

WESSA KNYSNA BRANCH
AGM Saturday 20th June 2015 at 10.30 at the Endlovana Coastal Hideaway, Brenton Road
Chairman's report

Welcome to this 38th AGM of the Knysna Branch. We must thank Susan Campbell most sincerely for making her beautiful Endlovana Coastal Hideaway available to us. The reason we are having the AGM here is because the WESSA committee won the Pledge Nature Reserve fundraising draw, with money we were donated by Colin Campbell and it was put in the draw – so we thank Colin most sincerely for his annual contribution to conservation efforts in the Knysna area. Our prize is a visit to Susan's special camp!

Sadly we lost the services of Rod Clinton during the year due to ill-health. He had been a WESSA committee member for 36 years - in Johannesburg & then here in Knysna. We wish him well and thank him for his faithful service in 'Caring for the Earth'.

Our committee therefore consists of four of us, Steve Gettliffe, Vice-chair and Secretary, Pat Nurse, Treasurer and Mike Peters, our roving ambassador! We dearly need some people to join us! As we mention at every AGM: your committee can only cope with a certain amount of activity, and we no longer have the capacity to arrange outings for members. Many other organisations are arranging those activities fortunately.

Conservation activities:

We represent WESSA on the many Trusts, Forums and Committees in Knysna, and this report mentions most of the environmental issues we have been involved with this past year.

We serve on the Knysna Environmental Forum where Steve Gettliffe, Dave Edge and I are co-chairmen. The main focus the last 2 years has been on the municipal ISDF – integrated spatial development framework. Susan Campbell has been our main champion and activist in protesting the irregular awarding of the tender for this work to the Knysna Creative Heads Consortium. The controversy still rages! Susan still crusades on many issues!

We attend the SANParks Knysna Area Forum meetings. This group is mostly concerned with the Lagoon and Forest conservation efforts of SANParks, where we also share information on what the various Knysna organisations are accomplishing. Illegal bait digging and poaching of seahorses and Knysna crabs are very concerning problems. Resolution of these issues just takes too long to accomplish unfortunately.

I must say, between Pat Nurse, Steve Gettliffe and me, we attend many meetings representing WESSA and the Lakes Bird Club interchangeably! There is a group of us working on activities to present to the public covering all the environmental special days this year. This is also how we worked with the Hope Spot launch and activities in December last year. Hope Spot, represented by Pat and the lakes Bird Club, aims to raise awareness about coastal issues with more than 56 countries all around the world committed to this programme.

I represent WESSA National on the Brenton Blue Trust and on the Brenton Blue Special Nature Reserve Management Committee. The Trust has expanded its endeavours and through the COREL programme looks after the 15 endangered South African Lepidoptera – 14 butterflies and 1 moth. The Brenton reserve is looking to expand its ground from 1.5 ha to 15 ha with the assistance of the municipality and CapeNature. For the past 16 years or so I and sometimes Dave Edge have met with the 400 plus Voortrekker organisation school children to educate them on the management of the Butterfly Reserve.

Pat Nurse represents WESSA National on the Pledge Nature Reserve Trust, where Stan Davis, also a WESSA member, is Chairman of the Management Committee and a Trustee. Thanks to Susan Campbell and her fundraising draws, a fair amount of money has been raised to support Pledge in the last year or so. More is always needed of course.

Mike Peters represents WESSA on the Knysna Water Catchment Forum, where they focus on the Knysna River fresh water supply issues, but also on the Waste Water Treatment Works, including pollution of the

estuary. It seems that the reverse osmosis treatment works and desalination plants are receiving some attention after lying dormant for the past few years.

The Red Tide last year and recently again, and the Green Tide this year, caused a good deal of consternation as to their origins. The Green Tide 'loo paper' on the lagoon turned out to be Ulva algae sea lettuce which grows together in big green sheets and which dries to look like loo paper stranded all over the lagoon. At present the Knysna Basin Project with Prof Brian Allanson and SANParks scientists is busy investigating this whole episode. It is also suspected that the sea lettuce may have led to the decreased number of water birds in the February CWAC count. There is a Pollution Committee which meets every Monday consisting of members from the municipality, SANParks, Eden Municipality, Knysna Basin Project and others who try to keep the lagoon clean for all of us.

Last year Roger Voysey invited me to join him, Esther Townsend and Ina Engelbrecht on the Steenbok Nature Reserve planning committee, looking at needs in the Reserve. He is presently developing a layout for plants and benches in a bird and butterfly corner near the entrance. It looks lovely already! We thank Roger for the support for WESSA this last year. Esther and Nana Joubert from the Pledge NR committee have recently been appointed 'Accredited Invasive Species Consultants'. Their job is to inform the public about the new legislation concerning alien invasive vegetation species. A law came into effect in October 2014, called the NEMBA (National Environmental Management Biodiversity) Act. All sellers of property are now obliged to notify the buyer in writing of the presence of listed invasive species on that property. Category 1 invaders MUST be eradicated. You will need to check how many Cat 1 plants you have. You'll be shocked to see the amount of species you are supposed to get rid of!

WESSA Blue Flag beaches are proliferating along the coast. Fortunately the flags are not declared invaders! We have Blue Flag beaches at Brenton and Buffalo Bay. The municipalities fortunately even employed lifeguards over the Easter holidays. There is a Blue Flag Marina on Thesen Island, thanks to the efforts of Richard Wilkinson and his team, and Ocean Odyssey now has licensed Blue Flag Whale Watching boats. They take wonderful pictures of our marine animals which they share on Facebook. (So does the Knysna Basin Project.) It was a scoop that Knysna was chosen to host the National Blue Flag awards for 2015 and good publicity for our town.

Membership issues:

Our numbers are diminishing unfortunately, and up to date membership lists are not forthcoming from National Office. We receive by email the WESSA correspondence. Our Knysna Branch now seems to include the Plett Branch which has folded. Thanks goodness for Christine Schnauffer, Secretary of the WESSA George/Eden Branch – she has great energy and produces all those amazing newsletters we receive. It appears that Cape Town WESSA are trying to resuscitate the Western Cape regional office.

Our thanks go to WESSA staff, Steve du Toit and Lorraine McGibbon who are still working on Regional issues. Lorraine has worked hard on the YES programme, which she explained to us last year, training and trying to place unemployed disadvantage youngsters in intern education projects. Four are helping at Pledge Nature Reserve, and Lorraine took a large group to Pledge and to the Steenbok Reserve recently to inspire and inform the youngsters further.

Thank you for 'Caring for the Earth'. Every contribution any one of us makes helps in some small way to 'make a difference'.

Since I have been on WESSA committees in various positions since 1991, I have decided that I have had a good innings and will retire from the position of WESSA Knysna Branch Chairman. I am delighted to say that Steve Gettliffe has accepted the position. Thanks Steve, and best wishes!



Lorna Watt