



## KIRSTENBOSCH BRANCH

250-726 NPO  
930072201 PBO

**BOTANICAL SOCIETY**  
OF SOUTH AFRICA

### **2023 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE KIRSTENBOSCH BRANCH OF THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON SATURDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023**

On behalf of the Kirstenbosch Branch Committee of the Botanical Society of South Africa welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Branch in the 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of the Botanical Society. The last AGM was held here on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

The Kirstenbosch Branch is governed in terms of its Constitution adopted in 2019. It is a registered Non-profit Organization (NPO) and a Public Benefit Organization (PBO). While independent the Branch subscribes to and fully supports the objectives of the mother body, The Botanical Society of South Africa. The Branch manages its own financial and operational affairs.

Since early 2022 the Botanical Society's Council has been engaged in negotiations with the South African Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), the custodians of the National Botanical Gardens. These discussions have centered around the review of the 2019 Collaboration Agreement between BotSoc and SANBI.

At an SGM of BotSoc on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023 it was explained that the longstanding arrangement of BotSoc paying 10% of all annual subscriptions to SANBI as an annual entrance fee to all NBGs has been discontinued with effect from 1 April 2023. From that date onwards until 31 March 2024 new BotSoc members will pay a discounted entrance fee of 90%. This new arrangement is already having a serious effect on the membership of BotSoc and all indications are that the long term financial sustainability of the Botanical Society is under threat.

#### **Branch Finances**

On the issue of financial performance new Branch Treasurer, Louis van As, will shortly report in more detail. This has been a tough year financially but the committee is pleased to report that the Branch accounts have received a clean audit to the year ending 31 March 2023.

The committee would like to express its sincere appreciation to Munier (Mo) Dalwai who stepped down as treasurer at the end of the financial year after more than three years of dedicated service to the Branch. His attention to financial detail and wise counsel on many aspects of the Branch's activities has been invaluable.

During the past two years it has become abundantly clear that more than ever before, the Branch and the Botanical Society as a whole, 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. The appointment of a dedicated and experienced fundraiser, Ms Ingrid Marti, by the Society is a positive step. The Branch will actively support all fundraising projects initiated by the National Office and continue with its own local fundraising programme.

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 Botanical Society of SA or the Kirstenbosch Branch for local community-based conservation projects, for specific use at Kirstenbosch itself or for any botanical conservation projects dear to the donor's heart.

### **Branch Communication with Members**

The Botanical Society's digital marketing consultants, LoveGreen, have continued to support the Branch and branch manager, Catherine Gribble, in projecting a fresh, colourful and informative internet presence. Outgoing committee member, Simon Tamblyn, has played a key role in promoting the Branch and its activities on Facebook and Instagram. The Branch and Bookshop Facebook pages will shortly be consolidated to create a more interactive and compelling platform.

The Branch's social media platforms including its Facebook and Instagram pages are refreshed often. Over 7600 colourful and content-filled email newsletters are distributed regularly. If members have not been receiving newsletters or meeting notifications, please contact the Branch office on 021 6715468 or email [info@botsoc-kirstenbosch.org.za](mailto:info@botsoc-kirstenbosch.org.za).

### **Membership**

During the past year the total current membership of the Botanical Society has been around 14600 of which about 9600 are allocated to the Kirstenbosch Branch catchment area. 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 biodiversity.

### **Branch Events and Fundraising Activities**

Most meetings, webinars, workshops, book launches and other member functions of the Society and Branch have continued to take 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.

A second plant sale in September 2022 focusing on succulents and a range of *Streptocarpus* sub-species sold well and was successfully conducted in the Richard Cowie Hall at Kirstenbosch.

In October 2023 the Kirstenbosch Branch in association with the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden will be hosting a plant sale in the Old Mutual Hall.

## **CONSERVATION PROJECTS**

### **Alien Vegetation Clearing (Hacking)**

In support of BotSoc's conservation and biodiversity mandate the Branch has continued its invasive alien clearing aka 'hacking' programme around the periphery of Kirstenbosch, in Cecilia Forest, on the slopes of Devil's Peak above UCT, Newlands Forest, on the shores of Princess Vlei and at Rondevlei often in association with SANPARKS, the Devil's Peak Hack Group, the Friends of Princess Vlei community group and the City of Cape Town's Nature Reserves Department. The Princess Vlei project is well supported by the surrounding community. This is a dynamic and sustainable model for conservation projects within all local communities.

Branch stalwart Tom Robbins continues to lead the 'hacking' programme energetically supported by an increasing number of fit young hackers many of whom are scholars from Southern Suburbs schools and universities.

### **Fynbos Life & Haasendal Reserve Projects**

The Kirstenbosch branch has continued to support FynbosLife 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 species of fynbos for the Haasendal reserve. The Branch, facilitated a generous grant of R66000 from the Roland & Letta Hill Trust for the Haasendal project.

In March this year the Branch funded the erection of interpretative environmental signage for the fynbos circle in the Doordrift Circle created by FynbosLife along the banks of the Diep River in Plumstead. Further fynbos circles are planned for Meadowridge, Sun Valley and Tamboerskloof.

### **Ingcungcu Sunbird Project**

The Kirstenbosch branch has continued to support the Ingcungcu Sunbird Project in and around schools in the South Peninsula led by project manager and former 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.

Committee members Christine Moir and Mmei Matjuda continue to support all these botanical conservation projects.

### **Botanical Walks**

One of the most popular Kirstenbosch Branch activities over the years has been the botanical walks led by experienced botanists and environmental scientists. These walks have often attracted 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 Rebello, Margaret Kahle and several other BotSoc stalwarts.

The programme of walks over the second half of 2023 is available on the branch website with reminders via regular newflashes. The walks are suitable for all relatively fit members of all ages and a great way to educate newcomers about the diversity of Cape fynbos.

### **BotSoc Volunteers at Kirstenbosch**

Many BotSoc members provide voluntary services at Kirstenbosch. One key service is the propagation of endangered species in the nurseries and hothouses at Kirstenbosch.

Another voluntary service is garden guiding by SANBI-accredited guides many of whom are BotSoc members. Literally thousands of visitors are introduced to the fauna, flora and history of Kirstenbosch throughout the year. These two activities alone provide valuable cost-free support to SANBI at Kirstenbosch.

During peak tourist season three BotSoc members assist at the Kirstenbosch Bookshop which is open seven days a week.

As a small token of appreciation all current BotSoc volunteers at Kirstenbosch will today receive a Certificate of Appreciation.

### **Youth Career and Skills Development at Kirstenbosch**

The Iziqalo Project at Kirstenbosch driven by former BotSoc Council member, Caroline Petersen, has entered its second year. Recently 30 young people working in the Kirstenbosch, Harold Porter and the Karoo National Botanical Gardens participated in a life skills development programme in Simon's Town. Generous support for this programme has been provided from the BotSoc/SANBI Partnership Fund and the DG Murray Trust.

### **Botanical Treasure Trove**

As reported last year, the Branch has made 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. Sadly, Dr George Davis, passed away during 2022. His contribution over decades to Kirstenbosch, Princess Vlei and other botanical conservation projects is much appreciated. Our heartfelt condolences go out to Dr Davis' family, friends and colleagues.

In mid-2022 Trevor Ankiewicz a forester from the Garden Route area and author of *Know them by their Fruit* donated 381 original botanical sketches from his book to the Branch. This collection will be added to the library of botanical literature preserved by the Branch.

For decades the Branch has been the custodian of numerous historical items of Botanical Society 'silverware'. These have been awarded regularly over the past 100 years to botanical scientists, conservationists and other botanical enthusiasts. The collection was recently transferred for safekeeping and display at the National Office of the Botanical Society at Kirstenbosch. The Society and Branch will continue to award floating trophies from the collection to meritorious individuals or projects from time to time.

### **Kirstenbosch Branch Office**

In February this year the administrative offices of the Branch were relocated from the Stone Cottages below Rhodes Drive onto the Kirstenbosch Estate. Branch manager Catherine Gribble, bookkeeper, Keith Christian, and administrative assistant, Gianpaolo Gilardi, run an efficient office which is now located in the Pearson House Annex above SANBI's Kirstenbosch administration building. All BotSoc membership-related queries are still handled online or at the BotSoc National Office accessed through Gate 2.

### **BotSoc Bookshop at Kirstenbosch and the Online Platform**

In August 2022 the Branch restructured its natural history bookshop business at Kirstenbosch. The smaller bookshop at Gate 2 was closed and the business consolidated into the shop at the Visitors Centre at Gate 1. The aim of the bookshop business is to contribute positively to the Branch's financial reserves. The four bookshop staff under the leadership of Chanel Hyser 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 assistance of three volunteer BotSoc members at busy times of the year is much appreciated.

The Branch is pleased to report that for the first time since 2019 the bookshop business turned a modest profit for the 6 months ending 31 March 2023. Overall, the bookshop business has shown a year-on-year turnover growth of over R800,000 or close on 33%.

The bookshop business has an online e-commerce platform that has the potential to outperform the physical bookshop. Online sales have been sluggish and over the next six months a concerted digital marketing effort will be made to boost sales. The 10% discount for BotSoc members on all books remains a worthwhile incentive.

### **Botanical Society National Office**

During the past year the Branch has engaged closely with and been supported by BotSoc General Manager, Antonia De Barros, and her National Office team. This has meant that the Kirstenbosch Branch remains informed, aligned with and supportive of the objectives of the national body of the Botanical Society.

## **Review of the Collaboration Agreement with SANBI**

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.

Over the past 18 months the Collaboration Agreement between the Botanical Society and the SA National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), first concluded in 2019, has been under review. SANBI manages Kirstenbosch and all other National Botanical Gardens. In these negotiations the Botanical Society has been represented by a team appointed by Council. From the Kirstenbosch Branch perspective what is really at stake is the financial survival and sustainability of both the Botanical Society of SA and the Kirstenbosch Branch.

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

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

## **2023/2024 Branch Committee**

The new branch committee that is being elected at this AGM will continue to 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 and the BotSoc National Council on their tireless efforts to sustain and lead BotSoc under challenging circumstances over the past year.

As the chair of the Branch, I would like to thank our enthusiastic and hardworking committee members Carol Cornel, Munier (Mo) Dalwai, Louis van As, Chris Moir, Mmei Matjuda, Simon Tamblyn, Grant Smith and Ceinwen Smith for their positive contributions, support and advice over the past year. We look forward to a productive and financially sustainable year ahead.

## **Appreciation**

On behalf of the Branch committee and management I wish to thank all members of the Branch and 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.

This 2023 Annual Report has been delivered in my absence by the Branch deputy chair, Carol Cornell, to whom I am most grateful.

## **Jeremy Wiley**

Chair

Kirstenbosch Branch of the Botanical Society of South Africa