



The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 21st July 2026: Notice of meeting #1384

Founded 1894

www.owls.org.za

Committee 2026/2027

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*IPP: Immediate Past President

*HA: Honourary Auditor

Dear Fellow Owls,

We look forward to your warm owlsh company for our 1384th meeting of The Owl Club, preceded by dinner and will be held on: Tuesday 21st July 2026, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start. In the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club, Cape Town.



Guest speaker

Brian Ingpen : Union-Castle Memories

"Remembered by thousands, Union-Castle ships played an important role in the economy of South Africa. All that is a mere memory, but Brian Ingpen's presentation will rekindle much nostalgia associated with Union-Castle and its ships once familiar sights in Dockland."

Music

Isaac van der Merwe : A Programme of Piano Music

JS Bach Chorale (arrangement by Busoni), Berg Sonata op. 1 ,
Rachmaninoff Variations on a Theme by Corelli op. 42 ."

"Issac van der Merwe is a celebrated and sought-after young South African pianist and composer, currently pursuing an Honours in Performance from UCT, before heading back to Europe to further his studies at the end of the year."

Waste Paper Basket (WPB)

Owl Martin Brossy: The Evolution of the Hippocratic Oath

Dinner fee: R380 Dress: Black tie (or similarly elegant attire).

Reservations & Payments: Owls are asked to use the Pay'n Perch procedure. It is essential to send booking confirmation email to secretary@owls.org.za with the following: **(1)** Your name / names of guest/s **(2)** Your or your guest's special dietary needs **(3)** If you are using a dining credit. In all cases, bookings will close at 6:00 pm on Sunday prior to Tuesdays meeting. Feel welcome to ask any questions to the Secretary Bird. All bookings will be acknowledged.



June 2026 Meeting



On Tuesday, 16th June 2026, 61 Owls and 8 guests gathered in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove, Newlands for the 1383rd Meeting of the Owl Club. The proceedings started at 18:45, with Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans welcoming all and Owl Grant Tarr delivering the Grace. This was followed by a three-course dinner (see page 11 for the menu).

Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans then congratulated the sixteen Owls who all celebrated their birthdays in June: Leighton Ashmead, Henk Beets, Penny Brown, Doc Caldwell, Roger Cleaver, Brian de Kock, Ian Farlam, Peter Gilchrist, Rory Gilmore, Rick Haw, Jeremy Lawrence, Rudi le Roux, Dan Ncayiyana, Julian Pino, Guy Preston and Peter Sutherland.

Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans then acknowledged Owl Dennis Nick who departed for a higher perch. Owl Dennis, a father, husband and philanthropist passed away at the age of 91. Known for his exceptional generosity and enduring philosophy to "Spread Joy," Owl Dennis left a lasting legacy across several prominent South African institutions.

New Owl Debbie de Bastos, seconded by John Hund and Sheila Camerer was then (with due ceremony) inducted, welcomed into the fellowship and invited to dwell in harmony with fellow Owls.

Following the address, the Owl President thanked Chris Nicklin for his talk and Owl Julian Wannell introduced the first set of the music programme for the evening, presented by Tertia Visser Downie (piano) Violina Anguelov-Hobbs (soprano).

After the first musical interlude, there was a bar interval, and then the assembly returned to enjoy the second set of the music programme. At the conclusion of the performance, the Owl President thanked Tertia Visser- Downie and Violina Anguelov - Hobbs for their contribution to the evening's entertainment.



After this, Owl Penny Brown presented her WPB on the topic of *Hoerikwaggo ... Some Ramblings on the Mountains and the Sea*.

Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans then thanked Owl Penny and, by way of concluding the meeting, he invited Owls and their guests to raise their glasses in a Toast to the Owl Club, and wished all a safe flight home.



Guest Speaker: Chris Nicklin: “Inside the Hive Mind: Honey Bee Intelligence and our Unique Cape Bee.”



Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Chris Nicklin.*

Chris Nicklin began his talk by thanking the Owl Club and Owl Medeé Rall for the invitation. He added a humorous note about being seated next to Grant Tar, who had recently suffered “80 stings, ... 50 for his wife” during a coastal hike, which made him momentarily apprehensive about how the evening might unfold. Chris Nicklin then introduced himself as a lifelong beekeeper, having started in Cape Town in the late 1970s. After a period working in media, he returned to agriculture when a commercial beekeeping opportunity arose. He stressed that commercial beekeeping was not primarily about honey production; its essential role was pollination services. Around 50 food crops in South Africa depended on honeybee pollination, a fact he believed was under-appreciated by both the public and government. He noted that removing honeybee-pollinated foods from supermarket shelves left a scene “literally the Irish potato famine.”

Nicklin described the industry as under-regulated and often chaotic, recalling his efforts as chairman of the Bee Industry Association to professionalise and protect it. But he explained that his focus that evening was not on grievances; instead, he turned to the “astonishing honeybee.”

He reminded the audience that there were 20,000 bee species globally, but only one honeybee species, *Apis mellifera*, with about 30 subspecies.

The Western Cape was one of the few regions with its own indigenous honeybee: *Apis mellifera capensis*, the Cape honeybee.

This bee had co-evolved uniquely with the fynbos biome and was of immense scientific interest because of its extraordinary biological traits – most notably arrhenotokous parthenogenesis, which he jokingly called “a virgin birth you get to believe in now.”

In a typical hive, the queen was the sole egg-layer, producing up to 2,000 eggs per day. Nicklin emphasized that the hive was “a victory for feminism”, the queen did not rule; the worker females did. If the queen failed, workers replaced her. What made the Cape honeybee unique was that infertile worker bees could develop the ability to lay fertile eggs if the queen died. These eggs could produce a new queen capable of mating and continuing the colony. No other honeybee subspecies in the world possessed this trait.

Scientists had theorised that the Cape’s strong southeast winds might have driven this adaptation: queens on mating flights were often blown off course and lost, so workers evolved the ability to rescue the colony’s reproductive future.

The Cape honeybee also showed remarkable resilience to global honeybee diseases and pests. Nicklin cited American foulbrood, which appeared in the Western Cape in 2009, and Varroa mites, which had devastated beekeeping industries worldwide. Cape bees survived these threats far better than other subspecies, possibly because of the region’s large population of wild, unmanaged honeybees that co-existed with managed hives, strengthening genetic resilience.

He recounted a failed 1990s experiment in which beekeepers transported Cape bees north to hybridise with *Apis mellifera scutellata*, the African honeybee. Cape worker bees infiltrated northern hives, mimicked queens, and caused widespread collapse. Because of this, South Africa enforced a Bee Line separating Cape bees from northern bees



Moving Cape bees north was illegal – and attempting to export them to the United States could lead to “terrorism charges,” he noted, because of their disruptive reproductive biology.

Nicklin then shifted to honeybee intelligence. A honeybee brain was the size of a poppy seed, containing about one million neurons compared to the human brain’s 86 billion. Yet honeybees demonstrated extraordinary cognitive abilities. Modern technology and AI had enabled scientists to study these abilities more deeply over the past decade.

He distinguished instinct from cognition. Building hexagonal honeycomb was instinctive. He cited the 1999 proof of the Honeybee Theorem, which showed mathematically that hexagons were the most efficient way to divide a surface into equal areas with minimal perimeter – something bees had done for millennia without mathematics.

Honeybees also detected electrical charges. Flying objects accumulated positive charge; flowers carried negative charge. Bees sensed this instantly: a negatively charged flower contained nectar and pollen. Once a bee has fed, the flower becomes positively charged, signalling to other bees that it had been depleted.

Nicklin described the challenges of foraging. New foragers often struggled; flowers differed structurally, and bees had to decipher each plant’s “puzzle” to locate pollen. A single foraging trip could cover 10 km, involve 1,000–2,000 flowers, and yield only 40–50 mg of nectar – a demanding task for an insect weighing about 60 mg.

He then turned to honeybee communication. Since ancient Greece, observers had noticed bees performing dances. The Austrian scientist Karl von Frisch decoded these dances, especially the waggle dance, which communicated the direction, distance, and quality of food sources. Bees used the angle of the sun relative to the hive to orient their dance. A long waggle indicated distant forage; an enthusiastic waggle signalled abundance.

Nicklin noted that humans and honeybees were the only known creatures capable of abstract communication about remote locations. Bees could effectively say: “Leave the hive, go around the tree, over the hill, and you’ll find food.” He mentioned a current \$10 million global competition to decode animal languages, noting that while we knew whales communicated, we did not yet understand their messages.

He then discussed swarm intelligence. When a colony divided, thousands of bees clustered while scout bees searched for new nest sites. Scouts returned, performed waggle dances to advertise locations, and other bees inspected and evaluated them. Poor choices were rejected; overly enthusiastic scouts were “bumped” by dissenting bees. Ultimately, the entire swarm—perhaps 50,000 individuals—reached consensus. This collective decision-making was a sophisticated example of distributed intelligence.

Nicklin briefly mentioned research showing bees could perform facial recognition, solve puzzles, and learn complex tasks. Some scientists had become uneasy about the implications of honeybee intelligence and had stopped certain experiments. He described bees trained to detect dynamite and landmineswork halted in the early 2000s due to lack of drone technology, though bees had proved highly effective.

He then shifted to environmental threats. He recounted a wildfire that had swept through his Overberg farm at 60 km/h, endangering his 200 hives. The Western Cape, he explained, was paradoxically a poor beekeeping region despite its reliance on honeybees for agricultural pollination. There was insufficient natural forage to sustain the number of managed hives required for crop pollination. Climate change was altering flowering seasons; he had received a request for nectarine pollination in mid-winter, something previously unheard of.

Wildfires, drought, and habitat loss compounded the problem. Many beekeepers relied on mountain forage, which burned frequently.



Meanwhile, agricultural landscapes were increasingly converted into monocultures, which he described as “terrain [that] offered no food sustenance for the honey bee.” These areas appeared pastoral but were ecologically barren for pollinators.

South Africa’s two indigenous honeybee subspecies were not legally protected, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and habitat loss. Nicklin argued that if honeybees were used as agricultural workhorses, we needed to understand their intelligence and needs. Recent research showed that bees relied not only on waggle-dance information but also on landmarks, wooded areas, and natural features to navigate. Removing these features through monoculture farming undermined their ability to forage and survive.

He warned that prioritizing economics over ecology was self-defeating: without pollinators, agriculture collapsed. Protecting forage, habitat, and wild bee populations was essential. Understanding honeybee cognition and behaviour, he concluded, made us “better human beings, greater custodians of our natural world,” and helped safeguard the insects on which our food systems depended.



Above: Sheila Camerer, *Drawing of Chris Nicklin.*



Musical Notes:

**Tertia Visser –Downie (piano) and Vilina Anguelov-Hobbs soprano):
“Operatic Works and Popular Songs.”**



Owls and guests present at the meeting were treated to a performance by Tertia Visser-Downie and Violina Anguelov-Hobbs who joined forces to present an exciting programme full of passion, seduction, gypsies and a little bit of alcohol, with beautiful music by Bizet, Verdi, Dvorak, Schumann and more.

Violina Anguelov-Hobbs (mezzo-soprano) was born in Bulgaria. She obtained her Performer's Diploma in Opera with distinction as well as Honours Degree in Singing (First Class) from the University of Cape Town under voice teacher Sarita Stern. She has been awarded many prizes including the Adcock Ingram Music Prize, the Leonard Hall Memorial Prize and Erik Chisholm Prize. Apart from her vast repertoire of operatic roles, Violina has performed as a soloist with great success in and around South Africa. These have included all the major oratorio works by Mozart, Pergolesi, Vivaldi, Haydn, Handel, Elgar, Beethoven, JS Bach, Berlioz, Mendelssohn and Verdi amongst others.

Violina has worked as a soloist with numerous famous conductors including Dr. Barry Smith, Arnold Bosman, Chris Dowdeswell, Dr Donald Hunt, Richard Cock, Kamal Khan, Sebastian Lang-Lessing and Martin Panteleev, etc. She has also just had the great privilege to sing with the world renowned conductor Sir Richard Bonyngne.

Tertia Visser-Downie is an accomplished South African pianist who studied under national and international piano masters, John Antoniadis and London-based Martino Tirimo, after winning the prestigious Mabel Quick Overseas Scholarship. She regularly accompanies talented and award-winning musicians at various national and international competitions and concerts. In November 2016, she received her Fellowship from the Trinity College of Music, London. She has been organizing the very successful Erin Hall concert series since the beginning of 2014.



WPB: Owl Penny Brown: “Hoerikwaggo, Some Ramblings on the Mountains and the Sea”

Owl Penny chose to reflect on her life through the twin themes of the sea and the mountains. These natural forces had shaped her experiences, travels, and passions. She was born on Glen Avon, a historic farm in the Eastern Cape, once described by a Canadian doctor as the most beautiful farm in Africa. Childhood there was idyllic for Owl Penny. She and her siblings roamed freely through mountains, forests, rivers, and waterfalls. They ate wild berries, cooked hares in the veld, and returned home dirty, hungry and happy. Her mother taught them to row on a farm dam, often bringing tea and cake, leaving slices for the fairies. They also rode horses bareback through the water.

Annual holidays to the coast near East London introduced her to the sea. Her father believed the first week was for settling in, the second for relaxing, and the third for preparing to return home. The sea captivated her early in life. She once floated out in the backwash as a child but was rescued. Before she could swim, she clung to her father's shoulders as he body surfed. She and her siblings slid down sand dunes on wooden boards, experiences that gave her dreams of flying. The Glen Avon Waterfall inspired her family and visitors, including artist Walter Battiss, who later painted it in abstract form. These early years instilled in her a deep love of nature that endured throughout her life.

She attended Assumption Convent in Somerset and Bedford before moving to boarding school in Port Elizabeth. Friendships formed there lasted a lifetime. School encouraged independence and curiosity. A pivotal experience was her year in Minnesota as an AFS exchange student. She joined a new family, immersed herself in a different culture and experienced four distinct seasons. Minnesota winters introduced her to skiing, which felt like flying. This passion remained with her.

At seventeen she travelled by train to Cape Town to study at the University of Cape Town. The sight of Devil's Peak against a brilliant blue sky was unforgettable. Initially intending to study medicine, she chose biochemistry instead, and wisely avoided a career she felt might not suit her.

She also studied zoology, which proved transformative. Under inspiring lecturers such as John Day, Alec Brown, George Branch and John Field, her fascination with the sea blossomed.

The Zoology Department felt like an extended family. Langebaan field camps were among her happiest memories. The neighbouring Oceanography Department and the University Underwater Club also shaped her life. Guided by Peter Zoutendyk, she spent much time scuba diving, spear fishing, playing underwater hockey and exploring reefs and wrecks. Diving became central to her life. She participated in competitions and adventures, including a deep dive in False Bay to seventy two metres, earning her a UCT Full Blue. She recalled a humorous incident at Kalk Bay harbour when she and a friend collected crabs for a project. Locals gathered to watch the “frog women”. The Harbour Master asked them to search for his false teeth, which had fallen in the water. She eventually found them and the crowd roared with laughter when he popped them back into his mouth.

During holidays she worked at the Port Elizabeth Museum, Oceanarium and Snake Park. She spent time on St Croix Island, where she helped raise awareness about the threat of a proposed ore berth to the penguin colony. The proposal was withdrawn due to environmental concerns. After completing her Honours degree she worked briefly in the Botany Department before embarking on two years of overseas travel. Between 1974 and 1976 Penny travelled extensively through Europe and the Middle East with little more than a backpack, snorkel and mask. She explored Britain, France, Spain, Andorra, Italy and loved Florence and Pompeii. She taught English in Milan at the Shenker Institute, enjoying Italian food, wine, and culture. She continued travelling through Portugal, France, Holland, Scandinavia, and Germany, then spent a winter in Israel. She worked on Kibbutz Dafna in the Hula Valley and later on a moshav in the Golan Heights, assisting at the ski resort of Neve Ativ. She then moved south to the Red Sea where she snorkelled extensively. Eventually she returned to South Africa, surprising her parents on her arrival.



Shortly afterwards she joined the Sea Fisheries Research Institute in Cape Town, beginning a rewarding scientific career.

Her work formed part of the Southern Benguela Ecology Programme, a collaboration among universities, government departments and research institutions. She worked with outstanding colleagues, especially her boss Larry Hutchings, who encouraged initiative and collaboration. Her assignments included fisheries cruises, marine mammal studies, seabird surveys and expeditions to offshore islands. On Malgas Island she studied Cape gannets, collecting diet samples by inducing them to regurgitate fish. She analysed samples in the evenings, identifying fish otoliths. Her own research focused on phytoplankton production, the foundation of the marine food web. Cold nutrient-rich waters along the west coast fuelled blooms of microscopic plants that supported zooplankton, fish, seabirds and fisheries. For her Masters degree and PhD she conducted field studies, often spending days offshore tracking phytoplankton blooms. These experiences reinforced her appreciation of the complexity of natural systems.

During this period she met her husband Guy at a computer course at UCT. They married in May 1984 during a storm that nearly prevented them from reaching the airport for their honeymoon. Guy introduced her to wild places in southern Africa, especially the Okavango Delta, which she described as the most magical place she had ever visited. Travelling by mokoro and sleeping under the stars was unforgettable. In 1987 they travelled to South America and explored the Galapagos Islands aboard a converted fishing boat. Snorkelling among sea lions, penguins, marine iguanas, turtles and sharks was extraordinary. She later told her eldest son Ian that he had been part of that adventure, as she was newly pregnant at the time. She suggested his love of swimming began there. Her younger son Charles shared a connection with Charles Darwin, whose observations in the Galapagos shaped evolutionary theory.

Penny's great aunt had written that the birth of a first child opened the door to the other half of life. Penny found this true. Raising children was both privilege and adventure, adding new dimensions to life.

Owl Penny left formal employment in 1994 and focused on family, community and environmental work. She became involved in organisations in Hout Bay concerned with planning, heritage, and conservation. She worked to encourage responsible development while protecting the natural landscape. She travelled with her children, visiting family, climbing Kilimanjaro, skiing in Europe, exploring Australia and New Zealand, and diving on the Great Barrier Reef.

Invasive alien vegetation became a major concern. Fires in the Baviaanskloof catchment in 1992, 2000 and 2015 highlighted the threat. After the 2015 fire, residents, schools and groups worked together to remove invasive seedlings. During the Covid period her family cut down over thirty thousand pines and other invasives on Skoorsteenberg. Persistence paid off. Most of the catchment was cleared, though maintenance remained essential. Public awareness grew and volunteer participation increased. Organisations such as the Sugarbird Trust and Friends of the Rivers of Hout Bay worked with government programmes like SAN Parks, Working for Water and Working on Fire. Together they made a significant difference.

Owl Penny concluded by reflecting on how fortune she has been. The sea and mountains had provided adventure, challenge, friendship, discovery and joy. Through science, travel, family and conservation they remained constant companions. The sea dominated the first half of her life, while the mountains claimed the second. Both enriched her life beyond measure. She emphasised that the natural world was endlessly fascinating and profoundly worth protecting. The more people understood it, the more they valued it, and the more willing they became to care for it.



Owl Club Colloquium on Crime

The Owl Club held its seventh colloquium on 5 June 2026 on the theme “The impact of crime and corruption on the economy and community.” Twenty-six Owls and fourteen guests attended talks by criminologist Matthew Skade and Cape Town Mayoral Committee Member for Safety and Security Alderman JP Smith.

Owl Mike Bruton opened the event by arguing that South Africa’s media disproportionately highlights crime while underreporting successes, creating a damaging national psychology reflected in emigration trends and declining investor confidence. He also discussed Jeremy Griffith’s theory of the human condition, describing the tension between instinctive moral cooperation and intellectual self-interest.

Matthew Skade’s presentation, *Prevention Pays*, focused on youth-centred violence prevention. He described the Western Cape’s Planet Youth initiative, inspired by Iceland’s successful reduction of youth substance abuse. Skade warned about alcohol as a socially accepted “legal drug” harming young people, and highlighted the dangers of excessive social media use. He stressed that belonging, family support, school mentorship, mental health care and safe recreation are essential to crime prevention, and argued that violence prevention is an investment in national development.

Alderman JP Smith’s talk, *Evidence Based Policing*, outlined the Western Cape’s advanced data-driven crime-monitoring systems, which allow proactive responses to crime and land invasions. He criticised the lack of SAPS collaboration, poor disaster management in other provinces, and South Africa’s severe crime burden – estimating that crime consumes 10% of GDP and noting a gun-crime conviction rate of only 4.7%.

Both talks were enthusiastically received, prompting lively discussion. Positive feedback from attendees and speakers affirmed the value of the colloquium.



Above: Matthew Skade. Alderman JP Smith & co-organisier of the colloquium, Owl Anthea Serritslev.



Seen & Noted at the June Meeting



Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of soprano Violina Anguelov-Hobbs pausing to serenade Owl Andrew Girdwood.*



Above left: Owls Paul Murray and Tony Grogan.
Above right: Tony Grogan, *Drawing of Owl Penny Brown.*





1383rd Owl Club Meeting: Tuesday 16
June 2026

President: Owl Nigel Gwynne-Evans

Dinner @ 6.45 pm

Grace:

Dinner:

Toast: South Africa: The Owl President

A break for the tables to be cleared

The 1383rd Meeting following dinner:

Announcements: The Owl President

Owls celebrating their birthdays in June

Owl flying to a higher perch

Initiations of New Owls

Food for Thought:

Extract from JC Smuts's *Religion of the Mountain*.



The Mountain is not merely something externally sublime. It has a great historical and spiritual meaning for us. It stands for us as the ladder of life. Nay, more, it is the great ladder of the soul, and in a curious way the source of religion. From it came the Law, from it came the Gospel in the Sermon on the Mount.

We may truly say that the highest religion is the Religion of the Mountain.

What is that religion? When we reach the mountain summits we leave behind us all the things that weigh heavily down below on our body and our spirit. We leave behind a feeling of weakness and depression; we feel a new freedom, a great exhilaration, an exaltation of the body no less than of the spirit.

We feel a great joy.

K.G.

W E L C O M E T O H O U S E

The Owl Club Tuesday 16th June 2026

Starter
Mushroom Soup

Main Course
Chicken Pie
Served with salad

Dessert
Mini Malva Pudding
Served with custard

The Grace.

We give thanks for the food and wine before us
For the special fellowship that graces these
tables and,

For the traditions that have kept Owldom alive
for so many years.

We think of absent Owls fondly.

We thank those who have given their time to
arrange this event.

The staff at Kelvin Grove.

The winemakers.

And of course, the speakers and musicians.

We think of those that are less fortunate than
ourselves and how privileged we are to be here.

We trust the evening will rise to the high stand-
ard of the plumage you see around you.

Amen.

Grace by Owl Grant Tarr.