



PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

2015 has been a difficult year, in which we worked hard to implement the strategies we'd decided upon in 2014. We've had to deal with a lot of headwinds, but I believe we can see light at the end of the tunnel.

The year started off with the Highveld Butterfly and Moth Club braai at Hermann Staude's farm. I was lucky enough to get up there for the 2015 event. I was also fortunate to meet John Brown and Todd Gilligan from the US Lepidopterists' Society. Todd is the President of that Society and it was great to compare notes, and challenges. This made me feel part of a worldwide team!

On a sad note, in 2015 we lost two lepidopterists of long standing, who in different ways were both legends. Nolan Owen-Johnston, who had not been active in recent years, was the first to leave us. Many of us have fond memories of days out in the field with him. And later in the year we lost one of the truly great lepidopterists, Torben Larsen. He was still very active, and his unexpected passing leaves a huge gap that it will take a long time, if ever, to fill. I'd like to take this opportunity to remember them both.

Our AGM and Conference, held at Pretoria National Botanical Gardens this year, was well-supported. We held a moving farewell to Torben, attended by his widow, Nancy Fee, and some of his friends from around the world. For me, this was another affirmation of our belonging to the fellowship of lepidopterists around the world.

Some really good news is that we have received donor funding from Woolworths, The Oppenheimer Foundation, and Scott Bader. Exactly how we intend using these funds to best effect is still subject to discussion.

In May we held our management conference, which was set up to follow through on the resolutions made at last year's strategy session. We looked at some of the challenges facing LepSoc, and set out to make plans to address them. Let's have a look at how we've met (or failed to meet) these. In terms of governance, we resolved to reduce the Council to the main office bearers: President, Treasurer, Secretary, Metamorphosis Editor and Public Officer. Three subcommittees were set up:

- Research and Conservation Steering Subcommittee (Chair – Reinier Terblanche)
- Marketing Subcommittee (Chair – Peter Webb)
- LepiMAP Steering Subcommittee (Chair – Peter Sharland)

Each Branch planned to develop a social programme. The branch that has had most success in this area is **Gauteng**. Their Buttermoth evenings have been well supported. The other branches have had less success, largely because of work and family commitments faced by the Branch chairs. Not to be outdone, the **KZN** branch has developed a programme of activities during 2016 to be hosted at the Butterfly Dome in Durban.

In terms of internal communications, the Council faces challenges stemming from the difficulties and costs of travel. We resolved to formally meet twice yearly; at the Management Conference, to be held mid-year, and the AGM and Conference. We committed to meet physically whenever possible but rely on electronic communications such as Skype and e-mail to keep in touch and resolve issues. The above subcommittees would deal with day-to-day matters in their purview. We use a Dropbox folder to store official documents.

The **Marketing Subcommittee** was set up to promote LepSoc in several areas. Use of Facebook and Twitter social media has been successful in promoting the activities and products we have been able to develop. Some field trips have been organised, and Yebo Gogga, Kloof Open Gardens and the Durban Sustainable Living Expo were well attended. Scholar learner material has been successfully disseminated via the Facebook pages The Butterfly School and the Caterpillar Rearing Group. As regards advertising and promotions, this is where, I am afraid, we fell somewhat short. There was disagreement as to which media and messages we should use to promote the Society. The Marketing Subcommittee found it difficult to reach agreement with the donor whose funds were released for this aim. To achieve this, we have decided to appoint a marketing intern, whose job it will be to develop a professional marketing plan for LepSoc Africa. This person will be a recent marketing graduate whose honours project will encompass the marketing plan and initial implementation of this. A job description has been drafted and interviewing will take place in the first quarter of 2016. He or she



will be managed by the Endangered Wildlife Trust through LepSoc's relationship with them via the Brenton Blue Trust.

Last year we finally got the www.lepsoc.org.za website up and running, and more people are starting to use it. But at this stage I have to report a big area of concern. Many of the new members who signed up when we started the site, are proving to be uncontactable, and have not yet renewed their subscriptions. There are nearly 150 of them. Our Membership Secretary is doing her best to contact them, and is sending out a mail shot to the physical addresses they provided when they joined. But this is NOT good. We will probably have to relinquish a large number of these people in the New Year, and our membership will fall as a result. A challenge we have is to find out what we did to disappoint them.

Our Public Relations Officer has faced considerable IT issues in 2015, which prevented him from issuing press releases. This has been addressed by the creation of a PR list on the LepSoc site back end; press and media releases will henceforth be published via this route.

Our social media presence continues to grow. Currently our Facebook page has 1922 likes, up from 1278 last year, and our Group 2217 members, up from 1629 last year. We are trying hard to convert these into actual LepSoc members, with some success since we launched the new *Practical Guide*. And we have 268 followers on Twitter.

Publications

Metamorphosis progress is reported on in the Editorial (page i).

Babbel Blues has released two issues this year. Like the original *Metamorphosis*, it has the challenge of getting material. Furthermore, its publishing team, like all LepSoc management, is facing challenges from work and family commitments.

Practical Guide to the Study of Lepidoptera in Africa. This LepSoc publication has been launched after Dr Ian Richardson and his chapter authors laboured long and patiently on this task. This team had some new members replacing the old hard copy authors, among whom were André Coetzer and Colin Congdon. The updated and totally revised *Guide* is now on the Publications tab of the www.lepsoc.org.za page. It is available at present as a set of PDF downloads to members only. Since its launch I am proud to say, we have had several new members join up, and some old ones we had lost touch with, have renewed their membership.

Research and Conservation Subcommittee

COREL has seen some significant successes this year:

- CapeNature and Stellenbosch University have agreed to declare the Westfield habitat of *Chrysoritis dicksoni* (CE) a contract nature reserve. A new locality has been found about 4km from those previously known and this could significantly expand the habitat available to this butterfly.
- A new locality was found by James Lawrence for *Dingana fraterna* (CE), which had been feared to be extinct, and a research programme has been initiated.
- A student (Ismat Adams) has enrolled at the University of Cape Town to do an MSc on the life history and ecology of *Kedestes barberae bunta* (CE), and significant progress has been made.
- Knysna Municipality has agreed to enter into a contract nature reserve agreement with CapeNature and the BBT for two pieces of land to expand the Brenton Blue Butterfly Reserve from 1.5ha to 15ha.
- The first phase of the research on *Thestor brachycerus brachycerus* (CE) has been completed and an MSc awarded to the researcher, Liz Bazin. This research was published in the (international) Journal of Insect Conservation.
- A new locality was discovered by Andrew Morton near Wolseley for *Kedestes niveostriga schloszi*, an Endangered skipper previously only known from Greyton.

The Caterpillar Rearing Group had by June this year carried out over 1600 rearing 'experiments', recording nearly 900 species records and over 1300 host plant associations – over half of which are new to science. The leaders of the project, Hermann Staude and Silvia Kirkman, are behind this success, and the results will be published early in 2016 as a *Metamorphosis* article.



South African Lepidoptera Conservation Assessment (SALCA).

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) was tasked by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) to conduct a National Biodiversity Assessment (NBA) for South Africa, due in early 2018. SALCA has been set up to provide information on Lepidoptera to the new NBA. Our deadline is October 2017, and as with SABCA we will need species experts and Provincial team leaders.

It will concentrate on all Lepidoptera, not just Papilionoidea, and will draw on multiple data sources. The SALCA project is described in detail in an article recently published in *Metamorphosis*. The project will be managed by Dr Silvia Kirkman (née Mecenero), who did such a wonderful job with SABCA. I'm sure everyone will join me in wishing her all success with this, and I call on all members to support her.

LepiMAP faces some challenges. As a project it is very successful; 482 citizen scientist contributors at the latest count; 50 expert (ID) panel members, of which 21 have been active this year. LepiMAP is the most heavily supported ADU Virtual Museum, topping out at around 3000 records in five out of twelve months of 2015. It has over 420000 records, of which over 86000 are citizen scientist derived (the balance being collection-based). The challenges are:

- LepiMAP needs considerable funding to sustain it, and LepSoc's funds are limited.
- Moth identification is constrained by shortage of experts and the incomplete taxonomy of African moths.
- More responsibility for IDs needs to be placed on contributors, with less reliance on an expert ID panel.

Conclusions

Last year I finished off with a 'wants list', which has not really changed... here it is again, with a few tweaks...

Membership numbers – needed all the more now, so 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 – This is of particular concern because I suspect that one reason why we lose new members, is that the social side of LepSoc does not satisfy them. I know that collecting and photographic trips are often arranged at the last minute. KZN and Highveld branches have set up a regular series of events for 2016, and we intend to cajole at least one of the experts to attend each one!

Funding – to resource our vital conservation efforts, this is all-important. We need to draft a new prospectus and budget for 2016/17, so that we can persuade our current donors to keep supporting us, and new ones to join them.

2016 is going to be a challenging year in many ways, but I know you will all rise to these challenges and take LepSoc to the next level.

Kind regards

Steve Woodhall

31st December 2015