

Western Cape Birding Forum

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

Minutes of the meeting held at Helderberg Nature Reserve Environmental Centre, Somerset West on Saturday, 6 February 2016.

Vernon Head - Chaired the Meeting.

Sylvia Ledgard - Minutes.

Present

Cape Bird Club: Vernon Head, Sylvia Ledgard, Priscilla Beeton, Johan Schlebusch, Dave Whitelaw, Joan Ackroyd.

Tygerberg Bird Club: Brigid Crewe.

BirdLife Overberg: Anton Odendal.

BirdLife Plettenberg Bay: Mark Brown.

West Coast Bird Club: Colin de Kock, Keith Harrison.

BirdLife Worcester: Charl Oettle.

Somerset West Bird Club: Bryan Butler, Caroline Crump, Freya Brett, Sakkie Krynauw, Annamarie Krynauw.

Stanford Bird Club: Marian Williams.

Apologies

Mike Bridgeford, Pat Nurse, Bill Naude, Kobus Graaff, Elsa Gebhard, Brian Vanderwalt, Salome Willemse, Jo Hobbs, Peter Hochfelden, Dale Wright, Tony Williams.

1. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Confirmation of Minutes of Previous Meeting (12/9/2015). Noted Caroline Crump (SWBC) was omitted from the list of attendees - record amended accordingly. Minutes otherwise agreed.

2. ELECTION OF WCBF OFFICE BEARERS 2016.

Appointments agreed by unanimous decision:

- WCBF Chairman: Anton Odendal
- Regional Representative: Mark Brown
- Mark agreed also to accept the role of Vice-Chair for WCBF.

Thanks are due to Dave Whitelaw and Sakkie Krynauw for accepting re-election as Conservation Member and Treasurer, respectively. The appointment of Secretary is pending.

Vernon noted that the partnership of Anton and Mark will bring together combined skills and experience that will grow the bird clubs and the conservation goals of the Forum - Anton for birding and club related activities with his passion for birdwatching, involvement in the birding community and fundraising drive, and Mark as one of South Africa's top ornithologists and conservationists representing the Regional Forum on the Executive Board of BirdLife South Africa.

A Vote of thanks. The Forum recorded thanks and appreciation to outgoing Chairman Vernon Head and Secretary Sylvia Ledgard for their contribution to WCBF over the past 13 years.

3. OPERATIONAL RULES AND PROCEDURES.

The Regional Forums operate under the BirdLife South Africa Terms of Reference dated 8 May 2015 for Regional Forums. The ToR governs general procedures applicable to the Forums. In accordance with clause 13.5 of the BLSA constitution, each Regional Forum is required to prepare a set of rules specific to their operation. In line with this brief, a preliminary set of rules was distributed to WCBF member clubs on 19 October. To simplify the application of this document, it has been updated to incorporate both the general rules and those specific to WCBF.

The updated document was distributed to member clubs in January 2016 and covers:

- (1) Status.
- (2) Objectives.
- (3) Membership of the Forum.
- (4) Bird Club representation on the Forum.
- (5) Other attendees at meetings.
- (6) Rights and voting procedures of member Clubs.
- (7) Nomination and election of Office Bearers.
- (8) Nomination and Election of Regional Representative for the Executive Board of BirdLife South Africa.
- (9) Meetings of the Forum
- (10) Fuel Allowance for Attendance at Meetings.
- (11) Finances.
- (12) Planned Activities for the Year and Action Plan.
- (13) Measurement of Success of the Forum.
- (14) Dissolution of the Forum.

The Operational Rules and Procedures of WCBF must be officially endorsed by member clubs at the next meeting of WCBF (4 June 2016), subject to any changes that may arise as a result of decision on the voting procedure and any other issues that may be tabled.

Action: Forum members.

4. VOTING PROCESS.

Rights and Voting Procedures of Member Clubs. The Cape Bird Club has proposed an alternative voting structure to the "one club, one vote" system as is presently listed in the Operational Rules and Procedures, which they suggest will be more appropriate and fairer for all the clubs. * Refer to Appendix 1 of these minutes for CBC committee's proposal to the Forum. Voting would operate on a simple, sliding scale based on the registered membership of the clubs. The alternative options for decision are:

(1) Voting will be on the basis of one club, one vote by mandated representatives of member clubs present. Voting will be by a show of hands unless a ballot is called by the majority of the members present. A majority vote will prevail with the chairman having a casting vote in the event of a majority outcome not being achieved. (Note: the chairman will have a casting vote only, not both a deliberative and casting vote.)

(2) Voting will be by mandated representatives of member clubs present on the basis a sliding scale as follows:

2 to 100 registered members = 1 vote

101 to 300 registered members = 2 votes

Over 300 registered members = 3 votes

- The maximum number of votes accorded to a club will be limited to three.

- Determine definition of "registered members" = Main members or Main plus Family members.

Consensus on the voting process was not reached at this meeting and has been carried forward to the next meeting (4 June 2016) for decision.

Action: Forum members.

Comments arising:

(1) Voting. KH queried why a vote was needed at all. CdK noted that voting by consensus was the mechanism originally agreed at the workshop on 6 June 2015. (JS): The Forum represents not only the clubs as entities but also the club members. A voting system needs to be in place as a mechanism for resolving important issues.

(2) Role of the Regional Forum versus Role of the Bird Clubs.

(DW): The form of the Forum has changed in that we now have a Regional Representative who will take issues to BirdLife South Africa. In effect, clubs' access to BirdLife South Africa is through the Forum. A mechanism is needed to facilitate this process.

(VH): Affiliated clubs have a direct line to BirdLife South Africa in regard to membership and own club matters. A division is in place at Head Office for this purpose and clubs can communicate directly with;

- Membership Manager Shireen Gould membership@birdlife.org.za and
- Business Manager Fanie du Plessis accounts@birdlife.org.za
- The office of Regional Representative has been set up to deal with conservation and group issues pertaining to the Region as a whole.
The Forum is a think tank for regional issues with bird clubs working as a team to filter information and concerns to BirdLife South Africa for resolution at Executive Board level or where appropriate at the AGM.

(MB): Every club still has a voice and can communicate directly with BirdLife South Africa.

The Forum is to enable BirdLife SA to interact with the bird clubs, pooling research and information to benefit Regional resources for conservation. The bird clubs are entirely responsible for their own affairs.

(PB): In regard to club matters, for example, BirdLife South Africa is currently providing membership administration services to clubs. This is important for large memberships. If it were to be proposed that this be discontinued, a uniform response would be needed. (VH) If the issue is one that has implications for the Regional clubs as a whole, it is a matter for the Forum to take up. If it applies to an individual club, that club would take it up directly with BirdLife South Africa.

(3) The Forum's Mandate (VH). Noted that WCBF has a double mandate:

- To promote and support the Forum's conservation activities and objectives in the region.
- To co-ordinate the activities of the bird clubs in relation to Regional activities and interests. WCBF evolved originally as a group of bird clubs that came together with the purpose of co-ordinating activities, running courses, sharing speakers and supporting smaller clubs.

(4) (MB): BirdLife South Africa's structural changes follow the international model, conforming to those of BirdLife International and the RSPB.

5. WCBF FINANCES (Sakkie Krynauw).

(1) Financial Report for the Year 2015. The financial report for the year ended 31 December 2015 is attached to these minutes.

- Opening balance: R19 456
- Income: R33 676
- Expenditure: R34 849

- Final balance: R18 283

Income was derived from club contributions, the BLSA grant, and reimbursement of deposit payments for the Ebb & Flow conference. Expenditure covered venue costs, car claims, Ebb & Flow conference costs (deposit paid and guest accommodation).

(2) Budget Forecast for 2016 (Revised).

- Income R13 630
- Expenditure R16 000
- Deficit: - R 2 370

Income is derived from club contributions and the BLSA grant. Expenditure covers three meetings in the year.

Note: Following the appointment of Mark Brown as Regional Representative, provision has been made for his travel costs from Plettenberg Bay for scheduled meetings. The preliminary budget forecast as presented at the meeting has been adjusted accordingly. The budget deficit that arises will need to be addressed by the Forum.

6. OUTREACH PROGRAMME-WEST COAST BIRD CLUB (Colin de Kock).

Funds held by WCBF in respect of the Anne Gray Flamingo Bird Club fund were transferred to WCBC for their schools outreach programme. Colin thanked the Forum and outlined the programme and budget. It is modelled on the SOS concept and is structured to take in schools on the Berg River axis, Piketberg, Porteville, Aurora and Velddrif, Goedverwacht and the Moravian Mission which have received very little, if any, eco-based attention in the past. Interactive workshops and activities will be organised with the focus on "Saving our Wetlands", using material developed by BirdLife South Africa for the Flufftail festival. Children, teachers and parents will be involved. There will be talks on conserving wetland birds in trouble and their habitats, littering and plastic in water, and treatment of animals.

- DW congratulated Colin on the organisation of this important initiative.

Note: (VH) A satellite festival, allied to the Flufftail Festival, is being developed for the Western Cape.

7. LIBAS PROJECT. Update on Decisions / Criteria (Dave Whitelaw).

The Forum owes Tony Williams a great deal for the concept of CUBAs (Critical Urban Bird Areas). CBC's conservation committee debated this concept in depth and has derived the following suggestions:

- (1) Change the name to LIBAs (Local Important Bird Areas), to follow the recognised IBAs.
- (2) The sites identified are within the areas covered by local bird clubs to enable monitoring by local clubs to ensure conformity to the criteria described below.
- (3) A method be developed to enable the findings to be subject to independent assessment, following which the Forum would approach BirdLife South Africa for a certificate to be produced indicating that the site is a LIBA.

Proposed Criteria:

- Site supports regular occurrence of endemic species (e.g. sugarbirds, sunbirds, rockjumper, etc).
- Site supports species that are regional rarities or uncommon in Cape Town metro/other metros (e.g. Black Duck).
- Site supports a breeding colony of seabirds/waterbirds (e.g. cormorants, ibises, herons, egrets, spoonbills).

- Site supports a roost site for seabirds/waterbirds (e.g. cormorants, ibises, herons, egrets, spoonbills).
- Site supports breeding sites for raptors and/or owls.
- Site supports reasonable numbers of migrant species (Palearctic and/or intra-African).
- Site constitutes an important corridor or habitat patch for a suite of species (e.g. Wynberg Park, greenbelts, etc.).

A fair amount of work must still be done to take account of specific numbers of birds in certain situations. Hence, a LIBA could be declared if it supports a much smaller number of Bank Cormorants compared to one that has a Cape Cormorant colony. Noted, the USA has local, regional and global IBAs and we will be looking at their system of designation and criteria for potentially added value.

Comments forwarded by Dale Wright:

(1) The concept is good but there is a concern that IBAs would then lose focus to LIBAs – even though they conserve greater number of species. We need to harness limited conservation resources for maximum gain.

- (DW): Most IBAs already have conservation status and have people on the ground to carry out monitoring. Dave does not believe that LIBAs will take focus away from IBAs.
- (CdK): The introduction of LIBAs will not denigrate IBAs. There are IBAs locally that can have relevance for LIBAs and vice versa. There are important opportunities for learning. The criteria are part of the process and will grow. Local sites offer eco education opportunities.
- (AO): BirdLife Overberg has a MoU with the Overberg division of CapeNature to assist CN with bird counts and bird monitoring at selected reserves and stewardship sites in the Overberg area. Training sessions have been conducted with CN staff to improve their identification skills in the field.

(2) Monitoring of sites by local bird clubs: Dale's experience is that actions proposed for existing IBAs have for the most part not been taken up by the bird clubs.

- (CO): Where people have an association with a site, they are more likely to take custody of it as, for example, with MyBirdPatch.

(3) There already exist "Regional" level IBAs that meet the regional criteria. Dale's comments and recommendations as noted will be discussed by the project's working committee.

(DW) We are focusing at the moment on sewage works; a new sewage plant is being developed at Mitchells Plain. We need to look at a wider field than IBAs, for example Terns at sewage works and estuaries.

(MB): Mark's view is that the Forum should proceed with LIBAs as a Regional Project and not wait on BLSA's approval. It can be tested in the Region. Link to MyBirdPatch and ensure the data is fed through. Data can be used for site conservation and contesting proposed developments.

8. THE REGIONAL CONSERVATION MANAGER'S MAJOR PRIORITIES AND GOALS FOR 2016 (Dale Wright).

Dale forwarded the following:

1. Finalise the Fynbos endemic birds' habitat guidelines and distribute; finalise the Hottentot Buttonquail surveys and determine the best route forward for that project.
2. Eastern Cape Forest Birds project through the collaboration with Stellenbosch University.

3. Verlorenvlei Protected Areas Project continues, with particular focus on the formal declaration of the Moutonshoek Protected Environment and the formation of the Verloren estuary conservancy.
4. Western Cape Estuaries Conservation Project continues - focus on establishing the Berg River estuary conservancy and developing an action plan for obtaining formal protection for Bot and Klein River estuaries.
5. Finalising and distributing the "Waterbird Habitat rehabilitation guidelines".
6. False Bay Nature Reserve engagements continue, in particular pursuing funding for various projects, hosting a successful Birdathon event and publishing the results of various academic research projects.

Dale suggests: The Forum would do well to support the Fynbos project, perhaps with help for printing the habitat guidelines, or with the Hottentot Buttonquail research actions which Alan Lee and Dale are still finalising.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL/CONSERVATION CONCERNS.

9.1 PROPOSED WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT-GOUDA.

The proposed development is 10km away from Voëlvlei with +/- 100 turbines in a bird movement path. Tony Williams reports as follows:

"As a result of my EIA bird report the DEA classed the application to develop the windfarm as fatally flawed with development denied.

The developer subsequently approached me to help with an appeal. I stated that my report stressed the precautionary principle since there was insufficient information available. I suggested that if more information was gathered the risk to birds might be less and potentially acceptable. I recommended: 1) funding of a study of bird use of Voëlvlei across at least a year; 2) a radar study of bird movements across the site during the presumed peak waterbird migrations to and from Voëlvlei (the radar study undertaken was too late to capture this); and 3) waiting for at least a year of data on bird mortalities at the adjacent windfarm which is already operating.

The developer was not prepared to wait for this information to become available and wished to appeal the decision so that they could go forward with their plans without the delay of gathering the information.

They sent me a letter to sign which would have exonerated them. In it I would have agreed to circumvent what I had stated in my initial EIA report. They totally ignored the fact the Voëlvlei has been incorporated into an IBA based substantially on information gathered for my EIA bird report. I wrote back refusing to sign their letter and stating that I would contact BirdLife about their unethical approach. In effect the developer VENTUSA sought to entirely circumvent the point of an effective EIA. I feel it is vital that this Bird Forum and Birdlife, separately, ensure that the authorities reject their appeal based on their wholly unethical and subversive approach. If this is not done it will set an extremely bad example and indicate to other developers that any EIA bird report is something that can be ignored or circumvented."

Action: Mark Brown.

- (1) Talk first to Sam Ralston (BLSA Renewable Energy Manager).
- (2) Take up with Simon Gear (Policy & Advocacy Manager).

(Note: Sam responded to Tony Williams and suggested he engage directly with Muhammad Essop at the Dept. of Environmental Affairs. Sam suggests that the most BLSA and the Forum can do is to comment on the appeal and draw attention to the concerns.)

Follow up further.

Action: Mark Brown.

(MB): Clubs and Forum should lodge concerns.

- The question arose as to who can legally comment. The Forum is not a legal entity. The Clubs are. Noted that the more submissions that are made, the more they count - it's all in the numbers.

(JS): The Forum can present a model that the clubs can use.

Action: Dave Whitelaw.

9.2 HOTTENTOT BUTTONQUAIL PROJECT Funding Request (Dale Wright & Alan Lee).

BirdLife South Africa and Alan Lee of UCT/SANBI have initiated a research and conservation project tackling the little known and highly elusive Hottentot Buttonquail, listed as "Endangered" on the South African and International threatened species lists. Very few records of this species exist.

Dale and Alan carried out walking transect surveys across the Fynbos Biome in an attempt to understand the population density and habitat associations of this species so that conservation action can be recommended. After long hikes without a single record of the species, a few populations were found and photographed but the team has been unable to establish densities. A more effective method is needed and the use of microphone arrays is being considered. These recording devices are being used to monitor wildlife species that are difficult to see. If one has several of these devices out, you can triangulate where calling is coming from and thereby obtain density estimates. The cost is high - US\$800/device - and may have to be sought from external funding organisations. However, Alan makes the point that additional funding, whatever it may be, will be appreciated to cover the cost of getting the teams together and associated travel expenses.

(VH): The HBQ is the only true endemic to the South-Western Cape and should be considered a priority species for WCBF to support as a conservation initiative.

Noted that BLO and TBC have made good funding contributions to the HBQ project and BLO will be earmarking funds derived from the forthcoming Charity Golf Day at Hermanus Golf Club for the Fynbos Birds/ HBQ project.

Forum request: The Forum asks that Dale document how effective he considers the deployment of microphone arrays will be in taking the project forward so that a formal proposal for funding can be taken to the clubs.

Action: Dale Wright.

9.3 WEST COAST: Main concerns going forward 2016 (Keith Harrison).

The report covers:

(1) Environmental Stakeholders Forum for Saldahna Bay. Following the suspension of the Saldahna Bay Forum last year by the Saldahna Bay Municipality, the area was left without protection and no forum to which collectively environmental problems could be taken. The re-formation of a forum has been driven by the Coastal Committee and will meet as the Environmental Stakeholders Forum for Saldahna Bay on 8 April.

(2) Power and Natural Gas Projects at Saldahna.

Major developments in planning and progress are:

(a) Koeberg Atomic Power plant - controls the National Grid by evening out fluctuations.

(b) Insufficient power in the harbour to supply future projects - application in hand to upgrade.

(c) Natural Gas. Three forms to be exploited: (1) Bio-gas from Municipal wet waste; (2) Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) - purified is used domestically and industrially; (3) Liquid Natural Gas (LNG)-used for power production, contains sulphur.

(d) Power unit for Vortum Thermal Power 1200MW, to be sited next to the R27 north of the weighbridge.

(e) Floating power vessel for Dept. of Energy. The process may cause atmospheric emission problems

and hot cooling water could affect the oyster farms.

(f) Power unit for International Power Consortium SA and Arcelor Mittal, 1500MW, to be sited next to the Eskom Blauwater substation. Foreseeable problems: (a) an off-loading buoy/floating storage facility in the oyster farming area; (b) the site is on the flight patch of migrant and waterbirds from St. Helena to Langebaan.

(g) Ibhohesi off-shore pipeline to take LPG or LNG to current power generation units at Atlantis to replace expensive diesel.

(h) Aurora sub-station - concern about all the additional power lines going into the sub-station, forming an aerial network of obstructing cables.

(3) **West Coast National Park.**

(a) Traffic through the Park. The upgrading of the Langebaan road system adds extra mileage to the journey and will result in increased usage of the road through the Park to cut the distance. Poor control and speeding are a problem and the concern is that increased usage will result in increased road kills with a related increase in the numbers of carrion birds like Pied Crows. WCBC has been counting Pied Crows and Raptors for many years in this section and baseline data is available. The Saldanha Bay Municipality is not interested, saying this is a District problem.

(b) Abrahamskraal. Reed infestation has virtually covered the water and viewing from the bird hide is cut off. The Park wants to use chemicals. This is unacceptable and the only means of addressing the problem is by extraction.

(c) Seeberg hide.

(i) Kiteboarders: The roped area that restricted access to the bay has been stolen and has not been replaced. Kiteboarders are disturbing feeding and roosting birds and birders' viewing from the hide. Park management shows no interest in sorting this out.

Action: CdK/KH

- Get Hon. Ranger Pierre Nel involved.
- Remind management that money for the park came from the Elizabeth Harding Trust.
- Take WCBF's concerns to the meeting of the park forum next month.

(ii) Renaming of Seeberg hide: It is hoped to rename the hide, after re-building, in honour of the late Anne Gray.

(4) **Cape Columbine Reserve (Paternoster).** The CWCBR has been asked to audit the reserve against the original Environmental Plan which is decades old and needs to be re-written.

9.4. **BIRDLIFE-PLETT/NATURE'S VALLEY LOCAL CONSERVATION GROUP** (Mark Brown).

Prior to the start of the meeting, Mark briefed members on some of the priority projects being undertaken by the LCG:

(1) **White-fronted Plover.**

Research is being undertaken to determine the cause of the 60% decline in the population of White-fronted Plovers in the last 3 years; in the Cape Town area, there are three beaches where it is no longer seen. BirdLife-Plett is funding research into the impact of disturbance on the poor breeding success of the WFP. Students and interns are working on the ground, measuring the effects of human disturbance at nest sites. Studies reveal that, natural predation aside, the cause of breeding failure is human disturbance near the nests - walkers, joggers and dogs.

Public awareness programmes are being carried out and conservation information boards erected on beaches.

(2) **African Penguin Project** (VH).

BirdLife South Africa is investigating options for creating a new penguin colony on the south coast mainland. Between Gansbaai and Port Elizabeth, there is 600km of coast where there are no islands and therefore no breeding penguins, effectively splitting the population in two. This new colony will represent a

safeguard for the penguin population if another large oil spill occurs on the west coast or climate change causes the fish population to shift again. Significant funding has been received from African Penguin patron Pamela Isdell for the research project. A potential land-based site, far enough away from the other colonies and far enough from commercial fishing grounds, has been identified in the Plettenberg Bay area and Mark Brown is doing the groundwork with students to monitor the use of the land, what the natural level of disturbance might be and how much policing will be needed.

10. OVERBERG UPDATE. (Anton Odendal).

(1) Birdfinder Web Pages.

(a) Established Pages: The Overstrand, Plettenberg Bay, Cape Town and Witzenberg pages are in place and are regularly updated as new material, trip reports, sightings, etc become available. The development of pages for the Theewaterskloof and Swellendam regions is at an advanced stage and several of the completed sections have already been posted on the website. Priorities for future development of birdfinder web pages are Cape Agulhas, Bergrivier, George and Langeberg local municipal regions and project proposals and budgets for these are available.

Forum members and bird clubs are requested to assist with the identification of potential sponsors and donors.

(b) Marketing Campaigns: Marketing campaigns were run again before the December holiday period, featuring the top 10 birding destinations in each of the areas already covered on the website. 50 000+ views were achieved on Facebook and 15 000+ hits on the website. Importantly, requests for guiding, information, itineraries, etc, over the December period increased dramatically with most of the requests coming from overseas birders.

(2) BirdLife Overberg.

1. BLO Golf Day 2016 (26 May) at Hermanus Golf Club. This day is being presented in support of the Hottentot Buttonquail project. BLO started working on this officially on 28 January and have so far collected prizes to the value of R30 000. Prizes are needed for players, raffles and auctions. A major sponsor is being sought. Essential cost of running the event: R40 000. Target for the day: +/-R100 000.

- We appeal to all clubs forming part of the WCBF to assist us with a variety of challenges, such as donations to cover our costs, the identification of 4-balls of players, prizes and the identification of celebrities. Anton can be contacted directly.
- We are looking to making this a WCBF Golf Day in the future. The infrastructure is in place and the potential is there for expanding.

2. Flight for Birders Courses. 8 Flight for Birders bird identification and conservation courses were presented during 2015 with a total of 215 birders participating. A course will be presented at Mollergren Park, Hermanus, on 20 and 21 February and this will be used as a membership drive. Other confirmed courses are at Intaka Island on 13 & 14 February and at Swellendam on 3 & 4 March.

3. The Possibility of a Cape Whale Coast Birding Weekend has been suggested as a fundraising drive - for further discussion.

11. WITZENBERG BIRD CLUB (Anton Odendal).

There was a fairly strong interest group at Tulbagh and the Witzenberg group at Ceres in the past. Both of these had unfortunately faded away due to a variety of reasons. Local community members approached us to try and revive these groups when we did the fieldwork for the development of the Witzenberg birdfinder web pages. We estimate that there will be at least 250 potential BirdLife members in the region.

Progress:

- We presented Flight for Birders courses at Tulbagh and Ceres during the latter half of 2015, and did a presentation also at the quarterly meeting of the Ceres Tourism Bureau which was attended by 50 members.
- Several discussions regarding the formation of a BirdLife South Africa affiliated bird club for the region were undertaken. This culminated in the founding of the Witzenberg Bird Club at a public meeting held at the Waverley Hills Organic Wine Estate on 14 January 2016. The WBC will cater for the towns of Wolseley, Tulbagh and Ceres and all three towns now have representation on the club's committee. Mark Watt was elected as Chairman.
- Several people made massive contributions in this regard, but we would like to thank Danell du Toit, Mark Watt and Wessel Uys particularly, as they essentially put the entire process together.

12. EVENTS IN THE WESTERN CAPE.

(1) Walker Bay Bird Fair (update from Peter Hochfelden). A headline sponsor is still being sought. A very nice glossy brochure has been produced which is being used to secure sponsors. There are one or two potential sponsors who have expressed interest. In the circumstances, it seems likely that the next bird fair will be postponed until February/March 2017.

13. BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA. (Vernon Head).

(1) Bird of the Year 2016. The Sociable Weaver is Bird of the Year for 2016. "Bird of the Year" is one of BirdLife South Africa's initiatives to raise awareness about birds, bird conservation and the protection of bird habitats. Educating people is a key component of BirdLife South Africa's conservation work and its marketing and education team develop "Bird of the Year" learning materials for schools. The resources this year will relate to the Sociable Weaver but will also include information about other weavers, the arid zone, climate change and other relevant matters.

(2) Nominations for Bird of the Year 2017. BirdLife South Africa is calling for nominations for Bird of the Year 2017. Nominations close on 26 February 2016 and should be submitted to Nikki McCartney at marketing@birdlife.org.za. (MB): A Western Cape coastal bird would be an appropriate choice, linking into "Flock at Sea" in 2017.

(3) Flock in Kruger and 87th AGM (10 - 12 March 2016). There has been good support for the event with some 300 participants registered to attend. The weekend includes a 2-day LAB conference (Learning about Birds) which has growing support from universities. CdK questioned whether there would be dissemination of papers coming from LAB. (MB): Actual papers cannot be disseminated but a document will be produced. VH suggests this could be included in "African BirdLife". MB to take to BLSA.

Action: Mark Brown.

(4) Regional Forums. BirdLife South Africa's constitution provides for a minimum of three Regional Forums to be formed by affiliated bird clubs. PB raised a question regarding the number of RFs that could be admitted. If in the future more RFs were to be established, how many would it be practical to have? Note: The constitution provides that in the event that more than three Forums exist, the Forums will form an electoral college comprising the Forum chairmen to select three representatives to serve on the Executive Board. (VH): Judging by the record to date, it is unlikely there will be any significant increase in the number of RFs.

14. PAARL BIRD SANCTUARY. (A report by Jo Hobbs)

Conservation education and community outreach programme.

Paarl Bird Sanctuary is arguably one of the best bird sanctuaries in the SW Cape, next in line only to Strandfontein and Rondevlei in terms of species variety and numbers and beautiful surroundings, but visitor numbers have dropped sharply in recent years due to the risky security situation.

Monthly bird counts have been continuing without interruption for the past 21 years, but despite efforts to step up security at the sanctuary at weekends, one of our team of counters was attacked and robbed only last month. The previous month the toilet block was broken into, vandalised and piping stolen during the night.

The good news is that an outreach programme to turn the situation around is in the early stages of planning. The initial meeting with the Drakenstein municipality officials, councillors and members of the sanctuary's Advisory Board was originally scheduled for Friday 29 January and I had hoped to be able to report back at this meeting. However, it has now been postponed to Thursday 18 February, so I hope to have more details for our next meeting.

John Fincham and Skhumbuzo Mbewu (formerly bird guide and eco education officer at Intaka Bird Sanctuary) are working together on this, and contacts have already been made with members of the local community and with teachers at Mbekweni. A PowerPoint presentation is being prepared for the meeting. More good news is that "Working for Water" is clearing the dense stand of blue gums and other alien trees along the banks of the Berg River which borders the sanctuary, providing easy cover for bad elements. This work is in hand and should be completed shortly.

These are early days, but perhaps some day we may even be able to organise a family Bird Walk at Paarl Bird Sanctuary on the lines of Strandfontein's annual "Birdathon" - on a smaller scale, of course.

Comment (JS): It is important to get the community involved. Look at the possibility of providing an incentive for the community. There must be something in it for them if they are going to support the project.

NEXT MEETING: The remaining meetings for the year will be scheduled as follows:

04 June, Venue Intaka Island Environmental Centre, Century City, hosting club: CBC.

01 October, Venue: Kristo Pienaar Environmental Centre, Durbanville, hosting club: TBC.