
PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

2017 seems to have flown by with the speed and single-mindedness of a migrating *Belenois aurota*! Let's focus on a few of the topics that we've encountered along the way:

Highveld branch activities

The LepSoc Africa (LSA) calendar commenced, as usual with the year-starting braai at Hermann and Louisa Staude's farm near Magaliesburg. This year's version was held on 5 February and was attended by approximately 25 LSA members – as always, an enjoyable time was had by all.

Highveld Butterfly Club members have been entertained by Hermann's "Butterfly Evenings", which are held at Ruimsig Country Club, Roodepoort on the second Thursday of every second month. LSA Council made the decision to do away with the rather arbitrary butterfly / moth distinction and now simply refer to all Lepidoptera as "Butterflies". In keeping with this, Hermann has embarked on a series of "meet the family" talks, introducing HBC members to the amazing diversity within the world of butterflies.

May saw the annual Yebo Gogga Exhibition at Wits University. This continues to be the primary educational and marketing drive of the Highveld Butterfly Club (the Gauteng, North West and Free State branch of LepSoc Africa). A dedicated group of HBC members ensured that our stand was attended at all times and the quality of our display was up there with the best at the Expo.

AGM and Conference 2017

The 34th Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Lepidopterists' Society of Africa was held at the Nestle Centre, Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens over the weekend of 21–22 October. The event was well attended and the talks were diverse, informative, entertaining and of the customary high standard. After several years without adjustment, it was agreed at the AGM to increase membership subscriptions for South African members, as detailed elsewhere in this Journal. It was further agreed that next year's conference would be held at Hermannsburg in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands; the date has been pencilled in for the weekend of 22–23 September 2018.

Apart from the above activities, numerous other butterfly talks and awareness programs were undertaken in 2017 by, among others, Andre Coetzer, Peter Webb, Hermann Staude, Jan Praet, Reinier Terblanche, Kevin Cockburn, Steve Woodhall, Justin Bode and Andrew Morton.

Conservation projects

The weather in South Africa continues to cast a dark shadow over our hobby, with persistent drought resulting in drastically reduced butterfly emergences in large areas of the country. This culminated in the catastrophic Knysna fire in June, which incinerated the Brenton Blue Butterfly Reserve. Like a Phoenix arising from the ashes, a few adult specimens of the Brenton Blue (*Orachrysops niobe*) have been observed so far this season, but the status of this species remains precarious at best. In addition to this, the long-term viability of another critically endangered butterfly species covered by the COREL project, *Erikssonia edgei* is extremely concerning. On the more positive side, the SALCA project is nearing completion and the various authors have submitted their reports to SANBI. The Society also has several other projects currently underway, such as *Kedestes* Conservation, Karoo BioGaps and the Butterfly Evolutionary Diversity (BED) project. In addition, we have added a new initiative, the *Aloeides* Project, with the intention of constructing an updated phylogeny for the *Aloeides* genus; it is anticipated that BED will play a major role in this undertaking.

Caterpillar Rearing Group & LepiMAP

The Caterpillar Rearing Group (CRG) continues to accumulate data from its numerous contributors and published the Volume 27 supplement to *Metamorphosis* in January. This is an amazing body of work and summarizes rearing-records of 975 species - the submissions received up until the end of 2015. LepiMAP is still going strong and is acquiring about 2000 records every month. LSA is committed to retaining our relationship with LepiMAP and a financial contribution has been agreed. Fanie Rautenbach, who has been responsible for a large percentage of recent butterfly-identifications via the LepiMAP ID panel, has been appointed as LepSoc Africa's LepiMAP representative.

African Butterfly News

The LSA newsletter "African Butterfly News" is now into its second year and is growing, as more and more contributions are received, both from LSA members and people outside of the Society. There is more than enough activity within the field of Afrotropical butterflies to support a bi-monthly newsletter: the challenge is to encourage people to submit articles and photographs and from my side, collation and formatting of the material.

The newsletter provides a summary of field trips, butterfly-activities, photographs, interesting observations and taxonomic news occurring within the previous two months. It will also contain information related to book sales, entomological equipment, upcoming events and a couple of general interest and historical articles. The newsletter is only as good as the material submitted by you, the members of LepSoc Africa. I believe a very encouraging start has been made and that ABN will continue to go from strength to strength.

Our new LepSoc Africa website

The new, expanded LepSoc Africa website, incorporating the LSA and *Metamorphosis* sites, went online in March. Dave Edge was instrumental in setting this up and his wife Hanna, LSA's Membership Secretary, has been actively updating the membership section and bulk-mailing facility. A new online shopping section for books and magazines will be operational shortly.

Financial compliance

The treasurer has reported that LSA is now fully compliant as regards to the Companies Act and our tax status. The only remaining thing to be done is to get our tax exempt status reconfirmed by SARS.

Marketing

Marketing continues to be a challenging portfolio; Jan Praet has taken over the reins and has had some success in engaging the public via Facebook. Jan has listed a program of butterfly activities for the coming year, in order to facilitate advance publicity notifications. In addition, we have revamped the Society's logo and have settled on LepSoc Africa as a standard shortened name for the Lepidopterists' Society of Africa.

We are however still miles behind the achievements of the Botanical Society of South Africa, which has membership numbers in the thousands and is in a position to allocate financial grants, for research and conservation projects of more than R100k per annum, this money being derived from interest only.

Collecting permits

LSA Council made a decision to manage collecting permits throughout South Africa. While we see this as a direct benefit to our members, we also hope to standardize the necessary processes and to strengthen the Society's ties with the relevant conservation authorities. Where Provincial Branches of LSA exist, the Branch Chairmen will continue to be the Society's interface with the local conservation officers. Where regional branches do not exist (and to assist Regional Chairmen with their duties), Peter Ward has been appointed as our national representative, overseeing permits.

Madagascar Workshop

On an exciting note, LSA are organizing the 3rd Afrotropical Lepidoptera Workshop, to be held in Madagascar in April 2018. A full complement of 40 delegates, including prominent lepidopterists from Africa and Europe, have paid their deposits and final, detailed planning is well in hand. The Workshop incorporates a Conference at ValBio, Ranomafana between 7 – 13 April; 29 delegates will be taking part in the second week of the workshop, consisting of a field trip to the central and southwestern parts of Madagascar between 14 – 21 April.

Lepidopterists departed

Sadly, during the course of 2017 we lost two lepidopterists who had both made significant impacts in the field of African Butterflies. Bernard d'Abrera, author of several butterfly books including "Butterflies of the Afrotropical Region" (published in three volumes) passed away on 13 January. Andre Claassens, author of "Butterflies of the Table Mountain Range" and several other books, died on 16 September. Apart from his publications, Andre was an active member of the Western Cape branch of LSA and made some pioneering observations regarding life histories of *Thestor* and *Lepidochrysops* species. His obituary appears elsewhere in this volume.

Metamorphosis

Finally, huge thanks are due to the editors of *Metamorphosis*, Mark Williams and his Sub Editor Dave Edge, who have put in a massive amount of time and effort in order to retain the content, character and quality of this journal, which continues to be a world class publication that everyone in the Society can be proud of.

Jeremy Dobson president@lepscfrica.org

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