



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

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON SUNDAY, 24 JULY 2022 AT
DURBAN BOTANIC GARDENS AT 14H00**

- PRESENT :** Suvarna Parbhoo Mohan (Chairperson)
Johan Bodenstein, Cindy Bradley, Margaret Burger, Frances Callanan,
Louise Colvin, Mahomed Desai, Tony Dickson, David Henry, Barry Lang,
Janet Longman, Allimuthu Perumal, Christine Sole, Sandra Dell (Minutes)
- Proxy votes :** Charles Botha, Gill Browne, Mary De Haas, Megan Goschen, Di Higginson
Margi Lilienfeld, Mark Liptrot, Bertha Pitout, Dr. Elsa Pooley, Jane Troughton
Coral Vinsen, Ismail Vahed
- APOLOGIES :** Prof. Himansu Baijnath, Charles Botha, John Bradshaw, Gill Browne,
Martin Clement, Mary de Haas, Megan Goschen, Rosemary Harrison,
Di Higginson, Michele Hofmeyr, Miki Jooste, Talia Krishanlal, Margi Lilienfeld,
Mark Liptrot & Cecily Salmon, Hilton Maclarty, Denise MacPherson,
Monica Ndlovu, Bertha Pitout, Dr. Elsa Pooley, Jennifer Rampersad,
Gail Robinson, Margret Schubert, Jane Troughton & Greg Courtney,
Ismail Vahed, Coral Vinsen

1. WELCOME

The Chairperson, Suvarna Parbhoo Mohan, opened the meeting and welcomed all present and thanked everyone for making the time and effort to attend.

It was confirmed that 13 members present and 12 proxies comprised a quorum.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 29 AUGUST 2021

The minutes of the previous AGM were adopted (Proposed: Janet Longman, seconded: Barry Lang).

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were none.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Suvarna's report was in the form of an MS-PowerPoint presentation; with Notes: (Appendix 1).

Dave Henry thanked Suvarna on behalf of the meeting. The Report was accepted (Proposed: Dave Henry; seconded: Janet Longman).

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

Dave Henry, the Treasurer, noted that there had once been 300 members in our Branch at the height of the plant fair and now there were just over 100 members. The country had faced tough circumstances in the past two years. Re-building membership was critical. Member benefits were needed. The Branch tried to keep costs down for members while charging non-members much higher.

Despite the challenges, the Branch had made a surplus of R5 265 for the financial year ending 31 March 2022. Dave gave a summary of the income received for the year. The Branch Levy had been increased for smaller Branches like ours. Donations Received of R9 781 included funds raised through some of our events like garden tours. Interest received was R8 824, slightly decreased from the previous year. The Branch secretarial with Stationery was the largest expenditure item of R22 595.

Accumulated funds of almost R260 000 largely from past plant fairs placed the Branch on a healthy footing and had made possible a substantial donation of R50 000 towards the Pooley tree guide in the past.

Dave was thanked. The Treasurer's Report was accepted (Proposed: Janet Longman; seconded: Mahomed Desai).

6. BOTANICAL EDUCATION TRUST REPORT

Suvarna noted that the BotEdTrust was a project that had been started by the Branch and now ran as an independent trust. The Report, prepared by Charles Botha, the Chair of the Trust, was read out by Janet Longman on behalf of Charles, who had been unable to attend. (Please see Appendix 2).

Janet was thanked.

7. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Branch Committee comprised Suvarna Parbhoo Mohan as Chair, Dave Henry as Treasurer, keeping our spending in check; Janet Longman: Plant Fair Chair, website and Facebook champion. Christine Sole provided much of the writing of our newsletter articles. Hilton engaged with estates and championed the BotSoc tree labels project. Barry Lang represented both the Durban Botanic Gardens Trust and the conservancies, and Ashraf Vahed, one of our youth members, was keen to assist with restoration projects. Jennifer Rampersad was co-opted as the Durban Botanic Gardens representative. Regrettably, Anno Torr resigned in order to concentrate on her business. Anno was thanked for her exceptional contribution as Vice-Chair, newsletter, plant fair handbook editor and plant fair committee member.

The remaining committee was willing to stand again. In addition, nominations had been received for BotSoc National Council member, Michelle Hofmeyr, ecologist Mahomed Desai and two more youth members: Talia Krishanlal who was increasing her taxonomic skills as she assisted the SANBI KZN Herbarium, and Monica Ndlovu who worked at Buffelsdraai Re-forestation Project.

There were no further nominations from the floor. The existing committee and additional nominees were elected (Proposed: Johan Bodenstein; seconded Margaret Burger).

Suvarna thanked the committee and looked forward to new projects and to a revitalised Branch.

8. GENERAL

Suvarna noted upcoming events. First was a tree identification course with Prof. Eugene Moll at various sites. These were great learning experiences as well as fundraisers for the Branch. Our plant fair would take place at Beachwood Mangroves on 3 & 4 September.

eThekweni had participated in three City Nature Challenges – an annual international event to interest people in nature by observing and sharing their observations on the iNaturalist online application. Similarly, we had participated in the Great Southern Bioblitz whereby cities in the southern hemisphere showcased their biodiversity. This would take place on 24-27 November in observing Durban's wildlife.

A discussion had taken place on our Public WhatsApp group about neighbourhood indigenous gardening. The committee would like to take up this idea in the form of a brainstorming workshop and project concept.

Questions and comments were then invited.

Janet Longman said that volunteers were needed for the Plant Fair. She asked everyone to please spread the word about the Fair.

Allimuthu Perumal suggested that BotSoc work in partnership with the City and collaborate with the verge project. All were encouraged to nominate verges for the City's verge competition.

Sandra could share the link with anyone wanting to join the Branch's two WhatsApp groups: one for members only and the other for the interested public as well.

Louise Colvin noted that the floods had taught us a lot. On the Bluff, slopes with invasive alien plants came down as slips. Some residents favoured wall-to-wall concrete. Much education was needed. Community newspaper articles should be written about what we can all do in our own suburbs. BotSoc members could invite nearby residents to visit their gardens to learn about indigenous plants and why to plant them in gardens.

Christine Sole felt that the new editor of the Caxtons community newspapers seemed less interested in featuring environmental matters than did previous editors.

Louise agreed with Dave that non-members should pay a higher rate to Branch events so as to encourage membership.

Suvarna is to encourage City Nature Challenge participation from the Sibonelo Environmental Education Centre at Umlazi.

Dave Henry mentioned the difficulty he had experienced in getting interest from Tongaat Hulett and their conservation trust in developing a Biodiversity Park on the northern banks of the Ohlange River.

The aliens at the pipeline in the Havaan should be tackled by WESSA, BotSoc and the City jointly.


Margaret Burger suggested an action to take forward was a meeting with all parties to be organised by the Branch to reach an agreement as to the way forward.


Christine Sole paid tribute to BotSoc member Hermine Goldsmith who had passed away the previous week. Hermine had been an ardent naturalist and indigenous gardener as well as botanical artist. Hermine had been involved in putting up tree labels at Jamieson Park, for participating in the tree walks at Pigeon Valley for many years, for growing indigenous trees at home from seed and as a loyal plant fair volunteer right into her 90's. She would be sadly missed. Her memorial service would take place the following week at the Westville Country Club.

As there were no further items raised, Suvarna, on behalf of the committee, thanked everyone for attending. Teas were available. Suvarna looked forward to hearing any other ideas that members would like the committee to take forward.

9. CLOSURE

The AGM then closed at 15h30.

Minutes recorded by:  _____
Secretary

Confirmed by:  _____
Chairperson

Date: 21 July 2023

APPENDIX 1: CHAIR'S REPORT: NOTES TO ACCOMPANY POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

I begin the Chair's Report with a few key updates from the Botanical Society's national office before discussing our Branch's activities over the year.

<Slide 7> Botanical Society National Update

- The National AGM was held in George as a hybrid meeting on 2 July
- SANBI BotSoc review of the Collaboration Agreement is in progress and while the SANBI Garden access benefits are being negotiated.
- Availability of new Life memberships has ceased with immediate effect.
- Quarterly minimum Branch Levy was reduced to R2 500.00
- Conservation Unit supports key projects.
- *Veld & Flora* available online and by request via courier to the Branch for collection.
- 3rd Thursday Plant Conservation webinars available on Society's YouTube channel
- For more information please see: <https://botanicalsociety.org.za>

<Slide 8> Botanical Society KZN Coastal Branch Update

Our Branch membership dropped from just under 150 to 104 members. The economical Regional Membership category is valid for members who sign up or renew with the starting date of up until 31 March. After that the category falls away, but benefits remain for the 12 months' of those subscriptions.

The last year has been difficult with the Pandemic, Riots and Floods, although we have persevered with a range of activities ranging from workshops and outings to garden tours.

Our social media presence has been steady. We now have 2000 people following our activities. Thank you to all contributors and especially to Janet Longman for maintaining these sites for us. The WhatsApp Public group for Branch members and supporters has grown to 119 people. This group encouraged increased member participation in the City Nature Challenge on the iNaturalist.com website. Ethekwini observers once again doubled compared to last year. A new Members-only WhatsApp was started earlier this month, to give members first notice of events, and for member-only matters, while inevitably there will be some duplication with the Public group. 38 members have joined so far. WhatsApp is a convenient, quick way of communication. Also, we realize that our newsletter provides relatively old news compared to the immediacy of the WhatsApp groups, and we were having challenges with MailChimp, thus in future will be sharing news items as it happens on the Chat.

Our work with the Durban Botanic Gardens continues. Jennifer Rampersad and Sli Hlengwa reported to our committee meetings on behalf of Durban Botanic Gardens. We appreciate the collaboration and involvement and being kept informed of the many fresh projects happening in the Gardens.

The CREW Durban group continues the important work of surveying threatened plants across the City.

<Slide 9> Grassland and Grass Identification Courses

Grassland courses of 14 people each led by Environmental Consultant Johan Bodenstein were held at Tunzini Gardens in Kloof in October 2021 and again in February 2022. Thank you to Johan for sharing his knowledge and to Pete and Brigid Turner for hosting us at Tunzini.

The CREW Programme spent their surplus funds due to COVID savings on Human Capital Development across the summer-rainfall region. CREW sponsored a Grass Identification course with Frits van Oudtshoorn at Buffelsdraai in February 2022. We are thankful to Errol Douwes for creating a video about the course which was shared via the WhatsApp group.

<Slide 10> **Buffelsdraai outing**

Our outing to Buffelsdraai Re-forestation Project near Verulam was postponed due to rain, which turned into the disastrous floods of April. We were able to re-schedule to May. We learnt about the Treepreneurs project which empowers community members who grow indigenous plants in return for grocery vouchers, the growing-on of these plants to plant-out size, the green-technology Centre of Excellence building, alien removal, grassland and wetland rehabilitation, a managed beehive, and the nearby landfill, for which this site is the buffer.

<Slide 11> **Indigenous Garden Tours**

We were privileged to host garden tours at Elizabeth Forsdick's magnificent winter garden, Shangrila, in Bazley last month. Elsa Pooley, who designed much of the garden, led the tours, which were well attended. The local community provided delicious eats afterwards. Proceeds were shared with Bazley Conservancy and Pevensey Place.

<Slide 12> **BotSoc Awareness Activities**

We participated in Hingham Nursery's Fun Day last September. The photo shows Ashraf Vahed manning the table. We regularly engage with the eThekweni Conservancy Forum. Durban North Conservancy (also known as the Envirofixers) invited us to display our wares at their Open Indigenous Gardens event at Jane Troughton & Greg Courtney's Gorgeous Green House in June. We also had a presence at Kloof Open Gardens earlier this month, stationed at Tunzini Gardens. The photo shows Mark Liptrot at the stand. As an offshoot of the CREW-organized Grass ID course, some committee members together with a representative from eThekweni Municipality met with Jesse Greaves of Redemption Point Church in Pinetown in April and walked the neighbouring forest being rehabilitated by the Church. It was encouraging to hear of the enthusiasm of the 20 young people that meet monthly to tackle aliens. The group was encouraged to make observations on iNaturalist. The Municipality provided alien training and BotSoc is to provide tree labels. The photo shows Jesse Greaves (left) with BotSoc members Monica Ndlovu and landscaper Judy Panton-Jones (Judy is also a member of the Pinetown Church) at the CREW Grass ID course.

<Slide 13> **Engaging with eco-estates**

The eco-estates are a possible source of new members. BotSoc tree labels with QR codes and the estate's logo were supplied to Zimbali and Kindlewood, Umhlanga Improvement Precinct and Durban North Conservancy.

Hilton geotagged a few estates like Elaneni and Zululami. The Branch was at the Kindlewood Estate's Nature Day this month to raise awareness about plants and iNaturalist. Hilton led a walk through the estate. We are looking to engage with other estates to create BotSoc exposure and aid in eradicating plant blindness. Thank you to Hilton Maclarty for championing this project.

<Slide 14> **Proposed projects**

Our branch grabbed the opportunity provided by eThekweni municipality's Public Engagement Programme, via 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 Jan-March 2021. We chose areas that have a high influx of people along two routes to King Shaka International Airport and in areas where BotSoc could get exposure to entice new membership. As luck would have it, the funding fell through. However, our committee will be discussing which projects we can actually undertake as a Branch. We are engaging with nurseries that we have visited over recent years and those who participate in our Plant Fairs to assist with BotSoc exposure.

<Slide 10> **PlantLife online journal**

To date, there have been 46 750 page views of the digital editions. Back issues are to be scanned for online viewing. The next issue is due out very soon. Thank you to editor, Graham Grieve for continuing this incredible local publication.

<Slide 12> **City Nature Challenge**



<Slide 12> **Thanks were extended to:-**

- Our members for their ongoing support and participation
- Those hosts / presenters who generously donated their time and shared knowledge
- Those who kindly contributed to our fundraising activities
- Those who shared images for this presentation and for our various publications
- Martin Clement and his team as well as the Durban Botanic Gardens Trust for the use of the office, and for other privileges in the Gardens
- The current committee for their enthusiasm, dedication and commitment

APPENDIX 2: BOTANICAL EDUCATION TRUST REPORT

While there were no awards in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic, the Botanical Education Trust is back on track and last year made grants to the value of over R90 000. Four applications, which in the opinion of the Trustees will best serve the conservation of our indigenous flora, were selected.

It is very positive that two of the recipients are promising young botanists. The first, Katharine Khoury of Rhodes University, is studying the Greater Cape Floristic Region and, in particular, how pollinating insects influence the selection of the great floral diversity across the region. As an undergraduate she has already documented the morphological and colour variation in varieties of Painted Lady Gladiolus flowers (*Gladiolus carneus*) and identified their pollinators. Now she has received a grant from the Botanical Education Trust to investigate the evolutionary relationships using genetic samples.

The second young botanist is, in addition, one of the two current awardees who have previously received funds from the Trust and produced excellent results. Jessica Minnaar recently completed her MSc degree at Wits University and has now been granted a further award to study the biology of plants of the genus *Galtonia* in the High Drakensberg for her PhD. Only 5% of the genetically diverse Drakensberg Mountain Centre is conserved and its plants are increasingly threatened due to overgrazing, afforestation, agriculture and invasion by alien plants. Therefore, conservation needs to be prioritised and studies that investigate the processes that have led to such a diverse region provide information essential to its conservation and help minimise further plant loss.

Dr Marianne le Roux, of the South African National Biodiversity Institute in Pretoria, is an established and well-published botanist who has also been successfully supported by the Trust before. With the current grant she will undertake a taxonomic revision of a group of legumes, of the genus *Argyrolobium*, which is in need of taxonomic revision. Because taxonomists seldom appear in the limelight of botanical research, they often find it difficult to attract funding. However, this work provides critical basic information that can be applied to many practical aspects such as conservation status, environmental management and environmental education.

Like the first awardee, Dr Ethan Newman is also from Rhodes University. An established researcher, he is investigating the impact of habitat transformation and fragmentation on insect pollinators and hence floral evolution. He aims to understand whether plants can withstand the loss of their most important pollinator by evolving divergent floral traits to attract less effective pollinators.

Dr Sibonelo Mbanjwa is the founder of the Sibonelo Environmental Education Centre, which aims to create environmentally-friendly citizens by encouraging communities to use natural resources sustainably and educating them about the dangers of invasive alien plants. Although his application to the Trust to fund stationery for his Centre was unsuccessful, the Trust's chair was able to donate a quantity of stationery to his organisation.

Since its inception in 2008, the Trust has dispensed over a million Rand to well deserving projects. But it needs further donations to continue this sterling work. And, in accordance with the Trust's registration with SARS, donors may utilise such payments as a tax deduction.

Charles Botha
(Chair: Botanical Education Trust)