



# WATERBERG NATURE CONSERVANCY

## Minutes of General Meeting

Date 8<sup>th</sup> September 2011 \* Venue: Rivier Oord, Vaalwater

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### 1. Welcome

The host and chairman, John Miller, welcomed all the members of the Conservancy and the special guest speakers.

### 2. Confirmation of Previous Minutes (9 June 2011)

The minutes were accepted as a true reflection of proceedings.  
There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

### 3. Guest Speakers:

**Nikki McCartney: Birdlife SA**

**Kobus Pienaar: LEDET Modimolle**

JM mentioned that Gerhardt Lorst of Wildlife & Ecological Investments were unable to make it to the meeting (as per the Agenda), and thanked Kobus agreed to present on very short notice.

#### Nikki McCartney

BirdLife South Africa is the country partner of BirdLife International and strives to conserve birds and their habitats. It is non-profit, public benefit environmental organisation.

The Aims and Objectives:

- To promote the enjoyment, conservation and understanding of wild birds and their habitats
  - o Maintain and improve the conservation status of all bird species
  - o Conserve and improve sites and habitats that are important for birds
  - o Help to, through birds, conserve biodiversity and to improve the quality of people's lives.

There are various divisions within BirdLife South Africa:

- Business and membership – which is based in Johannesburg and takes care of all the administrative work, finances and human resources. There are currently over 5000 members and 40 bird clubs around the country.
- Events – create awareness about birds through fun, bird related events:
  - o Bird of the Year – Barn Swallow
  - o National Bird Week
  - o Sasol Birds & Birding Fair
  - o Birding Big Day
- Conservation
- Seabird programme – based in Cape Town
- IBA programme – (Important Bird Area) – identify and works to conserve a network of sites critical for long term survival of bird species
- Community based conservation – environmental education and awareness in schools and communities
- Avitourism – where people travel outside their usual environment to view birds in their natural habitat.
- Policy and Advocacy – ensures that development and other human activities are done in a sustainable and environmentally acceptable manner.

For more information please log onto the website [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za) or join the facebook page.

Kobus Pienaar – LEDET Modimolle

Kobus gave a short presentation on the Blue Crane population in the Waterberg.

The Blue Crane is the National Bird of South Africa and is also used on the 5c coin. There has been an 80% decline in numbers over the past 20 years. There are only 20 000 Blue Cranes left in South Africa. The reason for the rapid decline is mainly due to habitat destruction and harmful chemicals used in the 1960s. There are currently 3 main populations and various other smaller populations.

In the Waterberg area the Blue Cranes use the high cliffs and also the lower areas into the valleys. They are dependent on open water areas for roosting and nesting. If there is not water they will not breed.

The Blue Cranes also use man-made habitats in the Waterberg like de-bushed areas and old crop fields.

There is ongoing monitoring of the Blue Cranes with different coloured rings. Some Waterberg birds have been found in other provinces.

Years ago the Waterberg had more grasslands than bush. Humans changed the habitat by planting bush in the grassland areas. With the habitat change there are less grassland birds to be found.

In conclusion, the only way to get the grassland birds and more specifically the Blue Crane back into the area, the following needs to be addressed:

- Improved environmental management
- Veld management
- Habitat improvement
- Habitat manipulation

Questions:

- How to get birds back onto your farm? *By manipulating old crop fields and keeping the grass short and burn at the right time of the year.*
- What is the minimum biggest area that the Blue Cranes need to reproduce? *It depends on the availability of open water and open grasslands. While they breed they very seldom leave the site. They walk wherever they need to go; thus they need water to be close.*
- Which predators are their biggest threats? *Humans are their biggest threat. The jackal is a threat only if they can get to them. Pythons, caracoles, cats etc are also threats. Birds could survive as a species before man changed the habitat. Powerlines, Telkom lines and fences are big threats as well.*

#### **4. Cheetah Metapopulation Project** **Vincent van der Merwe**

Vincent is the co-ordinator for the Cheetah Metapopulation Project for EWT and the Nature Conservation Trust

Cheetahs have been extirpated from 89% of the historical range in SA due to habitat destruction, illegal trade and captive breeding as well as persecution / retaliatory killings. The only method used to increase the numbers is reintroduction into the wild.

Currently there are 280 cheetahs introduced in 37 reserves. This has caused some bad publicity due to the following reasons:

- Captive Cheetahs
- Non-predator adapted
- Sale of problem animals into inadequately fenced reserves
- No consideration for genetic origin
- Lack of long term management following reintroduction

Major goals of the project:

- Develop an interactive web-based database
  - o Centralised website (5 months)
  - o Will contain background information on metapopulation;
  - o Interactive data entry component
  - o Portal for identifying suitable cheetahs for relocation
  - o Chat room / blog facilities for sharing information

This will ease communication between reserve managers and government
- Develop a national DNA database
  - o To quantify genetic status of cheetahs in small reserves
  - o Move cheetahs between reserves to maximise diversity and fitness
- Manage cheetahs in transit
- Continued ecological studies
  - o Essential to understand demographic responses of predators and prey in small areas

Waterberg Cheetahs

There are 31 metapopulation cheetahs in the Waterberg area. They are found in 8 reserves ranging in size from 960ha to 37 000ha. Most of these cheetahs originate from Eastern Cape reserves and from Phinda in KZN. Ecological research is currently being done in 3 reserves and cubs have been born from 5 reserves. 5 reserves also have lions.

## **5. SANParks Honorary Rangers, Mogol Sub Region** **Ben van der Merwe**

What is SANPark Honorary Rangers?

- An organisation of conservation minded, un-paid volunteers acting as an extension of SANPark's staff in the furtherance of SANPark's objectives
- Governed by a Constitution which is recognised by the SANPark's Board
- There are 720 trained members and 320 applicants in 30 regions serving all of the National Parks
- It is a registered Public Benefit Organisation (PBO)

National Projects include:

- Conservation Services
- Alien Invader Task Group
- Trunk Call - Newsletter
- Public education and awareness
- Training
- Birding
- Scientific services
- National quiz
- Juniors

SANP HR is committed to spending the bulk of funds generated on conservation projects. They support projects in all the National Parks.

National Parks that have benefitted from engagements are:

Kruger, Marekele, Mapungubwe, Golden Gate, Kgalagadi, Mountain Zebra, Namaqua, Richtersveld, Mokala and Augrabies

Other projects include:

Ranger field support equipment, Cyber trackers, Bird hides, fridges and braais, eco trails, lawn mowers, 2-way radios, projectors, tree tags, fence removal, snake catchers, solar water pumps and pipes, GPS and tracking equipment, co-operation and partnership with BirdLife South Africa

Contact details:

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082 829 9367

**6. Station Commander of Vaalwater  
Captain Mpete**

JM introduced Cpt. Mpete who asked for a few minutes to share some information on Rhino poaching with the WNC community.

Illegal rhino hunting and poaching has escalated to a pandemic. Various reports of poaching from Thabazimbi, Welgevonden and Polokwane have been noted.

The police have made a lot of arrests during the past couple of months.

The SAPS advise that public must be very cautious when dealing with poachers. If you are aware of any suspicious activity in the area, you need to contact the SAPS as soon as possible so they can act quickly.

Poachers are always armed and dangerous and the police offer large amounts of money to informants for information on where the Rhino's are.

Contact information Vaalwater Police:

014 755 9702 Tel

014 755 9710 Fax

082 565 8508 Cpt. Mpete

**7. Any Other Business**

JM thanked all the speakers for their presentations.

The next meeting will be on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November – AGM.

The meeting was adjourned and everyone was invited to stay for refreshments, chats and snacks.

**Signed:** .....**Chairman**

**Date:** .....