

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Minutes of the meeting held at the Helderberg Nature Reserve, Somerset West
Saturday, 07 February 2015

Vernon Head - Chaired the Meeting.
Sylvia Ledgard - Minutes.

Present

Cape Bird Club: Vernon Head, Sylvia Ledgard, Julian Hare, Jo Hobbs, Joan Ackroyd.

Tygerberg Bird Club: Brian Vanderwalt.

West Coast Bird Club: Keith Harrison, Angus Stewart.

Somerset West Bird Club: Brian Dennis, Sakkie Krynauw, Freya Brett, Alistair Lohead, Sonia Peacey, Bryan Butler.

Stanford Bird Club: Peter Hochfelden, Debbie Alexander.

BirdLife Overberg: Chris Cheetham

BirdLife Worcester: Kobus Graaff

BLSA: Dale Wright (Reg. Conservation Manager, W. Cape), Fanie du Plessis (Business Manager), Shireen Gould (Membership Manager).

Lakes Bird Club: Bill Naude

Cape Nature: Kevin Shaw (Scientific Services)

SABAP2: Peter Nupen.

Visitor: Tony Williams (Ornithologist), Nigel Stainforth (member of BLSA Board)

Guest speaker: Dr. Odette Curtis (Director, Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust).

Apologies

Brigid Crewe, Dave Whitelaw, Peter Nupen, Anton Odendal, Craig Holmes, Colin de Kock, Salome Willemse, Yvonne Weiss, Margaret Roestorf (SANCCOB), Stephen van der Spuy (SANCCOB).

Welcome extended to first-time attendees: to guest speaker Odette Curtis, Nigel Stainforth (member of BLSA Board and architect of the incoming governance and membership structure), BLSA representatives Fanie du Plessis and Shireen Gould, and Debbie Alexander (Stanford) and Sonia Peacey (Somerset West).

1. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES Confirmation of Minutes of previous meeting (27/9/2014).

Amendments recorded: Questions arising under section 11 BLSA New Governance Structure and Membership Administration.

- Nigel Stainforth noted that:
 - (1) The Chairman of the Governance Committee, and not an electoral college, will select his team.
 - (2) Affiliation: when a club becomes an Affiliated Member of BLSA, all the members are affiliated but do not have voting rights. The club has a single voting right.

2. TRIBUTE TO ANNE GRAY (Vernon Head). Anne Gray passed away on 28 November 2014.

Anne was a foundation member of WCBF. Her legacy and contribution to the Forum was her ability to embrace many different aspects of biodiversity. Her interests were wide ranging and her passion for the natural world extended beyond birds, whether it was wetlands, plants, rocks, butterflies, dragonflies and

she brought this to the Forum.
We will remember Anne for her passion and commitment.

3. PRESENTATION (Dr. Odette Curtis): **Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust (OLCT).**

Dr. Curtis presented a pictorial overview of the work being done by OLCT to conserve the critically endangered renosterveld remnants in the Overberg Lowlands and the importance of these remnants to botany and the wildlife that depends on them. OLCT is endeavouring to bring landowners, communities, wildlife agencies and NGOs together to conserve the last remnants of Lowland renosterveld in several strategic locations.

Almost all renosterveld remnants occur on privately owned land and are highly fragmented. It is found on fertile soils that have been transformed by agriculture to such an extent that only 5% remains today. Renosterveld supports a large range of endemic and threatened plants and animals and is the richest bulb habitat on earth. In the Lowlands, 95% has been lost.

The OLCT was formed in early 2012 in response to the urgent need to conserve the last remaining fragments of Lowland renosterveld. In 2013, WWF purchased 500 hectares of land between Bredasdorp and Malgas, just north of De Hoop Nature Reserve, which represents the largest contiguous piece of Lowland renosterveld left in the world, now named the Haagwegskloof Renosterveld Reserve. OLCT was appointed as the management authority.

OLCT's focus is on engaging with farmers in a positive way to instil a sense of pride about the biodiversity-rich remnants of renosterveld on their land and bring them on board as custodians of this habitat, along the lines of Cape Nature's Stewardship Programme. The farmers remain owners and managers of the land but with ecological principles being applied through OLCT's guidance and assistance.

BirdLife South Africa and the OLCT are collaborating with raising funds to set up an Easement Programme which will be used to secure parcels of land for conservation on private land and make it easier to gain the support of landowners. A key objective of OLCT is to secure deals with landowners so as to expand the reserve by purchasing land to connect the renosterveld remnants and ultimately the hope is to create an unbroken corridor through to De Hoop Nature Reserve. One such Easement has been signed with a farmer and others have shown a positive interest. If these farmers come on board, it will add another 1,000 hectares to the reserve.

Note (NS): Candice Stevens, a new employee at BLSA, is a tax specialist specialising in environmental taxes and the use of tax incentives. Candice is looking at tax incentives to improve fiscal benefits for landowners.

Renosterveld Visitor and Research Centre. Funds were raised to restore the old Haagwegskloof homestead on the reserve as a hub for renosterveld research. The birding community contributed to the funds. The Centre was opened on 6 September 2014 and can accommodate students and visiting scientists. There is also self-catering accommodation for guests - cost R250 per person/night. Lecture facilities are provided.

Other projects underway are:

- Restoration of healthy watercourses.
- Education and awareness. OLCT is working with BLSA and BOTSOC to produce a glossy booklet of management guidelines for farmers.
- Monitoring of flora: BOTSOC's Crewe unit collects data to inform the Red Listing of species.
- Monitoring wildlife. Interesting wildlife found in the reserve has been Black Harrier, Denham's Bustard, Aardvark, Aardwolf, chameleons
- Collaborative research on renosterveld.

Donations: Individuals can contribute to funding by “Sponsoring a Petal” for R450/annum.

4. BLSA’S NEW MEMBERSHIP STRATEGY & ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM (Shireen Gould).

Shireen reviewed the key changes that will come into effect following approval at the BirdLife South Africa AGM in March 2015, namely:

- Members of bird clubs will have the option of joining BirdLife South Africa as members. This will no longer be compulsory.
- Bird clubs will be able to do their own membership administration should they so wish, or BirdLife South Africa can continue to do the administration on the club’s behalf.
- If a club decides to do its own membership administration, this will include all the administration functions such as issuing membership invoices, collection of membership fees and issuing membership cards and the club’s membership details will be removed from the membership system.
- Bird clubs who do their own membership administration will not need to collect BirdLife South Africa membership fees from members who remain members of BirdLife South Africa. BirdLife South Africa will invoice these members directly.
- Members who do not remain members of BirdLife South Africa, but who still wish to subscribe to African Birdlife, will become direct subscribers and will pay the full price of the magazine (currently R270 as opposed to R205).
- Bird clubs will have the option of remaining as BirdLife South Africa affiliated bird clubs. Affiliated bird clubs will pay an affiliation fee of R15 per main member/family unit per annum. New Membership Administration System. BLSA is investigating a membership database programme called MASS (Membership Administration System Software). It is an Australian developed programme that is not as labour intensive as the current programme. It offers a huge range of parameters and options for pulling reports and running mail merges. It will be possible to read reports from the website.

Comments and questions:

(NS): Motivation for new strategy: BLSA’s key focus is the conservation of birds and their habitats. It is recognised that many members just want to watch birds. The new membership structure will make it easier for people to become part of the BirdLife family without having to get involved in all aspects of BLSA. BLSA wants to encourage clubs to join as Affiliated Members. That is where it starts. Members can grow into conservation awareness from there. Bird clubs can be the nursery for future conservationists.

(BD): Implementation: When do the changes go public? (SG): Following approval at the BLSA AGM on 21 March. Clubs will need to change their constitutions accordingly.

(SG): Affiliation: If the Club pays an affiliation fee, thus becoming an Affiliated Member of BLSA, the club members all become affiliated members but without voting rights.

The club has a single vote. The affiliation fee payable by clubs will come into effect in Sept / Oct. 2015.

(NS): Clubs will be asked to sign an affiliation partnership agreement with BLSA annually.

(BN): Member. What is the definition of a “member”? (NS): Members of BLSA are individuals or clubs that have paid a membership subscription fee to BLSA. An individual can become a Direct Member of BirdLife South Africa, an Affiliated Member via a Bird Club, or both.

(BD): Club name. Noted that clubs can retain or change their old name as wished.

(BvdW): Membership cards. Affiliated clubs that print their own cards should ensure that the BirdLife South Africa logo is incorporated on the card together with the designation “Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa”.

(BN): Administration charge. Will BLSA charge a fee for administering a club’s membership? (SG): An administration fee will not apply for the foreseeable future.

(BvdW): Dissemination of information to clubs. Will BirdLife South Africa continue to provide clubs with information? (NS): Yes. The e-Newsletter will be the main communication channel. (VH): Also, it will be the role of the Regional Forums to inform and give feedback to the clubs. The Forums will become very much more important in the new structure.

5. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES: BirdLife South Africa (Fanie du Plessis).

The new constitution will go to the BLSA AGM in March for approval. An advance copy of the finished document will be circulated to bird clubs.

6. WESTERN CAPE REGIONAL CONSERVATION REPORT (Dale Wright)

The chairman congratulated Dale on having been awarded a scholarship from the Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation in Front Royal, Virginia, where he attended a 2-week training course on the Conservation and Ecology of Migratory Birds.

Dale is preparing a comprehensive progress report for primary sponsor the Rupert Nature Foundation covering the work and achievements of BirdLife South Africa's Regional Conservation Programme in the Western Cape in 2014. A copy will be sent to Forum members.

Major activities in 2014

(1) IBAs. Assessments have been completed for all 23 IBAs in the Western Cape and a further eight in the Eastern Cape. In the context of South Africa as a whole, detailed assessments of all 124 of South Africa's IBAs have been completed over the past four years. Certain IBAs were expanded and new IBAs declared. This will inform the updating of the IBA Directory of South Africa and provide information for an IBA Status Report, both of which will be published shortly. There will be limited hard copies plus an electronic copy.

(2) Velorenvlei and Moutonshoek. Dale oversees the management and implementation of the Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project, involving Biodiversity Stewardship at the Verloren Estuary and its Moutonshoek catchment. Samantha Schroder was appointed as the Project Manager in February 2014. The roll-out of this project will ultimately lead to formal protection for these sites.

(3) Western Cape Estuaries Conservation Programme. Many of the estuarine IBAs in the Western Cape require formal protection for their safeguard. Funding has been secured from WWF/ Elizabeth Harding Trust for a second Biodiversity Stewardship project which will focus on the unprotected estuarine IBAs of the Western Cape, primarily the Berg River estuary and Bot and Klein River estuaries.

(4) Overberg Wheat-belt IBA. Dale is working with the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust to raise funds to implement conservation stewardship in the Overberg Wheat-belt IBA and distribute information on environmentally sustainable agriculture to local farmers. In this context, a booklet is being produced to inform farmers on the important flora and fauna of the region and provide guidelines on best land management practices to support biodiversity.

(5) Farm dams and Waterbirds. A partnership project has been developed with Nature Conservation Corporation (NCC) Environmental Services for the rehabilitation of waterbird habitat on farm dams.

(6) False Bay National Park. Dale is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the MOU with the City of Cape Town and the Cape Bird Club regarding the management of the FBNR IBA.

This site which includes Rondevlei and Zeekoevlei Nature Reserves and the Strandfontein Sewage Works will soon be designated a Provincial Nature Reserve.

The site received RAMSAR status, conferred by the DEA at a World Wetlands Day celebration on 4 February 2015.

RAMSAR recognises wetlands of international significance and sites must meet stringent conditions to qualify.

Corporate sponsorship of the IBA: Initiatives continue for securing corporate sponsorship to support the socio-economic development programme encompassing skills development, training and environmental education. A detailed funding proposal has been drafted and the Cape Bird Club commissioned a high quality video production to showcase the planned projects at FBNR. Positive interest has been expressed by ACSA and the Melomed Group and an approach is being made to Sun International.

The second annual FBNR Fun Walk - the "Birdathon" - took place in April 2014 with double the number of

participants attending. The Melomed Medical Group has come on board as a major sponsor for the 2015 event.

University students were recruited to undertake specific projects at FBNR, namely (i) Fire Management Planning in the reserve and (ii) Security aspects entitled "Fun and Fear at the False Bay Nature Reserve".

(7) Coastal bird surveys have started in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Kwazulu Natal to see how the abundance of birdlife has changed in the last 30 years.

(8) Local Conservation Groups. Dale continues to support the two existing Local Conservation Groups, namely BirdLife Plettenberg Bay and Bitou (Eastern Cape), which have been established to implement local conservation projects with volunteers from the local bird clubs.

(9) Fynbos Endemic Birds Project. Dr. Alan Lee's research project on the potential impacts of climate change on the Fynbos endemic birds represents a priority area for BirdLife South Africa. BLSA supports Dr. Lee with financial resources including the recent purchase of two camera traps to research water requirements of the Fynbos birds.

A further collaboration has been initiated regarding a population survey and conservation plan for the endangered Hottentot Buttonquail. With the support of Anton Odendal, BirdLife Overberg raised R30,000 as an initial contribution to the surveys planned in 2015.

7. WEST COAST: Environmental Conservation Concerns (Keith Harrison)

(1) Vredenburg Wind Farm. An Afrisam application is in for the expansion of the wind farm to 47 turbines. This would mean a continuous line of turbines from Shelley Point to the R27. A SABAP2 survey of the pentad indicates that the area is not suitable for further WEF developments due to:

- Cumulative effect of additional WEFs.
- Flyways for waterbirds and migrating birds.
- Raptors (9 species of raptors are recorded).
- Breeding sites of large birds - Blue Cranes (15 families), Secretarybird nest, Yellow-billed Kites, nesting Heronry).
- Feeding area for African Sacred Ibis.

There are so many dangers, we must object. KH will contact Dave Whitelaw. **Action: KH/DWh.** KH seriously questions the capabilities of the EIA specialists who assessed these farms.

Quality of Bird Surveys: There is a concern regarding the capabilities of some of the people who are employed by EIA specialists to carry out surveys. TW quoted the example of Voelvlei where three wind farms adjacent to the waterbody are proposed. Not recorded was the fact that the turbines will form a line directly across the flight path of waterbirds moving at night. Likewise, in the Overberg one of the surveys noted the presence of Crowned Eagle which does not occur in the region. In particular, two companies have been criticised for the poor quality of bird reports, namely Savannah and Bio-Insight.

Comments.

(KS): A list of suggested specialists is on the BirdLife South Africa website together with best practice guidelines for carrying out surveys but EIA specialists cannot be forced to comply. Every EIA report goes to CapeNature at National level for comment and approval.

(NS): Can we discredit people who do bad EIAs?

Dale will take this up with Samantha Ralston. **Action: Dale Wright.**

The Marketing Committee can put this on the agenda and look at ways of doing this.

Action: Vernon Head

(BvdW): Would it help for BLSA to get an initial report from birders on the ground to compare with the report of the EIA specialist? (NS): BLSA can only look at IBAs.

(2) Port of Saldahna. The scheduled Environmental Stakeholders Forum meeting where the proposed developments would be discussed was cancelled due to an inspection by the "Green Scorpions" following

correspondence from a resident of Langebaan that the port does not hold an Environmental Authorisation for any of the volumes that it now handles, e.g. Iron Ore stockpile authorisation is for 100,000 tons while currently it is carrying over 3,000,000 tons.

(3) Oil Terminal. A Press advice was received that a serious problem had arisen at the oil handling quay where cormorants were nesting and fouling the facility. KH informed all the authorities and BLSA. The Environmental Manager of National Ports took images to show the seriousness of the situation and Bruce Dyer of Coasts and Oceans identified the species as Crowned Cormorant. This bird is highly endangered with only 8,200, confined to the Benguela system, living in the wave zone. KH was planning to take this to ESF only to be advised it was not their problem. The only suggestion is to relocate the birds back to Marcus Island where they came from, which will involve construction of platforms as successfully used by CapeNature at Lamberts Bay. A plan must be prepared before National Parks can be approached.

Action: KH to copy Vernon with correspondence to take to a forthcoming meeting with the National Director of Marine Protected Areas.

(4) West Coast National Park.

Seeberg Hide: A template of the basic EIA has been received. KH will arrange a meeting with the Park so that he can complete the forms. Comment (BvdW): If need be, the National Projects Co-ordinator for Parks can give the go-ahead to build the hide and the Park Manager can be by-passed.

Environmental Plan for the Park: At the last Park Forum meeting it was proposed that a workshop be set up to examine points in the Environmental Plan.

Abrahamskraal Hide: Phragmites australis reed is choking the observation area. The only permanent solution is to mechanically remove the reeds. This is an Honorary Rangers project but funds will be needed.

Other Environmental/Conservation Activities (Notes submitted by Dave Whitelaw).

Orange River Estuary: Members of the Cape Bird Club are at Alexander Bay to help resurrect bird counts. They will meet with the Eco rangers and formulate a training programme for them and assist with putting together a programme to implement some aspects of the management plan. Working with the Primary Science Programme, it is intended also to initiate an eco educational programme at local schools.

Strandfontein:

(1) Noted as in 6(6) above that the False Bay National Park has been declared a RAMSAR site.

(2) Research by the on-site ranger, Erica Essig, on the littoral edge of the pans has been halted temporarily due to high water levels.

(3) A spraying programme has commenced to reduce water hyacinth.

(4) Plans are proceeding for the annual "Birdathon" on 28 March.

Knysna Warbler Project: Only two males have been identified calling during the last season despite many hours of listening in the Constantia area. However, there were also two reports of calling males higher up the mountain in Skeleton and Ascension gorges. Follow-up will be done.

Phillippi Wetlands (Phillippi Horticultural Area): Incentives are being sought to enable farmers to remain on their land. Farmers are being tempted to make money from their land by allowing dumping and sand mining. One farmer has already sold and Consul Glass has taken up 40 hectares of wetland. DWh is approaching farmers and talking to lawyers with a view to having the area declared as a National Heritage Site.

8. CUBAs (Critical Urban Bird Areas).

BLSA has declined to take up the proposal motivated by Tony Williams to identify and establish CUBAs in local urban localities. The concept of CUBAs was enthusiastically endorsed by WCBF when it was tabled

at an earlier meeting. VH proposed that it be taken up as a WCBF project and that Dave Whitelaw be asked to look at the feasibility of the proposal and the possibility of launching a pilot project in the Western Cape. **Action: Dave Whitelaw.**

9. OVERBERG UPDATE (Chris Cheetham for Anton Odendal)

(1) BirdLife Overberg Committee. Anton and Elaine Odendal are stepping down from the committee. Record of appreciation: Chris acknowledged Anton's and Elaine's enormous contribution to birding and the club since its inception and thanked them for all they have done and accomplished. Chris and Carin Malan will represent BLO at future WCBF meetings. Anton will continue to give feedback on progress with westerncapebirding.co.za and the development of birdfinder web pages.

(2) Fundraising. At the year-end club function in December, BirdLife Overberg donated R30,000 each to Wilfred Chivell of the Dyer Island Conservation Trust and Dale Wright of BLSA. The DICT money was sourced from previous fundraising efforts such as golf days and the 2014 calendar and will go towards the development of the African Penguin and Seabirds Rehabilitation Centre at Kleinbaai. The BLSA money was sourced within a matter of 6 weeks from donations by club members and a Flight for Birders course and will go towards future research into the Hottentot Buttonquail.

(3) Birdfinder Web Pages. During December 2014, a marketing campaign was run to market the three established regions as top bird-watching destinations. The Cape Town, Plett and Overstrand web pages were shared on a variety of internet forums and an average of more than 200 visits a day was received with 26% from overseas. The links were posted on Facebook together with a list of the top 10 bird-watching destinations in each of the regions. These posts achieved 7,500 views within three weeks and more than 10,000 during December. Most significantly, a dramatic increase in enquiries on birding in the province was received and we have had to take out many more visiting birders and/or refer them to bird guides. The development of itineraries for visiting birders is now being done regularly. Increased numbers of people from the tourism industry have started registering for the first Flight for Birders identification and conservation courses to be presented in 2015. WESGRO has given a formal letter of endorsement for the current projects underway which include the development of the Theewaterskloof and Witzenberg web pages and for the next three prioritised areas, namely Bergrivier, Swellendam and Cape Agulhas. They have decided that the Netherlands and China will be the target countries for the promotion of the Western Cape as a top birding destination during 2015.

10. WALKER BAY BIRD FAIR (25 Feb.-1 March) (Peter Hochfelden)

On this the 10th anniversary of the Bird Fair at Stanford, the aim is to make it the best yet. It has been modelled on the highly successful Sasol Bird Fair that is held annually in Johannesburg and the world famous British Bird Fair at Rutland.

The Fair has become a regional event with collaboration between the Stanford Bird Club and Hermanus Bird Club. The Dyer Island Conservation Trust and the Overberg Lowlands Conservation Trust are on board. The aim is to make it the biggest bird fair in southern Africa. The Overberg is a fantastic platform for a national event. An exciting programme of events and activities has been put together. The Bird Fair will host eminent speakers on a wide variety of subjects. No fewer than 12 lectures will be presented by experts in their field including VIP guest speaker Tim Appleton MBE who established the British Bird Fair. Activities and events will include:

- Guided outings
- Boat cruises on the Klein River and to Dyer Island
- Mini raptor ID course by Dr. Anton Odendal
- Raptor rehabilitation with a live demonstration by Eagle Encounters
- Bird ringing
- Photographic workshop on bird photography with Albert Froneman
- Stretton's/Zeiss sponsored photographic competition
- Zeiss "Bird Brain of the Year" quiz hosted by John Maytham of 567 Cape Talk
- Binocular and telescope exhibition by Orms

- Crafts, wine and food on the Village Green

11. PAARL BIRD SANCTUARY (Jo Hobbs reporting for Yvonne Weiss)

The Paarl Bird Sanctuary comes of age this year. 21 Years ago, with the assistance of the then Town Engineer and Cape Bird Club chairman Jan Hofmeyr, the sanctuary was formally instituted. It has undergone turbulent and difficult times. Like elsewhere in southern Africa, sanctuaries and wild places are being threatened by people and Paarl is no exception. At PBS, changes in the waste management system are contributing factors but the biggest threat comes from plunderers and thieves.

Update on status

- New visiting hours 08h00 to 17h00 daily, only within the fenced area, while the main body of the sanctuary that lies outside the fence is open only on Saturdays and Sundays when increased security is provided. Toilets, viewing platform and picnic area are open during visiting hours.
- These measures will stay in place while building of a secure wall by Transnet to protect the railway line is being undertaken. Senior Superintendent of the Drakenstein Waste Management Systems Mark Anthony Watson and Paarl Superintendent Grant Rhoda are adamant that the sanctuary should remain viable for birds, bird-watching and the general public.
- CWAC counts continue as they have done for the past 21 years with dedicated monitors.
- Bird ringing, instituted by Gordon Scholtz, continues under the guidance of Felicity Ellmore.
- The water lettuce problem, which has become drastic, has to be handled by contract and is being dealt with. With fewer birders visiting the outer ponds due to security risks and shrinking of the water area not under lettuce, duck species are flourishing. Black Duck, Hottentot Teal and Fulvous Duck have been breeding and counts of White-faced Duck have increased. Of interest is that the Jackal Buzzard has bred for two seasons in succession along the banks of the Berg River on the boundary fence.
- Security remains a problem in that there is no penalty clause in the contract with the security firm that has been engaged by the municipality; a better management system cannot thus be enforced. The security firm manages the gate.

Contact details. Supt. Grant Rhoda, Cell 071 575 6800. Office 021 807 4766.

12. SABAP2 UPDATE (Report forwarded by Peter Nupen)

To date, nationally 120,797 Full Protocol Cards (FPCs) have been submitted to the SABAP2 Project, covering 14,039 pentads. Since the previous WCBF meeting in September 2014, 561 new pentads have been atlased. This means that four out of every five pentads have at least one FPC. A great achievement.

In the Western Cape, of the 1,837 pentads, 1,609 have at least one FPC, equating to 87.6% of the region, or very nearly nine out of every ten pentads have been covered. Importantly, 1,269 pentads have at least two FPCs (69.1% coverage), 910 pentads have at least four FPCs (49.5% coverage) and 607 pentads have at least seven FPCs (13.7% coverage). This means that 67 quarter degree square maps in the Western Cape have at least seven FPCs-an excellent statistic that compares more than favourably with progress in other regions.

Atlasing Expedition

A massive atlasing expedition to the Murraysburg region of the Western Cape will take place over nine days from 25 April to 3 May 2015. Planning is at an advanced stage.

Currently 14 atlasers have confirmed their participation and we can still accommodate a further six atlasers from further afield for the second half of the period. BLSA has generously sponsored the expedition to the tune of R10,000. A big thank you to BLSA.

13. LAUNCH OF HOPE SPOT AT KNYSNA (Bill Naude). website www.hopespotknysna.com

Hope Spots are a global network of people-oriented marine conservation areas, promoted and driven by the global initiative Mission Blue which was established through the Sylvia Earle Alliance.

The Lakes Bird Club brought the idea of Hope Spots to Knysna after Dr. Tony Ribbink's talk in February at the WCBF conference. The club felt that the organisation of such an event was beyond its capabilities, so club chairman Pat Nurse sold the idea to Vernon Gibbs-Hall of the Biodiversity and Coastal Management Committee of the Eden District Municipality. He seized the idea with enthusiasm and an organising committee was formed comprising representatives from the following organisations: Eden District Municipality, Knysna Municipality, SAN Parks, CapeNature, Western Cape Provincial Government, Biowise, Thesen Islands, Knysna Tourism, Knysna Basin Project and the Lakes Bird Club.

The official launch took place at Thesen Islands, Knysna, on 7th and 8th December. Highlights were:

- A cocktail party at the Turbine Hotel for all participants to meet Dr. Sylvia Earle. The LBC received a certificate signed by Dr. Earle, acknowledging its role in the Hope Spot launch.
- The creation of a potential Guinness World Record for the creation of the largest underwater sculpture of a Knysna Sea Horse.
- Diving with the unique Seahorse in the channels of the Thesen Islands Marina. Knysna is the only Hope Spot in the world based on an estuary.
- Participation by National Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom in the launch events.
- A day's activities geared towards school children with stands set up by the various committee members' clubs, including the Lakes Bird Club.

In 2015, the first Hope Spot Committee meeting after the launch was held with a view to future planning and activities. All committee members attended and it was agreed that Environmental Education for the youth was the key activity to be undertaken going forward. Workshops to educate teachers were considered to be vital and the LBC has offered to assist in any way it can. Poverty alleviation is the hoped for outcome of these initiatives.

Note: The Plett Hope Spot covering the greater Plettenberg Bay area was launched at a gala event on 8 December. Together with Knysna, this brings to five the number of internationally declared Hope Spots on the South African coastline that have been recognised to date. The others are Algoa, the Aliwal Shoal and the Cape Whale Coast.

14. BIRDLIFE S.A.

(1) Organisational Overview. (Fanie du Plessis) * Refer to Appendix 1 of these minutes for full details. The presentation covered:

- BLSA Finances for 2014
- The healthy state of the finances
- How BLSA turned around its financial situation
- The long term strategies in place to remain financially sustainable.
- BLSA Planning and Management process.
- "African Birdlife Magazine" sales and distribution.

Looking ahead to 2015:

- New Birdlife Head Office.
- Conservation project highlights for 2015.
- Events and awareness campaigns planned for 2015.

Comments.

(FdP): Conservation projects must be self-funding. Sponsorship is sought and if sufficient funding is not available, the number of projects will be reduced.

(BvdW): BLSA should consider advertising on Facebook. (Note: Feedback from Fanie is that the Marketing Committee considers all avenues of advertising, including Facebook. The fact that BLSA has

over 15,000 members on its Facebook Group and over 7,000 Likes on its Facebook Page is already a significant marketing achievement. In order to post adverts on Facebook, strategic planning and identification of specific target audiences is needed, which is costly. However, the medium will be used if deemed appropriate for specific campaigns.)

(2) Bird of the Year 2015. The Bird of the Year for 2015 is the Blue Crane, South Africa's national bird. Selection of the Blue Crane will focus public attention on the bird and the need to protect it and the country's wetlands and grasslands. Bird of the Year 2015 is sponsored by Bidvest Waltons. Posters and pin badges will be available at the BLSA AGM in March.

Bird of the Year 2016. Nominations have been invited. WCBF proposes the Hottentot Buttonquail, the only true South African endemic. SVL will forward the nomination to Nikki McCartney.

Comment (VH): Bird of the year (BOY) presents an opportunity to turn the event into a campaign to get the youth involved. (BN): Youth must be able to relate to the selected bird of the year.

(3) Flufftail Festival-Celebrating our Wetlands (2-6 February): BLSA in conjunction with Eskom, Rand Water, Sandton City and other partners will be holding the inaugural Flufftail Festival at Sandton City. Named after the Critically Endangered White-winged Flufftail, one of South Africa's rarest birds, the aim of the Flufftail Festival is to raise awareness about the need to conserve the planet's freshwater resources, wetland habitats and waterbirds. There has been a huge buy-in from 80% of the shops at Sandton City. The festival has been modelled on the SOS Seabirds concept and will incorporate lectures, educational activities and a photographic competition. The "Wetlands of Life" photographic competition offers magnificent prizes in the Open and Youth categories.

(4) "Flock at Jozi" 2015 (20-22 March) affords great birding opportunities in and around Johannesburg with expert guides. The 87th Annual General Meeting will be held at the Benvenuto Conference Centre and Hotel on 21 March. Highlights of the AGM will be awarding of the prestigious Austin Roberts Memorial Award and announcement of Bird of the Year 2016. The cocktail party will host guest speaker Ashley Smith, Executive Life President of the Hawk Conservancy, UK.

(5) Vote for South Africa's Favourite Bird. In an on-line poll over three months, December 2014-February 2015, people were invited to vote for their favourite bird from a list of birds provided. This was not for scientific purposes but a fun event that attracted almost 10,000 votes. The majority vote was for the Cape Robin-Chat with follow-up votes in order of popularity for the Cape Parrot, African Fish Eagle, Woodland Kingfisher and African Penguin.

(6) World Seabird Conservation Conference will be held in Cape Town from 26-30 October 2015. 900 secretariats will be attending from all over the world. VH is heading up the BirdLife International fund-raising team.

(7) Nomination of Representative for BLSA Board. The new BLSA structure requires that Regional Forums select a representative to be on the Board. Agreed that Vernon Head will be the representative for the Western Cape Birding Forum.

15. WCBF CONFERENCE

Ebb & Flow, Wilderness (11-13 Sept. 2015) (Brian Vanderwalt)

Brian has proceeded with accommodation bookings. A 15% discount will apply. Bookings as requested have been confirmed and WCBF has paid a 50% deposit. SVL will notify participants of payments due. **Action: Sylvia Ledgard.**

16. OTHER

(1) Injured birds (BD). A website has been established for SWBC. An early result is that people are telephoning the club regarding injured birds and where to take them. Angela Lewis runs a rehabilitation

centre in Somerset West and SWBC is referring enquiries accordingly. There are other people who also take in birds but we don't know who they are. (TW): Legally speaking, transportation of wild birds is not allowed. (KS): Rehab. Centres must have a permit. Transportation is not allowed, yes, but one must be practical; the prohibition is really about transporting birds for sale. SANCCOB routinely transports injured birds - we must be flexible.

(2) CapeNature training at SANCCOB (KS). Angus Stewart is doing a basic course with SANCCOB and will represent CapeNature on the West Coast.

NEXT MEETING: Saturday, 6 June 2015, at the Intaka Island Environmental Education Centre, Century City. The Cape Bird Club will host this meeting.