



Minutes

GSSA AGM Meeting

25 July 2023, 17h00

Hybrid event

No	Agenda Item	Responsible
1	Welcome Charne welcomed everyone to the AGM and thanked them for their patience as they waited to ensure a quorum was present.	Charné
2	Present and apologies: Council Present: Charné Viljoen, Suzi Vetter, Urs Kreuter, Lisa Matthews, Igshaan Samuels, Linda Kleyn, Robyn Nicolay, Ntuthuko Mkhize, Kevin Kirkman. <i>Request register.</i> Apologies: Winston Trollope, Yvette Brits, Jamie Paulse, Pete Zacharias, Peter Scoggins, Janet Taylor, Michelle Keith, Donna Berjak, Albertus Dyason	Robyn
3	Additions to and acceptance of the agenda Charne noted any additions to the agenda, specifically mentioning the need to reinstate two portfolios (Treasurer and Secretary) according to the constitution, which occurs every two years.	Charné
4	Approval of the minutes for 27 July 2022: Kevin Kirkman approves, Linda Kleyn seconds.	Charné
5.	Council reports: 5.1. Scientific Editor's report Report attached. Urs expressed his honour in presenting the report and noted his long-term association with the journal. Provided a brief historical overview of the journal, now known as the African Journal of Range and Forage Science. Highlighted statistics from the 2022 volume, noting 42 articles published with an impact factor of 1.4 and a CiteScore of 3.1. Emphasized the increase in institutional access and download statistics, aiming for a quick turnaround time from submission to publication. Discussed the acceptance rate of 31%, explaining a focus on elevating journal standards. Showed trends in CiteScore and impact factor over recent years, with an all-time high impact factor of 2 in the previous year. Plans to publish more articles per issue due to changes in page limitations and increased online publication.	Urs



Mentioned a backlog of accepted manuscripts, which will lead to a higher number of published articles in the upcoming year.
Highlighted the geographical distribution of downloads, noting a significant interest from African institutions.
Shared the most frequently cited papers and the impact of open access on download and citation rates.
Discussed the journal's financials, noting an increase in gross profit but a decrease in royalty commissions, which will be reviewed.
Announced the absence of a special issue in 2024 to address the backlog and plans for a significant special issue in 2025 for the society's 60th anniversary.
Acknowledged key contributors, associate editors, reviewers, and the council for their support.
Question by: Justin du Toit: Justin inquired about the proportion of paid downloads versus free downloads through institutional access.
Urs responded that he did not have specific data on this and noted that most downloads occur through institutional subscriptions, making direct cost calculations difficult. He committed to investigating further.

5.2. Publication Editor's report: Grassroots

Report attached. Lisa conveyed her greetings and regret at not being able to attend the conference in person.
Reported on the latest issue of Grassroots, released the previous day, and encouraged attendees to check it out.
Discussed Grassroots statistics, noting a decrease in engagement since 2022, likely due to a reduction in online activity post-COVID-19 lockdowns.
Provided an overview of session metrics, reader engagement, and view statistics for the past five issues.
Explained differences in metrics: sessions, readers, views, and unique views, with a decrease in overall interaction due to busier schedules and less focus on online media.
Mentioned a consistent pattern in reader engagement for issues released in March and the most recent issue.
Highlighted that most readers access Grassroots via email distributions, followed by Facebook, with a shift from desktop to mobile reading.
Detailed reader demographics, noting the majority from South Africa, followed by Australia, the US, Germany, and the UK.
Expressed gratitude for contributions and support, thanking specific individuals for their ongoing contributions to the publication.
Invited feedback and suggestions for Grassroots, encouraging members and students to submit articles to the publication.

Charne opened the floor for questions regarding the Grassroots report. There were no questions from the audience or online participants.
Charne thanked Lisa for her hard work and encouraged continued contributions from members, highlighting the value of Grassroots for students and researchers.

Lisa



<p>5.3. Website Editor's report</p> <p>Report attached. The website editor's role included reviewing web content, editing as required, and reporting to the council. Grassroots issues, study opportunities, and events were added to the website throughout the year. The website saw notable traffic surges, particularly in September after the congress and in April 2023. Average visits per month were 658, with a peak of 1,100 visits in April. Website visitors predominantly came from the same countries as previous years, reflecting consistent interest in South African research. A new website is being developed, expected to improve user experience once launched. Yvette expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve as the website editor, noting that her term ends with this AGM.</p> <p>No questions were posed following Yvettes presentation of the website editor's report. Charne reiterated appreciation for Yvette's efforts and noted that any questions would be addressed to the new website editor in the future.</p> <p>5.4. Public Relations Officer's report</p> <p>Acknowledgements:</p> <p>Jamie expressed thanks to Debbie Jewitt for managing the LinkedIn profile and highlighted its active membership and diverse professional backgrounds, including lecturers, ecologists, managing directors, and environmental consultants. Special thanks were given to Craig for his work on Facebook, where a humorous post about disappointing moments in evolution reached an impressive 3,600,000 people, increasing followers by 250%.</p> <p>Facebook:</p> <p>The Facebook page had approximately 18,000 visits. The gender distribution among users was fairly equal, with 48% women and 52% men. The majority of engagement came from South Africa, particularly Cape Town and Pretoria, followed by Namibia, Botswana, and the United States.</p> <p>Twitter Activity:</p> <p>Kevin reported that Twitter is most active during congresses, generating significant interest through posts related to the event. During the 57th congress in July 2020, there were 22,400 impressions. Leading up to the current congress, there have been 124 impressions per day on average, with activity increasing daily.</p>	<p>Yvette</p> <p>Charné (OBO Jamie)</p>
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Call for Contributions:

Charne encouraged members to send ideas or events to Jamie, the Public Relations Officer, to facilitate dissemination through the society's channels.

Questions and Comments:

Charne invited questions, noting that while she might not be able to answer them immediately, she would relay them to Jamie. There were no questions from the floor or online.

5.5. Trust report

Report attached: Julius thanked Ferozah Conrad, Debbie Jewitt and Nicky, particularly Nicky who serves as the chairperson of the trust.

Freyne du Toit continues as the administrator of the trust, providing essential support along with Ewing and Associates, who manage the trust funds.

Trustees:

Current trustees are Nicky Allsopp (Chairperson), Ferozah Conrad, Debbie Jewitt, Dawood Hattas and Julius Tjelele.

Financial Status:

The Trust has recovered well financially despite global economic challenges.

As of June 30th, the trust's funds stand at R729,000.

The society has repaid R68,000 of the R100,000 borrowed, which is appreciated by the trust.

Advisory Committee:

The trustees have decided to establish an advisory committee to assist in serving the society and the broader discipline.

The committee will include the current president (Susi), the immediate past president (Charné), the vice president elected during the meeting, and an additional member, Igshaan Samuels.

Student Sponsorships:

The trust co-sponsored Guy Masto, an MSc student at Stellenbosch University, to attend an IGC conference in Kentucky, USA.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of supporting students and developing talent within the society.

Resource Management:

Julius stressed that the trust funds are a scarce resource and that it is crucial to exercise due diligence in providing financial assistance.

Nicky highlighted the importance of careful management and ensuring that funds are used effectively to support the society's goals.

Julius Tjelele (OBO Nicky)



Future Growth and Funding:

In response to a question about the trust's future growth, Julius explained that the trust's funds grow through investments and occasional financial contributions from the society.

The question raised the possibility of increasing the trust's funds through donations or bequests, to which Julius responded that this is a potential avenue for future consideration.

Questions and Discussion:

A question was raised regarding the nature of the trust's funds and how they grow over time.

Julius explained that the growth primarily comes from investments and contributions, including the repayment of loans by the society.

There was a suggestion to consider encouraging members to include the trust in their wills to provide a significant infusion of funds in the future.

Conclusion:

Charne thanked Julius for presenting the report and expressed gratitude to Nicky in her absence.

5.6. Honorary Treasurer's report

Report attached: Linda greeted the attendees and outlined the focus of the report, which included presenting the audited financials for 2022, discussing the budget for the upcoming year, and reviewing the society's current financial situation.

Income Generation:

- The annual congress is the primary source of income for the society.
- Additional income sources include sponsorships, membership fees, journal royalties, online workshops, and limited advertising, particularly in the Grassroots publication.

Expenses:

- Main expenses cover administration, congress costs, publication costs for the journal and Grassroots, audit fees, IT software, and website maintenance.
- The society maintains a Nedbank credit card facility for emergencies, with efforts to keep the balance at zero.

Liabilities and Financial Status:

- The society still owes R100,000 to the trust from a loan taken for Congress 55, which was conducted online due to COVID-19. Plans to repay R50,000 this year and the remaining R50,000 next year.

Linda



- The conservation symposium contract has ended, and financial reporting on it will conclude next year.
- The society is tax compliant.

2022 Financial Performance:

- The society made a surplus of R160,000 in 2022, with an accumulated profit of R186,000 at the end of September 2022.
- Congress 57 generated a surplus in line with the budget, thanks in part to R132,000 in sponsorships.
- Membership fees and journal royalties exceeded expectations, covering publishing costs and contributing to overall financial health.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Administrative and publication costs, particularly for Grassroots, are high. Efforts to find sponsorship for Grassroots have not been successful.
- The society is exploring new revenue streams, including advertising on a revamped website and offering online workshops, which have proven profitable in the past.

Year-to-Date Financials and Future Plans:

- Current cash flow is stable, with the journal royalties check still pending.
- Sponsorships are down this year, which may impact the surplus.
- The new website development is underway, with completion expected soon.
- Plans to repay the trust loan by the end of September will depend on congress financials.

Budget and Membership Fees:

- Proposed a 5% increase in annual membership fees, pushing it over R500 for the first time, which is still competitive compared to other societies.
- Proposed budget anticipates lower income due to decreased sponsorships and a slight increase in expenses.
- A vote was required for approval of the budget and the 5% increase for administrators and the editor.

Questions and Discussion:

- **Question on Online Congress Profitability:** Virtual delegates pay the same fees as in-person attendees, covering the cost of the information portion of the conference. The costs of online setup are minimal compared to the revenue generated.
- **Question on SACNASP Income:** The society receives R30,000 annually from SACNASP for voluntary association activities.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggestions for Revenue Generation: Suggestions included advertising on the new website and registering courses with SACNASP for potential income. <p>Voting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The budget for 2024 and the proposed 5% increase were approved by the attendees present and those online, with names recorded for the proposal and seconding. Accepted by Sigrun seconded by Yanka, Justin and Thabiso. Linda thanked Erica for her contribution to last year's successful congress and Freyni for her work on the symposium. She welcomed and thanked Minette for her support in managing the finances. 	
6	<p>Additional Items to the agenda</p> <p>6.1. Election of new Office Bearers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vice-President: Nomination received for Dr Ntuthuko Mkhize Website Editor: Nomination received for Janke van der Colf Additional member: Nomination for Patrick Rakau & Thulisile Jaca <p>Thulisile introduces herself as a researcher in biological invasions. Majority vote for Thulisile</p> <p>6.2. Reinstatement of existing portfolio holders</p> <p>Secretary & Treasurer: No objections to Linda and Robyn as being reinstated as portfolio holders.</p> <p>6.3. Introduction of the President: Prof Susi Vetter</p> <p>Charne expressed great pleasure in introducing the new president of the society, Professor Susi Vetter. She mentioned that a more formal introduction would be done at the gala dinner but invited Professor Vetter to say a few words to the attendees.</p> <p>Professor Vetter introduced herself as an ecologist, working in the Botany Department at Rhodes University, which is located in the Eastern Cape.</p> <p>Professor Vetter thanked everyone for the opportunity and wished good luck to all.</p>	Charné
7	<p>General</p> <p>Congress 59 (2024): Aldam/ Northern P./ Western Cape Congress 60 (2025): KZN for the 60th - Midlands Charné encourages OC for both these locations. Prof Kellner suggested Northern Cape, Debbie suggested Prof Kellner put together a OC.</p>	Provincial bids
8	Vote of thanks and closure of AGM	Charné