



South African
NATIONAL PARKS

AGULHAS PARK eBULLETIN

Official:

Friends of the Agulhas Park:

www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/

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November 2011, Volume 20



November eBULLETIN

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The Nuwejaars Wetland System

To the north of Agulhas National Park and partially within, lies the Nuwejaars Wetland system – an area of immense diversity and conservation value. It consists of rare and endemic natural fynbos and wetlands, which are all interlinked by the streams and rivers of the Nuwejaars Wetland ecosystem. This system drains the Southern Agulhas Plain forming a number of annual and permanent water bodies or vleis, the most notable of which are Zoetendalsvlei and Voëlvlei. The area is inhabited by a large variety of avian and aquatic species, some of which are extremely rare and endangered and others endemic to the area. The conservation value of the system is further enhanced as it ultimately feeds into the Heuningnes River. The mouth of the Heuningnes River, the De Mond Estuary, is listed as a Ramsar Wetland Site of International Importance.



The headwaters of the Nuwejaars River are on the south-facing slopes of the Bredasdorp Mountains, the Koue Mountains to the west, the hills to the south of Elim, and the north-facing slopes of the Soetans Mountains. The five tributaries of the Nuwejaars River are the Koue, Wolwegatskloof, Jan Swartskraal, Boskloof and Uintjieskuil. The Nuwejaars River measures 55km from its westernmost source, through Soetendalsvlei to the confluence of the vlei's overflow channel with the Kars River. From this confluence it flows as the Heuningnes River for 15 km to its estuary at De Mond.

(Read more about the wetlands and birds www.agulhas.org.za)

FLORA

Vegetation types in Agulhas National Park

Cape Lowland Freshwater Wetlands (Wet Restioid Fynbos)



Cape Lowland Freshwater Wetlands consists of tall reeds of *Phragmites australis* and *Typha capensis*, restiolands, sedgelands and rush-beds, as well as permanent water body vegetation on sandy, silty and clayey soils derived from weathering Cape Supergroup shales and Cape granites, as well as Table Mountain sandstones. It is distributed in some of the vleis of the Agulhas Plains. Conservation target is 24%. About 14% is statutorily conserved in Agulhas National Park, other National Parks and Cape Nature reserves. More than 15% is transformed by cultivation and urban areas. Other specific species in this vegetation type are

Dekriet, *Chondropetalum tectorum*; Knoppiesbos, Line-leaf cone-bush, *Leucadendron linifolium*; *Cliffortia ferruginea*; *Orphium frutescens*; *Limonium anthericoides*; Fluitjiesriet, *Phragmites australis*; *Falkia repens*; Waterblommetjie, *Aponogeton distachyos*.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FORESTS

Celebrate Forests in 2011!!



Swartbas, Bladder Nut, *Diospyros whyteana*

The bladder nut is a small, evergreen tree occurring from the Western Cape of South Africa up to Ethiopia. It is found in forests, mountain slopes and shady mountain ravines. At Platbos, the bladder nut grows as a delicate, understory tree.

White, sweetly scented flowers appear in spring. The red berries that follow are encased within a papery calyx – it is this inflated, bladder-like seed pod that gave rise to the tree's common name. The fruits are enjoyed by many bird species and the attractive glossy-green leaves are browsed on by buck as well as livestock.

The new leaves are covered in silky, copper-coloured hairs that bring life and sparkle to the shadows. The bark of the bladdernut is an attractive dark, grayish-black. The wood is heavy and evenly

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grained and makes beautiful household articles and implements. The seeds are roasted and used as a coffee substitute and the tree has a number of medicinal uses: bark extracts are used to treat infertility, impotency and menstrual pain, and leaf and root infusions are used to soothe skin rashes.

The bladder nut is a popular bonsai subject and it is used increasingly in landscaping – its neat form and attractive foliage make it a good

choice for city gardens. It grows happily in the shade and in containers and is excellent as a clipped hedge.

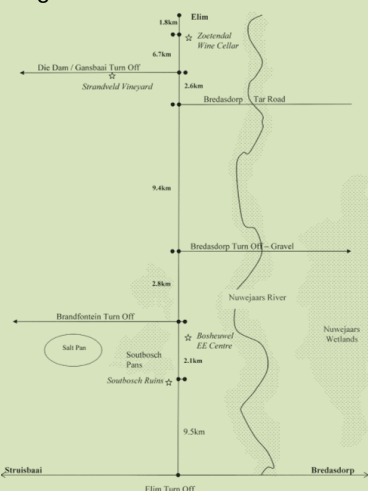
(Identified by Platbos Forest, info@platbos.co.za | www.platbos.co.za)

FAUNA

Struisbaai-Elm Birding Route

The Struisbaai-Elm road was identified as an exciting birding route by Agulhas National Park. It meanders for 35km along the very important Nuwejaars River Wetland system between the gravel road turn-off to Elm from the tarred road between Struisbaai and Bredasdorp to Elm village itself.

The very low gradients in the south-eastern Agulhas Plain result in significant wetland development, and have created the second largest lacustrine wetland in South Africa, Soetendalsvlei. The



Agulhas region is unique in terms of the wide variety of wetlands (freshwater springs, rivers, estuaries, lakes, vleis and endorheic pans) that occur within a relatively small area. Twelve types of wetlands have been identified on the Agulhas Plain.

The Agulhas Plain constitutes one of the largest lowland fynbos and Renosterveld habitats in the world. The diversity of habitat types, wetland ecosystems, red data plant species and local endemics is unmatched in the Cape Floristic

Region (CFR). The CFR biodiversity hotspot is a globally significant repository of biodiversity, recognized for its high vulnerability. Eight protected areas within the Cape Floral Region have been officially recognised as South Africa's sixth World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Committee.

The agricultural landscape of the Agulhas Plain during ploughing season and after harvesting offers exceptional bird viewing opportunities.

All this contributes to a very good birding area with a variety of birds at different times of the year.

Birds to watch out for:

Blue Cranes, Egyptian Geese, Sacred Ibis, Hadedda Ibis, Spur-winged Geese, African Spoonbill, Herons, Egrets, Flamingos, Cape Francolins, Helmeted Guineafowl, Denham Bustards, Raptors: Jackal Buzzard, Fish Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite, Yellow-billed Kite, Black Harrier, African Marsh-Harrier, etc.

Pelicans might be seen flying from one vlei to another, and look out for the elusive Secretary Bird around the Southbosch salt pans and Bosheuvel at certain times of the year.

Sasol/Stretton's Agulhas Birding Weekend 2011

Programme

Friday, 4 November 2011

12:00 - 17:30 Registration and collection of goodie bags at Agulhas NP offices
19:00 Opening function, Suiderlig Dienssentrum, Struisbaai

Saturday, 5 November 2011

7:00 – 12:00 Birding all day with guides (from Bosheuvel EE centre to various sites) Birding by kayak – morning and afternoon (from Bosheuvel EE centre)
12:00 - 14:00 Catering at Bosheuvel: tea and coffee will be available in the morning at R5 a cup, and boerewors rolls at lunch at R20
18.30 for 19:00 Evening function, Suiderlig Dienssentrum, Struisbaai Guest speaker, Don Pinnock

Sunday, 6 November 2011

10.30 Bird lists to be returned to Suiderlig Dienssentrum, Struisbaai
11:00 Brunch and prize-giving, Suiderlig Dienssentrum, Struisbaai

Registration fees: R450,00 pp

Daily fee (Saturday): R150,00 pp (includes the evening meal and presentation)

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Don Pinnock, guest speaker at the Sasol/Stretton's Agulhas Birding Week



Don Pinnock will be the guest speaker at the 2011 Sasol/Stretton's Agulhas Birding Weekend from the 4th to the 6th November 2011. Don will present at the Saturday evening function on 5th November. The birding weekend is organized by the Agulhas Honorary Rangers and this year will be the fourth.

Don Pinnock is an associate of Southern Write, an association of top travel writers and photographers in Africa, and is a former editor of

Getaway magazine in Cape Town, South Africa. He has been an electronic engineer, lecturer in journalism and criminology, consultant to the Mandela government, a professional yachtsman, explorer, travel writer, photographer and a cable-car operator on the Rock of Gibraltar. His present passion is the impact of humans on planetary processes. As a criminologist, he was one of the co-drafters of the Youth Justice White Paper for the ANC government, and is a specialist in adolescent deviance.

Don has a PhD in political science, an MA in criminology, a BA in African history and has published a post-doctoral study on gangs, rituals and rites of passage. He has held lectureships in Journalism (Rhodes) and Criminology (University of Cape Town) and completed his PhD research at The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He was Writer in Residence at South Africa's Antarctic Sanai 4 base in 2005/6. Together with Andrew Muir, Don was also a founder of the Wilderness Foundation, of Usiko, a rehabilitation organization for high-risk youths, and Umzi Wethu, a residential programme for Aids orphans.

His books include *The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control*; *Gangs, Rituals and Rites of Passage*; *Natural Selections*; *African Journeys*; *Love letters to Africa*; *Writing Left* (a biography of Ruth First); *Blue Ice: Travels in Antarctica*; *The Woman who Lived in a Tree* and *Other Perfect Strangers*. His first novel, *Rainmaker*, was written out of a need to empower young people labeled coloured. It was a finalist for the 2009 European Union Literary Award.

He is married to the novelist and poet Patricia Schonstein and they have two children, one an architect, the other studying genetics in Siena, Italy.

Bird people

Congratulations to Peter Chadwick, conservationist and wildlife photographer, for being awarded the Gerald Durrell Award for Endangered Wildlife at the 2011 Veolia Environment Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition with this excellent picture of African Black Oystercatchers. Peter lives in Bredasdorp and Black Oystercatchers can be seen on the Cape Agulhas coast.



AFRICAN PENGUIN *Spheniscus demersus* – Eddie Cassani, Agulhas Honorary Rangers

The only penguin species to breed in Africa, the African Penguin is largely confined to the cold waters of the extreme southwest, breeding on scattered islands along the South African and southern Namibian coasts from Bird Island in Algoa Bay westwards.

From roughly 4 million African Penguins in existence at the beginning of the last century, the population fell to 200 000 in 2000. In September 2010 with only approximately 55 000 left, they were listed in the Red Data Book as endangered. If the decline is not halted the African Penguin is expected to be extinct within 15 years. (Read more on www.agulhas.org.za)



Western Cape Crane Conservation Project - Nandi Thobela, Field Officer

The Western Cape Crane Conservation Project is not a new initiative; however, I am new to it. Six months into the project, I have experienced a lot and I am proud to report that I have seen a

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considerable number of Blue Cranes. I have recorded at least 468 adult birds and 23 juvenile birds from ad hoc sightings alone, and conducted the fixed route census with Kevin Shaw on three occasions. These routes are adopted from the Coordinated Avifaunal Road counts (CAR) and are monitored bi-monthly. In the meantime we have had to abandon a particular route for safety reasons, but have selected an alternative route within the area.

In summary, I can conclude that the current problematic issues facing cranes in this area are poisoning and power line collisions. These issues are going to be monitored very closely with the intention of reducing the threat they pose to the Blue Crane population. With the start of the breeding season in the Overberg, Blue Crane pairs are prolific and I have already seen a nest. The recording and monitoring of these nests and pairs will invariably lead to more farmer interaction. There has been an approval of a wind farm in the Caledon area, whilst there are ongoing EIAs for other proposed wind farms. (To read full article, go to www.agulhas.org.za)



Photography by Heather D'Alton

HERITAGE

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Renovations of the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse in the Agulhas National Park

The lighthouse at the Southern Tip of Africa is due to be closed for long-awaited renovations as announced by Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA) and South African National Parks (SANParks).

The 162-year-old lighthouse, situated near the southernmost tip of Africa within the Agulhas National Park, will undergo the alterations towards the middle of November 2011. The completion date is projected to be the end of April 2012. Due to safety and construction aspects, access to the artefacts and displays accommodated in the Lighthouse Museum and services provided by the lighthouse restaurant will not be available. The entire lighthouse building and direct surrounding terrain will be closed for all visitors during the construction period.

The Lighthouse and Navigational Systems section of TNPA and



SANPark's Agulhas National Park apologise for the inconvenience that may be caused during this time. TNPA together with SANParks look forward to an improved visitors' facility at what has become the icon of the Cape Agulhas region.

Issued by the Joint Management Committee (JMC) of Trans National Ports Authority & SANParks.

Rietfontein *Langhuis* restoration

Agulhas National Park reports that the restoration of the historic Rietfontein *Langhuis* has finally been completed. Destroyed by fire in December 2009, the house was handed over by the contractors at the end of October. The *Langhuis* will be furnished soon, but will unfortunately not be available for accommodation for the December holidays.



Events Calendar

November 2011	
4 - 6	Sassol Stretton's Agulhas Birding Weekend
26	Birding Big Day



For more information and bookings

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