



Chairs Report – 2018

Committee 2018

Chair:	Lesley Frescura/David Swanepoel
Vice Chair:	David Swanepoel/Lesley Frescura
Acting Chair:	Nicolette Forbes
Treasurer:	Frankie Berghorst
Secretary:	Nicolette Forbes
Membership:	Lesley Frescura
Publicity:	Arnia van Vuuren
Activities:	John Bremner
Indoor Meetings:	Lesley Frescura
Media:	Flick McKenzie
Website:	Paul Bartho
Conservation:	Arnia van Vuuren
Education:	Arnia and Lesley
Youth:	Adam Cruickshank

Although it is now two years since Roy left us it still feels like just the other day. I don't want to move on to the rest of the report without pausing to remember Roy and the lasting legacy he left. He was club chair, and Honorary President, Forum chair and probably filled a whole lot more roles than that but his legacy is in the numbers of people he managed to interact with - he changed hearts and minds ! Often with wonderful wit and acerbic comments. I met Roy while still at school in 1981 and between him and two of his DHS students I was started on this wonderful journey of birds which has taken me to many places and filled me with delight whether in my own garden or in an exotic location. Roy and I crossed paths many times over the next few decades after my studies in biology and we would often both release steam after EIA meetings when impact assessments were being done without integrity and studies were glossing over the impacts by saying it will all be fine with "good housekeeping." I miss his plain speaking and no-nonsense approach.

It is a year to celebrate - it is the 70th AGM of the BirdLife Port Natal club having been founded in 1949 as the Natal Bird Club. This is our Platinum anniversary making us one of the oldest bird clubs in the country ! We will go through a more detailed history of the club at the 70th Anniversary Celebration event which is scheduled for the

18th May so will not dwell too much on that now. Events this year will be branded with our new logo creatively put together by Crystelle Wilson - thank you Crystelle you always give so willingly of your time and energy. For today though we will, with the members present (in person and via proxy) take the club through the business of the day and on to the next decadal anniversary - 80 and then 100 years ? Onwards and upwards with the birds !

2018 has been a busy year and even more so for the committee who struggle to find enough volunteers to assist with the various committee functions. This was my introduction to the committee. Having seen at least two or three messages from Lesley on KZN Birds email group that a secretary for the club was needed I, with great fear and trepidation, put up my hand. One of the by-products of a slower economy is more time on your hands and that combined with the fact that I don't know how to sit still, resulted in me joining the committee in March / April as secretary. Lesley at the time was Chair and David Swanepoel Vice-chair. It was agreed that David would assume the chair with Lesley on hand to assist him and their roles were swapped in September 2018. It was not to be a long arrangement and David's transfer back to Cape Town necessitated another change. David and Lesley convinced me to take on the role of Acting Chair during the final months of the year and leading up to the AGM. The club thanks David sincerely for his work on the committee and his stint as Chair and we wish them all well as they settle back into their home in the Western Cape.

The club's activities have been a wonderful mix of outings and indoor meetings. This is all thanks to a dedicated group of people both those on the committee and those who assist and give freely of their time. The indoor and outdoor activities have continued to be co-ordinated by John Bremner throughout the year with indoor evening meetings being organized by Lesley Frescura and hosted with steadfast reliability by Terry Walls. Many people assisted with hosting outings, but the efforts of Elena Russell and Lesley and Sandi du Preez also ensured that Wednesday and Saturday outings were on offer. Jane Morris and Mike Roseblade have also added slightly longer trips to areas further afield. Please consider volunteering to host outings - you do not have to be an expert but be willing to act as a central organizing point, meet participants and carry out the small amount of necessary admin for the club. Our final official get together at Springside Nature Reserve on the 1st December was great and the generosity and willingness of Elena Russel, Terry Walls, John Hinck and Marion Spence in providing everyone with the now famous toasted sandwiches was really appreciated. Tessa White and our satellite Krantzklouf Birds continued their morning meetings and presentations in Kloof and these are well attended with 30 - 60 people attending talks. Flick McKenzie has been invaluable in getting notices about all the club's activities and events into the press wherever possible and we sincerely thank her for all she has done. She has indicated she will leave the committee at this AGM but she has assured us she will be on hand to assist whenever we need it. Thank you Flick! John Bremner will be leaving the committee at this AGM

and we thank him for ensuring that all the activities are co-ordinated and compiled into organized lists for distribution to the various media, email groups and KZN Birds.

The 2019 calendar sales have gone well with a few left on sale at this AGM. With Crystelle Wilson's design expertise and Hugh Chittenden's generous photograph donations and the generous donations by sponsors of the months of the calendar these are a wonderful product and generate great income for the club. Frankie and Lesley in particular and all the people who took on the role of selling calendars are thanked for their efforts in making this such a successful venture for BLPN.

David Swanepoel attended and represented BLPN at the regional KZN Forum meeting in March and September 2018. One of the decisions to come out of this meeting was that KZN Birds magazine will be distributed as an electronic publication to members. This will start with the first edition of 2019. The vehicle for distribution will be via the KZN Birds email group and via password on the webpage. This list will be checked and cleaned in March and only paid up members will be able to receive these emails going forward. Crystelle has continued to selflessly provide her services to the Forum to put together the magazine and will continue to do this. The only difference will be that the magazine will not go to print. However, members will be able to print the quarterly list of outings themselves if they enjoy having a hard copy to hand / next to their bed.

A very successful event was held in November 2018 organised by Adam Cruickshank. The Wagtail Conservation Festival in Amanzimtoti included speakers, guided walks, guest speaker (Faansie Peacock) and photography (Albert Froneman) workshops. BLPN provided some sponsorship towards this event and the club sees this as a way of providing more opportunities for birders that are spread throughout the eThekweni Municipal area (BLPNs boundary) as well as a way to attract more people to birding.

The D'Moss areas throughout the BLPN area remain important jewels of biodiversity and provide an opportunity for birders close to home. The issues of safety and security were brought quite sharply into focus with the murder of Simon Milliken in one of these areas. This makes our organised bird outings even more significant and people are encouraged to support these to ensure that enthusiasm is maintained by the people who do so much to organise these events.

Membership is a concern. BLPN was one of the largest clubs in the country at one point but we have seen significant membership declines over the past 8-10 years. The committee would be interested to get feedback from members as to the reasons there might be for this and to make suggestions that might improve recruitment of members or activities which may spur interest. One of the reasons for the decline is considered to be the rise of communication across social media.

At the same time this increase in the use of social media has opened up some amazing opportunities for sharing events, bird photographs and communicating with other like-minded birders. BLPN has branched into all of these different platforms with a webpage, BLPN Facebook [page](#) for official announcements and posts and a BLPN Facebook [group](#) which allows members to post all things birding. The webpage is linked to Twitter and an Instagram account has been started. Use all of these to stay informed about club activities, sightings and other news in the greater Durban area. Trip reports posted on the website are a wonderful way to share locations and sightings and the recent reports by Sally and Paul Bartho of their Kruger and Berg trips continue to provide a great read with lots of information. The reports from the recent outings by Sandi du Preez and Adam Cruickshank also provide a vivid picture of what has been seen and experienced on these outings. All the trip reports are available on the BLPN website so please visit the home page and have a look to get inspired to get out there and bird.

I will end with the BirdLife South Africa's chosen Bird of the Year for 2019 - the Secretarybird - *Sagittarius serpentarius*. Secretarybirds have been listed as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN Red List since 2011 with large declines in their available habitat and the numbers of birds seen across Africa. The biggest threat they face is loss of habitat, while also being susceptible to collisions with electrical infrastructure and fence lines. The story of this remarkable bird is a story we would want to end on a happier note so do whatever you can do to make the right lifestyle choices, change hearts and minds of people around you and let's really scale up the 'act local think global' movement in whatever way we can. Individual actions do make a difference.

Your membership of a bird club contributes to the voices who speak up for conservation of birds and their habitats. So speak up, keep your membership active and convince others to join up.

Thank you to the committee for guiding me through the committee activities for the first time this year and then for entrusting me with guiding the club, albeit for a short time as Acting Chair.

Nicolette Forbes
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