



***Botanical Society of South Africa
KZN Coastal Branch***

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON SATURDAY, 21 NOVEMBER
2020 ON THE ZOOM CONFERENCING PLATFORM AT 10H00**

PRESENT ONLINE :

Ms Suvarna Parbhoo Mohan (Chairperson)
Ms Antonia Xaba (National General Manager)
Mr Rupert Koopman (National Conservation Manager)
Ms Simone van Rooyen (National Office Manager)
13 other members: Himansu Bajinath, Lindsay Bowker, Gill Browne, Frances Callahan, Virginia Cameron, Louise Colvin, Barry Lang, Janet Longman, Hilton Maclarty, Patricia McCracken, Christine Sole, Anno Torr, Sandra Dell (Minutes)

Proxy votes: Charles Botha, Margaret Burger, Dave Henry, Michele Hofmeyr, Lydia Petre, Bruce Surmon, Val Thurston, Corinne Winson

Electronic vote: Margret Gehner, Peter Chrystal

APOLOGIES : Charles & Julia Botha, Margaret Burger, Mike & Stella Cottrell, Francois du Randt, Glen Campbell, Mary de Haas, William Gilchrist, Peter Chrystal, Tony Dickson, Margret Gehner, Dave Henry, Michele Hofmeyr, Lydia Petre, Elsa Pooley, Jill Seldon, Bruce Surmon, Val Thurston, Coral Vinsen.

1. WELCOME

The Chairperson, Suvarna Parbhoo Mohan, opened the meeting and welcomed all present. Simone van Rooyen requested everyone switch off their microphones and to type any comments or questions in the Chat column until such time as questions could be answered.

Simone confirmed that including those present, the proxies and electronic vote, there was a quorum.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 21 JULY 2019

The minutes of the previous AGM were adopted (proposed by Janet Longman and seconded by Anno Torr).

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Suvarna's report was in the form of an MS-PowerPoint [presentation](#).

Branch membership decreased from about 200 members to just under 150 but it was hoped that numbers would increase with the introduction of the recently introduced Regional Membership category.

Activities prior to the Covid19 virus included monthly outings and talks, Plant Fair, ad hoc garden tours and indigenous nursery visits. Before Covid, three alien-clearing workparties were hosted at the Manor Gardens grassland in partnership with local residents and Ethekewini municipality. Our Branch sponsored two experienced invasive alien plant clearers for 2 days to work there.

Our work in partnership with Durban Botanic Gardens continued.

Durban CREW citizen science had had a rewarding year with over fifteen field trips undertaken and various threatened species found.

National

The National Office had had more engagement with the Branches, despite the lockdown.

From September the completion of all of the Branches' accounts was done virtually by an accountant contracted by BotSoc National, so that reports were consistent across the Branches and making for easy consolidation across the Society. Much discussion on the new BotSoc Constitution had resulted in a workshop to be facilitated the following Saturday, 28 July and members were welcome to join in.

The National AGM was held virtually, which, it was hoped, would become the standard so that all members could participate, if they wished. A summary of the Annual Report was available on the newly transformed BotSoc website. Suvarna went online at this point to show the website's different facets including the branding changes. Membership could be renewed online, and new cards would soon be made available. *Veld & Flora* was available online. The Society's conservation and marketing strategies were online too. Two interesting publications had been released: one on the Renosterveld in the Overberg and one on medicinal plants by Tony Dold. The collaboration with SANBI continued. Conservation fund-raising would be undertaken in the next few years. BotSoc National could be followed on the various social media platforms. The National Office was thanked for all of its hard work during lockdown.

Branch Virtual Activities

The Branch too ventured into the virtual world during lockdown. Spotify, an audio streaming site, held podcasts from some of our Branch talks that had been recorded. There had been 220 plays thus far. YouTube, an online video sharing platform, in time, would host short videos from our outings. Suvarna played an example of Prof Eugene Moll at Burman Bush showing how to identify *Turraea floribunda*. Members were encouraged to take snippet videos and to share them with us on our social media platforms. Our newsletter format had changed from PDF to online MailChimp, which allowed us to track the most read articles so that we could provide our readers with content that was of the most interest to them. Our newsletter was available to 750 subscribers with an average read of 29-41% which was above the average read for MailChimp non-profits at 25%. We hoped to publish the newsletter more frequently. Committee member Hilton Maclarty was thanked for championing these virtual projects.

Other Events and Activities

Our calendar was normally filled with monthly talks, outings and garden tours but we met in just seven months of this unusual year. The estuarine specialist Prof. Ticky Forbes was our first guest speaker. He enlightened us about the species interactions in Durban Bay. Bringing his talk to life, Prof. Forbes then led an outing to the Beachwood Mangroves Nature Reserve.

Our Branch ushered in Spring with the return of our Indigenous Plant Fair at a new venue, Beachwood Mangroves Nature Reserve. The ample space for displaying a variety of plants from various nurseries plus space to interact and network, made for a delightful weekend. Indigiflora Nursery was thanked for donating R4 000 worth of plants to the Plant Fair.

Branch member Jocelyn Sutherland led an outing to Havaan Forest. Over the course of the year, our Branch had become joint custodian of the Havaan with WESSA and Umhlanga Improvement Precinct, with Hilton being our champion. The western portion of the Forest's easy access from the N2 and lack of security presence had unfortunately led to the forest becoming a hotspot for poachers recently as several snares had been found.

Promoting the splendours of the Umtamvuna Reserve had become an annual event as everyone thoroughly enjoyed the day in KZN's southern tip. The Pondoland CREW group was thanked for showcasing the beautiful swathes of colour with us. All members were encouraged to follow the Pondoland CREW Blog and to arrange an outing to the Pondoland Centre of Endemism.

Only one garden tour was held and that was to Lydia Petre's garden. Lydia had worked on her garden for over 14 years to transform it from exotic to thriving with indigenous plants.

The author of *Wild Orchids of the Southern Drakensberg*, Richard Braby, shared his passion for photographing orchids and key aspects of his book with us. This podcast was available on Spotify.

The Izingadi Zethemba "Gardens of Hope" Plant Nursery was one of the Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust's longest running economic empowerment projects at over 10 years old. Their aim was twofold – to create jobs and thus contribute to the economic empowerment of families impacted by the AIDS, while at the same time contributing to the Trust's long-term sustainability in offering its life-saving and life-changing projects and services across the Valley of A Thousand Hills. The plant nursery currently stocked a wide variety of both indigenous and exotic plants as well as garden décor at very affordable prices. A most enjoyable and informative outing was held here.

Conservancies KZN members offered an outing to our membership to Glenholme Nature Reserve at Kloof. The Reserve at 42 ha in extent comprised grasslands, scarp and swamp forest. The small stream flowing through the reserve and plunging over a waterfall into a gorge and forming one of the headwaters of the Umbilo River was a beautiful place to visit for an outing.

Prof Eugene Moll's almost annual tree ID courses had been a highlight for our members. Two very well-attended outings were held with Prof. Moll just before lockdown. Prof Moll's talk to the Branch on *How Tree Book Authors Have Failed Amateurs*, was also available by podcast.

Horticulturist Jennifer Rampersad, after serving time in other areas of eThekweni's Natural Resources Dept., joined the Durban Botanic Gardens and subsequently joined our committee. Besides Dr Hugh Glen's informative and witty walks in the Gardens, Jennifer

arranged a walkabout for BotSoc members who regularly walked through the Gardens to provide their vision for the various sections of DBG. Apart from holding work-parties, the Branch planned several small projects that were put on hold due to lockdown, although discussions had begun again recently once more.

Our Branch had engaged in three ad hoc activities over the past year: First was the Eden Schools Eco Festival where our Branch and the CREW programme hosted a joint expo and iNaturalist training session. Second, we participated in the Green Diwali Festival at Mitchell Park. Then last month we partnered with Durban Botanic Gardens to celebrate International Garden Day.

Following the move of PlantLife journal to online, two issues had been published so far: in December 2019 and in July 2020, capturing interesting articles about the life of plants. Members were encouraged to join the mailing list. Our committee had decided to write off the value of the stock since it had been unrealistic to expect to sell all of the dated copies. SANBI's Mary Gunn Library was assisting us to scan all the past issues which would be made available online.

The Wally Menne Memorial Book Fund was steadily growing. A few donations had been made over the past year and the pre-loved books donated to us were being documented to share on our website. Members knowing of individuals or organisations who would benefit from these botanical gems should please contact our secretary.

Our Branch took advantage of an opportunity provided by eThekweni Municipality's Public Engagement Programme through the eThekweni Conservancies Forum to conduct environmental activities to boost economic development at a local scale. Our committee hurriedly put together a proposal for three rehabilitation projects that were to happen over January to March 2021. It showed areas for rehabilitation with a high influx of people along the roads to King Shaka International Airport and where BotSoc could get exposure to attract new members. The funding unfortunately fell through; however, our committee would be discussing which projects to undertake as a Branch.

The Branch engaged with nurseries that we had visited over recent years and those who participated in our Plant Fairs to assist us with BotSoc exposure.

Suvarna thanked our members who had participated in our activities throughout the year, speakers, homeowners and outing leaders who generally donated their time and shared knowledge, those who had kindly contributed to our fundraising activities and shared images for our various publications, to Hilton Maclarty and Anno Torr for championing the online newsletter as well as to article contributors, to our volunteer Lyn Roodt for weekly assisting with various tasks in the office, to Martin Clement and his team as well as to the Durban Botanic Gardens Trust for the use of the Durban Botanic Gardens Visitors Centre for our monthly talks and finally to the committee for their enthusiasm, dedication and commitment.

Questions and comments were then invited.

Louise Colvin thanked Suvarna for an excellent report, well presented and visually attractive. Louise asked if the Branch had made links with Conservancies, because they were doing the project work, rehabilitation on roadsides and protecting certain areas. They were well organised and worked well with government and so there were overlaps. Suvarna thanked Louise and said that the Branch committee had indeed been working with Conservancies KZN and it was through them that the link to the possible funding was made.

Antonia commended Suvarna, committee and members for the work done. BotSoc National aimed to focus on conservation, membership growth and the transformation of

the organisation in various ways. This Branch was already transforming the way people accessed BotSoc and its information, its services and the experience of a Botanical Society member by using technology. Transformation was also about access, using technology and getting young and older people involved and getting them talking to each other.

Antonia noted the drop of membership numbers. The National Office hoped to support branches by building member numbers and in engaging branches to see how to do so. Similarly, the National Office would see how it could support the Branch in its Conservation efforts. Antonia thanked the Branch for its co-operation and participation in the Wave financial system which allowed a standardised way of managing the financials, and had been a great step forward. The work and relationship with the branches would improve, increase and the relationship would grow. This branch had a lot to offer potential and current members. Suvarna conveyed the Branch's thanks to Antonia.

Rupert too offered encouraging words. He reminded the Branch that there was a core team of membership support officers to assist and they were just a phone call or email away.

The Chairperson's Report was then accepted: (Proposed: Janet Longman, seconded: Barry Lang)

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

The financial statements had been published on the Branch website and were shared during the meeting on Suvarna's screen. Suvarna read out the Report on behalf of Dave Henry who had been unable to attend.

A notable improvement had been the renewal of the Plant Fair on a limited scale in 2019 which increased the net revenue by over R20 000. Unfortunately the Plant Fair could not be held in 2020 but it was hoped it could resume in 2021.

The drop in members resulted in the revenue from subscriptions dropping significantly. Attention to increasing our membership base would assist. Garden tours and talks contributed a useful increase in revenue. Interest on funds held at Grindrod Bank was a solid contributor to covering our administration costs.

Expenses were well contained and secretarial costs were the key to our continuity.

The overall surplus was R25 878.73 but it had been considered prudent to then write off the entire stock of PlantLife issues. Any proceeds of those in future would accrue to revenue.

The Balance Sheet reflected our position of cash resources remaining strong. These exceeded R275 000.00.

Questions were invited but there were none. The financial report was accepted (proposed: Janet Longman; seconded: Anno Torr).

6. BOTANICAL EDUCATION TRUST REPORT

The Report, prepared by Charles Botha, the Chair of the Trust, was read out by Anno Torr on behalf of Charles, who had been unable to attend.

During 2019 the Botanical Education Trust received 17 mostly excellent applications, totalling an amount of almost R490 000. Because only interest on invested donations was used, the Trustees had had to make difficult decisions and eventually decided on nine awards that, in their opinion, would serve conservation best. Even then, the record amount available of just over R146 000 had had to be spread very thinly, with several applicants receiving only part of the amount requested. The Trust desperately needed more donations.

A variety of projects was funded, awarding applicants who were contributing in different ways to the preservation of South Africa's indigenous flora. These ranged from young promising postgraduate students to a citizen scientist and included conservationists working to restore habitat, to restore species, and even one cataloguing priceless historical photographs which revealed long term changes in the environment.

Warburgia salutaris (Pepper-bark Tree) was highly valued in southern Africa for its use in traditional medicine. Over-exploitation and habitat loss had all contributed to it becoming endangered. In the Kruger National Park, there was a lack of fruit and viable seed production, leading to concern about its long term viability in the Park. Kaylee van den Bosch, of Wits University, received funding to assist in her MSc. study to examine and address this problem.

Jessica Minnaar, another promising young student who was carrying out research for her MSc. degree at Wits University, was granted an award to study the reproductive ecology of *Aloe reitzii*. The population of this aloe, which was endemic (occurred only in South Africa), was declining due to mining and afforestation.

Aloe peglerae was another aloe endemic to South Africa, where it had a very limited distribution range. Largely due to poaching for horticultural purposes, it was classified as Critically Endangered. Arnold Frisby, of Pretoria University, received a grant for his study which would reintroduce cultivated specimens into their natural habitat in two sites in the Magaliesberg, Gauteng/North West Province. Besides increasing *in-situ* numbers of this charismatic aloe, the protocol developed could be used to help conserve other threatened *Aloe* species.

A decade ago, in the wake of a large coal mine north of Emalaheni, Mpumalanga Province, a population of the endangered sandstone grassland endemic *Frithia humilis* was translocated to various other sites. Although adult plants had thrived, regeneration had not been as successful as in the natural habitat. Prof Stefan Siebert, of North-West University, had been diligently monitoring these translocations and received funds for a ten-year follow-up. *Frithia* translocations were often approved for coal mines, so this work would help inform appropriate habitat selection for successful translocations.

Hester Steyn of SANBI received funding to undertake a taxonomic revision of the genus *Cyphia*. Because taxonomists did not appear in the limelight of botanical research, they often found it difficult to attract funding. However, their work provided critical basic information that could be applied to many practical aspects such as conservation status, environmental management and environmental education.

Another important genus considered a priority for taxonomic revision was *Senecio*, of the daisy family. *Senecio* was also an economically important group as some species had been involved in the poisoning of farm animals. Marinda Koekemoer of SANBI received funding to undertake this research.

Wahroonga (uMvemvane), a grassland area in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands, was of great conservation importance because it was one of the last few remaining habitats of the endangered Karkloof Blue butterfly. As it was threatened by encroachment of invasive

alien species, Selvan Pillay of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife was given an award to help with his work protecting and restoring the area.

Robbie Thomas of Betty's Bay, Western Cape, a citizen scientist and world authority on grafting plants of the protea family, had been awarded a grant to write up and publish his pioneering work, including his current study entitled, *Are grafted Proteaceae seeds viable?*

Comparing current and old photographs of a landscape can provide much ecological information. For example, one may see bush encroachment not picked up in short-term studies. Dr John Ward received funding for digital capture of invaluable annotated photographs taken by botanist/ecologist CJ (Roddy) Ward between 1955 and 2015. These cover areas of KZN and parts of other SADC countries. Now, instead of being lost to future scientists, they would be available in perpetuity for research through the Plant Conservation Unit at UCT.

Because of the Corona virus pandemic, interest rates had been severely reduced and, in addition, many companies were not paying dividends on shares. Owing to this drastic drop in income the Trustees had decided, for the first time ever, that it would be prudent not to make any awards during 2020.

Anno was thanked and questions were invited for forwarding to Charles. There were no questions, but Suvarna commented that the young student recipients could possibly be considered for the limited free membership on offer to young students.

7. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The committee had comprised of Suvarna Parbhoo Mohan (Chairperson) for the past 3 years, Anno Torr (Vice-Chair and Newsletter), Sandra Dell (Secretary), Dave Henry (Treasurer), Janet Longman (Website, Facebook, Plant Fair). Christine Sole had been co-opted in August together with Corinne Winson who regrettably had resigned in March - both had provided many of the newsletter articles; Hilton Maclarty was our technology guru who was keen to record our activities; Jennifer Rampersad had been co-opted in January, and Barry Lang was the Durban Botanic Gardens Trust and Durban CREW representative.

The existing committee was prepared to stand again. Other nominations were invited from the floor, but there was none.

Simone indicated that it would be best to vote for each committee member rather than as one block.

Suvarna received votes from Barry Lang, Gill Browne, Louise Colvin, Anno Torr, Janet Longman, Sandra Dell, Hilton Maclarty, Christine Sole; Patricia McCracken (on the Chat) and 10 electronic/postal votes.

Anno received votes from Janet Longman, Patricia McCracken, Sandra Dell, Hilton Maclarty, Gill Browne, Barry Lang, Christine Sole and Louise Colvin, and 9 electronic/postal votes.

Sandra received votes from Barry Lang, Janet Longman, Hilton Maclarty, Patricia McCracken, Gill Browne, and Louise Colvin, and 9 electronic/postal votes.

Dave received votes from Anno Torr, Patricia McCracken, Janet Longman, Gill Browne, Louise Colvin, Christine Sole, Hilton Maclarty and Barry Lang, and 9 electronic/postal votes.

Janet received votes from Patricia, Sandra, Anno, Barry, Gill, Hilton, Christine, and Louise, and 9 electronic/postal votes.

Christine received votes from Louise, Gill, Hilton, Patricia, Sandra, Janet and Barry, and 9 electronic/postal votes.

