
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I'm sure everyone will agree that 2020 was an extraordinary year. While many of our activities were disrupted by coronavirus restrictions, there were several positive developments and I'd like to focus on these as far as possible.

Administration

As you are all aware, for the first time in LepSoc Africa's history, we had to cancel our Annual Conference, which had been scheduled for Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens over the weekend of 12–13 September (we had booked the Nestlé Centre, which had been made available to us free of charge by BotSoc / SANBI). Despite this setback, we were able to hold our Annual General Meeting via Zoom networking. The elected council members, Justin Bode (Secretary), Peter Ward (Treasurer) and myself were re-elected for a further two-year term.

An international conference planned for Gabon last November was cancelled; we still hope that the conference can be held later this year, although this is looking increasingly doubtful at present.

LepSoc Africa (LSA) have complied with all statutory corporate governance obligations and, thanks to Peter Ward, Dave Edge and Graham Henning, have up to date and certified financial statements. Hanna Edge, our Membership Secretary, maintains detailed membership lists and our membership, in terms of numbers, remains at, or near, record levels. LSA council have prepared Membership Cards for all paid-up members of the Society. The cards are produced on 01 July each year; we intend that the Member Cards will become a form of identification, linked to the permits. Members can apply, via the website, to be included on provincial collecting permits. Applications will be coordinated by the Permit Administrator (Reinier Terblanche), who will liaise with Provincial Chairmen and monitor submission of research-proposals to their respective Provinces. A reminder that annual subscriptions are due on 01 January – LSA Council resolved that subscriptions will remain unchanged for 2021. LepSoc Africa is already registered as a Public Benefit Organisation and exempt from income tax. We submitted an application earlier in 2020 to the SARS Tax Exemption Unit to be approved to issue Section 18 tax exemption certificates to our donors for any donations made. Possibly because of disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we have not yet received a response.

There is an urgent need for LepSoc Africa to find a storage facility for African Lepidoptera collections. We are currently looking at a possible development near Magaliesburg, but I appeal to all members of LSA to consider this pressing issue and to get back to me with any ideas or suggestions.

Interaction among our members

Our bimonthly newsletter, African Butterfly News, continues to go from strength to strength. These are exciting times in the world of African butterflies and there is plenty of news to report on. Active provincial WhatsApp groups have been established in Highveld (Gauteng, North West and Free State), Limpopo and Eastern Cape. There are active Zimbabwe and East Africa groups and we hope to initiate a West Africa group shortly.

Research and Conservation

The society is actively engaged in various projects, focused on Lepidoptera conservation and research, such as COREL, CRG, BED, *Aloeides* Project, *Kedestes* Conservation and the Butterfly Index. New projects include *Lepidochrysops* (Marianne Espeland) and Edible Insects (Dr Barbara van Asch). In addition, there are other initiatives that LSA members can contribute to, such as the English Names and Transcribing projects.

LSA are engaged in a comprehensive review of one of the large African butterfly genera (the largest in terms of South African taxa), the *Aloeides* (Russets). Substantial progress has been made over the last two years and we hope to be able to publish an initial paper during the course of 2021. A portion of your membership subscriptions will be used to obtain DNA sequences for this project.

The Butterfly Index hopes to track trends of butterfly abundance within South Africa – in light of various “insect apocalypse” reports, worldwide, we have an obligation to record this to the best of our ability. The project is hampered by a shortage of contributors at present, but is at least keeping some track of butterfly abundance,

particularly in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. A new LSA undertaking, monitoring butterflies within our National Botanical Gardens has been initiated, and will add another source of reliable data to this monitoring effort.

LepiMAP (the Lepidoptera component of the Virtual Museum) has moved from the ADU and is being administered by the Biodiversity Institute (BDI). Fanie Rautenbach is LepSoc Africa's representative and identifies most of the Papilionoidea. We are still looking at instituting some kind of partnership between LepiMAP and our own Lepidoptera database, Lepibase, but nothing has been resolved as yet.

As result of the – now completed – SALCA project, the number of Critically Endangered butterfly species in South Africa has risen from 11 to 20, with a further 5 taxa listed as Possibly Extinct. There has been little positive news in 2020 and status of two Critically Endangered species, *Orachrysops niobe* and *Erikssonina edgei* is increasingly uncertain. On an encouraging note new localities were found for *Thestor dicksoni malagas* (Vulnerable) and *Durbania amakosa flavida* (Endangered).

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.

Publications

Our scientific journal, *Metamorphosis*, has experienced an unprecedented year, as described by the Editor. Volume 31, in both size and quality, represents a highpoint in the history of the Journal to date. Congratulations are extended to Dave Edge (editor of *Metamorphosis*) and Silvia Kirkman (subeditor) for the considerable amount of work they have contributed in this regard.

LSA council resolved that the printed version of Part 1 will continue to be free to Honorary Life and Sponsor members. The potential demand for the other three volumes will be assessed and costed early in 2021. If there is sufficient demand to justify print runs printed versions will be produced.

On a sad note, Douglas Kroon (Honorary Life member of LepSoc Africa and author of *Lepidoptera of Southern Africa - Host Plants and Other Associations*, among other publications) passed away in August.

To conclude, thank you all for your continued support of LepSoc Africa; our paid membership has declined slightly this year – possibly an indication of the troubled times that we live in – but remains at near record levels. As noted last year however, we should be measured by our achievements rather than by our size.



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31st December 2020