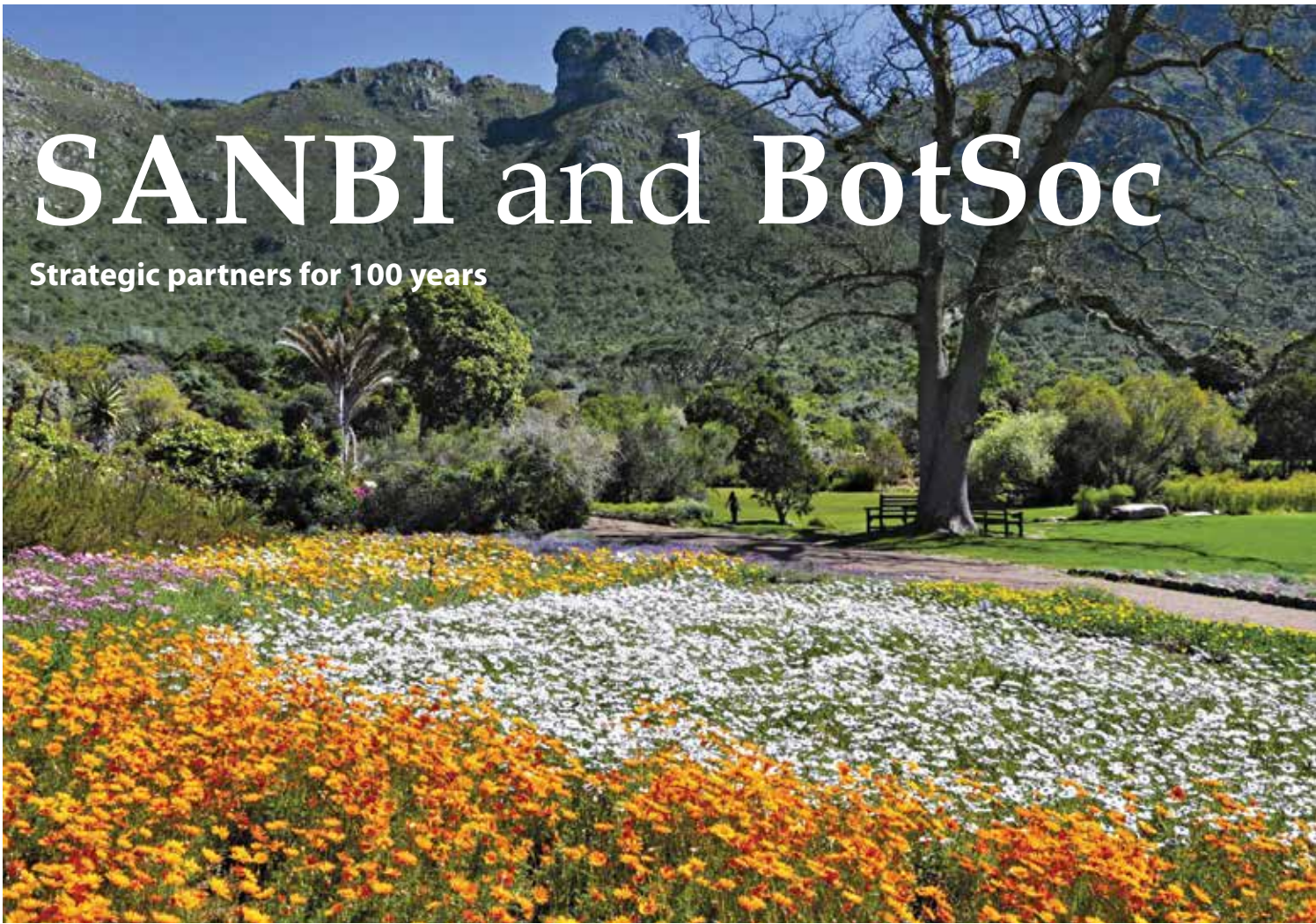


SANBI and BotSoc

Strategic partners for 100 years



ABOVE: The spring annual display at Kirstenbosch. Photo: Alice Notten.

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Much has been written and documented regarding the history and association between the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and its predecessors – the National Botanic Gardens (NBG) and the National Botanical Institute (NBI) – and South Africa’s oldest environmental non-governmental organization, the Botanical Society of South Africa (BotSoc), since they were established within weeks of one another in 1913. For the latest and most up-to-date review of Kirstenbosch, consult the book *Kirstenbosch the most beautiful garden in Africa* by Prof. Brian Huntley.

The meticulous records and details of events, activities and experimental research that took place in Kirstenbosch in its formative years were regularly documented and published in both annual reports and successive editions of the *Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*. Having been established in the same year, SANBI and BotSoc’s relationship over the past 100 years could be described as both symbiotic and mutualistic, with each organization supporting one other in so many different ways, and both evolving and adapting to changes and challenges experienced over the decades. Successive Directors of Kirstenbosch, in their annual reports, regularly mentioned the important role and valuable assistance rendered by the Botanical Society and its members to the functioning and development of Kirstenbosch and other SANBI-managed gardens and estates.

Early years

In the early, formative years of Kirstenbosch and the Botanical Society there was a very close relationship between the two organizations, both being based in Cape Town, with the Botanical Society of South Africa nominating a member (Mr W. Duncan Baxter faithfully represented BotSoc for almost 45 years from 1913–1958) onto the Board of Trustees of the National Botanic Gardens, and the Society allocating an annual grant to assist in the operations of Kirstenbosch. As new gardens were established (the Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden in 1921 and the Harold Porter National Botanical Garden in 1959), the Botanical Society expanded its support to them.

1960s to 1980s

Following the Golden Jubilee celebrations associated with Kirstenbosch’s fiftieth anniversary in 1963, several new National

Botanical Gardens were established by Prof. Brian Rycroft, the third, and first South African-born, Director of the National Botanic Gardens. These gardens included the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Lowveld and Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens. As these new gardens were established in major urban centres of the country, the Botanical Society established new branches to support the operations of the new NBGs. In his book *Kirstenbosch, Garden for a Nation* (1965), Prof. Compton indicated the following: ‘After the Government ... the Botanical Society has (from 1913 to 1960/61) been the second largest contributor to the funds of the National Botanic Gardens: it has faithfully followed the condition originally laid down by Government in 1913 that the support of the public must also be enlisted.’



ABOVE: Where it all started. Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, nestled below the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, was the site where SANBI and BotSoc began their 100 year-old relationship in 1913. Photo: The Aerial Perspective.

The Kirstenbosch Development Campaign

With the amalgamation of the National Botanic Gardens (NBG) and Botanical Research Institute (BRI) to form the National Botanical Institute (NBI) effective as from 1 April 1989, the 1990s brought significant change to the organization. The role of the Botanical Society (its Kirstenbosch Branch in particular) and its members in supporting the Kirstenbosch Development Campaign, championed by the new NBI CEO, Prof. Brian Huntley, appointed in January 1990, has been recorded in much detail in past editions of *Veld & Flora* as well as in the Botanical Society's special publication produced to mark its ninetieth anniversary in 2003. During the period from 1991 to 2005, funds amounting to over R65 million had been raised (from government, BotSoc, private and corporate sponsors and donors) for specific development projects in Kirstenbosch – including improved staff facilities, a Kirstenbosch Research Centre (KRC), Conservatory, Visitors' Centre, Restaurant, modern greenhouse facilities and a new Centre for Home Gardening – and enabled the Garden to reach a position by 2007 where the income generated by the Garden, from increased admissions and rentals, exceeded the Garden's total expenditure – for the first time in its history.

The role of BotSoc and dynamic personalities associated with the Society and its Kirstenbosch Branch were instrumental in realizing the success of the Kirstenbosch Development Campaign, the benefits of which are still being felt by the Garden and SANBI today. Important management philosophies followed by Kirstenbosch from the 1990s till the present day, which have been adopted by other NBGs across South Africa, have been well described by Prof. Huntley in his book on Kirstenbosch. Firstly 'the more diverse one's products are, the more customers one can attract; and the higher the quality of one's services, the better chance one has of succeeding', and secondly 'a diversity of partners brings with it a diversity of new friends, supporters and active users of the Garden'. Diversity and



ABOVE: The Botanical Society Conservatory in Kirstenbosch was a major project undertaken by the Botanical Society, with the support of many friends of the Garden, which enabled the Garden to grow and display a range of succulents in a more protected environment. Photo: Alice Notten.

quality of products offered and strategic partnerships, with a variety of partners, are critical factors required for the success of all SANBI's national botanical gardens.

The new millennium

Whilst the first few years of the new millennium were spent on completing and implementing the new facilities developed during the late 1990s, the mid-2000s brought expansion to SANBI's mandate through the promulgation of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) in 2004, as well as significant changes to corporate governance regulations and guidelines applicable, not only to government departments, but also to public entities and non-profit organizations, such as BotSoc. With BotSoc



ABOVE: The Olive May Porter Bridge (foreground) in the Harold Porter National Botanical Garden, Betty's Bay, was built in 1967 and restored with funds sponsored by the Botanical Society in 1998. BotSoc has sponsored the restoration of several other bridges in the Garden since the 1990s. Photo: Christopher Willis.

no longer represented on the SANBI Board (where in the past many of the joint SANBI/BotSoc projects and activities had been discussed, approved and monitored), it became necessary to establish a formal co-operation agreement between the two organizations. 2010 saw the formulation and joint signing of a structured and formalized Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between SANBI as a public entity and BotSoc as a membership-based non-profit organisation.

The Botanical Society/NBI Development Fund, which had been used so successfully during the 1990s, was transformed into the Botanical Society/SANBI Partnership Fund, still used extensively to support critical projects and garden-based developments across all NBGs today. Through the MoU, BotSoc's support expanded to SANBI's Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers (CREW), an *in situ* plant conservation project linked to SANBI's Threatened Species Programme, and to supporting education, marketing and awareness projects jointly with SANBI.

The close association between SANBI and BotSoc has also been realised in the joint participation and involvement of both organisations in the 2013 Centenary celebrations, not only in Kirstenbosch but indeed across all NBGs and BotSoc branches countrywide.

Celebrating the unsung heroes

When one reads through the annals and historical records of SANBI and BotSoc, what comes through time and time again is the huge commitment and contributions (through time and/or financial donations and bequests) made by many BotSoc members (e.g. volunteers, guides, donors) countrywide towards the operations

and collections of both the NBGs and research centres across SANBI. The tireless commitment of BotSoc members across South Africa and common vision of both SANBI and BotSoc is something that makes the relationship between the two organisations so special and significant, and has enabled both organisations to remain relevant 100 years after they were established.

2013 and beyond

Building on the long and mutually beneficial relationship that has so far endured for 100 years, the outlook for both SANBI and BotSoc into the next few decades is very positive, with joint commitment at the highest level in both organizations to promoting collaboration, growing and diversifying membership of BotSoc, expanding the

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ABOVE: CREW (Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers) volunteers conducting a bioblitz in the Umtamvuna Nature Reserve, southern KwaZulu-Natal. Photo: Domitilla Raimondo.

network and support for South Africa's national botanical gardens, improving the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems with their associated plants, animals and ecological interactions. BotSoc will continue to be there to support SANBI in realizing its mission – to champion the exploration, conservation, sustainable use, appreciation and enjoyment of South Africa's exceptionally rich biodiversity for all people.

Whilst the details may have changed over the past 100 years, the essence of the visionary public/private partnership established in 1913 between SANBI and BotSoc has remained consistent and relevant. 🌱

READING

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