreast of what is happening in the club – both for future events and through reports of past events

Our thanks go to Fiona Jones, our Promerops editor, and her team – Simon Fogarty compiling the rarities list, Dennis Randell looking after the advertising, Daryl and Lynette de Beer for the Outings programme, Priscilla Beeton for the Guest Speakers programme, Jo Hobbs for the Counts & Hacks programme and liaison with the mailing house and Linda Merrett who prepares the labelled envelopes, and the many other folk who assist with the myriad of jobs there are to do to produce and distribute a worthwhile magazine. And, of course, many thanks to those who take time to write articles to be included.

The team that works on our website can be very proud – Gillian Barnes, Mel Tripp, Otto Schmidt, Cheryl Leslie and Gavin Lawson. The stats show that our website was accessed over 13000 times in 2018, on average about 40 per day. Although the stats are apparently not very accurate, they do give us an idea of how much our website page is being consulted. Thanks are also due to Cheryl Leslie, who produces the e-newsletter. Many members still prefer to use the printed medium of the club magazine, but more and more are referring to the e-newsletter for up-to-date information and news. Cheryl is also our Facebook page administrator. Our Facebook page has 2414 members. What a delight it is to see members and others' beautiful photographs on the Facebook page. I wonder how many of you followed the delightful, almost daily, photographic diary of Gerald(ine), the baby owl on Noordhoek Common through Rob Mousley's photographs and captions. We love that non-members choose to share their birding highlights on our Facebook page. Facebook is an excellent way to advertise CBC activities to members and non-members!

Thank you also to all the photographers out there who so willingly share their photographs whether on the website, in Promerops or in the e-newsletter or Facebook page, to enhance trip reports and the educational resources we offer.

Linda Johnstone arranges advertising of our events in the local community newspapers and other media. Quite a few people attending evening meetings or outings have told us they knew about it because of an advertisement in the newspaper! Thank you, Linda!

The Committee

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. Melodie Hertslet served for some months on the committee and assisted in the Youth Portfolio but resigned because of work and other commitments. I could go on and on

about this wonderful team – but you need just to look at the reports of the last 3 years where I have sung my praises for them. To you, members of the committee, I extend my huge thanks and tell you again how much we treasure what you do to keep the Club running so smoothly! I also want to thank Mary Debrick, who with such commitment looks after the day-to-day accounts and payments. Despite the fact that she and Terry have moved to Somerset West, she has agreed to continue!

And so a final very big thank you to the many members who give so willingly of their time, talents and knowledge in ensuring that this club runs more or less like clockwork. You will have noticed that the same names are coming up over and over. We always need new and more volunteers to give fresh life and blood to the club. Please volunteer YOUR skills and don't wait to be approached. Rest assured – volunteering to help somewhere does not mean you have to serve on the committee!

PROMEROPS AWARDS

This year we are honouring five of our members with Promerops Awards (one is a joint award), and I invite Peter Steyn our Honorary president to hand over the awards.

PAUL AND CATHY JENKINS

Paul and Cathy resigned in December 2018 from running the Sales Table after six years. In 2012 they volunteered to take over the Memorabilia Table, until then run by Simon Fogarty after it was set up in 1998 for the 50th anniversary celebrations. A year or two later, when the Frylincks retired, they amalgamated the Sales and Memorabilia tables. Second hand books and home-made greetings cards were added to the goods for sale. If an especially suitable book came along Paul and Cathy would run a raffle, often raising more than the book could have been sold for. I am sure that any of you who were ever approached by Paul or Cathy to buy a raffle ticket will remember how “persuasive” they were in getting you to part with some money in aid of the bird club funds. Over the six years they raised and put into the Club coffers more than R24 000! We thank them for their huge efforts and commitment to the club. It took a lot of effort sorting through second-hand books and goods, pricing them and then carting them backwards and forwards to the evening meetings. They are well-deserving of this award for their willingness to provide a service to the club that many enjoyed.

MERLE CHALTON

For many she is the “face” of the Cape Bird Club, especially since she took over the running of the Beginners’ Outings at Rondevlei in 2011. She is a quiet, friendly and warm person, and an excellent and patient teacher.

We asked several members for some input and Daryl and Lynette de Beer wrote this creative citation:

People such as Merle are, and always will be, the greatest asset of the Bird Club. The success of the monthly Rondevlei outings is dependent on having a capable and devoted leader such as Merle who draws a large crowd of 'newbies' and experienced birders each month.

We began our visits to Rondevlei about three years ago as 'newbie' birders and have continued attending the monthly Saturday outing. Under Merle's tutelage our knowledge of birds has grown greatly as she does not **STINT** on sharing her valuable tips, wide reading and general knowledge of birds.

Her warm welcome each month and her assurances that "there are no stupid questions" make 'newbies' feel immediately comfortable and they are quickly **TAKEN UNDER HER WING** and motivated by her enthusiasm.

Merle has **AN EAGLE EYE** and one of her many talents is the easy recognition of the SMSs (Swallows, Martins and Swifts). She has a unique way of remembering each one and patiently explains (and re-explains each month!) the difference in wing shape, size, colouring and the flight pattern of each. She is immensely proud (**AS A PEACOCK**) and complimentary of her **FLEDGLING** birders when they recognize the species. And her keen listening skills and tips have taught many how to recognize and identify the calls of the two different warblers present at the Reserve.

Our birding experience has been greatly enriched by our visits to Rondevlei with Merle (and Derek, her dedicated scribe and **WING**man). Thank you, Merle.

FIONA JONES

Fiona stepped in as editor of Promerops in 2015, taking over from Jo Hobbs and Otto Schmidt who had been doing so for the previous 17 years. In her first editorial she said she was stepping into their 'big shoes' with trepidation, and that she was somewhat daunted by the lofty standards they had set. Fiona need not have worried. From her very first edition in March/April 2015 she has maintained the same high standards in the 13 issues published since then. Promerops has continued to flourish. For many it is still the primary source of communication from the Club, and for those who live far away or who are unable to access the Internet it is an important link.

Fiona and her husband had been members of the club for a long time, but largely inactive. She saw the advertisement in Promerops calling for a new editor and decided to apply because she wanted something relevant and worthwhile to do in her retirement! She had been the academic reference librarian in the Science and Engineering Library at UCT Libraries for 34 years. However, full retirement for her has still not happened – she keeps being called back by UCT because she is the only BSc Librarian they have at the moment and they need her expertise as a scientific cataloguer. So, she has produced Promerops while continuing to work at UCT, albeit part-time.

Fiona is a quiet but forceful. She knows exactly what she wants in the magazine and ensures that she gets it. She is very organised and her work is painstaking and precise, but at the same

time very creative and artistic. Jo Hobbs tells me that as part of her application to be editor of Promerops she sent examples of newsletters and pamphlets that she had created using desktop publishing. With Promerops she has continued to put her desktop publishing skills into practice, designing the layout of the magazine herself before sending it to the printers.

Fiona, you tell us you LOVE being editor of Promerops. WE LOVE YOU being editor of Promerops and producing for us an interesting and highly readable magazine.

MEL TRIPP

Mel Tripp is one of our Cape Bird Club characters, one of those people that most members of the club are a little in awe of – incredibly knowledgeable and, although he calls a spade a spade, also helpful and kind. He has excellent teaching skills which many a beginner birder and even ‘not so beginner’ birders can confirm if they are lucky enough to have been on an outing or camp with him.

Since arriving in Cape Town in about 1982 and joining the Cape Bird Club, he has played a huge role as a leader and he has done a tremendous amount for the Cape Bird Club. He was on the committee for many years, including serving as vice-Chairman for 6 years. Even after resigning from the main committee, he continued to serve on smaller sub-committees such as the 50th Anniversary Committee, the courses committee and others. He has helped with the new website and is responsible for arguably the most used part of the website where top birding venues in the Western Cape are described. (This of course follows on from the book he co-compiled in 1995 - *Guide to the Birds of the South Western Cape.*, now out of print

Simon Fogarty summed up the qualities of Mel Tripp:

Apart from his organizational skills, he has a great work ethic and I think his career in the advertising industry and administering the AAA, has enhanced his exceptional observation skills and attention to detail, which, coupled with his willingness to research and plan thoroughly, almost guarantees success, whether for a club camp he’s leading, a bird talk/presentation, a bird quiz, a birding holiday, an article for Promerops or anything else he embarks on.

He’s an exceptional birder, with a keen sense of humour and a willingness to share his birding knowledge with birders of all levels and always with attention to detail. He loves the waders and LBJ’s and helps so many others on the path to identifying and enjoying them. Birding with Mel on an outing or a longer trip is always memorable.

Mel has a passion for birds and their conservation and apart from doing more than his share of work for the CBC, he has been involved for many years in CWAC counts, CAR counts, atlasing and atlas bashes.

Mel is always prepared to promote and advance the CBC, birding and bird conservation.

Mel does not only promote the CBC. He works incredibly hard for Birdlife South Africa. He is senior marketing advisor on the National Marketing Committee and is directly responsible for many of the innovative advertising ideas for Birdlife South Africa. He received a prestigious Owl Award in 2017 for his outstanding long-term service, selflessness, and dedication over many years to Birdlife South Africa.

Mel, this is a richly deserved award (and probably overdue) from your own club which you have served and supported and continue to do with such dedication. Congratulations!