



KIRSTENBOSCH BRANCH

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BOTANICAL SOCIETY
OF SOUTH AFRICA

2022 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE KIRSTENBOSCH BRANCH OF THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON SATURDAY 16TH JULY 2022.

Introduction

On behalf of the Kirstenbosch Branch Committee of the Botanical Society of South Africa welcome to the first 'live' Annual General Meeting of the Branch since 2019. The last AGM was held 'virtually' on 26th June 2021. Since then the branch has been increasingly active within the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic which has set SA and the World back over the past two years.

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

Branch Finances

On the issue of financial sustainability the Branch Treasurer will report shortly in more detail. What is clear is that the Branch and the Botanical Society will have to focus on raising funds from corporate and diverse private sources. This will not be easy in the current tough economic climate but the Botanical Society has a strong and positive message, mandate and brand. Sponsorships, donations and bequests have always been important sources of funding for the Society and its branches. Members are encouraged to ensure a lasting legacy by making a donation or bequest to the Branch for either specific community-based conservation projects, for specific use at Kirstenbosch itself or for any botanical conservation projects dear to the donor's heart. Recently the Botanical Society Council adopted a new marketing and fundraising strategy. The Kirstenbosch Branch will actively support and implement this strategy in order to continue to source funding for Kirstenbosch and the many valuable botanical conservation projects around Cape Town.

Branch Communications

During the second half of 2021 and first half of 2022 the Kirstenbosch Branch has further enhanced its social-media and online presence. A new branch website sporting the modern revised Botanical Society branding and imagery was launched concurrently. The BotSoc membership card system supported by Webtickets has continued to show improvement. The total current membership of the Botanical Society is around 14600 of which about 9600 are members allocated to the Kirstenbosch Branch. Given the current recessionary macro-economic climate in SA the increase in membership numbers is commendable. This shows that members and the public at large increasingly appreciate a healthy outdoor lifestyle and the work of the Botanical Society in the conservation of SA's bountiful botanical heritage and bio-diversity.

The Branch's social media platforms including its Facebook page are refreshed often. Over 7600 colourful and content-filled e-mail newsletters are distributed regularly. The Branch is concerned that although e-mail diagnostic reports indicate a delivery rate of over 95% and a "bounce-back" rate of less than 5% there are still many members who for some reason or another are not receiving e-mail messages from the branch. The reasons may vary from incorrect e-mail addresses, aggressive anti-spam software or full mailboxes. If members have not been receiving newsletters or meeting notifications please contact the membership desk at the National Office or Branch office 021-6715468 or e-mail: info@botsoc-kirstenbosch.org.za The Branch appreciates the ongoing technical and social media content support from LoveGreen. Overall the Branch has established a

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much improved and more visible online presence. The result of these improvements is that the Branch is more accessible to not only its members but also to a much wider audience who support its activities in increasing numbers.

Branch Events and Activities

Most meetings, webinars, workshops, book launches and other member functions of the Society and Branch have taken on more of a 'hybrid' character i.e. physical and 'virtual' engagements. This has enhanced member participation in branch activities. Following the successful first 'online' plant sale in 2021 the Kirstenbosch Online Plant Sale was held again in late May through to mid-June 2022. Under the direction of branch manager Catherine Gribble, and horticulturist, Gianpaolo Gilardi, ably assisted by several energetic volunteers the 2022 Plant Sale attracted over 260 purchase orders from members for over 3000 plants. These results were lower than 2021. The plan is to have second sale in September 2022 with a focus on succulents and other special indigenous species including trees.

Alien Vegetation Management (“Hacking”)

In support of BotSoc's conservation and bio-diversity mandate the Branch has continued its invasive alien clearing or 'hacking' programme around the periphery of Kirstenbosch, in Cecilia Forest, on the slopes of Devil's Peak above UCT, on the shores of Princess Vlei and at Rondevlei. These hacks are often in association with SANPARKS, the Devil's Peak Hack Group and the Friends of Princess Vlei community group. Branch stalwart Tom Robbins continues to lead the hacking programme ably assisted by an increasingly large group of fit and energetic young hackers many of whom are scholars from Southern Suburbs schools. The hackers work in all weathers to remove gums, black wattle and other invasive alien species. In April a successful 'hack' was again conducted on the shores of Princess Vlei in support of the Friends of Princess Vlei's Cape Flats Sandveld rehabilitation project. The Branch continues to contribute financially towards replanting of several endangered species at Princess Vlei.

Fynbos Life & Haasendal Projects

The branch has continued to support Fynbos Life projects directed by Dr Caitlin von Witt. Besides the community garden and nursery on the banks of Zandvlei at Muizenberg Caitlin is actively involved in the Haasendal Reserve restoration project near Kuils River. The branch has donated funds towards the collection of seeds and the propagation of several endangered fynbos species for the reserve.

Ingcungcu Sunbird Project

The branch has continued to support the Ingcungcu Sunbird Project in and around schools in the South Peninsula led by project manager and branch committee member, Ceinwen Smith. This project is creating a network of fynbos feeding stations particularly for sunbirds from the Cape Peninsula mountain chain right across the Cape Flats to the Hottentots Holland mountain range. The project teaches school children about the importance of biodiversity, ecology and nature conservation in general. Committee members Chris Moir, Carol Cornell, Mmei Matjuda and Ceinwen Smith continue to lend passion and energy to all these conservation and other outreach programmes.

Botanical Walks

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. These walks have attracted increasingly large and diverse numbers of enthusiastic members and guests. These walks throughout the mountainous Cape Peninsula have been conducted under the enthusiastic and knowledgeable leadership of Dirk Muller, Tony and Pat Rebelo, Margaret Kahle and several other BotSoc stalwarts. The programme of walks over the second half of 2022 is available on the branch website with reminders via regular newflashes. The walks are suitable for all relatively fit members of all ages.

Volunteer Programmes at Kirstenbosch

There are two other important voluntary services that many BotSoc members provide. They are the propagation of endangered species in the potting shed and hothouses at Kirstenbosch. The other is the voluntary garden guiding by SANBI-accredited guides many of whom are BotSoc members.

These two activities alone provide valuable cost-free support to Kirstenbosch. During the past year approximately R450,000 has been allocated from Kirstenbosch Branch share of the Botanical Society and SANBI Partnership Fund towards the training and employment of 14 young horticultural assistants at Kirstenbosch. It is hoped that a number of these young people will embark on a career in botanical conservation and research.

Botanical Treasure Trove

The Branch has made further progress under the guidance of committee member Carol Cornell in collating 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 also the custodian of historical Botanical Society 'silverware' which has been awarded regularly over the past 100 years to botanical scientists, conservationists and other botanical enthusiasts. The preservation of this collection deserves serious attention from the Botanical Society.

BotSoc Bookshops at Kirstenbosch and the Online Bookshop Platform

In late 2019 the Branch resumed operational control of the two natural history bookshops at Kirstenbosch. The intention was that the bookshop business would contribute positively to the Branch's financial bottom line. 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 bookshops have struggled to overcome the lingering effects on their operational and financial performance caused by the COVID-19 restrictions and the negative macro-economic environment.

The bookshop business has 'pivoted' by creating an online e-commerce presence but continues to sustain financial losses. Extensive effort has been made to promote its wide range of natural history books and memorabilia to a global market via its online e-commerce platform. Online sales have been made to customers right around South Africa and to North America and Europe. The result has been that during the past 12 months gross bookshop sales have increased marginally to around 70% of pre-COVID levels. This is not really surprising since visitor numbers to Kirstenbosch are still only around 60% of those pre-COVID in 2019. Online sales have not grown as fast as anticipated in mid-2021. The 10% discount for BotSoc members on all books remains a worthwhile incentive. A recent online member survey about the BotSoc Bookshop business attracted over 500 responses (roughly 8% of recipients) and produced useful data.

Given the above the Branch Committee has decided that the financial losses of the bookshop business can no longer be sustained because they deplete reserves and divert scarce resources from other important Branch activities and plant conservation projects. To this end the Branch Committee is working towards a plan to cut the trading losses and re-organise the bookshop business by 31st August 2022. This necessary exercise will impact the physical bookshop business and its staff but will hopefully contribute to a more sustainable long term financial future for the business and the Branch.

BotSoc National Office

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. This has meant that the Kirstenbosch Branch remains informed, aligned with and supportive of the objectives of the national body of the Botanical Society. In recent months the review of the longstanding relationship and Collaboration Agreement between the Botanical Society and the SA National Bio-diversity Institute (SANBI) which manages Kirstenbosch and all other National Botanical Gardens has become a key area of focus and concern to the Branch and the Botanical Society. From the Kirstenbosch Branch perspective what is really at stake is the longstanding, supportive and co-operative relationship between the Kirstenbosch Branch of the Botanical Society and the financial sustainability of both the Botanical Society and the world-renowned Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. This relationship goes back to 1913 and has seen the development of Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, with considerable financial and material assistance, primarily of the Botanical Society and its members, many of whom have been munificent benefactors and donors to Kirstenbosch. The Branch has always had a positive and productive

working relationship with successive curators of Kirstenbosch. The current curator, Werner Voigt, is appreciative of support from the Branch and is a regular and active 'ex officio' member of the branch committee. The relationship between the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden and the Kirstenbosch Branch of the Botanical Society is a symbiotic and mutually beneficial one. It is also a good example of how other branches of the Botanical Society do and should support the development of other national botanical gardens around SA.

Review of the Collaboration Agreement with SANBI

The Botanical Society, in general, and the Kirstenbosch Branch, in particular, through the voluntary participation of its members, has over 11 decades raised, recruited and donated dozens of millions of Rands towards Kirstenbosch and other botanical gardens around the country. The Kirstenbosch Branch is therefore disappointed that the current management of SANBI, the official custodian of national botanical gardens of SA, appear not to regard the Botanical Society as a credible, long term and increasingly valuable civil society future partner in the protection and promotion of SA's bio-diversity for the benefit of future generations in SA and the enhancement of the global natural environment.

The notion that by phasing out the longstanding access arrangements for members of the Botanical Society to Kirstenbosch and other national botanical gardens and to replace the Botanical Society with a SANBI in-house 'loyalty programme' is in our view shortsighted, financially imprudent and not in the long term interests of either SANBI, the Botanical Society or the conservation and promotion of SA's bio-diversity. The Branch hopes that SANBI and the Botanical Society will find a way to ensure that in partnership over the next 100 years will make even more progress towards environmental sustainability.

2022/2023 Branch Committee

The new branch committee that is being elected at this AGM will build on the solid foundations established by previous committees. As the current branch committee we express our appreciation to branch manager, Catherine Gribble, and to the branch office and bookshop staff for their hard work and enthusiasm over this past year. We would also like to congratulate Kyra Lunderstedt, on her election as BotSoc Council Chair. We wish her and her colleagues on Council well in the year ahead.

As the chair of the Branch committee I would like to thank our treasurer, Munier Dalwai, and enthusiastic committee members Carol Cornell, Chris Moir, Mmei Matjuda and Ceinwen Smith for all their positive contributions, support and advice over the past year. We look forward to welcoming two energetic young members, Grant Smith and Simon Tamblyn, to our committee.

In Conclusion

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 will continue to take 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 you, the members of the Branch, and all the enthusiastic volunteers who have supported the Branch and its activities over the past year. We look forward to broadening the membership base of our branch by implementing 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 of the Botanical Society of South Africa

July 2022