

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT APRIL 2020 – FEBRUARY 2021

This year, the year of Covid-19, has pretty much stopped many of our activities, so this report will be shorter than usual.

Zoom meetings

With restrictions already beginning in early March and then the announcement of the strict lockdown on 27th March our outings, courses and bird counts were brought to a grinding halt. We all hoped the lockdown would end quickly – but as soon as we realized this was not to be, we had to make alternative arrangements, especially for our evening meetings which we believed were important to continue. Many of us were thrown into the deep-end, learning the ins-and-outs of Zoom and online evening meetings began – including last year's AGM (which was to have been held in mid-March but was postponed because of Eskom's load-shedding). We thank our 'Zoom master' Mike Buckham very much for leading the way and for so patiently teaching us all what to do. As was done for our online AGM last year we are again using e-mail to circulate the Chairman's report and then presenting on Zoom the Financials for sharing and approval.

I am indebted to the committee who have worked hard to keep the Club going and to do the right thing for the members. We have continued our monthly committee meetings via Zoom, with detailed minutes being kept by our diligent and proactive Club secretary, Gillian Barnes.

Donations

Because of the cessation of our projects and the hire of the hall for meetings, we have had more funds at our disposal. The last year brought hardship to many, and we made a number of donations aimed at relieving that hardship. We monetarily supported a number of very worthwhile projects (to date to the value of R67 000) and I thank Joy Fish and her assistant, Mary Debrick, very much for so efficiently administering those payments. They are detailed in Joy's Treasurer's Report. We also took out corporate membership of SANCCOB in June – a long overdue step as we acknowledge the lifesaving work they do for our seabirds.

Membership

On a positive note, a year later Covid-19 lockdown is not as strict as it was in those first months, and on the whole, although we are all pretty fed up with Covid-19 fatigue, we are not quite so frightened as we have come to know more about the virus. Despite the loss of essential club birding activities many people have continued birding on their own and with friends in small allowable groups. The committee has been pleasantly surprised at how many people have started birding, perhaps just noticing and hearing birds in their gardens as their frenetic lives slowed down and they spent more time at home, or perhaps inspired by the lockdown garden challenges, and during this last year we have had a surprising number of

new members (surprising in that for a large chunk of the year we have had little to offer besides the Zoom meetings). Linda Merrett, our membership secretary, welcomes all new members. It, however, also falls to her to follow up those members who have fallen behind in their subscriptions and this after both an invoice and a reminder e-mail from BirdLife South Africa's membership division, which administers our membership subscriptions, have already been sent. We encourage members to look carefully at their e-mails and pay their memberships timeously so that the e-mails do not become lost in the plethora of other messages you are receiving. If you suddenly realise you are not receiving your Promerops or African Birdlife magazines, that should alert you to check that your subscription is up to date! Thank you so much, Linda for all you do!

Online meetings, webinars and podcasts

Many have enjoyed the learning online: not only viewing our own monthly evening meetings but also enjoying the excellent weekly webinars offered by BirdLife South Africa. Webinar courses such as those offered by Mike Buckham and Dave Winter in their Better Birding series have enthralled many of us. What is good too about these is that one can go back to the YouTube video of the webinar many times in order to refresh one's learning. Many have also enjoyed "The Birding Life" weekly podcasts produced by Adam Cruickshank and team. During those he has interviewed some of our members, including Prof. Peter Ryan and Mike Buckham. Joel Radue and Adam Buckham have been interviewed for the special Youth podcasts. Those interviews can still be accessed as online podcasts, so I urge you to listen to them if you haven't yet done so. The Virtual African Bird Fair arranged by BirdLife South Africa on 5th September in 2020 was a great success – both interest-wise and also in that so many birders around the country got to participate whereas before, in its physical format, only those living close to Johannesburg or those who could travel to the event could attend. I am sure all those who watched Peter Harrison's keynote address were as moved as I was! The CBC was quite well represented by several speakers and Mike Buckham, along with Andrew de Blocq, hosted a cracking Quiz to end a thoroughly satisfying day of presentations. There has been so much on offer that sometimes one can feel "zoomed-out"!

Our own monthly evening Zoom talks have been varied. We visited Easter Island with Peter Hills, the Pitkern Islands with Prof. Peter Ryan and Ethiopia with Nick Fordyce and Garret Skead. Mike Buckham shared with us his bird-filled anniversary trip with his wife to Uganda. Michael Mason celebrated with his beautiful photographs the joys of the Kruger National Park. Tony Williams again enthralled us with a presentation on amazing birds around the world. Jesslena Suri's excellent presentation on bird communities in our cities was very thought-provoking. Trevor Hardaker in his illustrated account of his participation in the 150 km Cape Town challenge must have encouraged some who had not considered this challenge before to register for 2021! Our non-birding talk by Dr Jeanne Tarrant focussed on the threatened frogs of the South Western Cape. Many thanks to these speakers!

All along, however, the committee has been mindful of those who have been unable to access Zoom and Facebook Live; they have had little to keep them going ... Sadly, despite the requests for evening meetings to resume at the lighter lockdown levels with the allowed 50 people, your committee has not felt comfortable arranging for this to happen. We feared greatly that unbeknown to us (and them) there might be Covid carriers in an audience comprised largely of older and more-at-risk members. The good news is that a special Cape Bird Club channel on YouTube has been created on which anyone from the February meeting onwards can watch the recorded evening meetings albeit after the event. We believe many more will be able to access these.

Our annual December Quiz – online – was most successful. Mike Buckham ensured that there were questions to suit all levels of birders. Participants were encouraged to form small teams either communicating via WhatsApp or gathering at one team-member's home where Covid protocols could still be observed.

Courses

Courses have, of course, not taken place in the last year. We are however working on an online Beginners' course. Helen Fenwick has taken on a major responsibility for this. Thank you, Helen.

Youth and Education

We have, led by Johan Schlebusch our vice-Chairman, continued to debate and plan for the resumption of the Education Project at Floreat and Steenberg Primary Schools as soon as we are able to visit those schools again. We are currently looking for and advertising for a new Education Project co-ordinator as Sanjo Rose has embarked on new studies and is unable to continue co-ordinating and planning activities for us. Sadly too, Khanyisane Falake in our youth portfolio on the committee is stepping down because of huge teaching commitments. She has been involved in discussions and sharing ideas to find a way forward for best supporting high school learners but unfortunately the Covid-19 lockdowns have prevented any practical activities at both primary and high school levels. Many thanks to both Sanjo and Khanyisane for what they have respectively done to take our youth projects forward. Kristi Rossouw continues to be our champion teacher at Floreat Primary and is raring to get going again as soon as schools are allowed to begin their after-school activities.

Outings

I would like to thank Daryl and Lynette de Beer for faithfully continuing to plan outings, three per month, ever hopeful that lockdown levels will be lifted enough to allow outdoor gatherings. Outings DID begin in September and as testament to how members had missed these, they were pretty well subscribed – up to 45 birders at some outings. They stopped again for January and February when we went back into Lockdown Level 3. But this month, March, they have begun again. We must

thank all participants for adhering to the Covid-19 protocols, always wearing their masks and trying to socially distance. We also thank the leaders of the walks: Merle Chalton for her legendary Rondevlei outings, Mel Trip, Daryl and Lyn de Beer, Graham Pringle, Gillian Barnes, Dennis Laidler, Margaret Maciver, and all those who have been prepared to lead but whose outings were cancelled. I wonder if you all know that these leaders take time to do a recce before a walk so that they have a good idea of the layout of the area and the birds that could be found there! They also ensure that a report of the outing is written for posting in the e-newsletter and/or on the website. A new venue this year was the outing to the Cape Flats Nature Reserve at University of the Western Cape. What a gem that is!

Communications

Our Communications Team deserve a huge accolade.

Fiona Jones has continued as our Promerops editor, producing a high-quality magazine every four months. The magazine is both informative and entertaining – and we applaud her hard work and dedication in following up stories and articles and also the hours she spends on her computer putting it all together. She has a large team of people working with her to produce, proofread and distribute this praiseworthy mouthpiece of the Cape Bird Club. Thank you also to all who have taken time and made the effort to submit articles and photographs. Fiona is amazing! She has, during this year, besides producing a fine magazine, set up an index to Promerops called Promdex which can be accessed on our website. Already all issues of Promerops from 2016 to the present are indexed. As new issues of the magazine are produced they are immediately indexed and retrospective indexing continues to grow the list. This index will be a most welcome boon to researchers and students.

Cheryl Leslie, ever helpful and proactive, has produced the e-newsletter, not only once per month but whenever we have needed to reach members with urgent information such as Zoom links, programme changes and communiques from BirdLife SA. I stress again the importance of ensuring that you are on the mailing list and receive it. It does provide good reading and is also an effective rapid communications tool. Melodie and Colin Attwell are in the background when she needs assistance and are assisting Cheryl and Cathy Jenkins with the Cape Bird Club Facebook page administration. We have seen an increase in numbers both joining the Facebook page and sharing their birding activities and photographs via this medium which is always pleasing and fun to see what others are doing.

We thank all involved in running our website and keeping it up to date. There really are some wonderful resources to be found there. For example, the albums of bird photographs which, as long as the source is acknowledged, can be used free for educational purposes. Most useful, especially for new birders or birders visiting Cape Town, are the descriptions of where to go birding around Cape Town. There is loads of information to be found on the website!

Here I need to thank Sylvia Ledgard. She has been our Club 'information person' for many, many years, first telephonically and latterly by e-mail answering the many queries sent via the website or forwarding them to the appropriate person for a response. Sylvia is now relinquishing this post as she feels these queries should be handled by someone who is better placed to deal with current issues. Sylvia, we thank you so much for all that you have done for the Club over the many years and for the wider birding community. Sylvia was one of our first Promerops Award recipients, being honoured for all her years of service on the Club committee and on the Western Cape Birding Forum.

Priscilla Beeton has produced a newsletter for younger birders called "Birding Buzz" – two issues so far. It has been e-mailed to families in the club that we know have children in the 8 – 15 year age group and also to our project schools and a couple of other schools with outdoor clubs. If you know a child who may be interested, please let us know and we will add the name to the mailing list.

Conservation (including report of the Conservation Committee)

The main committee has been working more closely with the Conservation Committee especially pertaining to issues around Strandfontein Birding Area. The initial stages of lockdown prevented staff and visitors from visiting the site for prolonged periods. During this period several problems arose – water levels in P1 and P2 were neglected and rose making it unsuitable as wader habitat and flooding the sandbanks for gull and tern roosting. Moves have been made to correct this and the situation is returning to normal.

The Strandfontein Birding Area signage project has largely been spear-headed by Joy Fish and Dave Whitelaw. Decisions were made with the management of the False Bay Nature Reserve to erect new signage including maps demarcating the pans of the Strandfontein Birding area and to explain the importance of the area as a Ramsar site. We thank Mel Tripp for all the work he has put into designing the boards and being so patient with the many revisions as we sought to produce signs that both the management of False Bay Nature Reserve and the CBC were happy with. We hope the new signage will go up shortly. A special thank you to both Joy and Dave for the huge amount of time and energy they have given and continue to give this project. A very generous member has donated funding for this project and also for the ongoing maintenance of the breeding banks.

One of the conservation issues at Strandfontein has been the spread of the water hyacinth. Several more pans have been infected. Fortunately, the "P" pans do not seem to be affected. The management of the WWTW is responsible for clearing the infected pans, but it is VERY expensive to dredge the pans and funding is a major problem.

It was decided the Club and visitors to the area can assist in keeping those pans which are currently clear from water hyacinth from getting infected. Visitors have

been asked to inform any spread of water hyacinth in the P pans or in S2 or to any others to Joy Fish or Dave Whitelaw or Chairman of the club. All the relevant numbers are in Promerops and on the noticeboards.

Dave reports that the pandemic has meant that little has been achieved this year by the Conservation Committee. Other sewage works have received little attention primarily because staff are reluctant to meet with the Conservation Committee or allow access. There have been no meetings of the PAAC boards (Protected Areas advisory Councils) where the Club is represented, nor of the WCBF (Western Cape Birding Forum).

The mega development at the River Club has also been a major focus of the Conservation Committee. Hot off the press is the news that the development has been approved. This could have major implications for the flood plains of the Raapenberg and the Liesbeeck Rivers and will have a significant effect on the Raapenberg Bird Sanctuary which has a bird list of 68 species.

Bird Monitoring along the Liesbeeck River: a project in conjunction with Communitree, an organisation which revegetates areas in the City, has been started to document bird species and numbers there. This is in addition to the large number of sites which are already being monitored including Symphony Way, Edith Stevens and the Consul Glass works. Lockdown obviously has affected negatively most of the monthly and quarterly bird counts but as lockdown has eased they are starting up again. We must thank all the co-ordinators responsible for these as well as their teams. We thank Dick Barnes, co-ordinator of the Strandfontein counts for many years as he now hands over the reins to Graham Pringle. Dick will continue to assist but the co-ordinator will be Graham. Thank, you, Graham, for being so willing to take on this responsibility.

Citizen Science is alive and well with our many atlasers going ahead with their atlasing, as soon as they were able to go out.

Dave also reports that he and Cliff Dorse accompanied John Fincham on a site visit to the reed beds along the Kuils River where the City of Cape Town had done control burns and, in the process, destroyed the nests of the many birds roosting there. Cliff organised a meeting with the City officials in charge of the area and lines of communication were set up to ensure that burns should only occur once breeding season was over.

We thank Dave Whitelaw and his Conservation Committee for their work during what has been a difficult year.

Sales

Anne Greig has continued to make the bookshop available to members from her home in Constantia during the time that we have had no evening meetings. She advertises regularly in the e-newsletter and a number of people have made use of

this service – especially when the new Sasol guide came out. Jo Hobbs and Priscilla Beeton have managed to sell some second-hand books via the e-newsletter, so raising funds for the club. We thank those who have donated books and magazines for this purpose and for use at our outreach schools. Another project taken on by the club was the distribution of the fourth edition Sasol guides (after the 5th edition came out) donated to us via BirdLife South Africa by the publishers – and we thank Jo Hobbs and John Fincham and the committee members who assisted with this distribution to schools and rangers and officials in reserves.

BirdLife Bird of the Year posters

As you all know the Bird of the Year for 2021 is the Cape Rockjumper, a bird endemic to the Western Cape and therefore particularly close to our hearts. You will be receiving a poster about this charismatic little bird in your next African BirdLife magazine. Please do not just throw it away. Pass it on to your local school or ask someone whom you employ to take it to their local school! Give it to a teacher or a child who loves birds. Please also share with anyone in the teaching profession that there are more Bird of the Year resources on the BirdLife South Africa website that they could use most successfully in the classroom.

To end this report, although I have mentioned some people by name, I have by no means mentioned everyone who has had a part to play in keeping the Cape Bird Club alive – members who have chatted to others about birds and birding, who have shared their birding expertise and who have arranged small allowable groups to go birding together. Thank you to all of you!

Promerops Awards

Will be announced at AGM.