



### **2021 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE KIRSTENBOSCH BRANCH OF THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON SATURDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2021**

On behalf of the Kirstenbosch Branch Committee of the Botanical Society of South Africa welcome to the second consecutive 'virtual' Annual General Meeting of the Branch. The last AGM was held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and since then the branch has been active despite the restrictions associated with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic which has wracked SA and the World.

During the past year the Kirstenbosch Branch has in terms of its Constitution adopted in 2019 become an independent registered Non-profit Organization ("NPO") and a registered Public Benefit Organisation ("PBO"). While independent the Branch subscribes to and supports the objectives of the mother body, The Botanical Society of South Africa. As an NPO and PBO the Branch is a separate legal entity which manages its own financial and operational affairs.

In late 2019 the Branch resumed operational control of the two natural history bookshops at Kirstenbosch. The COVID-19 enforced closure of the bookshops from March to August 2020 had a devastating effect on their operational and financial performance and on the affected staff. Fortunately the bookshop business was able to survive by 'pivoting' to create an online e-commerce presence which is increasingly able to present its wide range of natural history books and memorabilia to a global market. The result has been that during the past 9 months gross bookshop sales have increased to around 50% of pre-COVID levels and is growing slowly. The five bookshop staff under the leadership of Greg Donnelly are to be commended for their dedication, innovation and determination to make the Kirstenbosch Bookshop a leader in the sale of Southern African botanical and natural history literature. The 10% discount for BotSoc members on all books is a worthwhile incentive.

The Kirstenbosch bookshop is also assisting the Kogelberg Branch at Harold Porter NBG to establish a new bookshop in the Overberg region. Branch Treasurer Munier Dalwai has added his considerable experience to guide the bookshops and the branch, as a whole, to become financially viable in a constrained economic environment. At this point I would also like acknowledge the generous bequests and donations to the Kirstenbosch Branch of the Botanical Society from the Estates of the late Messrs O Van Oordt and WT Fraser and from the Susan Stehlik Charitable Foundation which have made major contributions to the work of the Kirstenbosch Branch.

During the second half of 2020 the Kirstenbosch Branch, in conjunction with the National Office of the Botanical Society, reviewed its digital and online presence. A new branch website sporting the modern revised Botanical Society branding and imagery was launched concurrently with the new BotSoc membership card system supported by Webtickets. Social media platforms including a new Facebook page and regular online newsletters followed. The result has been a much improved and highly visible online presence for the branch. This has made the Society more accessible to not only its members but also to a much wider audience.

Most physical meetings, seminars, workshops, book launches and other member functions of the Society went 'virtual' over the past 15 months. After being cancelled in 2020 the Kirstenbosch Plant Sale was successfully resuscitated in May this year in a completely on-line format. Under the direction of the branch manager, Catherine Gribble, and horticulturist, Gianpaolo Gilardi, assisted by several energetic volunteers the Plant Sale was conducted over almost a month and was successful in attracting over 450 purchase orders from members for over 5000 plants. Initial feedback is that members far preferred the new format which allowed them to select on-line and at their leisure from the wide selection of fynbos plants available. There were some glitches but it is clear that the annual Kirstenbosch Plant Sale has taken on a new lease of life and may even become a bi-annual event. This is something that other branches may wish to emulate.

Since late 2020 the Branch, in support of BotSoc's conservation and bio-diversity mandate, continued under strict 'social distancing' protocols its invasive alien clearing or 'hacking' programme around the periphery of Kirstenbosch. Committee stalwart Tom Robbins has led the charge. It is most encouraging to see how many enthusiastic and energetic BotSoc 'hackers' have been turning out in all weathers to remove gums, black wattle and other dreaded Australasian species. In April a successful 'hack' was also conducted on the shores of Princess Vlei in support of the Friends of Princess Vlei's Cape Flats Sandveld rehabilitation project. The Branch has contributed financially towards replanting of several endangered species at Princess Vlei over the past 18 months.

Besides the Princess Vlei project the branch has continued to support the 8 year old Ingungu Sunbird Project in and around schools in the South Peninsula. This project aims to create a network of fynbos feeding stations for sun and other birds from the Cape Peninsula mountain chain to the Hottentots Holland range across the Cape Flats. The project teaches school children about the importance of biodiversity, ecology and nature conservation in general. Committee members Chris Moir and Carol Cornell continue to lend passion and energy to these conservation and outreach programmes.

One of the most popular Kirstenbosch Branch activities over the years has been the botanical walks for members led by experienced botanists and environmental scientists. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions these walks have now recommenced under the enthusiastic leadership of Dirk Muller. A programme of walks for the rest of 2021 will be advised via a newsflash in July.

During the past year the Branch has embarked upon an ambitious project to record for posterity the oral history of Kirstenbosch. Committee member Carol Cornell has spearheaded the project with BotSoc member and professional recorder of oral histories, Carohn Cornell, who volunteered her time to interview several BotSoc and Kirstenbosch 'legends' including Dot Malan, Ernst van Jaarsveld, Christien Malan, Andrew Jacobs and Dr George Davis. The result is a veritable treasure trove of personal oral anecdotes about Kirstenbosch, its people and its botanical heritage. These interviews have been transcribed and will be archived and curated in a suitable and secure way to be viewed and used by researchers and natural historians for the benefit of future generations. The Branch is most grateful to Dr George Davis who donated to the Botanical Society a documentary "Memories from a Garden: Kirstenbosch turns 100!" that he filmed and produced in 2013 to commemorate the centenary of the Society and Kirstenbosch.

During the past year the Branch has engaged closely with and has been supported by BotSoc GM, Antonia De Barros, and her National Office team including Rupert Koopman, Simone van Rooyen and Bradley Bergh. Through our immediate past chairman, Keith Kirsten, who is on the BotSoc Council, Council Chair, Marinda Nel, and Honorary Treasurer,

Henk Beets, the Kirstenbosch Branch has managed to ensure that it is informed, aligned with and supportive of the objectives of the national body of the Botanical Society.

The new branch committee that is being elected at this AGM will build on the solid foundations established by previous committees. Our appreciation goes to Keith Kirsten and Tom Robbins who, having served the branch enthusiastically for many years, are standing down while remaining involved in BotSoc in other significant capacities. We look forward to welcoming Desiree Galant, Ceinwen Smith and Mmei Donald Matjuda to the new committee.

The Botanical Society was established in 1913 initially to support the first national botanical garden in South Africa, Kirstenbosch. This is a legacy and responsibility that the Kirstenbosch Branch is proud of and takes seriously. We support the current Curator of Kirstenbosch, Werner Voigt, and his team in their task of ensuring that Kirstenbosch remains one of the great national botanical gardens of the world and the primary custodian of the Cape Floral Kingdom and South Africa's floral heritage.

Finally on behalf of the Branch Committee I wish to thank the many members and enthusiastic volunteers who have supported the Branch and its activities over the past year. We look forward to implementing more membership recruitment drives, conservation programmes and fundraising initiatives over the next 12 months. Your ongoing financial, material and active support as members of the Botanical Society will be much appreciated.

Jeremy Wiley  
Chair  
Kirstenbosch Branch  
June 2021