



South African National Society

History - Culture and Conservation. Join SANS.

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NEWSLETTER & PROGRAM FOR September 2015

THE DATE: Tuesday +8th September 2015

VENUE: KwaMuhle Museum, Bram Fischer Road [Ordnance Road] Durban.

TIME: Meeting commences at 17h30; Refreshments will be served from 16h45.

PARKING: Off Bram Fischer/Ordnance road [next to the Museum]; security person is present

FEATURE: **Upgrading the Durban beachfront - dune rehabilitation and Indigenous landscaping, 2008-2014 – Dr Elsa Pooley**

The first week of September is National Arbour Week which is an opportune time for all South Africans to plant indigenous trees as a practical and symbolic gesture of sustainable environmental management.



SANS is delighted that well known botanical artist, author and environmentalist Dr Elsa Pooley is our guest speaker this month.

Elsa describes the planning behind the Durban beachfront upgrade. Dune vegetation has been re-established along the coastal strip from uShaka Marine World to Blue Lagoon. This is a heavily transformed beachfront and most of the dune vegetation was destroyed a very long time ago. Using mostly low growing dune plants, the unstable wind-blown sands have been brought under control whilst also bringing wildlife back to the 'Golden Mile'.

Report back for August

The August meeting continued the healthy trend of increasing attendance and growing membership and was attended by 44 members and guests. This is doubtless due to the continuing support of outstanding presenters talking on widely varied and fascinating subjects.

Presentation of the Daphne Strutt Prize for 2015 to Carla Ann Gersmeir



President Robert King presented Carla Ann Germeir the winner of this year's Daphne Strutt prize of R1000.00 and the Society's last remaining copy of Daphne Strutt's book *History of Clothing Fashion in South Africa* which Chair Ian Smith added may one day prove to be of greater value because of its scarcity.

For new members this prize is awarded annually to the top student in second year '**Costume Design**' at DUT and until now has comprised a cash prize as well Daphne Strutt's book. The committee is now endeavouring to trace further copies in order to maintain this tradition.

SANS believes that this young lady will go on to become a leader in her field and we look forward to hearing more about her career as this progresses.

Presentation - The Conservation Status of the Waterbirds in Durban Bay by David Allan

Members will recall that we literally ran out of time when David addressed SANS in May this year with riot type mumblings from members who wanted to learn more about the waterbirds of Durban Bay. So we welcomed David back for the second part of his talk which focussed on the valuable research carried out by the Museum's Bird Department into the history and conservation status of the waterbirds inhabiting Durban Bay over the long period of the harbour's development.

David explained that he has been involved with the project for 16 years since it started in 1999. The motivation for the project came because of concerns that the introduction of helicopters to ferry the pilots in and out of the harbour might impact the birds and Richard Boon wanted to know what effect this might have on waterbirds in Durban Bay. With the assistance of the SA Navy counts started in July 1999 and until Dec 2014 not a single monthly count was missed until a new Base Commander arrived who needed to get a grip on what was happening. Following his agreement the counts restarted in January 2015.

Few waterbird counts and studies have had such a lengthy run and this is one of the longest running studies. Last year *Novitates* issued a monograph on the counts and this included older data. The study of the waterbirds also covers the history of Durban and members saw views of Durban Bay as it was in early 1800 and how it is now – the largest harbour in the southern hemisphere.

David's talk covered the major changes and particularly how change has occurred from the 1950's with four coloured maps showing how the bay has been modified over the past 200 years to what it is now.

This was done using historical evidence. Interestingly the last map for 1999 shows very little change from what is there today. The maps used green for Mangroves, and red for tidal mudflats which are inundated twice daily. Although tiny in global terms these areas are actually of immeasurable value because of their biological richness. Speckled brown colour showed surrounding land.

As the harbour developed it became smaller and smaller as the map indicated with the original high tide mark marked with a dotted line. As the warehouses were built around much of the harbour so the area of mangroves shrank. All that exists today compared with the 1800's is 3% mangroves and 4% natural shoreline. Permanent deep water has not only doubled in size but also gone from shallow to between 12 to 16 m depth.

From a waterbird habitat viewpoint these are sledgehammer blows which give us an expectation of a totally dramatic and major change.

Because it is part of a major city we have a very good history of which waterbirds were there. Records from the Natal Bird Club (NBC) newsletter *Albatross* were examined and it was pointed out this has been published since 1951 having over 350 issues. Some waterbird counts of varying comprehensiveness were all analysed. These comprised counts by Richard Liversidge; Dave Young a Brit with great wader interest counted Palearctic waders; Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology (UCT) 1970 and 1977; Ryan in 1980s; and Sinclair later in the decade.

Using a Google image of the harbour as it is today members saw the route which is followed consistently once a month by up to six people. Birdlife Port Natal mainly co-ordinate this group and well over 100 people have been involved from NBC. The route hugs the shoreline and takes three to four hours. The harbour is divided into 12 different sections with each having a name.

Photos of groups on the boat were shown. Tony Carney of the Mercury came on one trip; views were shown of an American and Arnie van Vuuren who has done so many counts. Since 1999 few major changes in harbour – just the small fish wharf change, another wharf concreted plus widening of the mouth.

Then findings were examined. Records showed that 93 waterbird species have occurred in Durban Bay but the fifty odd species that regularly occurred are the ones looked at in depth. Although just to whet the appetites of birders in the audience rare birds like the young Greater Frigate Bird were discussed briefly. A recent count found a Lesser Blackbacked Gull which has been there since March 2015 until at least July, during which time the bird has gone through a moult. And sadly we know it's the same bird because it has a fish hook, a swivel and a long piece of line embedded in the side of its mouth which flags a stern warning that anglers must pick up and remove fishing line and hooks. In fact the average is that on every second trip the people counting find a bird which is dead or dying because it is entangled in carelessly discarded fishing tackle.

In September 1999 a Slenderbilled Gull appeared which was undoubtedly the very best rarity recorded in Durban Bay. It was discovered just three months after counting started and present for only four days. It remains the single southern African record.

To précis some of the findings we looked at Palearctic waders which travel the globe from North to South. In fact nobody can beat them in terms of distances travelled. We only see them in boring non-breeding plumage but in terms of what they are able to do they are spectacular. The commonest is the Curlew Sandpiper. Its range is from the northern edge of Siberia where it breeds on the Tundra. In the northern spring they head north to breed where the males remain on those breeding grounds for just three weeks. This is a journey that takes two months so in all the male is only



Curlew Sandpiper in Breeding Plumage

away from the non-breeding grounds in southern Africa for five months and here for seven months. The male does not assist the female with raising the young and gets away with this behaviour because during the brief thaw there is an absolute explosion of life. Insect life, namely food, is hyper-abundant so the female can leave the eggs for a few minutes; fill her stomach with food and return to brood the eggs. When the chicks hatch they can vacuum up food at a furious rate and enjoy rapid growth.



David Allan showing data for the once abundant Curlew Sandpiper

Prof Les Underhill from UCT working with other researchers noticed that first year Curlew Sandpipers do not bother to migrate back to Siberia because they are too young to breed. Researchers in southern Africa also noticed an interesting pattern in that there was a very cyclical trend in terms of

wintering numbers of Curlew Sandpipers. This pattern showed there was a three year cycle of overwintering Curlew Sandpipers and discovered this cycle was related to

Lemming numbers. In seasons when Lemming numbers were high the predators like Arctic Foxes just ate Lemmings which allowed the Curlew Sandpipers (and other waterbirds) to successfully raise their young. However during seasons with low Lemming numbers the Curlew Sandpiper and other waterbird chicks were heavily predated.

David pointed out that these birds are a symbol of the interconnectedness of our planet and things happening in one area can have an effect on other parts of the globe.

So how have things gone with the Curlew Sandpipers in Durban Bay since the first counts in the 1960's. Using two graphs we looked at counts from the 1960's which were made by Dave Young, the 1970's, 1980s and the counts up to just two years ago. Then inserting a line through the graphs we can see whether the birds are increasing, decreasing or remaining constant. Then we looked at the 14 years of the counts where the graph shows each month with peaks where the birds are present and gaps where they've migrated away.

Dave Young had one count of 10000 Curlew Sandpipers and many of several thousand. Now we are very lucky if we get 300 but mostly it's just 100 birds. The situation is even worse with the Little Stint which once occurred in the thousands but today we are lucky if we see just five Little Stints. Other wader species including non-migrants are also experiencing local extinction. In fact we are looking at the end of this process over this short period of 14 years of waterbird counts.

But some species buck the trend. The Common Greenshank which is another Palearctic wader coming to us from the Eurasian breeding grounds has maintained its numbers remarkably well with little change over both the long and short-term. Even more striking is the Common Whimbrel which remarkably seems to have increased in numbers over the period. Two reasons immediately come to mind to explain this change. Unlike the smaller waders that are probing around on or close to the surface for invertebrates such as worms that they pull out of the mud, the Common Greenshank is renowned as a fish eater and it will eat crabs as well.

The central sandbank has seen an increase in the numbers of sand prawns over recent decades and the Common Whimbrel with its long down-curved beak can probe deep into the mud to reach the sand prawns which might explain the increase in numbers over this period.

Examining a couple of other species we looked at the Blacksmith Lapwing, a species whose numbers are exploding all over southern Africa probably because the bird has adapted to a wider range of habitats and is apparently displacing other species such as the Crowned Lapwing at the same time. However the species does not appear to feed on the bay but rather uses it as a loafing ground after feeding in surrounding areas of grassland.

The Egyptian Goose is another bird whose numbers have increased hugely but this increase had occurred at some time prior to the counts starting. This species has benefitted from increased lands under crops and extensive grasslands and probably feeds in surrounding areas as well as the lawns around the yacht clubs but not in saline areas.



Pinkbacked Pelican numbers have also increased, the birds breeding in the Botanic Gardens and moving to the bay to feed on fish which are brought back to their young. Margaret Cooke can tell folks more about this phenomenon from her ongoing monitoring at Botanic Gardens. But David pointed out the increases had been more noticeable to 2008 and appeared to have dropped off a little since then.

Another fish eater the Whitebreasted Cormorant has shown increasing numbers until about five or six years ago when numbers decreased.

Little Egrets which are of course fish eaters increased until about 2008 since when numbers have tapered somewhat. Grey Herons, Greyheaded Gulls and Lesser Crested Terns all occur in the bay.

One of the very sad stories of Durban Bay is the loss of the Greater Flamingo which was almost an iconic species for Durban people over many decades. The older generation will recall looking for the pink shimmer as they were shown the flamingos by parents and showing their children in turn. The late Nolly Zaloumis one of Africa's longest serving conservationist said his love of waterbirds was started by his father taking him to see the Greater Flamingos. In the 1960's and early 70's hundreds of flamingos were regularly recorded until a major construction took place in the harbour. During the same period the heronry with its breeding birds including Black Herons, was destroyed when mangroves were simply bulldozed to make way for port developments. No environmental impact assessments were carried out in those days. So Durban lost a bird which could have been used as a symbol for the city. Adverts reading, ***Come to Durban and see Greater Flamingos***, could have been the norm.

David discussed other incidents that impacted the birdlife around the bay. When the first power outages occurred in 2008 the pumps which transferred waste water from the town drains to water treatment works failed and raw effluent flowed into the bay with massive fish kills the result. We look upon some exposed areas in the bay as playgrounds where we can introduce our children to real nature in the form of mudflats and marine sandbanks. However many of these contains levels of heavy metals and other pollutants that are not safe for humans, especially children. The levelling off in the numbers of fish eating birds since that time appears to be related to those first outages.

Numerous questions flowed when David ended his enthralling presentation and Chair Ian Smith had perforce to call a halt as we once again ran out of time. Our speaker was thanked by Anne Youngleson when the applause was resounding.

Hardy Wilson – who is responsible for any inaccuracies.



An Investigation of Historical Thinking in School History Textbooks

Pranitha Bharath has sent a summary of her research as well as a little information about the places visited as part of that research. We are sure members will enjoy this update from our talented 2014/15 Killie Campbell bursary winner. Congratulations Pranitha on having your paper accepted by the journal 'Yesterday and Today'.

The rationale for this topic lies in my interest in textbooks arising from my equally deep passion for the teaching of the school subject of History. The various curriculum shifts in post-apartheid South Africa, has resulted in an alternate form of History in textbooks. My argument is that there is too much of an ideological emphasis in research, where there is concern over whose history we are telling, the identity of particular groups and how each are represented. This has been matched with interest in gender concerns throughout history and how this realisation has been dealt with by purposive installments of female aspected history. These kinds of research are anticipated and welcome, considering our conflicted and controversial past. But, what becomes of the structure of history, as a form of knowledge? Is there adequate engagement with history's disciplinary dimensions?

History is said to be composed of both substantive knowledge (content) and procedural knowledge (skill) and any advancement would be in both these two compulsory, complementary, inter-twined and parallel strands. It is argued that history finds progression in the second-order or procedural dimension which is further composed of key constructs or benchmarks: the establishing of historical significance, the use of primary sources, the identification of cause-and-consequence, analysis of change and continuity and the ability to take a historical and moral perspective. "Historical thinking" is thus a particularised way in which learners think about the past, using evidence available to construct narratives. I am interested in understanding how this progresses.

For this study, I combine theories from SFL (Systematic Functional Linguistics), history education, psychology and the sociology of knowledge to analyse a sample of seven History textbooks across the Intermediate, Foundation and Senior Phases in the South African school history curriculum. Each one from a grade, beginning with a Grade 3 textbook, where history commences, to Grade 9 where history is advanced in its level of disciplinarity. Or is it? The academic discipline of history involves the 'doing' of history in very nuanced, disciplinary practices, using a variety of perspectives to construct accounts. The type of history the learner interacts with in a classroom is 'recontextualised' history, the shape of

which must be interrogated as the textbook is the closest representation of the curriculum. Since it was difficult to consider whole-text analyses, I aggregated the analysis to a chapter per text, telling the story "About me" and "The history of South Africa". Various methodological tools were used for the analysis to present the findings as follows.

The study found that history advances in both the substantive and procedural dimensions in varying gradations. There are also different principles which signal progression in both the dimensions. As far as the substantive dimension is concerned, there is clear advancement in its trajectory through abstraction, nominalisation, genre use (from recording to explaining to interpretation and argumentative genres) as well as the types of reading and writing learners (simple to more complex, common sense to uncommon sense) are required to engage with. There is also a shift from concrete to abstract levels, advancement in cognitive levels (remember and understand to analyse and create), greater introduction to and use of historical sources, greater interaction with general and specific participants of history, increased incorporation of chronological principles compared to earlier learning which is context bound and common sense. Language, as the means to present history content, becomes more dense and abstract, drawing away from localised learning to more universal knowledge. Since progression is advanced in various ways, I located techniques to describe these, incrementally, by dividing the analysis into three intensive levels, each contributing to an understanding.

Many papers are possible from this thesis. One such paper, I have written thus far is entitled 'Using genre to describe the progression of historical thinking in school history', and this has been submitted to a Journal called "Yesterday and Today". (Since writing this summary the reviewers have recommended publication. *Hardy Wilson*)

My 2014 excursion to Germany was sponsored by the Georg Eckert Institution (Braunschweig) where I obtained rich international material from their extensive library. I also presented my study at their international conference. Here, I met with other fascinating PhD students from Argentina, France, America and other parts of the world. It was enthralling to engage with different historical concerns and to learn how diverse methodological and conceptual tools could be used. I was accompanied by my supervisor Dr. Carol Bertram and research peers, Dr. Marshall Maposa, Professor Murthi Maistry and Jackie Naidoo. A highlight of the journey to Germany included a tour of Berlin, led by the Associate Professor of UKZN, Professor Johan Wasserman. He is extremely knowledgeable about Germany's history and heritage, and because he could speak the language, got us to see all the amazing historical sites. He also ensured that we experienced the charm of Germany's coffee shops, bars and bistros. That it was the anniversary of the First-World War was a historical co-incidence, one which I will remember and treasure for all time. I also got my piece of the Berlin Wall and the rare opportunity to indulge in delightful Indian cuisine at the "Curry Box" a few exciting seconds from Checkpoint Charlie on the streets of Berlin. It was a 'wow' moment as I would never have imagined sipping a 'mango lassie' in Germany! Culture and history, so you see, resonate and permeate all meanders of the world.

I once again, thank the SANS committee for considering me a worthy recipient of the honoured Killie Campbell award. I applaud the work they are doing and look forward to a continued partnership, in the interest of history.