CREATING A LEGACY

"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." – Abraham Lincoln

BotSoc’s ‘character’ has been tried and tested many times during our almost 100-year history. The power of the Society, and the very essence of its longevity, is our members. Our members and the role they play in conservation are the lifeblood of the Society, and have been since its establishment on 10 June 1913.

The first AGM of the BotSoc was held on 31 July 1913, and in the same year the now world-famous Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden was planted on land that Cecil John Rhodes left to the ‘united people of South Africa’. Ninety-nine years later, on 10 June 2012, we were enormously proud to report that the power and character of the Botanical Society of South Africa (BotSoc) are still now world-famous Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden.

We express our sincere appreciation and thanks to our members, branches, committees, and personnel for their commitment and co-operation during the past year, which was one of consolidation, with expansion into some exciting new areas. Of course, planning for our Centenary celebrations has been high on the agenda all year.

The following report summarises our growth and achievements over the last year and looks towards the momentous Centenary celebrations that lie ahead. We are actively engaged in creating a legacy for future generations.

PEOPLE AND PARTNERS

Members remain most important

Recruiting and retaining supporters of BotSoc has never been more important. Faced with evidence of declining membership numbers in recent years, BotSoc has specifically directed its efforts towards nurturing our existing members through branch activities and personal contact. This approach has halted the declining membership trend toward year end, and resulted in more members renewing their membership. The introduction of monthly membership tracking statistics keeps us informed about membership movements enabling prompt detection of shifting and emerging trends. Overall the membership base remains at around 20 000.

Improved communication with members

This year the first membership renewal notices were sent via email rather than by postal service, in efforts to streamline and reduce our carbon footprint. A few new initiatives were put in place over the past few months by Head Office such as: sending a third renewal notice via email to all members before their membership expires. An additional administrative function actioned in the past year is an email reminder to ‘three-month expired’ memberships holders, to try to boost renewals. This is closely monitored to see the impacts on the membership retention strategy.

The staff who make it all happen

This past year saw the start of a new chapter in the Society’s leadership, when in March 2011, Zaitoon Rabaney was appointed as BotSoc Executive Director. This reflects another step in the development of Zaitoon, who has a 16-year history with the organization. Zaitoon is also not the only Head Office member with a long service record. Systems Administrator Simone van Rooyen was congratulated on celebrating ten years with BotSoc towards the end of 2011. We thank her for her loyal and excellent service.

All BotSoc staff operate in a multi-tasking environment where they are often asked to go the extra mile, and help with duties beyond their area of direct responsibility. The Society acknowledges this and extends warm thanks to each one for diligently carrying out their responsibilities and supporting BotSoc, our members and partners. We would especially like to highlight the exceptional work of the front office staff.

Council input

The BotSoc’s Council members – all of whom serve on a voluntary basis – continued to do a sterling job in 2011 under Council Chair Michael Lawrence. Council also had great input and support from the new President, Ted Oliver, who took over from John Rourke in 2010. Council members are listed in the box on p.104. In 2011 the Council welcomed a new member, Richard Boon, who replaced outgoing councillor Abri Meiring. Our thanks to Abri for his long and dedicated service to BotSoc.

Key alliances

BotSoc has a proud history of responsible conservation and long-standing associations with key organizations, especially the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and WWF-SA on whom we rely to extend our reach. Our special thanks to SANBI for their role in building the close relationship we enjoy. In the past year our relationship with SANBI was extended, in terms of our Memorandum of Understanding, to include their taking over the hosting of the BoSoc website which has, in turn, enabled us to upgrade and improve this facility.

In addition BotSoc thanks and acknowledges the following partners for their support:

- Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI)
- C.A.P.E. (Cape Action Plan for the Environment)
- Cape Peninsula University of Technology applied sciences department
- CEEF (Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund)
- Climate Action Partnership
- CREW (Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers) programme under SANBI’s Threatened Species Programme
- IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature)
- Limpopo University botany department
- Mazda Wildlife Fund for their continued sponsorship of project vehicles
- National Lottery
- SANBI-Goldfields education directorate University of the Western Cape biodiervity conservation faculty
- WESSA, DELTA, SANParks, City of Cape Town and Eco-Schools programme for distribution of school material through their networks

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Membership, conservation and education continue to be key areas of focus for BotSoc with a view to ensuring growth in members and relevance in the national conservation agenda. In pursuit of these aims, we had a busy 12 months. Some of the highlights from 2011 include:

CREW

BotSoc continued to support the SANBI Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers (CREW) programme in the Cape Floristic Region (CFR) as well as the Summer Rainfall Region. CREW enables a network of volunteers to monitor and conserve threatened plant species. There are now 22 CREW volunteer groups operating across the country. Highlights of 2011 included the training of young botanists at the universities of KwaZulu-Natal and Zululand and the Durban University of Technology and the partnership between CREW and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to conserve critical sites for the conservation of plants through the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme. This work has now led to a separate BotSoc project funded by the international Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF). BotSoc also facilitated the employment of Israel Johnson in the CREW programme during 2011 to mentor Suvarna Pathibhoon with the skills required to run the programme in KwaZulu-Natal. Suvarna has now been appointed as the manager of this region. Special thanks also to one of our members (who wishes to remain anonymous) who has undertaken to single-handedly meet the operating expenses for the Cape
ultimately introducing environmental Sciences educators in the FET sector and the goal of building capacity among Life by BotSoc and spanned three years, with keynote address on the work of Biodiversity Environmental Education Conference in at SANBI, Roleen Ellman, attended the Assistant Director of Biodiversity Education German learnings the Forest, in order to further education Loedolff did the artwork, were re-printed funding from the National Lottery. The free at schools across the country with books were printed and distributed for BotSoc’s educational posters and work-International Year of the Forest BotSoc’s posters celebrate International Year of the Forest BotSoc’s educational posters and work- books were printed and distributed for free at schools across the country with funding from the National Lottery. The Forest and Fynbos Bione posters and practicing for which Jeanette Loedolff did the artwork, were re-printed in celebration of the International Year of the Forest, in order to further education and awareness of our national treasures German learnings Assistant Director M. & Biodiversity Education and the Empowerment Directorate at SANBI, Roleen Eillman, attended the Environmental Education Conference in October 2011 to deliver a keynote address on the work of Biodiversity Education Directorate, of which the BotSoc Further Education and Training (FET) project was a part. The project was funded by BotSoc and spanned three years, with the goal of building capacity among Life Sciences educators in the FET sector and ultimately introducing environmental action projects into the curriculum. Phakamani Xaba’s articles in Veld & Flora on traditionally useful plants were used in the workshops to good effect. Science and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (SKIS) BotSoc supported the SKISP conference at the University of the Western Cape by providing free issues of Veld & Flora and Wild Flowers of the Table Mountain National Park to delegates. The material was well received, particularly the articles on traditionally-useful plants by Phakamani Xaba, which were also used as work cards. BotSoc supports IUCN regional forum BotSoc sponsored the Green Pavilion at the IUCN’s Regional Conference on Indicators in Gauteng in September 2011. The Pavilion was dressed up in indigenous plants and trees that were later donated to a school in the area. The forum was organized by the IUCN in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries, the garden of Environmental Education at the African Forest Forum with support from the Australian government, with the aim of bringing together governments, organizations, and communities in the cause of conservation. Campaigning around the world The IUCN SA members’ committee’s meeting was held on 3 May 2012 in Gauteng. The main item on the agenda was the list of motions to be tabled at the next World Conservation Congress (WCC) in South Korea from 6-16 September. The BotSoc co-sponsored two motions drafted by IUCN-SA members: We supported the call for a global policy action on rhino and elephant poaching as indicators of the state of poaching, and the Department of Environmental Affairs on discussions for an International Panel on Biodiversity for Ecosystem Payments. Conservation in action The CEEP funding for the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Stewardship Project in partnership with BotSoc, the Wildlands Conservation and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife was approved and the two-year project commenced in October 2011. The biodiversity stewardship programme supports landowners who allocate land to biodiversity conservation and sustainable practices. EKZN Wildlife proclaimed five new sites during 2011, of which is the 7 000 ha Umqalo...