

Hunters Village, Knysna, 29 December 2025

Dear Friends and Colleagues

Thank you for your messages. I'm sorry that I'm not able to reply to each of them individually, but I will – eventually! – if you respond to this one. This is the eighth instalment (V & W) in the second series of my Library ABC, together with a brief report on my professional and scholarly activities during 2025.

I am happy to report that Monika and I, and our sons and family, are well.

Prompted by a growing awareness that my energy is not what it used to be, I've been cutting back on my scholarly activities. There are parts of southern Africa that we would like to explore while we are both still fit enough. As the chairperson of our local bird club likes to say: "Adventure before dementia". No academic travel for me in 2025, but I was able to go on a 19-day birding "safari" with Japie Claassen of [Karoo Birding Safaris](#): from Beaufort West, north to Kasane in the north-easternmost corner of Botswana, then from Katima Mulilo westward along the [Caprivi Strip](#), down the [Okavango Panhandle](#), which feeds the Okavango, south into Botswana, to Maun, and back home. The trip covered over 5500 km and had a trip list of 320 species, of which I recorded 303, including 16 lifers, including some sought-after species. For a detailed report see [here](#).

On the academic front, I have resolutely (obediently) been turning down requests to engage in various scholarly projects, some genuine, others not. Like most other scholars nowadays I receive at least half-a-dozen spam requests every month from [predatory journals and conferences](#), inviting me to submit articles or papers to wildly inappropriate "journals" or fake conferences. Anyone who has seen me struggling to open a tin can will be surprised to learn that I have been invited to moderate specialised conference sessions in mechanical engineering.

One scholarly duty I cannot abandon is participation in the compilation of the IFLA Centenary (2027) volume. It is turning out to involve a lot of work. I'm contributing one of the 27 or 28 chapters, and serving as one of the four editors. The book is to be published by De Gruyter in the IFLA Publications series and there are quite intimidating editorial instructions. I was the first one to raise the coming centenary at a meeting of [IFLA's Library History Special Interest Group](#) several years ago, so I can't walk away from it! In addition to the chapter, I have on the back burner two or three articles arising from my archival research.

A commitment to which I had agreed several years ago, was to examine a Norwegian PhD thesis, by [Randolf Mariano](#), on "The changing landscape of United States Library Diplomacy. It took a while, and just as he had submitted it, Mr Trump turned American diplomacy on its head, so that the situation the candidate had described had changed radically. Nevertheless, the thesis was interesting and insightful, a useful contribution to the theory of library diplomacy. As is not unusual in parts of Europe, the thesis consisted of three articles published in peer-reviewed journals and a "Kappe" or capstone essay. My American colleague, Steve Witt, and I had to evaluate the thesis, set the candidate a "trial lecture" on a related topic, and then participate (online) in a [public defence](#), during which we first evaluated the trial lecture and then questioned the candidate at some length. I served as one of the two "opponents". It was a new experience for me and involved a lot of preparation. (My slot was allocated 90 minutes!) At times I felt like being examined myself. I'm happy to report that Randolf did a good job defending his thesis and was [awarded his PhD](#).

That's it for now. What about XYZ? They have to wait, since I didn't have suitable libraries for the last three letters of the alphabet. Usually I only include libraries I have photographed or at least visited myself. For next year's ABC, which will probably be the final instalment, I'm inviting readers to propose libraries whose names begin with those letters, or which are located in cities whose names start with those letters. If you can contribute, please provide some pictures and brief descriptive/historical text.

With warm greetings and good wishes for health, prosperity and, above all, peace, in 2026.

*Peter*