



BirdLife eThekweni KZN

Non-Profit registration Number:
263-993 NPO

Chair's Report 2025

Presented at the 77th AGM

On the 7th March at Bonamangzi Game Reserve



1. WELCOME

Good morning everyone, and thank you for being here. When I look back on the past nine years as Chair of **BirdLife eThekweni KZN**, what strikes me most is not simply what we achieved, but what a small group of passionate people can accomplish when they believe deeply in birds, conservation, and in each other. And as I prepare to deliver my final Chair's report over nearly a decade in this role, I find myself reflecting on something rather curious about the times we live in.

We live in an age of extraordinary connection. Our phones connect us instantly to thousands of people, information flows endlessly across screens, and social media promises communities that span the globe.

And yet, paradoxically, many of the traditional forms of civil society — clubs, societies, volunteer organisations – are rapidly declining. Attention spans are shorter, commitments harder to sustain, and genuine community sometimes feels like a rarer commodity than it once was.

And yet here we all are.

We gather not around a screen, but in the bush around a shared passion for the living world — for birds, for wild places, and for the simple joy of being outside and experiencing the wild together. A bird club may seem like a small thing in a fast-moving world, but I have come to believe that it represents something deeply important.

Because birding slows us down.

It asks us to look more carefully, to listen more closely, to notice what most people pass by without seeing. It takes us to places we might otherwise never have visited — quiet estuaries at dawn, misty grasslands, forest paths alive with birdsong. And along the way it gives us something else that is increasingly precious: genuine connection.

Connection with nature.

Connection with place.

And connection with each other.

A club like BirdLife eThekwini KZN creates a space where that connection can flourish. It offers companionship and safety when we venture out birding. It creates opportunities for learning and mentorship. It allows people to be drawn in a positive direction — where enthusiasm becomes knowledge, and knowledge becomes conservation action.

Most importantly, it reminds us that meaningful change rarely happens alone. It happens when people come together with a shared purpose. A single person watching birds is a lovely thing, but it is simply that. However, a community of birders working together can achieve something far greater: raising awareness, supporting conservation, gathering citizen science data, and giving a voice to the birds and habitats that cannot speak for themselves.

Birding also nourishes us in quieter ways. It brings joy. It restores our minds after difficult times. It encourages curiosity and wonder. In a world that often feels hurried and uncertain, birds offer moments of beauty and perspective — small reminders that the natural world still has the power to inspire us.

And so, as we reflect on the past year and on the journey of this club, I think it is worth pausing to recognise what BirdLife eThekwini KZN really represents. It is not just a club! It is a community of people who have chosen to care — about birds, about wild places, and about each other.

And in today's world, that choice matters more than ever.

2. 2025 IN REVIEW

Turning to the year under review, 2025 has once again been a busy, productive, and deeply rewarding year for BirdLife eThekwini KZN.

Perhaps the most encouraging indicator of the club's health is that our membership has continued to grow. We closed the year with 675 members, marking this the eighth consecutive year of growth — a remarkable achievement at a time when many volunteer organisations are struggling to maintain participation. That sort of growth does not happen

by accident, and I would like to acknowledge **Jane Morris, our Membership Manager**, whose care and diligence in managing membership administration, following up with members, and nurturing a welcoming environment has made a significant difference. Jane approaches this role as a true birder — someone who cares deeply about birds and leads by example in encouraging other members to do the same.

Throughout the year the club maintained a full and varied programme of activities. This is the heartbeat of any bird club, and I would like to thank Jenny Norman, who once again ensured that every month offered something to look forward to — from walks and outings to presentations. The range of places visited, birds encountered, and experiences shared reflects her quiet diligence in keeping the activities calendar running smoothly. It is a wonderful thing for a chair not to have to worry about the execution of our committee members duties and Jenny that's the benefit you gave me as chair.

Within activities my roll out of the club's branding of different activity types has also now settled in well, and I hope this means that members instinctively recognise what each label promises — whether it be a relaxed outing, a stake-out, a talk, or something a little more adventurous.

The club's conservation contribution continued in tangible ways through the efforts of Steve Davis, Conservation Coordinator, and Dave Rimmer, Atlas Coordinator, who have ensured that BirdLife eThekwini KZN remains actively involved in citizen science and monitoring initiatives. Through atlassing, CWAC counts, and the monitoring work at Van Riebeeck Park, members are contributing real data that feeds into conservation understanding and action. These efforts quietly demonstrate how ordinary birders can make an extraordinary contribution simply by paying attention and recording what they see.

Another important part of the club's success is our annual calendar, and I would like to thank my very own Professor - Ticky Forbes - our Calendar Coordinator, who keeps the entire process on track — from production to sales, distribution, and record keeping — with a level of diligence and focus that only he can bring. The calendar was completely sold out by the beginning of this year, a wonderful achievement that allowed the club not only to generate income but also to subsidise events for members and strengthen our ability to support bird conservation. On a personal note, Ticky is not only a committee member but

also the person who has had to live with the additional demands that come with being married to the Chair. He is my rock, my guide, and often my sounding board, and I am deeply grateful for his constant presence and support.

My fellow office bearers have also been steadfast in their roles. Carron Dove, our Secretary, has been dependable in keeping the administrative wheels of the club turning and very often my personal wheels too.

Andrew Mather, as Vice-Chair, is a valued support that has been present to bounce ideas off and act if it was needed. And finally Bridget Thorne, who has served as Treasurer for longer than she ever imagined she would, has once again guided the club's financial obligations with care. Bridget will present the 2025 Annual Financial Statements shortly after this report.

Beyond the regular activities, the club also enjoyed several memorable events during the year. We once again hosted for the fifth year in a row the highly successful July weekend at uMkhuze Game Reserve, which seems to grow better and more enjoyable with each passing year. In September we hosted the BirdLife KZN Forum at St Lucia, bringing together birders from across the province for several days of learning, exploration, and camaraderie. Dave Rimmer hosted a very successful club mini Birding Big Day in October and we rounded off the year with our End of Year celebration at Alverstone in mid December. And as is our tradition of treating AGMs as events rather than merely meetings, today's gathering serves as our final occasion marking the close of the 2025 club year.

All of these achievements reflect what can be accomplished when a committed group of volunteers works together with enthusiasm and purpose.

Of course, as with any volunteer organisation, the picture is not entirely effortless or without its challenges.

While the club continues to grow, the reality is that the day-to-day running of a club like this depends on the dedication of a relatively small group of volunteers. Organising activities, managing membership, maintaining finances, coordinating events, producing calendars, answering queries, and ensuring that everything runs smoothly behind the scenes requires a considerable amount of time and energy.

In today's world, where people's lives are increasingly busy and attention is constantly pulled in many directions, it has become more difficult for volunteer organisations everywhere to sustain active participation and leadership. This is not unique to BeKZN. It is a broader shift affecting civil society across the world. Yet it does mean that the work of the club often rests on the shoulders of a few committed individuals who give generously of their time and expertise.

Over the past eight years I have seen firsthand both the rewards and the demands of keeping a club vibrant and relevant. There are moments of immense satisfaction — when an event comes together beautifully, when members share in a special birding moment, or when we know that our efforts have contributed to something meaningful for conservation.

But there are also moments when the workload feels heavy, when participation in some activities is lower than hoped. Bird clubs do not run themselves. They exist because people care enough to give their time, their skills, and their enthusiasm.

And when that spirit of contribution is present — as it certainly is in this club — remarkable things can be achieved.

At this point I would like to pause to acknowledge and recognise the members of our committee who give so much of their time and energy to keep BirdLife eThekwini KZN thriving. I would like to invite each committee member who is present today to please come forward to the lectern as they are called to receive a small token of appreciation from myself as Chair, and from all our members. If you would like to say a few words, you are most welcome to do so.

3. HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP AWARDS

Having reflected on the past year for the club I would like to focus on three specific members whose whose long-standing commitment to this club deserves special acknowledgement.

Honorary Life Membership is one of the highest honours that BirdLife eThekwini KZN can bestow. It recognises members who, over many years, have demonstrated loyalty to the club, participated actively in its activities, generously mentored newer birders, and supported the club whenever needed. We currently have two of the five places filled having

lost three of the Honorary members over the past 18 months. So to introduce this I am going to paraphrase one of my favourite sayings –

if AGM meetings are bridges *(from one year to the next)*,
lets hope on this day,
that we make it across without too much sway,
but whether your birds be in country or town,
look up and look out but never look down.

So it is time to look up and look out and announce that this year a motivation was made and unanimously accepted by the Committee to confer Honorary Life Membership of BirdLife eThekwini KZN on three outstanding individuals: Mr Ismail Vahed, Dr Adam Khan, and Mrs Kathleen (Pat) Long.

All three have been long-serving and loyal members of the club. They have shared their knowledge with care and patience, encouraged others in their birding journeys, and quietly helped to strengthen the fabric of this community. Ismail has also served the club by assisting the Treasurer with finances, adding service and leadership to an already impressive record of dedication.

Unfortunately, none of them are able to be with us in person today, partly due to the observance of Ramadan and partly through travel constraints, although they may be joining us online. I will read out their emails on receipt of the news.

I would therefore like to ask everyone present to please stand, raise your glasses, and join me in a toast to our newest Honorary Life Members of BirdLife eThekwini KZN — Ismail Vahed, Adam Khan, and Pat Long.

Toast | To Ismail, Adam and Pat — thank you for your years of support, knowledge, and service to this club.

4. ITS BEEN NEARLY A DECADE

So to the reflective part of this Chair's report, I would like to take a moment to reflect briefly on the past nine years.

Serving as Chair of BirdLife eThekwini KZN has been a remarkable journey — one that has taught me a great deal, not only about the workings of a club, but also about myself. From

the beginning I felt that this role was one of **service**: service to the birds we all care so deeply about, and service to the members who make up this community.

When I first stepped into this role, my instinct was simply to keep the club strong and relevant. Over time that journey evolved into something larger — from keeping the club alive, to growing it, and ultimately to making it matter. I certainly know that we have done the first two and I think we have managed to do all three.

During these years the club has embraced change. We introduced new ways of communicating, made greater use of technology, and created opportunities for members to connect more easily with one another. One of the most striking examples of this was during the Covid years, when we found ways to work around lockdown, many of which allowed some of the members to meet digitally for the first time. People who had never encountered each other before suddenly found themselves sharing virtual talks and conversations about birds. And when we were finally able to return to the field, those digital connections turned into real friendships — some of which continue to this day as people bird together beyond official club activities.

Like any journey, it has had its highs and its lows. I will miss the close interaction with members — sometimes very close interaction — and the sense of being at the centre of a vibrant community of birders. What I may not miss quite as much, with tongue in cheek and a smile, are the constant questions from people who perhaps did not quite get around to reading information that had already been sent out!

But in all seriousness, the overwhelming experience has been one of support. There have been many members — far too many to mention by name — who have offered encouragement, advice, and deep friendship along the way. You know who you are, and I am deeply grateful for the role you have played in sustaining both the club and, at times, the Chair and me personally. Empathy is a gift and many of you have shown me over the years so clearly that you have it.

One of the more difficult aspects of serving for a long period is that you also come to know members more closely. Over time the club becomes not just a list of names, but a community of people and families. And with that comes the sadness of losing members and sometimes members of their families. Those moments remind us that a club like this is about

far more than birds; it is about the relationships and shared experiences that grow over the years. Or relationships that are formed within the club – Jane met and married Mike, Heidi and Mark met here at Bonamanzi at the spring forum of 2023 and bush fever worked its magic and there are many others.

Yet perhaps the most encouraging reflection from this journey is the way in which this club has consistently translated enthusiasm into real conservation impact year after year. Every year, through the generosity of our members, BirdLife eThekwini KZN has made a financial contribution to bird conservation. And year after year those contributions have grown — a remarkable achievement for a bird club.

That growing commitment reflects something very special about this club. Our ethos is even included into our branding – some subliminal brainwashing hopefully. Some of you may have wondered about or even realised that the exclamation mark after **BeKZN Talks!** is deliberate — its there because when we talk about birds and conservation, I believe we all do so with enthusiasm, conviction, and a goal.

And our outings are called **BeKZN Walks...** — those three dots are also deliberate and they are there to remind us that the journey never quite ends. There is always another bird to find, another place to explore, and another step forward for conservation.

And it is in that spirit of action that brings me to the final and perhaps most meaningful development of this past year.

5. TURNING COMMITMENT INTO CONSERVATION

This is something that I believe represents a defining moment for BirdLife eThekwini KZN.

Over the years this club has built up financial reserves through careful stewardship, successful fundraising initiatives such as our calendar, and the huge generosity of our members. Those funds have been accumulated gradually and responsibly.

But the purpose of a conservation club is not simply to hold money in a bank account.

The purpose is to turn that support into real impact for the birds and habitats we care about.

This decision was discussed carefully by the committee and received strong support. As in any healthy organisation there was debate, and while the motion was supported by the

majority of the committee, it was not entirely unanimous. A dissenting vote to this action was registered by Dave Rimmer which has to be recorded and is acknowledged here in the spirit of transparency and good governance.

Nevertheless, it agreed that this was the right moment for the club to translate its accumulated support into meaningful conservation impact. This year we will be making a **once-off conservation donation from our accumulated reserves** to support bird conservation initiatives.

As a result, when Bridget presents the Annual Financial Statements shortly, members will notice that for the first time in nine years the accounts reflect a **deficit**.

Let me reassure you and I am sure Bridget will do the same in her explanation — this is not a financial problem. It simply reflects that we are using funds that were accumulated over the past eight years for the very purpose for which they were raised.

I have always stated that my goals in running BirdLife eThekwini KZN were to strengthen its two core functions – one of these is member experience and the other is the conservation of birds and their habitats. Over recent years, strong member support, successful fundraising initiatives, and careful financial management have placed the club in an exceptionally healthy position. In other words, we are converting savings into conservation.

Good governance requires that a club retains sufficient reserves for operations and contingencies. That requirement is comfortably met. At the same time, conservation challenges facing birds are urgent and ongoing. Funds held indefinitely in a bank account do not protect birds; funds directed to conservation do. BirdLife eThekwini KZN exists to conserve birds and their habitats. When the club is fortunate enough to have the financial capacity to make a meaningful contribution to conservation, it is not just an opportunity — it is a responsibility.

It therefore gives me enormous pleasure after due diligence has been met to announce that **BirdLife eThekwini KZN will be donating R550 000 to bird conservation.**

This is an extraordinary achievement for a volunteer bird club, and it is entirely the result of the generosity, enthusiasm, and commitment of our members. This donation is not the

result of one event or one initiative. It represents years of careful stewardship, participation, and belief in the idea that a community of birders can make a real difference.

Today, we are not just celebrating birds we have seen, places we have visited, or friendships we have made.

We are celebrating something even more meaningful.

We are celebrating the fact that this club has turned its passion for birds into tangible conservation action.

And that, I believe, is something every member of BirdLife eThekwini KZN can be deeply proud of.

6. REFLECTION AND A TOAST TO THE BIRDS, THE CLUB AND OUR MEMBERS

As I come to the end of this report — and of my time as Chair — I find myself reflecting on how much this club has meant to me.

Over the past nine years I have had the privilege of serving a community of people who share a love for birds, for wild places, and for the quiet joy of discovery that birding brings. Together we have grown the club, strengthened its activities, navigated challenges, embraced new ways of connecting with one another, and — perhaps most importantly — translated our passion into meaningful support for conservation.

That journey has been filled with memorable moments: early mornings in beautiful places, lively discussions in talks and meetings, friendships formed over binoculars and field guides, and the shared excitement that comes when someone calls out “There it is!”

But beyond the birds themselves, what makes this club truly special is the community that surrounds them. BirdLife eThekwini KZN is not just an organisation — it is a gathering of people who care deeply about the natural world and about one another.

And so, this is a good moment to ask you all to please **raise your glasses** and join me in a toast. There are three pledges so please only drink at the end of the toast...

First, **to the members we have lost over the years** — friends and fellow birders whose voices and companionship we miss, but whose love of birds continues to live on in the habitats they cherished and the community they helped build. May their legacy remain with us every time we step into the field.

Secondly, **to those of you who have made the effort to be here today** — thank you for being part of this club, for sharing your enthusiasm, your knowledge, and your friendship. It is your presence that keeps BirdLife eThekwini KZN vibrant and alive.

And finally, **to those members who may have joined us but who could not be here today** — may we see you out in the field again soon, binoculars raised, enjoying the birds and the places that bring us together. And we hope, of course, to see you at the next AGM.

To our members past, present, and future —
to the birds that inspire us —
and to the continued journey of **BirdLife eThekwini KZN**.

Please site and give me a few more moments.

In a world that moves ever faster — where information flashes past us in seconds and attention is constantly pulled in a thousand directions — birds quietly teach us something different. They remind us to pause, to look more carefully, to listen more closely, and to appreciate the wild beauty that still surrounds us.

Perhaps that is the real gift of a club like this. Not just the birds we see, but the perspective they give us — about patience, wonder, and the importance of protecting the natural world that sustains them.

One of the things I shared with my predecessor, Lesley Frescura was a passionate love of poetry and lyrical words so if you will all indulge me I wish to...

A Lyrical Goodbye

Nine years ago I took the chair,
Not knowing quite what waited there -
Only that birds had drawn us near,
And this small club was something dear.

We met at dawn with field guides worn,
Through misty grass and forests torn,
Where calls and wings and fleeting sight
Turned ordinary days to light.

Some days were easy, bright with song,
Where laughter carried walks along.
Some days were harder, work to do—
Emails, questions, meetings too.

For clubs like ours don't run alone;
They stand on hearts that carry stone.
On quiet hands that plan and guide,
And those who simply walk beside.

Through storms of change, through Covid years,
Through doubts and hopes and small-held fears,
We found a way to stay connected—
Birders united, curious, protected.

We grew in number, grew in care,
More eyes to watch the moving air.
More voices speaking for the wild,
More wonder in each adult child.

And slowly something more took flight—
A purpose rising into sight:
Not only watching wings above,
But turning birding into love.

Love for estuary, veld and tree,
For habitats that long to be
Protected by the hands of those
Who understand what nature shows.

So if these years have meant a thing,
It's not the chair or role I bring—
But knowing, standing here today,
Together we have found a way.

A way to grow, a way to care,
A way to keep the wild things there.

And if I've learned one truth to keep,
It's that the promise that we reap
Rests not in titles, rank, or fame –
But in the birds that call our name.

And so today as I step aside,
Still walking with you, just not to guide -
Grateful for every path we've shared -
we say with heart and soul ... we truly cared.

Prompts and thoughts from Nicky and shaped by ai

And with that, I thank you for the privilege of allowing me to serve this remarkable club for the past nine years. It has been an honour I will always treasure. Nicky out!

Cheers.

Nicolette Forbes
7th March 2026