The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 20th May 2025: Notice of meeting #1371

Founded 1894

Visit our website at www.owls.org.za for current notice, back notices, Constitution (as amended 2021), In Memoriam 1894-2023, list of members and more.

Committee 2025/2026

President: Mike James

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Treasurer: Richard Morris

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The Owl Club, Standard Bank of South Africa

A/c no. 071 818 006

Bank branch code: 051 001

This month's edition:

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Drawings: Tony Grogan, Peter Hyslop, and Sheila Camerer

Dear Fellow Owls

The 1371st meeting of The Owl Club, preceded by dinner, will be held on Tuesday 20th May 2025, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start, in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club.

Chairman: **President Owl Mike James**

Guest speaker: **Jonathan Jansen,** on the topic of: ***"Why Working-Class Schools fail Working Class Children***"

"Jonathan Jansen is Distinguished Professor of Education at Stellenbosch University and the immediate past President of the Academy of Science of South Africa. He started his career as a high school Biology teacher in the Cape and holds a PhD from Stanford as well as four honorary doctorates, and is a widely-published author."

Music: **Trombonist Peter Worthington-Smith and Fellow Musicians**

"Owls can look forward to a musical programme with a bit of a difference. The youthful ensemble arranged by trombonist Peter Worthington-Smith will present a brass quintet playing a varied programme of musical arrangements for a combination of trumpets, French horn, trombone and tuba."

WPB: **Owl Ron Duff** on the topic of: **"*The International River Rats – 1995*"**

"Owl Ron Duff will talk on his white-water rafting trip on the Colorado River, throughout the entire length of the Grand Canyon, Arizona, USA."

Dinner price: R350. PLEASE NOTE THE NEW PRICE.

Dress: Black tie (or similarly elegant attire).

RESERVATIONS & PAYMENTS:

Any Owl who does not have internet access is welcome to telephone the Secretary Bird at 082 440 8204 or 021 671 3121 to book a perch.

All other Owls are encouraged to use the Pay'n Perch procedure by paying their (and their guest's) dining fee into the Club's bank account by EFT and instructing the bank (using the option provided) to send a remittance confirmation email to secretary@owls.org.za whereupon their perches will be booked.

Besides details of your invited guests (see above), no further emails will be needed from you unless you also have special dietary needs or if you are using a dining credit.

In all cases, bookings will close at 6:00 pm on Sunday 18th May 2025.

All bookings will be acknowledged.

The April 2025 Meeting

On Tuesday, 22nd April, 63 Owls and 28 guests gathered in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove, Newlands for the 1370th Meeting of the Owl Club. The proceedings started at 06:45 pm, with President Owl Mike James welcoming all and Owl Geoff Davies delivering the Grace. This was followed by a three-course dinner (see page 12 for the menu). The President then asked Owls to charge their glasses and to rise for the Toast to South Africa, followed by a short break.

Owl President Mike James then extended a warm welcome to the guest speakers, Andrew Darwin and Eduardo Villouta Stengl, and special guests, Lucy Darwin, who came to South Africa with her husband, members of the *Darwin200* Project and all other guests of Owls for the evening. The President then asked Owls to charge their glasses and to rise for the Toast to the Guests.

Owl President Mike James then congratulated Owls celebrating birthdays in April. Those birthday Owls who were not present that evening were Angel Tordesillas, John Webb, Neil Veitch, Roger Stewart, Kit Vaughan, Leon de Wet, Brian Robertson, and Duncan Greaves. Those birthday Owls who were present at the meeting included Geoff Davies, Bruce Dietrich, Mickey Lowther, Paul Murray and Julian Wannell.

Owl President Mike James then invited the guest speaker, Andrew Darwin, the great, great grandson of the naturalist Charles Darwin, to address the assembled Owls and guests on his topic: *On the Nature of Curiosity.*

After the address, Owl President Mike James thanked Andrew Darwin for his insightful talk and presented him with a bottle of port. Following this, Owl David Little introduced the first set of the music programme for the evening: Bernhard Henrik Crusell's *Quartet for Clarinet and Strings*, *Op 4*, in C Minor.

After the musical interlude, Owl President Mike James thanked all the musicians, David Little, Jane Price, Jessica Scott, Karin Gaertner and Lucia Di Blasio Scott.

Following the bar interval, the assembly returned to enjoy the second set of the music programme, a performance of Antonín Leopold Dvořák's *String Quartet No. 12 In F Major*, *Op 96* (*The American*).

At the conclusion of the performance, Owl President Mike James thanked the performers and then introduced the second guest speaker, Eduardo Villouta Stengl, a senior member of the *Darwin200* team.

Having thanked Eduardo for his presentation on the topic: *The Role of Volunteers in the Darwin 200 Project*, Owl President Mike James invited Owls and their guests to raise their glasses in a Toast to the Owl Club, following which the President wished all a safe flight home.

Guest Speaker: Andrew Darwin: “On the Nature of Curiosity”

Andrew Darwin, the great, great grandson of Charles, delivered a most entertaining speech, delving into the multifaceted theme of curiosity, weaving personal anecdotes, scientific exploration and historical perspectives to illustrate how humankind’s curiosity about the world has had a profound impact on human progress. Starting with the unveiling of Charles Darwin’s bust in South Africa, Andrew recounted Darwin’s monumental journey aboard the *Beagle*, shedding light on the complexities of his experiences and their transformative effect on his scientific outlook.

Darwin's voyage was presented as an emblematic “gap year” of exploration, rich with intellectual and physical challenges.

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Andrew Darwin.*

Andrew captured the arduous conditions aboard the *Beagle*, including Darwin's cramped quarters and the ship’s notoriety for poor handling and instability, tempered by Fitzroy's modifications. He vividly painted Darwin’s encounters with diverse landscapes and cultures across the globe, from Brazil to the Galapagos, unveiling a tapestry of observation and discovery that defined his work. These travels not only shaped Darwin’s theories but also underscored his profound curiosity and persistence.

Andrew Darwin emphasized the significance of collaboration highlighted through Darwin’s interactions with figures such as Sir John Herschel, whose bold scientific methodologies deeply influenced Darwin’s approach. Herschel’s philosophy of forming and testing hypotheses, rather than relying solely on amassing observations, resonated with Darwin and became a cornerstone of his investigations. This methodology, exemplified by Kepler’s work, emerges as a pivotal theme in understanding “meaningful curiosity” – a curiosity directed toward challenging existing paradigms and generating new insights.

The broader discussion expanded to include historical examples of curiosity-driven progress, such as Anaximander’s early cosmological theories, which bear striking similarities to contemporary understandings of the universe. The interplay of observation, interrogation, and hypothesis formulation is presented as a timeless approach to unravelling mysteries and advancing knowledge.

Andrew further explored the role of circumstances in enabling curiosity. Examples include Darwin’s privileged background, which afforded him opportunities for exploration, and the accessibility of communication and transportation in the 19th century, which facilitated the exchange of ideas and specimens. This interconnectedness is likened to modern scientific collaboration, underscoring the enduring importance of shared knowledge and collective inquiry.

Andrew outlined Darwin's meticulous recording methods, connecting the act of observation to the shaping of conclusions. The speaker recounted a personal anecdote about discovering one of Darwin's microscopes, emphasizing the tangible connection to his legacy and the evolution of recording techniques. The shift from analog methods to electronic data collection and analysis prompts reflection on how technology influences scientific conclusions, exemplified by contemporary discoveries like the potential signs of life on distant planets.

Andrew also touched on the human element of curiosity, from serendipitous encounters to the drive for exploration. Stories of Darwin's return home and references to popular culture, such as Ted Lasso's emphasis on curiosity, reinforce the idea that curiosity is not only a scientific virtue but a universal mindset.

In concluding, Andrew celebrated curiosity as a force for progress, urging the Owls to embrace it in their own pursuits. By intertwining personal, historical, and scientific threads, he painted curiosity as a timeless and transformative aspect of the human experience.

Above left: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Andrew Darwin.*

Above right : Andrew Darwin (assisted by sculptor Johan Steyn) at the official unveiling of the Darwin bust on Simon's Town Jetty.

Below right : The bronze bust of Darwin by sculptor Johan Steyn, now permanently displayed on Simon's Town Jetty.

Musical Notes: Lucia di Blasio's String Quartet: "Works by Bernhard Henrik Crusell and Antonín Leopold Dvořák"

The musical programme for the evening was presented and performed by leading Cape Town string players under the direction of Lucia di Blasio Scott, with our own Owl David Little, on clarinet), the theme for the evening being that of exploration and discovery.

The first set was a performance of the work of Bernhard Henrik Crusel (1775 – 1838), the *Quartet for Clarinet and Strings, Op 4, in C Minor.* Specifically, the four movements: *Allegro molto agitato – Menuetto – Pastorale un poco allegretto – Allegro.*

Crusell was a Finnish clarinettist and composer, and one of the leading virtuosos of his time. Almost an exact contemporary of Ludwig van Beethoven, Crusell studied in Germany and at the Paris Conservatory, and was a frequent soloist on concert stages. He took up residency in Stockholm, where he was the principal clarinettist of the Royal Court Orchestra for forty years, from 1793-1833.

Crusell's superb writing for the clarinet was founded in his own supreme mastery of the instrument, earning him a reputation around Europe as a great virtuoso.

The second set was a performance of the work of Antonín Leopold Dvořá (1841 – 1904), specifically the *String Quartet No. 12 in F major*, *Op 96 (The American*). The four movements: *Allegro ma non troppo – Lento – Molto vivace – Finale: vivace ma no troppo.*

Dvořák was born in a village near Prague in what is now the Czech Republic. Along with Smetana and Janacek, he is one of three famous composers who wrote nationalist Czech music. From 1892 to 1895, Dvořák was the director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Dvořák was interested in the music of black Americans, which was to profoundly influence his own compositions.

Dvořák met the student Harry T. Burleigh, one of the earliest African-American composers, who introduced him to traditional American Spirituals.

In the winter and spring of 1893, while in New York, Dvořák wrote his most popular work, the *New World Symphony (No 9)*. He spent the summer of 1893 with his family in the Czech-speaking community of Spillville, Iowa, where some of his cousins lived. He also composed chamber music there, including the quartet being heard this evening, the *String Quartet in F ,* which is known as the *American*, and a Sonatina for Violin and Piano.

Above: Peter Hyslop, *Drawing of Lucia di Blasio's String Quartet (& Owl David Little on Clarinet).* From left to right: Karin Gaertner, Jessica Scott and David Little. In the foreground with her back to the viewer, Lucia Di Blasio-Scott. Not in the picture, Jane Price (see drawing overleaf).

Biographical Notes

Italian born Lucia Di Blasio -Scott started her performing career at the age of six in Sanremo (Italy). Lucia was one of the youngest students to obtain a Violin Diploma with flying colours from the G. Verdi Conservatoire in Turin, at age eighteen.

Seeking new horizons, in 1983 she auditioned in Vienna for a position in the Natal Philharmonic Orchestra and subsequently moved to Durban where she soon was promoted to Vice-Principal First Violin.

Lucia has been in Cape Town since 1993. She was a Principal in the CTSO as well as the CTPO.

Jane Price was born in Cape Town and started the violin with Isabel Arzul at age 9. She had always wanted to be a musician and has successfully followed her career as a performer, teacher and composer. Her studies have been extensive, starting at the South African College of music, where she achieved her degree with distinction in 2005, majoring in both performance and composition. She is also a fully qualified Audio Engineer and uses a multitude of her skills to produce an eclectic and original musical style.

Karin Gaertner was a member of the former Cape Town Symphony Orchestra for many years and then principal violist of the former Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra prior to its closure. Her studies include a BSc from University of Cape Town and a Performer's Diploma from the conservatoire Claudio Monteverdi in Italy, as well as various master classes attended in Europe.

Jessica Scott. Third born into a family of musicians, Jessica absorbed music from the word go and started learning the cello and the piano at age 5. While in junior school she was selected twice to perform in the Hubert Van der Spuy National Competition. She was a recipient of the Herschel Scholarship and of the Coke Music Foundation Bursary, and completed he BMus degree at the South African College of Music with distinction in cello, chamber music and ensemble performance.

Above left: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Lucia Di Blasio-Scott.*

Above: Peter Hyslop, *Drawing of Jane Price in performance with Lucia di Blasio's String Quartet .*

Second Guest Speaker: Eduardo Villouta Stengl: "The Role of Volunteers in the Darwin 200 Project"

Eduardo Villouta Stengl – who described himself as a ChileKiwi, having been born and educated in Chile but then worked first in academe as a marine biologist and then in government in New Zealand – and who in retirement had landed what he described as a dream job as part of the *Darwin200* project, combining his two passions, sailing and the imperative of caring for the environment – gave an entertaining account of this role and the role of volunteers in the *Darwin200* project.

The idea started with Stuart MacPherson whose vison it was to go round the world training young conservation leaders who would share the urgency and the recognition that change would require the commitment of many generations. A pilot voyage before Covid kick started the project, which was about adventure, change and interesting young people in change. The link with the tall ship the *Oosterschelde* – a national monument of the Netherlands – had been important to its success.

Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Eduardo Villouta Stengl.*

Starting in 2023 in Plymouth (as had Darwin's *HMS Beagle*) and tracing the *Beagle's* voyage, the project had recruited selected young leaders in every port. The ship was now in Cape Town on its homeward voyage.

The volunteers were young men and women between 18 and 25 who had demonstrated passion and long-term commitment and had a record of singular achievement. Each was placed in a port to learn about specific conservation problems, to understand the problem, what was being done to address it, get out into the field, and bring their own conclusions as to how to go about the issues.

Working with a camera operator, each selected volunteer has the task of making three short (6 to 7 minute) films, presenting the 1st by the end of the first, intense week – and Eduardo gave us a sense of how intense this week was – and the 2nd and 3rd by the end of the month. The hope, which he believed the *Darwin200* project had realised, was that at the end of their short time on the project, each volunteer would go home empowered to play a part in changing the world. It was, he said, a project of hope of which he was proud to be a part.

Members' News

Increase in the Dinner Fee

For Owls who may have missed this. The Committee has increased the dinner fee to R350 with immediate effect from R320.This is the first increase in three years and follows a significant increase in Kelvin's pricing. The Club is able to subsidise the dinner fee and thus limit the increase.

The Moulting Fund

Owls are reminded of the Moulting Fund; this fund (to which Owls contribute voluntarily, and which now has a reasonable reserve) exists to ensure that Owls who are unable to afford the full dinner fee are able to continue to enjoy the fellowship of the Parliament. The moulting fund pays part – usually a significant part – of the dinner fee for Owls in this position. This is done with discretion. If you know of any Owl who is no longer booking his or her perch because he or she cannot afford the dinner fee but would otherwise perch please let the Fiscal Shrike or the Secretary Bird know and be assured that the matter will be handled with the necessary discretion.

Three new Owls

The Committee has been pleased to elect the following to membership of the Club

Penny Brown (Proposed Owls Everingham & Bruton: Science)

Guy Preston (Proposed Owls Everingham & Amoore: Science)

Julian Pino (Proposed Owls Lindhorst & Hess: Art)

We look forward to their induction in the near future (and to the induction of recently elected owl Leighton Ashmead).

Scribes

In recent years, the Sociable Weaver has published the text of talks and WPBs in the Notice; this of course depends on the submission of text by the speaker or the Owl filling the WPB, and that does not always happen. In order to give a full account of meetings where a speaker does not submit (or have) a written speech, we need scribes who will write a report on the talk or WPB, for publication in the Notice as a record of what was said. This was in fact standard practice for many years, and it was rare for the Notice to contain the verbatim text of a talk or WPB. (This Notice in fact contains a report on the 2nd talk at the April meeting – as the speaker spoke without notes and without a prepared text.) If you would like to undertake this task (we envisage a roster of three or four Owls who will do this as and when needed) please contact the Secretary Bird (secretary@owls.org.za) or the Familiar Chat (Owl Nigel Gwynne Evans nigel@edasolutions.co.za).

Owl Club Accessories (at the present largely for men! But that will change too)

The Committee has placed an order for new stocks of Owl Club clothing – self tie and pre-tied bow ties, cummerbunds, and waistcoats). These items have bene out of stock for some time and, sensing demand form both newer and long-serving members, Owl Pual Murray has found a supplier able to make the owl-club patterned cloth from which these are to be made up. We hope to have delivery by mid-year. So, watch this space. For obvious reasons, the initial order will be limited: we cannot afford to sit with unsold stock. Selling process will be announced as soon as the order is received. Enquiries to Owl Paul Murray.

The Appointment of Owls as Honorary Life Members

The distinction of being appointed as Honorary Life Members is limited to 15 at any one time and is not lightly given. The Committee has decided to appoint two Owls to be *Honorary Life Members*, Owen Kinahan and Mike Bruton.

Darwin Display

In order to add lustre to the themed Owl Club dinner on Tuesday, 20th April 2025, Owl Mike Bruton mounted an interesting display on Charles Darwin, *HMS Beagle* and the Dutch tall ship, *Oosterschelde*, which is the flagship of the *Darwin200* project.

The first display table (see below) included the clay maquette of a young Charles Darwin created by Johan Steyn The maquette was tantalizingly displayed inside a metal bird cage to symbolize the "thought prison" from which Darwin had to es-

cape in order to propose his revolutionary *Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection*. This table also displayed the silicon mould and fibre glass cast used to cast the bronze bust of Darwin as well as miniatures of the bronze bust and examples of some of Steyn's other metal sculptures.

The second table (see above) featured a scale model of *HMS Beagle* made by Bob Harrison of Simon's Town together with historical navigational aids used at the time of the voyage of *Beagle*, including a ship's chronometer and sextant (on loan from Rear-Admiral [ret.] Arné Söderland) and a sympesiometer (accurate horizontal barometer) on loan from the South African Astronomical Observatory courtesy of Owl Ian Glass. Owl Ian also arranged the loan of the flare pistol that was fired at noon during the 1830s from the Royal Astronomical Observatory and the remarkable pair of telescopic binoculars that were used by the Astronomer Royal, Sir Thomas Maclear, at the time of Darwin's visit to the Cape.

The second table also included displays on *Oosterschelde* and an original flag from the Explorers Club of New York that the tall ship is carrying around the world.

An artistic touch was added to the exhibition by Owl Dirk Durnez and his stable of artists from the Art@Africa gallery who displayed 12 stunning artworks on the theme of *Art of Evolution, Evolution of Art*.

Of Interest to Owls

Why is the Chat so Familiar?

Before humans inhabited South Africa, the familiar chat, *Oenanthe Familiaris*, like many flycatchers, lived in rocky and mountainous habitats where it fed on insects and fruit. It has since become a frequent visitor to human habitations. What is the reason for this change in behaviour? A clue can be found in the Afrikaans name for the bird, *spekvreter* (fat eater).

When the Voortrekkers set off on their Great Trek in 1835, they used animal fat to grease the wheels and axles of their ox-wagons. Familiar chats took a liking to the lard and accompanied the Boers into the interior, eventually becoming friendly inhabitants of gardens and farms where they feed on household and farmyard scraps.

Mike Bruton

The Familiar Chat (Oenanthe Familiaris)

Excursion to Dutch Tall Ship the *Oostereschelde*

Nine Owls and their guests, led by Owl President Mike James, participated in an excursion to the Dutch tall ship, *Oosterschelde* on Thursday, 24th April 2025. *Oosterschelde*, which was built in The Netherlands in 1918, is the flag ship of the *Darwin200* project and is retracing the route of *HMS Beagle's* famous voyage from 1831 to 1836. The tall ship visited Cape Town in April 2025 to participate in Darwin celebratory events. The Owls were joined on the excursion by members of the Cape Town Heritage Foundation and the Ship Society.

During the excursion the Owls toured the upper deck of the tall ship and then heard talks in the sumptuous, wood-lined saloon below decks by Captain Bernd and Darwin200 co-leader Eduardo about the ship and the Darwin200 project. *Oosterschelde* is the largest, fully restored Dutch tall ship with a length of 50 m and a main mast 36 m tall. At each port of call *Darwin Leaders* (young researchers recruited by the *Darwin200* team) carry out biodiversity conservation projects with local experts.

Mike Bruton

Above: Owls on an excursion to the Dutch schooner the *Oosterschelde*, flagship of the *Darwin200* project.

Seen & Noted at the April Meeting

Above: (clockwise) Guests Fritha Langerman and Eduardo Villouta Stengl, Owl Geoff Davies, guest Andrew Darwin, Owl President Mike James, guests Lucy Darwin and Andy Buffler, Owl Hugh Amoore.

Above: (clockwise) Owls JP van Niekerk and Martin Hess, guest Philip Todres, Owls Dirk Durnez, Mickey Lowther and Joe Tyrrell.

The Owl Club
Tuesday 22nd April 2025
The 1370th Meeting

President: Owl Mike James
Dinner @ 6.45 pm
Grace: Owl Geoff Hughes
Dinner:
Toast: South Africa: The Owl President
A break for the tables to be cleared

The 1370th

Announcements: The Owl President
Toast to our guests: The Owl President
Talk: Andrew Darwin: On the nature of curiosity
Music 1st Set: Quartet for Clarinet & Strings by Crusell
Bar Break
Music 2nd set: String quartet ("The American") by Dvořák
Talk: Rolf Schreuder, The Darwin 200 Project and why it matters

Toast: The Owl Club,
And a safe flight home

KG
KELVIN GROVE

The Owl Club
Tuesday, 22nd April 2025

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Starter
Curried Butternut Soup

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Main Course
Chicken Ballotine
served with baby potatoes, seasonal vegetables and mushroom sauce

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Dessert
Mixed fruit crumble
Served with cream

***

Filter Coffee

Food for thought:
Our guests talk tonight is on the nature of curiosity.
"Curiouser and curiouser"
Owls will recognise this from Wonderland, but perhaps not Alice's reply to the caterpillar:
" Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle."