



Isdell House

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA'S HEAD OFFICE

About Isdell House

For some time, and for several reasons – inadequate office space and parking and an inability to expand, among others – it had been clear to BirdLife South Africa that the head office, Lewis House in Blairgowrie, had become unsuitable for the growth of the organisation. And so, with the support of the Lewis Foundation whose generosity provided BirdLife South Africa with its premises in 2002, a small team led by Mark Anderson began the search for an alternative home in late 2013.

A major challenge was to source the funding required for the purchase of a new head office without using funds earmarked for conservation. Far sooner than expected, the dream became a reality when Pamela and Neville Isdell, with their keen interest in and love for conservation in southern Africa, offered their assistance. In recognition of their major contribution to the project, BirdLife South Africa's new home, Isdell House, is named in their honour.

The leafy Dunkeld West suburb in the northern parts of Johannesburg was considered the ideal location for BirdLife South Africa's new head office. This suburb is in the heart of older Johannesburg, an area where property is known to be an investment. It borders on trendy and vibrant Rosebank, a cultural and artistic hub and growing cosmopolitan commercial centre, and is close to Sandton, the commercial heart of the country. Situated about two kilometres away from Isdell House, as the Hadeda flies, is the well-known Wanderers Stadium.

The original house was built approximately 60 years ago, but, with little known about the history of the suburb's development, the exact age of the building has



not yet been determined. However, it is known that one of the oldest houses in the suburb, just a few blocks away, was built in 1936.

The Gautrain bus route to the Rosebank Gautrain Station runs past the office, and the station is in fact within walking distance. Its location encourages the use of alternative forms of transport; the intention being to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

The criteria for the redevelopment of the new premises were that the building must be energy efficient, with water use kept to a minimum, and the garden to be indigenous, waterwise and to showcase different habitats to encourage a variety of birds. Isdell House has three functional sections; the public and administration areas in the main building, and a separate conservation wing for the conservation staff. The public area includes a shop opening onto a deck suitable for events, the Lewis Boardroom and a library, which houses complete sets of the scientific journal *Ostrich, Africa Birds & Birding* and *African Birdlife* magazines, alongside a range of bird and bird-related literature. An archive room and adequate storerooms enhance the efficiency of administration and governance. The walls are decorated with beautiful bird photographs and artwork which is on long-term loan from the Everard Read Gallery.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA

BirdLife South Africa is the country partner of BirdLife International, a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity. BirdLife International is represented in more than 120 countries. Continually growing, BirdLife South Africa works nationally and has more than 5000 members and 30 affiliated bird clubs. It is this organisation's mandate to conserve our country's birds and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa produces a scientific journal, *Ostrich*, as well as a magazine, *African Birdlife*.

Isdell House will serve BirdLife South Africa's needs for many decades to come and be a very suitable base from which the organisation will conduct its important bird conservation work in South Africa. The move to Isdell House from Lewis House took place on 31 July 2015, with the official opening on 13 November 2015.

BIRDLIFE NATIONAL TRUST

Isdell House is owned by the BirdLife National Trust and leased for a nominal fee by BirdLife South Africa. The Trust is the vehicle through which BirdLife South Africa intends to raise and invest funds for the purpose and aims of the organisation. The current trustees are David Lawrence (Chairman), Humphrey Borkhum, Mike McCullough, Michael Spicer and Roger Wanless.

Deconstruction and redevelopment



The architect's concept sketch of Isdell House, produced in July 2014.

THE BUILDING PROJECT TEAM

Vernon Head

Architect and past Chairman of BirdLife South Africa

Andy Featherstone (Project Manager)

Quantity Surveyor and Chairman of Witwatersrand Bird Club

Arno Ellmer

Structural Engineer

Bantry Construction

Primary Contractor

Landmark Studios

Landscaping hardworks

Keith Nevin (Hard Landscape Enterprises)

Wetland construction

Robbie Saraiva (Ranlic Electrical)

Electrical works

Servest

Site preparation and planting

Mark Anderson, Fanie du Plessis and Roger Wanless

The Client



The reconstruction work started in earnest in late-January 2015.



The space around the building was totally cleared in preparation for redevelopment and garden landscaping.



The roof had to be replaced, but the shell of the building was reused.



The R.J. Downie Conservation Wing, sponsored by Gaynor Rupert and named after her father to commemorate him for encouraging her love of nature and support of conservation work.



Progress as at early July 2015.

Initially described as a 'very ugly building', it has metamorphosed into the now beautiful Isdell House.



Greening the building

During reconstruction, a large amount of the original, existing materials was recycled and reused. The basic structure of the house was kept intact, paving bricks were reused and plant material was mulched for the garden.



ENERGY USAGE

The use of energy has been reduced in the following ways:

- The **large pergola** was constructed to form a green buffer which will reduce heat on the west-facing walls, keeping the building cooler in summer so that less artificial cooling is needed. The green pergola also provides a sheltered habitat for nesting by smaller birds and a cool, shaded deck for visitors.
- **Insulation** was installed in the ceilings to minimise temperature fluctuation within the building.
- The wall **paint** used is eco-friendly, non-toxic and low-VOC. VOCs are volatile organic compounds that vaporise into the air over several years and react with other elements to form ozone and air pollution. Low-VOC paints reduce this impact on the environment and prevent health issues related to VOCs.
- The roof is a **cool roof** because of the dove-grey colour, which provides a solar reflective surface that absorbs less heat. This improves indoor comfort and reduces the need for artificial cooling.
- Large **windows** ensure that the offices are naturally lit, hereby reducing the use of electrical lighting and improving the health and wellbeing of the staff. The window glass is thicker and provides better insulation against climate and sound, which improves indoor comfort and staff productivity.
- The geyser was fitted with a **heat pump** to reduce the hot-water energy demand by up to 75%.
- **Energy-efficient light bulbs** (LEDs), extremely efficient at saving electricity, have been fitted, as well as motion detector lighting in the passages and toilets.
- **Solar panels** will be fitted on top of the carports in the future. These will provide renewable energy to the building and reduce electricity use and dependency on the municipal electricity supply.
- An **electric vehicle charge station** is being sourced.



SAVING WATER

Smart solutions have also been applied to reduce the use of water. Bathroom facilities have been fitted with **dual-flush toilets** and water-saving **mixer taps**. JoJo tanks have been installed to **harvest rainwater** from the roofs, and this water will be used to top up the wetland and to irrigate the garden.

The garden was developed as a **waterwise, bird-friendly and indigenous garden**. **Drip irrigation**, the most effective way to water with little evaporative loss, was installed in a few sections where more regular watering is required. The drip-irrigation system is computer controlled and the computer is connected to a **rain sensor** that switches off the irrigation when rain is detected. The other areas are watered by hand only when necessary and, once mature, will rely on rainfall during summer.



Ornithogalum juncifolia, a *Star of Bethlehem* species, in flower at the wetland.



WASTE

Separation bins are located in the kitchen for collecting **paper, plastic, glass, metal**, organic and general waste, and paper-waste bins have been placed in offices. Whole Earth Recycling collect the recycling waste. For every ton of paper recycled, 17 trees, 4000 kW of energy, 15 000 litres of water, 27 kg of air pollution and 2.2 cubic metres of landfill space are saved. The **organic waste** is put into a composting bin to create compost for the garden.

The indigenous garden

The indigenous garden was created in order to attract birds and other biodiversity, and the aim is to have a model garden in Johannesburg for people to visit for inspiration and to promote the enhancement and maintenance of biodiversity within the urban landscape.

The garden layout was planned with veld types (biomes) as the overarching theme, and various habitats were created to represent bird habitats within these. A large wetland with two pools and a stream forms a main feature within the natural grassland habitat. The wetland will provide water for birds to bathe in and drink, and it is anticipated that a variety of aquatic animals will also use this habitat. Bird habitats in the garden include: Highveld grassland, savanna, dry and mesic bushveld thickets, forest, woodland, arid and aloe habitat, a shrubby exclusion zone and shady low shrub habitat.

Most of the indigenous plants are water thrifty, making it a waterwise garden. Mulch, in the form of shredded sticks and organic material recycled during pre-construction garden clearing, bark chips and nutshells, covers the soil to keep moisture in and weeds out.

Harvested rainwater collected in two 5000 litre JoJo tanks overflows into the wetland and can be used to water the grassland area, which has no irrigation system. This will save water during dry periods and reduces the water bill.

Western Barn Owl and Spotted Eagle-Owl nest boxes have been placed in large trees on the perimeter of the property. Several sisal logs attached to surrounding trees provide more nesting sites for cavity nesters, and several bird feeders are used to provide food for birds.

Two novel reptile and insect 'hotels' have been constructed, and a bat 'hotel' will be added to the eaves. The wetland is home to banded tilapia.



Driftwood White-winged Flufftail in the wetland.



The reptile and insect 'hotel'.





African Hoopoe

MARIETJIE FRONEMAN

How you can support BirdLife South Africa

Join BirdLife South Africa today! Sign up as either a standard, student, or senior citizen member. Other categories include: Conservation League, Corporate and Golden Bird Patron.

Make a donation towards one of our conservation projects or to the Sustainability Fund or BirdLife National Trust to ensure the long-term future of BirdLife South Africa.

Do more than just ticking birds, learn about how birds tick. Join our annual Flock and biennial Learn About Birds (LAB) meetings around the country.

Take action to help conserve birds. Become a citizen scientist and collect information on birds through a number of projects, such as SABAP2, CWAC and CAR.

Through leaving a legacy gift you can help ensure that the pleasure you derive from birds will be something others will share and enjoy in future, and help this organisation continue its amazing work.

Come to Isdell House and connect with us, shop for bird-related gifts in our "Shop For The Birds" gift shop, and stroll through the bird-friendly garden.

For further information contact info@birdlife.org.za.

ISDELL HOUSE

17 Hume Road, Dunkeld West, Johannesburg, 2196. Tel. 011 789 1122.
GPS co-ordinates: S 26°08'04.0" E 28°02'08.7". Or find us on Google Maps.

DONORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The project was coordinated by Mark Anderson, Fanie du Plessis, Arno Ellmer, Andy Featherstone and Roger Wanless.

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BirdLife South Africa
17 Hume Road, Dunkeld West, Johannesburg, 2196.
Private Bag X5000, Parklands, Johannesburg, 2121.
Tel. 011 789 1122 • info@birdlife.org.za
Visit us at www.birdlife.org.za