



PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

It hardly seems a year ago since I sat down to write the President's Comments for Volume 24 – 2014 has gone by incredibly quickly!

We kicked off with an innovation – a strategy session, held at Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden's Nestlé Educational Centre on Saturday 15 February. This was the day before the (as usual) very well attended Highveld Butterfly and Moth Club braai hosted by Hermann and Louisa Staude. We did this because of a realisation that there was a gap in our planning activities. Council meetings are short and usually concentrate on day to day issues. The AGM and Conference is more of a venue for reporting on progress, and debating issues in a broader context.

What was needed, we thought, was a forum for Council to brainstorm ways to take LepSoc into the future, and develop a strategic plan. We managed to get nearly all the Council to attend, and the results were interesting. What came out of the session was that there were four main areas we needed to look after. These were communications, administration, funding and our 'product'.

On communication, we agreed there had to be a better way of keeping members up to date on what was happening in LepSoc. The website was still defunct at the time, so some form of newsletter was vital. Justin and Yolande Bode, André and Bennie Coetzer, and Peter Webb, came up with 'Babel Blues'. And of course... the website... more of that later!

We determined to formalise our press releases, and Peter Webb, who had already done a sterling job publicising the triumphs of 2013, agreed to do this.

So we could let potential members and donors know what we are all about, and what our aspirations, plans and budgets are, we created a Prospectus. This is available via our website, Facebook page, and we send it to any interested parties. Peter Sharland and Dave Edge did a great job of drafting budgets for the COREL species, and these are shown in this document alongside other budgets.

Peter Sharland has set up LepSoc's accounts in Pastel, with a little help from Membership Secretary, my wife Jayne. The new site sends out invoices to members and reminds them when their subs are due, which the old site did not. We are now over 450 members and growing.

We agreed that to achieve our broader conservation ends, LepSoc needs substantial donor funding – we cannot continue to fund LepiMAP and COREL from membership fees and book revenues. One way to do this is to approach large potential donors - the Prospectus is an initial approach. So far we have had some interest, but so far only for funding specific research projects. We are still some way away from securing a large enough endowment to make, for example, LepiMAP self-sustaining. So if anyone has any ideas on this front, please let us know!

We have also started to formally acknowledge donors, and have had some very good advice from numerous sources on how to attract donor funding.

Our products – what our members and the public sees of us - take several forms. Here are the main products we identified at the strategy session:

Conservation of Lepidoptera. Here COREL plays a major role and Dave Edge, wearing one of two important hats, is doing a sterling job here. He's drawn up plans and budgets for all our critically endangered species, and for some of them, effective programmes are already in place. Others require a lot of research and detective work – such as the many Swartland species that have become so scarce. Dave is looking for support on a landscape-level project aimed at these. Of course all these are covered in the Prospectus.

Our four butterfly reserves are also covered in the Prospectus, and we never miss a chance to promote them.

Another high profile conservation project is of course, this Journal. Dave's other hat. Judging by the increasing number of papers, and citations, *Metamorphosis* is going from strength to strength. It now has its own website www.metamorphosis.org.za, accessible to members via the main www.lepsoc.org.za site, and also to institutions of learning, directly via Dave.



LepiMAP goes from strength to strength. We now have a full African butterfly names list, and very soon a full Lepidoptera list will be ready. Already, identifications are being done for butterflies all over Africa. We have 333 contributors, the record count since 2000 stands at 128120 (383729 all-time) and we have 48 VM expert panel members. LepiMAP data is being used to provide research information to workers in the field... an example being Reinier Terblanche's work on the Brown-veined White *Belenois aurota*. Another is a phylogeographic assessment of the Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*, at a global scale by Gerard Talavera of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. And Craig Peter (Associate Professor at the Department of Botany, Rhodes University) is using LepiMAP data in his study on orchids. He wants to compare the distribution of an orchid species he is working on to the butterfly species that have been found pollinating the flowers.

And of course we have the Caterpillar Rearing Group. This started life as The Great Moth Caterpillar Hunt Challenge, as Hermann Staude's plan to address the paucity of information on moth (OK, non-Papilionoidea Lepidopterans!) early stages. The name was changed, and it's now managed by Silvia Mecenero and Allison Sharp. It now covers ALL Lepidoptera, and has grown like a caterpillar does, to the point where it is providing an amazing amount of new information. All butterfly life histories are being collated by Mark Williams, and Hermann continues to look after the balance...

We had a very successful Conference and AGM from 19 to 21 September this year, ably managed by Highveld Butterfly and Moth Club. And the 2nd Afrotropical Lepidoptera Workshop was held at Kibale Forest in western Uganda on 19 to 25 October. David Agassiz was the chief organizer, assisted locally by Perpetra Akite, a professional biologist at the Makarere University field station, which is where the Workshop was based.

The branches have again been very active, tirelessly spreading the word about butterflies and moths. Highveld Butterfly and Moth Club had a well-supported stand in May at Yebo Gogga, and was at the Sasol Bird Fair in June, in Johannesburg. Other activities were a training course in February at Bushveld Training Adventures, at Combretum Park in Modimolle, and Groenvoer in Midrand, in November. KZN Butterfly and Moth Club had a presence at the Botanical Society Coastal Branch Plant Fair, at its new venue inside the Sustainable Living Exhibition at the DCC. The branch also held a Butterfly Fun Day in partnership with Kloof Conservancy, as well as a stand at their Indigenous Open Gardens show. Some of us also took part in a weekend event held by the Zululand branch of the Dendrological Society, along with Birdlife Port Natal members.

Our social media presence continues to grow. Currently our Facebook page has 1278 likes, and our Group 1629 members – which we are trying hard to convert into actual LepSoc members, with some success. And we have 220 followers on Twitter!

I think one reason why 2014 has gone by so fast, is the amount of time I spent working on the new website! This proved to be a monster task, and our developer kept encountering new problems and challenges. One was that we have to transact in Rands, and 2Checkout is the only platform that allows us to do this. This would not be a problem... except for MasterCard, which will not allow transactions in any other currency than US Dollars. I hope this will not last long – we have a workaround at present via EFT payments direct into our bank account.

But the main thing is... the site is WORKING! Members can do all sorts of things on the site, such as:

- Pay their subscriptions online (and new members can join online)
- Access *Metamorphosis* and all our other publications
- Post blogs on our forum (and upload images)
- Announce events
- Learn about our projects
- Donate to LepSoc (you don't have to be a member to do this)
- Contact an office bearer or project leader

I hope all our members use the site fully, especially the Forum and Events pages (and of course the Donate page!). The Forum is much easier to use than the old one was. Once your post is complete you



can share it directly on a FaceBook page. The advantage of doing this is that the Forum is dedicated to LepSoc, and all posts remain in the same place, are searchable and Google indexed. FaceBook posts are not, and soon get buried under newer posts. However, we realise that these have far greater reach. So please online members, post on the Forum and then use FaceBook (or Twitter) to expand LepSoc's reach. In particular, I'd appreciate it if experts can post on such matters as identifications, photography and breeding. If that happens, the public will start using the Forum as a source of information – and if they want to participate, they will join the Society.

So what does 2015 hold for us? Well, we have a good platform now, that we can build on. We need all members to help LepSoc reach new highs.

Membership numbers – please will everyone promote the Society as much as possible, via the Website and our social media presence.

Metamorphosis – keep doing good scientific work, and publish it. Dave Edge and his team are there to help you prepare your articles. This goes in particular for Caterpillar Rearing Group participants – the sheer volume of new-to-science discoveries will provide a lasting stream of material for years.

Babbel Blues – this is a great little e-magazine, a platform for all the fun activities we in LepSoc are known for. Please support the editorial team, and submit articles to them.

Website – Please post trip reports, etc. to the forum. Also a plea to the experts - use it to give photographic advice, help with identifying difficult species, rearing and breeding tips etc.

Branches – One common thread I hear from new members, is that they are keen on the social side of LepSoc. I know that collecting and photographic trips are often arranged at the last minute. The site has a group announcements feature that you can use for this. And a suggestion – perhaps appoint a social secretary from the ranks of the new members, and ask them to set up a regular series of events - and cajole at least one of the experts to attend each one?

Funding – this is becoming more and more important. We have funded a big part of LepiMAP for a year now, and cannot do this much longer. And all the COREL species need funds for research and maintenance. All of us know influential people with access to funds, who may be persuaded to donate to LepSoc. Please use the Prospectus here – show them our successes to date, and our plans and budgets.

Lepidoptera is an exciting field right now, and is set to become more so. I am looking forward to 2015, as I'm sure all of you are!

Kind regards

Steve Woodhall

31st December 2014