In December 2020, I noted that we had experienced an extraordinary year, but was confident that 2021 would see a return to “business as usual”. Well, I certainly got that wrong, although hopefully we are now over the worst of Covid restrictions. The world of African Lepidoptera carries on regardless, although aspects of LepSoc Africa’s activities have probably changed forever.

Let’s review our key constitutional objectives and how we performed last year:

Publications

Our journal, Metamorphosis, has experienced another busy year. While the quantity of material is down compared to Vol 31 (2020), it still represents a considerable body of work. Silvia Kirkman – our former Sub Editor – had to relinquish the position to pursue other commitments; fortunately, we have an excellent successor in James Lawrence, who has taken over Silvia’s role and is responsible for production of the Journal. Dave Edge continues his role as Editor.

LepSoc Africa (LSA) were directly responsible for Butterflies of Botswana and their Natural History, a book based on manuscripts produced by the late Torben Larsen and compiled by Steve Collins, Jeremy Dobson and Mark Williams. All profits from the sale of this book accrue to the Society. Another significant publication involving our members was An Illustrated History of Butterflies of the Afrotropical Indian Ocean Islands, produced by James Lawrence and Mark Williams. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the unique butterflies of this region. A further publication, Mylothris by Haydon Warren-Gash, has undertaken a complete review of this genus with several new descriptions; the latter book was the winner of the Torben Larsen Tankard at the 2021 LSA conference.

Research

LepSoc Africa are engaged in a comprehensive review of a large African butterfly genus - the largest in terms of South African taxa - the Aloeides (Russels). While substantial progress has been made this year, publication of our preliminary phylogenetic paper has been postponed, pending the acquisition of further DNA sequences. We are commencing similar programs with Thestor (the Skollies) and Spialia and related genera (the Sandmen). Marianne Espeland, with assistance from several members of LSA is busy with ongoing research into Lepidochrysops, Orachrysops and Euchrysops.

In 2020 we commenced with the monitoring of butterflies within our National Botanical Gardens. To date we have volunteers regularly visiting Walter Sisulu (Roodepoort), Garden Route (George), Lowveld (Mbombela), Harold Porter (Betty’s Bay) and Kirstenbosch (Cape Town); from 2022 we will include KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and hope to expand the program to other National Gardens if possible. In conjunction with the Botanical Garden surveys, the Butterfly Index is tracking trends in butterfly abundance within South Africa; if we are in fact experiencing an insect apocalypse, we are at least recording this to the best of our ability.

We are looking at instituting a partnership between LepiMAP (administered by the Biodiversity Institute) and our own lepidoptera database, Lepibase, but as yet nothing has been resolved. The Caterpillar Rearing Group (CRG) managed by Hermann Staude and supported by a considerable number of assistants, goes from strength to strength; Hermann was the recipient of the Ivan Bampton Teapot at the 2021 LSA conference.

Conservation

Our principal Conservation initiative COREL (Custodians of Rare and Endangered Lepidoptera) has been restructured: In addition to the individual custodians, provincial leaders have been appointed (the branch chairmen) who report to the National Coordinator, Mark Williams. A report for the 2020–2021 season was completed and has been circulated to all interested parties.

There has been little positive news regarding some of our Critically Endangered species, with no sightings of Orachrysops niobe or Erikssonia edgei for several years. On a brighter note, Andrew Morton recently found a new locality for Chrysoritis rileyi near Robertson in the Western Cape. This Endangered butterfly was discovered as a direct result of the SALCA Screening Tool, which had flagged the site as a potential locality for Aloeides lutescens. Further good news involved Louise Baldwin finding three new populations of the Critically Endangered Kedestes barberae bunta at Strandfontein and Cliff Dorse, a representative of the City of Cape Town, locating a colony of Kedestes lenis lenis near Kommetjie.

Our members continue to find and record rare and endangered lepidoptera within Africa, whether as part of COREL or otherwise. A notable finding this season was the discovery, by Peter Ward, of a strong colony of Lepidochrysops penningtoni.
While there is some uncertainty regarding the taxonomy of this butterfly, it is distinctly possible that this new finding represents the first time that this species has been seen for over 50 years.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) has contacted LepSoc Africa regarding possible assistance with the funding of COREL; we will hold further meetings and engage with EWT in this regard.

**Interaction among our members**

Our bimonthly newsletter, *African Butterfly News*, endeavours to report on all matters related to African Lepidoptera. The newsletter appears to be increasingly gaining acceptance by our members and there are inevitably plenty of articles regarding trip reports, taxonomic revisions, or butterfly projects. Active provincial WhatsApp groups have been established in the Highveld region (Gauteng, North West Province and Free State), Limpopo and Eastern Cape and there are also lively Zimbabwe and East Africa groups. As a result of Covid there were no branch meetings last year, although we hope to reinstate Butterfly Evenings at Ruimsig in 2022.

In October we hosted our annual Conference which, for the first time, featured a mix of “live” delegates and presenters, combining a similar number of “virtual” attendees. Internet connectivity is the way forward and it enables all our members, wherever they may live, to participate and interact with the Society, without the cost - and uncertainty - of international travel. We will adopt a similar approach for the 2022 Conference and, hopefully, will make this an even bigger and better event than last year.

While the internet may solve our networking needs, it doesn’t help you find any butterflies. Our hobby has been severely impacted by Covid and many field trips and expeditions have been canceled as a result.

**Administration**

Hanna Edge, our Membership Secretary, maintains detailed membership lists and our membership, in terms of numbers, remains at, or near, record levels. Membership Cards are produced for all paid-up members of the Society. We have complied with all statutory corporate governance obligations and, thanks to Peter Ward, Hanna Edge (Bookkeeper) and Graham Henning (Internal audit), have up to date and certified financial statements.

A friendly reminder that annual subscriptions are due on 01 January – LSA Council approved moderate increases to your subscriptions for 2022; you should have already received a notification in this regard.

**Other activities**

LepSoc Africa are committed to the construction of an African Butterfly Centre, which will house specimens bequeathed by our members. Lepidoptera collections are, in general, not wanted by our national museums and we urgently need to find a secure home for the valuable specimens that they contain. A significant amount of design and planning has already been undertaken and we are currently reviewing several options. We desperately require funding, so if anyone can help, please let us know!

LSA are compiling a single, consolidated list of English names for all African butterflies; almost 6 500 taxa. Considerable progress was made last year, and we hope to have a completed list, ready for comment, by 2025.

To conclude, thanks to you all for your continued support of LepSoc Africa. Our Society has maintained steady growth over the last few years, and we have a current membership list of about 300; a creditable result in the uncertain times that we find ourselves in. While we are not a large organization, we are an active and important one.