

Cape Bird Club Chairman's Report

March 2019 – March 2020

It gives me great pleasure to present the March 2019 – March 2020 Chairman's Report which in ordinary times would have been read at the 72nd Annual General Meeting of the Cape Bird Club. It records another extremely busy year in the life of our Club and its members.

What unprecedented times we are living through – first the postponement of our AGM from 12th March because of Eskom's load-shedding, and then because of the cancellation of all club activities just 10 days later due to the Covid-19 virus. How lucky we are to have a club member who has suggested an alternative online method of running the AGM – using email to circulate this report and then using Zoom for the sharing and approval of the Financials as well as time to bring up matters raised as a result of this report.

Remembering those who have died

It is with sadness that we record the passing of members or members' spouses and extend heartfelt condolences to them:

Fiona Jones, our Promerops editor, lost her husband, **Jeff Jones**, in August of last year; and Sylvia Ledgard's husband, **Derrick Ledgard**, passed away in November. Both these gentlemen keenly supported their wives' bird club involvement, although because of ill health and frailty were not able to join in.

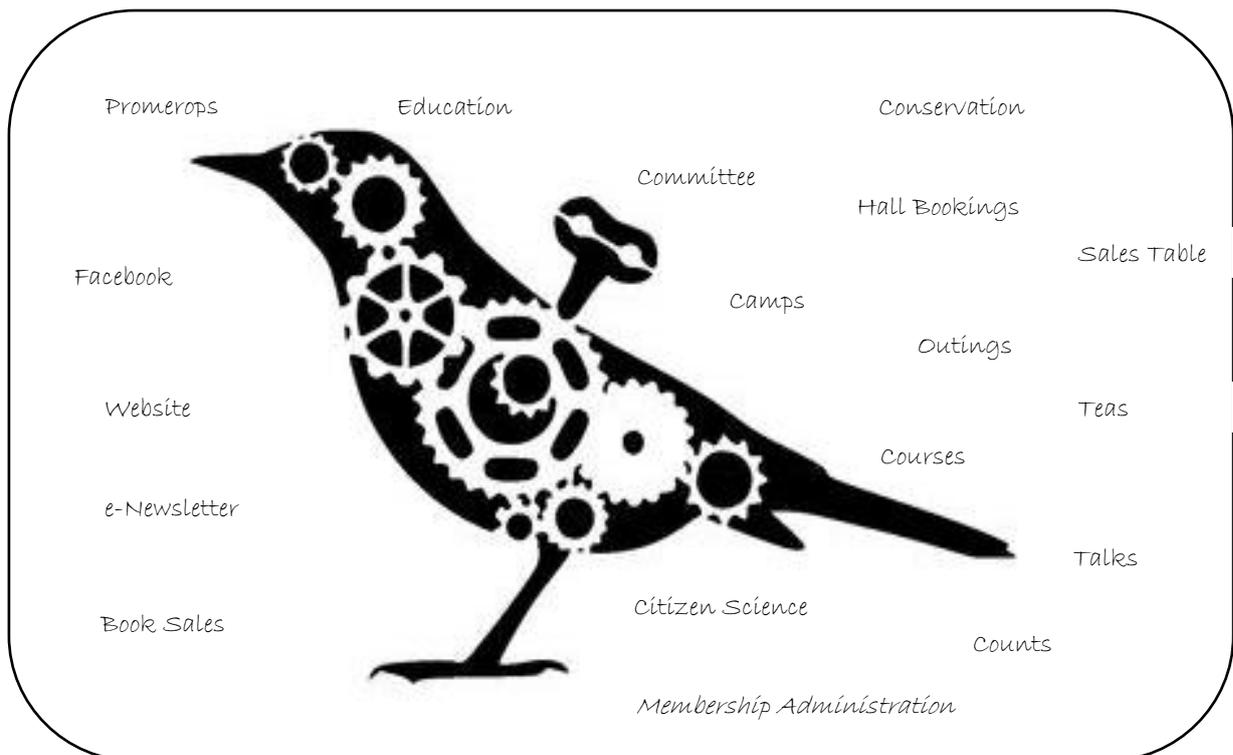
Many of you will also remember **Peter Cooper** who was an active member, with the portfolio of outings and camps organiser between 2004 and 2009. He resigned then to look after his very ill wife. He became very well known in the Fish Hoek / Kommetjie area as chairman of the Meals on Wheels NGO, a position he held until his death after a short illness in early December.

Barbara, Graham Pringle's wife, died in January. Many members still remember her accompanying Graham on bird outings when she was still able to and spotting birds and trying valiantly to tell people where they were even after she lost her ability to talk.

In March we received the sad news that **Charles Saunders** had died very unexpectedly of a heart attack. He was a staunch member of the Cape Bird Club and for some years he arranged the camps (2011 – 2015). He also led a couple of tours, one to Kruger National Park and one to the reserves of KZN, which many of our members enjoyed greatly. He also served on the committee in 2011 - 2012. He was friendly and warm-hearted, an excellent organiser and popular leader with his capacity of being able to 'read' and manage group dynamics appropriately. For some years his work on environmental impact assessments took him away from Cape Town a great deal and he was unable to attend many events. We were thrilled to see him at the February meeting, just prior to his move to his new home in Villiersdorp where he died.

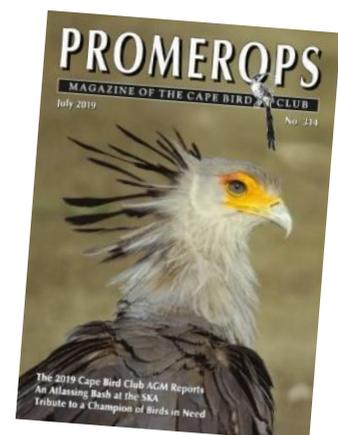
We remember too, not only those who have died, but their families and friends who mourn their passing.

While in this report I will be concentrating on the 'bigger' portfolios, for a club this size to run smoothly, we rely heavily on ALL who volunteer to take on leadership and supporting roles, whether big or small, and I thank all who are willing to run with the less 'up front' tasks. Without our many volunteers each fulfilling a specific role, this huge 'machine' could not move forward like 'clockwork' as smoothly as it does. Thank you to all of you – too many to mention by name. You know who you are!



HONORARY PRESIDENT

We congratulate our Honorary President, Peter Steyn, because during this year he achieved the distinction of having been responsible for 63 cover photographs for Promerops magazines. This year he also celebrates 22 years as Honorary President (April 1998 – April 2020). In fact, he has equalled Gerry Broekhuysen's record 22 years of office, albeit that Gerry was Chairman and Peter is Honorary President. He modestly asked me if I felt it was time for him to step down. I said emphatically not! How lucky we are to have a man like Peter as the President of our club. I thank him also for being so supportive of me and for his readiness to be our 'praise-singer' at most of our meetings. He always thanks the guest speakers with such



Cover photo by Peter Steyn

aplomb and wit, often adding interesting related personal and entertaining anecdotes.

THANKS TO COMMITTEE

I would like to thank the committee for their hard work on behalf of the club. I have loved working with the team! Our committee meetings are always constructive and sharing



occasions, quite 'gesellig' with lots of teasing and laughs – but always run to a strict agenda. The committee is enthusiastic and committed, showing huge concern for every aspect of club life and I thank them for all their support, their collective wisdom, their willingness to lead and their readiness to take on

extra responsibilities – Johan Schlebusch, Joy Fish, Barbara Jones, Linda Merrett, Dave Whitelaw, Cheryl Leslie, Gillian Barnes and Vince Ward. Barbara, Cheryl and Vince are stepping down from the committee.

SECRETARIAL MATTERS

Barbara Jones, our secretary, has resigned from the committee, this because she has taken up some studies that prevent her from regularly being able to attend our committee meetings and give enough attention to her CBC responsibilities. Thank you, Barbara, for all your hard work recording discussions and decisions at meetings over the last few years. The good news is that Barbara has said that once her studies are over she will be very willing to return to the committee!

MONEY MATTERS

Joy Fish is our very competent honorary treasurer, seemingly unflappable. I have loved working with Joy. She, very quietly, keeps tabs on the club's money, investments, income and expenditure, regularly updating us at our committee meetings as to the state of our finances. She always acts promptly on what she has promised to do.

She is assisted by Mary Debrick. Despite Mary and her husband, Terry, having moved to Somerset West, Mary continues with much commitment to attend to the day-to-day transactions and payments via EFT.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Linda Merrett, our membership secretary, plays a vital role of welcoming new members to our club. She liaises very closely with Shireen Gould of BirdLife South Africa, keeping membership records up to date and striving to ensure their accuracy. One good way you can help her is to ensure that, if your personal details change, you inform her a.s.a.p., so that she is able to update the records. Another way you can help her is to renew your membership as soon as you receive notice that payment is due. If you don't, that email simply becomes 'lost' in all the others you receive! It is unnecessarily time- and energy-consuming for both Shireen and Linda to have to send reminders. If you have decided against renewal for whatever

reason, may we strongly urge you to drop Linda a line with the reason. We value your feedback, both positive and negative, to help us improve the functioning of the CBC. At the end of 2019 we had 685 members (including family members). 91 new members joined the club.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Audio-Visual

I would like to thank Patrick Riley who takes care of the Audio-Visual side of evening meetings and courses. This club would struggle without him – and we especially realised this when he was unable, in the middle of last year, to attend a couple of meetings because of ill health. Thank you, all those who stepped into the gap then. All offers to assist with this task going forward will be VERY gratefully received! Patrick will train you!

Speakers' Programme

Our speakers' programme, arranged by Priscilla Beeton, has been varied in the last year. We have learned about various research and conservation projects around specific bird species. We have travelled to such varied countries as Peru and Antarctica. We have all learned what a Pecha Kucha presentation is when we heard the presentation about the Kruger Birding and Wildlife Challenge. Our one no-birding talk was on spiders. Many thanks to our all our guest speakers (including those unable to present) who put an enormous amount of preparation time into their presentations. They were Andrew de Blocq, Carla du Toit, Nicholas Pattinson, Mike Buckham, CBC Kruger Challenge Team, Peter Ryan, Norman Larsen, Michael Mason, and Tony Williams. Sadly, both our January and March meetings were cancelled because of load-shedding. The school where our meetings are held had hoped to purchase a generator but they are unable to afford it. We need to think out of the box regarding what to do when evening meetings are threatened by load-shedding. Suggestions will be gratefully received.

Quiz

An important evening meeting that rounds off the calendar year is the December quiz and pizza evening. The success of this evening depends greatly on our quizmaster, and Mike Buckham has proved to be a great quizmaster. Thank you, Mike. Even the less experienced or less well-travelled birders were able to answer many of the questions and everyone learnt something new! The pizzas were delicious and the evening was great fun.

Courses

Johan is our Courses Organiser and during 2019 he arranged two superb Saturday morning courses, the first in June, by Dr Melissa Whitecross, on grassland birds, and the second one in September by Ian Glenn on Francois Levallant, French author, explorer, naturalist and ornithologist. Feedback from participants on both courses was very positive.



We were unable in the year under review to run a Beginners' Course as we were let down by the venue we had booked and were unable to find another suitable venue that was available three Saturday mornings in a row. Heather Howell, however, has still run a couple of U3A beginner birding courses – and of course she encourages those course attendees to join the Cape Bird Club.

Mel Tripp has kindly given of his expertise to plan our course posters and advertisements. Thank you, Mel.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Camps

Gillian Barnes, as Camps Organiser, has in this last year arranged two most successful camps



Evening braai at Honeywood Farm

- in April at Kromrivier in the Cedarberg and in October at Honeywood Farm and Grootvadersbosch. Gillian has made a point of keeping a few places for members new to the club as this is one of the best ways to get to know fellow enthusiasts plus be immersed in bird watching for two or three days. Thank you, Gillian, for your quiet and efficient organization of camps and thank you also to the folk who have, when approached by Gillian, so readily agreed to be camp guides - Derek and Merle Chalton at Kromrivier and Vernon Head and Mel Tripp at the Anne Gray Memorial Camp held at Honeywood Farm.

Outings

Daryl and Lynette de Beer have been great outings programme organisers and under them quite a few new venues have been explored. We thank all the guides who freely and generously give of their time to research and recce outings venues and then also to write outings reports so that others can vicariously enjoy them too: Merle Chalton, Marilyn



Paarl Rock and Gardens outing

Metcalf, Gerald Wingate, Otto Schmidt. John Magner, Simon Fogarty, Mike Buckham, Mel Tripp, Margaret Maciver, Daryl de Beer, Gillian Barnes, Alison James, Felicity Ellmore, Tony Williams, Peter Nupen and Dave Whitelaw. We also thank Linda Hibbin for arranging the regular public Kirstenbosch Garden bird walks and the members from our club and from Tygerberg Bird Club who lead the walks. These walks are well patronized by members and non-members alike!

EDUCATION AND YOUTH PROJECTS

School bird clubs

Johan Schlebusch heads the education portfolio and under him this has gone from strength to strength. Our flagship school is still Floreat Primary and our champion teacher there is Kristi Rossouw. What is great is that she has also involved many of her colleagues in the school bird club and other related Eco-School activities. We have also worked at Steenberg Primary fairly successfully. Both schools have had some classroom sessions and quite a few outings (we strive to do 2 activities per term). Probably the highlight of the year for these two primary school bird clubs was the Camp at Soetwater Environmental Centre in Kommetjie which was attended by 30 children. We thank our wonderfully organised programme co-ordinator, Sanjo Rose.



Sanjo working with two learners during an owl pellet dissection

While she continues to assist us at the moment, she has now registered to do a Masters degree and has warned that from August onwards she may no longer be able to be hands-on. She will, though, continue her involvement in the planning of the programme but we are now looking for a young person to run the activities. If you know of someone who may be interested (it is paid by the hour) please let Johan know urgently. Ceinwen Smith of Ingcungcu “Sunbird Restoration Project” has also been invaluable. She assists regularly with the birding educational initiatives and outings which have meshed extremely well with the “gardening for birds” activities of Ingcungcu. How wonderful it has been to have these three energetic and creative young people working as part of the education team!

We thank Johan and his wonderful education team (Priscilla, Sanjo, Kristi and Ceinwen) and all who have helped with any events at these schools when we have called on them.

A real success story (not of our making, but very much supported monetarily and by providing transport and expertise by the Cape Bird Club as well as many members), has been the Claremont High School Bird Club under the leadership of Khanyisane Falake. Our donations, in part, enabled a life-changing tour to the Northern Cape in July last year. Some of our members also supported their school’s fund-raiser Bird Quiz in October. Sadly for Claremont High, Khanyisane has gone to teach at another school, but the good news is that she has already set up a fledgling bird club at her new school. Our task, as I see it, is to continue to

support the keen birders at Claremont High in whatever way we can.

Plans are well under way to move into other schools – plans which now are on hold because of Covid-19 and school closures. After the pandemic is over we need to explore opportunities to introduce bird clubs at one more primary school and also another high school, this latter because the children who really take to bird watching need somewhere to go at high school level to continue developing their skills. One of the ideas we are exploring is to create opportunities for high school birders at different schools to come together perhaps just once or twice a term to bird together, this idea born from a comment made by a young birder in our club who said he wished that he had had other young birders with whom to share his birding experiences.

CBC youth members

The Youth liaison portfolio has been held by Vince Ward whom sadly we are also losing from the committee. Vince has found it difficult to juggle work and CBC committee commitments, hence his resignation. Vince's portfolio had to do with the young members in our club. He arranged a couple of outings for them – one in the July school holidays and one in the September school holidays. Thank you, Vince, for what you managed to do during your brief time on the committee (also for the Rooi Els signage project mentioned under 'Conservation').

Birdathon

The CBC participation in the annual Birdathon in October last year was organised by Dave Whitelaw who worked with CTEET and City of Cape Town. We thank the many members who assisted by manning information tables and scope / binocular stations along the route at Strandfontein. Many members also assisted by passing on old magazines and posters that were handed out at the CBC table where children were also able to make bird feeders and learn a bit about making their own gardens bird friendly. You have no idea how 'thirsty' many of the children are for these glossy and beautifully illustrated magazines!

Ad hoc birding opportunities for young people

Priscilla Beeton has been the liaison person for NGOs who are wanting to include birding opportunities for the youngsters involved in their programmes – usually on a once-off basis. For example, in early February seven of our members manned a station at the World Wetlands Day event at Princess Vlei attended by 180 youngsters from two nearby high schools. We have had several more of these requests and we need to build up a data base of club members who are willing to assist on an ad hoc basis. Another request was for the 9 Miles High Project (an NGO involved in keeping at-risk teens off the streets in Strandfontein) for a visit to Rondevlei during the March school holiday – sadly cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Graham Pringle explaining how to use binoculars - World Wetlands Day at Princess Vlei

Please volunteer when we get going again.

CONSERVATION

Conservation is always very high on the agenda and Dave Whitelaw heads the Conservation Committee. In this last year the main focus has been Strandfontein Birding Area. The area has been under tremendous pressure but, in Dave's words, it is not all bad news. First some



FTMAK Project nesting walls - an overhaul

maintenance was necessary on the nesting walls for the TMAK project, and we did have our hopes lifted when a member reported seeing one of the martins moving out of a nesting hole. Last year in his report which was printed in the June Promerops, Dave reported concern about rapid spread of the Typha beds around P1 and P2 with the resultant loss of habitat for wading birds. The Wastewater Treatment Works management, at the urging of the Conservation Committee, has secured the use of heavy equipment for several weeks. P1 is currently

being cleared and Typha beds along the northern edge of P2 will also be cleared. A regular supply of Megamelus, the bug which parasitizes Water Hyacinth, is now being received. There was a bit of a glitch with this in the middle of last year and the hyacinth increased its range somewhat but now the bug is multiplying again. It is also hoped that staff will be able to do some manual clearing. (This has been hampered by the need to go "hippo" hunting.) Dave reports that he is also negotiating with an MSc. student who intends studying the possible effect of heavy metals and toxins in the water which may inhibit Megamelus activity.

You'll all be relieved to know that the road which the City Council wanted to construct through the area will now circle the birding area. This shows that if enough objections are raised, it can make a difference. Thank you to all members who took time to write to the City Council and comment critically on this proposal.

Again, those who visit the area will have seen that water levels still remain a problem with the water recycling but the Conservation Committee will be negotiating with the WWT management about this issue. We're hoping that the birding habitat will improve with significantly improved dam levels.

At Mitchells Plain and Athlone sewage works, a good relationship with the management is being established. At the Mitchell's Plain works, in consultation with the staff, sites have been identified to improve wader bird habitat. At Athlone they have undertaken to schedule mowing to times that do not negatively affect breeding birds.

At the Liesbeeck River, the Conservation Committee is working with Communitree, The Friends of the Liesbeeck and Stepping Stones on a major project to document whether revegetation improves bird diversity. This requires regular monitoring of the bird population along the Liesbeeck River. They also plan to repeat a major study done 5 years ago in the Liesbeeck catchment. This will be led by a researcher from UCT Ecological unit. Bird Club members are strongly urged to sign up to assist in these two projects.

The Conservation Committee has grave concerns about our bird monitoring – both CWAC and CAR counts, because of the declining numbers of people able to assist. It's sobering to remember that if we didn't have evidence of Strandfontein's bird numbers and diversity, it would not have been recognised as an IBA or a RAMSAR Site. Sadly, here at Strandfontein our monitoring has been reduced to once a quarter from once a month because there are no longer enough counters. The matter of CAR counts was brought up at the last Western Cape Birding Forum meeting in early March because fewer and fewer routes are being covered because of a lack of counters (that is from all the bird clubs not only CBC). The monthly Kirstenbosch Gardens count continues to flourish – and that is, perhaps, because for many participants it is another most enjoyable bird outing, albeit with a specific purpose. Thanks to the leaders of the counts. Please, if you are able, consider assisting them in counts, including CWACs and CAR.

We are also most grateful to all our members who continue to support SABAP by regularly atlassing and some going that extra mile to strive to cover pentads with insufficient coverage. I know more and more of you are using Birdlasser. You don't have to be a fanatic lister / twitcher to enjoy keeping a personal record of your own sightings! And then it is just a button away from you starting to atlas too. Let's continue to embrace the new technology and also the many online sites for sharing special sightings quickly.

During his brief tenure, Vince Ward arranged the successful new Cape Rockjumper signage at Rooi Els, urging visitors to stay on the road. He collaborated closely with the Rooi Els Conservancy group who were worried not only about the charismatic Cape Rockjumpers but also about the rich botanical offerings that the site holds. He worked closely with a local birding tour company which partially funded the project.

COMMUNICATIONS

We are very fortunate to have an excellent communications team providing information via different media – literally something for everyone. They deserve a huge round of applause.

Promerops

Promerops, which comes out three times a year, is still for many a major attraction, especially as very few clubs still offer a printed magazine. You should all have received your March edition of this magazine and, as usual, Fiona Jones, our editor, has surpassed all expectations. She continually strives to ensure the best standards in making the magazine both informative and entertaining – and we applaud her hard work, dedication and tireless efforts. What a huge vote of thanks she and her large team deserve in producing and distributing this wonderful mouthpiece of the Cape Bird Club. Thank you also to all who have taken time and made the effort to submit articles and photographs.

Webpage

We remain very proud of our web page – kept up to date and relevant by Gavin Lawson, Cheryl Leslie, Gillian Barnes, Joy Fish, Mel Tripp and Otto Schmidt. Thank you to you all! How

many of you have referred to our web page recently and seen the wonderful resource of Western Cape birds prepared by Mel Tripp and Otto Schmidt and their team of photographers as well as the information on the best birding sites in the Western Cape.

E-newsletter

Cheryl Leslie has been responsible for our monthly e-newsletter. She is leaving the committee because of onerous work commitments but has agreed to continue producing our e-newsletters and administering the Facebook page. Both have become such important communications tools for us. This has been especially evident in recent months when we needed to get urgent messages out to club members to inform them of a cancelled evening meeting because of load-shedding, of venue changes for outings and also about the shutdown of all bird club activities due to the pandemic. The e-newsletter is definitely the 'go-to' tool for updates on planned outings and any changes that might have become necessary since the printing of the activities programme in *Promerops*. Cheryl is always so willing to send out a special edition and news snippets when it is urgently needed! Thank you, Cheryl. At the risk of sounding like a stuck gramophone, I stress the importance of ensuring that you are on the mailing list and receive it, so that it can be an effective rapid communications tool as well as an entertaining and information tool.

Facebook

Our Facebook page is jointly administered by Cheryl Leslie, Cathy Jenkins, Vince Ward and Fiona Jones. Thank you.

Those of you who use Facebook will know that this is quite a lively page for members to share photographs, experiences and birding tips and I thank all who contribute to it regularly. During this shut-down let more of us start sharing online!

Media Liaison

One person who works very hard behind the scenes is Linda Johnstone who arranges advertising of our events in the local community newspapers and radio. Quite a few people attending evening meetings or outings have told us they knew about it because of an advertisement in the media! Thank you, Linda!

BOOKSHOP and SALE TABLES

Anne Greig continues to run our new book sales at evening meetings and courses, so willingly and diligently assisted by her son, William, and husband, Gavin. We must also thank Jo Hobbs and Mel Tripp for organising our second-hand / precious book sales.

We thank Gillian, assisted by Penny Dichmont, who runs the Sales Table (hats, badges, stickers and more) at evening meetings.

These are all important sources of income for the club to support our various education or conservation projects. Thank you to all of you for supporting the club in this special way and increasing significantly the services that members can expect from the club.

Special mention

Sylvia Ledgard is amazing – she works in the background doing various admin tasks. It is she who responds to or redirects queries that come via the website and e-mail. It is she who arranges all our hall bookings, and to top it all, she leads the tea team who work so slickly at providing refreshments at all our evening meetings and courses. Sylvia, thank you for all you continue to do for our club and also for being our go-to person when we need assistance or advice. Thank you to all who assist with serving refreshments at meetings – and I can't say 'Ladies' because several men assist too!

Once again may I convey a very big thank you to the many members who give so willingly of their time, talents and knowledge. I have not mentioned all of you by name; there are too many! A message to all those not yet involved in a task that enables the club to keep running smoothly: We *always* need new volunteers to give fresh life and blood to this club of ours. 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!

We must honour some special people in our midst.

OWL AWARDS

Three of our members received BirdLife South Africa OWL awards during 2019 for the work they have done for advancing birding and the conservation of birds and their habitats. This is a tremendous honour and we congratulate them!

Khanyisane Falake and Garth Shaw jointly won an OWL award for their work at setting up and running the very exciting Claremont High School Bird Club. Jessie Walton received an OWL award for her considerable contribution to bird conservation and research.



Khanyisane showing off her Owl Award



Vernon Head (on behalf of BLSA) presenting the Owl Award to Jessie Walton

PROMEROPS AWARDS – Every year we honour members in our club who have made and continue to make a special contribution to our club. These will be announced during the Zoom meeting on 30th April 2020. They will also appear in the next copy of Promerops magazine.