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South African
NATIONAL PARKS



December eBULLETIN

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Agulhas dune fields

The shoreline of the Cape Agulhas coast has both rocky (60 km) and sandy (45 km) beaches, backed by sand dunes, and which include rare hummock-blowout and playa-lunette dunes between Brandfontein and Cape Agulhas.



The dune fields as a habitat type are an important conservation target for the Overberg and the Agulhas National Park coastline. Dune fields are not a marine habitat, being outside the tidal influence, however, due to their close proximity to the sea, are linked to a marine environment. The Agulhas dune fields are not only ecological sensitive, but are also a very fragile and important archaeological site from the Holocene era – the last 10 000 years.

In 1984 Martin Hall of the University of Cape Town undertook an archaeological survey of the Agulhas dune field. It was found that the dune field has an enormous number of archaeological sites from the Holocene period. Stone-age people from the Holocene period moved in three specific environmental zones: the coastline; the inland border of the dune field; and the smaller coastal mountain ranges, Sandberg, Soetans Mountain and Heuningrug. The archaeological sites found in these zones differ in structure and composition. This region can be interpreted as the first land-use in the Agulhas area. Groups of Stone-age people most probably lived permanently on the Agulhas Plain and moved in smaller groups to the coast to harvest seafood to bring back to the permanent dwelling. The composition of the sites shows summer use of the area and that the low-lying areas were avoided in the winter.

The Agulhas dune field is threatened by illegal tourism activities and the collection of archaeological objects.

(INFORMATION: *The Late Stone Age in the Cape Agulhas area: a distributional study*, Martin Hall, 1984; *A Marine conservation plan for the Agulhas Bioregion*, B.M. Clark & A.T. Lombard, 2007)



FLORA

Vegetation types in Agulhas National Park

Overberg Dune Strandveld (Dune Asteraceous Fynbos, Duineveld Fynbos)

Overberg Dune Strandveld consists of dune vegetation dominated by Dekriet *Thamnochortus insignis*, Blombos *Metalasia muricata* and *Ischyrolepis eleocharis* occurring on calcareous sands forming dunes to sandstones and limestones of the Bredasdorp Group on underlying Table Mountain Group sandstone. The largest of this type of dune field surrounds the Agulhas Peninsula. It is severely threatened with a conservation target of only 36%. About 30% is statutorily conserved in Agulhas National Park and Cape Nature reserves. More than 5% is transformed by urban development, cultivation and illegal tourism activities. Other specific species in this vegetation type are: Seaguarri, *Euclea racemosa*; Rosyntjebos, *Rhus crenata*; Wasbessie, Waxberry, *Morella cordifolia*; Melkhoutboom, *Sideroxylon inerme*; Bietou, *Chrysanthemoides monilifera*; Lemoenbessie, Noem-Noem, *Carissa bispinosa*; Aambeibossie, Christmas berry, *Chironia baccifera*; Kooigoed, *Helichrysum crispum* and Suurkanol, *Chasmanthe aethiopic*.

(MUCINA & RUTHERFORD (eds). 2006. *The vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*. Strelitzia 19. SANBI, Pretoria; MUSTART, COWLING, ALBERTYN. 2003. *Southern Overberg: South African Wild Flower Guide* 8. Cape Town).

Tree of the Month

Cherry Wood *Pterocelastrus tricuspidatus* - Melissa Krige, Platbos Forest



The cherry wood is a variable tree. In forests it can reach a lofty height of twenty metres and more; along the coast it tends to be low growing and sprawling in habit. At Platbos it occurs mostly on the forest edge as a small, bushy tree.

The cherry wood bears sweetly scented, creamy flowers in spring that appear as clusters of tiny stars along the young branches, followed by the decorative, three-pointed seed capsules that are a waxy orange colour. The foliage is smooth, slightly rubbery, green-blue leaves and the branch tips are often tinged magenta.

The bark and leaves are rich in tannic acid and in the Clanwilliam district of the Western Cape, a tanning industry developed around

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the cherry woods. The timber of this tree is heavy and hard, pink to dark red in colour and it has a beautiful ribbon-like grain. The wood has been used for flooring, veneers and panelling. The San people used a wax obtained from the tree to attach their arrow heads to the shafts of their arrows. In a similar fashion, African warriors used a sticky resin that they extracted from the roots to fix the blades of assegais to the handles. Early Cape colonists used the branches and roots as torches because of the resin they contained. The tree has a number of traditional medicinal uses. The bark is used to treat respiratory ailments and for purifying the blood. Decoctions made from the bark are also used as an antidote to sorcery.

The cherry wood is a hardy and beautiful tree that is tolerant to frost, sea spray and wind and will grow under a wide variety of conditions.

www.platbos.co.za

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FORESTS

Celebrate Forests in 2011!!



Grootbos and Flower Valley launch new tourism venture

Heather D'Alton, Flower Valley Conservation Trust

A new tourism venture in the Overstrand region, called Fynbos Retreat, was launched on Friday 25 November. Fynbos Retreat is a joint venture between Grootbos Nature Reserve and Flower Valley Conservation Trust. The launch was attended by municipality representatives, tourism officials and other tourism enterprises in the vicinity.

Fynbos Retreat offers accommodation and a host of walking and mountain biking activities, and forms part of a three-day hiking trail. It is based on Flower Valley's neighbouring farm, formerly known as Witvoetskloof, near Gansbaai. The property is a recognized biodiversity hotspot for its rare fynbos and ancient milkwood forests. According to Ben Solomon, Chairman of the Overstrand Municipality's portfolio committee for Local Economic Development at the launch, fynbos is one of the municipality's biggest tourist assets. "We want the Overstrand Municipality to develop as a tourist destination. Fynbos Retreat can now help tourists stay in the region longer."

Fynbos Retreat is expected to work closely with the other enterprises within the municipality, to increase the number of activities available to visiting tourists. Aside from the sporting activities, the region offers nature lovers access to rare fauna and flora. Sean Privett of Grootbos Nature Reserve said Fynbos Retreat is home to limestone fynbos, which is endemic to the Agulhas Plain, as well as the critically endangered Overberg Sandstone fynbos. Fynbos Retreat holds 600 species of Overberg Sandstone fynbos,

of which 80 are endangered. One Erica species found on the farm is found nowhere else globally.

Privett said, "This property was initially bought by Fauna and Flora International some years ago, because of its amazing flora and exceptional biodiversity. It's a true biodiversity hotspot. However, the property faced threats many years ago, in the form of alien vegetation and potential conversion to agriculture. Now, with this nature-based tourism offering, we hope that this little piece of the Cape Floral Kingdom will still be protected 400 years from now."

Fynbos Retreat was previously owned by Flower Valley Conservation Trust. The Trust sold the property to Grootbos – in a deal which will ensure it is protected in perpetuity. During the sale, title deed restrictions were placed across the property, and it was rezoned out of agriculture. Flower Valley's Enterprise Development Manager, Frieda Lloyd, said this was the first deal of its kind in South Africa. "Fynbos Retreat serves as a model for property sales where the land needs to remain under conservation under the new owner. Today Fynbos Retreat is a showcase of sustainable tourism."

The new tourism venture also forms part of a three-day hiking trail that starts at the Growing the Future project on Grootbos. The trail is 26km in total and includes steep inclines to Pinnacle Peak. The trail traverses Steynsbos, Fynbos Retreat, Flower Valley Farm and Bodhi Khaya – and covers sections through afro-montane forests and milkwood forests. The trail, which is guided, ends at Grootbos. For more information on the trail, visit www.walkerbaytrails.co.za. And for details on Fynbos Retreat, see www.fynbosretreat.com.

FAUNA

Most Popular Southern Coast Angling Species

A booklet on the most popular Southern Coast angling species is available at the Agulhas Reception.

To check the status of any fish, text its name to 079 499 8795. (SASSI Consumer Seafood Pocket Guide, September 2010)

Rock pooling on the Cape Agulhas coast – Magriet Kruger, www.wildcard.co.za

The southernmost tip of Africa is known for its rocky coastline and many ships have been stranded on treacherous reefs that reach out into the ocean. But the rocks along the beach also form intertidal pools where several creatures thrive and when the tide retreats you can get a closer look. The entire coastline from Struisbaai to the

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Skippie is accessible during low tide and you can spend a good few hours rock pooling.

The rock pools around Agulhas are home to seaweeds, tiny marine snails, limpets and barnacles. One of the most interesting marine animals you might see is the prickly sea urchin. Urchins are very sensitive to bright light so they use bits of seaweed, shell and stone to shade themselves during low tide. Sheltered as they are by their sunshades, these spiny creatures can become hard to see. Look where you walk because stepping on an urchin is painful. You've been warned!

In Agulhas National Park you can also see stone fish traps built by early Khoi-khoi residents. These functioned much like rock pools, filling with seawater during high tide and trapping fish inside when the tide went out. You can see historic fish traps at Rasperpunt (get a map from the park office). There are also some fish traps near the lighthouse that have been turned into tidal pools for swimming.

The intertidal zone is the part of the shore that lies between low tide and high tide levels. The crashing waves at high tide and the high temperatures that come when the cooling waters retreat make this a tough place to live. How do the plants and creatures that live here survive? Read more about their strategies here.

http://www.agulhas.org.za/main/page_marine.html



HERITAGE

Lighthouse Renovations



Please take note that Transnet National Ports Authority announced on 14th November 2011 that the renovations to the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse building will only commence on 18th January 2012. The Lighthouse Museum and restaurant will be fully functional and accessible during the coming festive season.

The scope of works entails the following:

1. Reinstate the veranda to the north front.
2. Plaster over the limestone walls to resolve the on-going decay.

3. Rebuild the limestone plinths entirely in Paarl granite.

The public will be notified of the exact date when the renovation will commence and informed on a monthly basis of the progress.

Two Oceans Hiking Trail

The Two Oceans Hiking Trail is open to be hiked. The hiking trail was developed by the Agulhas Honorary Rangers and the Friends of the Park. The hiking trail starts at *Blaasgat* – east of the Agulhas Rest camp and west of Suiderstrand – marked with a no. 13. *Blaasgat* is a well-known landmark on the coast west of Suiderstrand. The circular hiking trail is divided into three distances. The short route is 3km, marked blue, and divides at no.16. The 5km route is marked in red and divides at no. 20. The longest route is 11km, marked in yellow and divides at no. 27. The routes begin and end at *Blaasgat*. At the highest point, on the long route, on top of Sandberg, both the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans can be seen, hence the name of the hiking trail. Hikers park at the parking area in Suiderstrand and walk for about 500m to *Blaasgat*. Hikers keep to the left at no. 15 on the route and follow the arrow and the poles.



The Platbos Forest Camp - Melissa Krige, Platbos Forest

The new Platbos Forest Camp opens for bookings on the 1st December 2011.



The 'off-grid' Forest Camp offers private, tented accommodation.

The venue sleeps up to six guests. However, for larger family groups, you

are welcome to bring along extra tents and gear. The *Forest Camp* is exclusive in that guests enjoy the privilege of having this unique and beautiful forest venue all to themselves. To find out more about this and also our Forest & Tree Appreciation Workshops, the Labyrinth, Indigenous Tree Nursery, and the *Platbos African Tree Essences*, please visit www.platbos.co.za.

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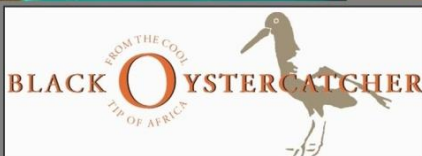


SASOL/STRETTON'S Birding Weekend, 4 - 6 November 2011 – Len Le Roux, Agulhas Honorary Ranger

The 4th Sasol/Stretton's Birding Weekend, organized by the Agulhas Honorary Rangers, was held in the Agulhas National Park (ANP) from 4 to 6 November 2011. 118 bird species were sighted with the Roseate Tern (*Rooiborssterretjie*) as the most exciting. The Roseate Tern is a rare bird in the Agulhas region. Read full report www.agulhas.org.za.

Events Calendar

December 2011	
1	World Aids Day
25	Christmas Day



30KM FROM BREDASDORP AND L'AGULHAS
ON THE R317 EN-ROUTE TO ELM

SEASON PROGRAMME

WINE TASTING & SALES

Open. Mon - Fri 9:00 TO 17:00
Sat & Sun 10:00 to 14:30

Bookings Essential

Closed. 24 & 25 December

RESTAURANT

Kitchen Open. Mon - Sun 11:00 to 14:30

Bookings Essential

Closed. 24 & 25 December

SPECIAL EVENTS:

Bookings Essential

SAUVIGNON BLANC & OYSTER FESTIVAL
26 & 27 DECEMBER

**TRADITIONAL FOOD, GREAT WINE
& LIVE MUSIC**
30 DECEMBER

Contact Details for Bookings

T: 028 4821618

C: 072 4602602

E: venue@blackoystercatcher.co.za



GENERAL

What is the Fire Danger Index? - Samantha Schröder, Section Ranger (East)

The Fire Danger Index, or FDI as it is known in the field, is a continuous reference scale for estimating the potential for a fire to start and the required suppression action on any given day. The FDI is supplied by the South African Weather Service on a daily basis. The higher the rating and the closer it gets to red the more dangerous the situation and the extra vigilant we need to be. Read more on www.agulhas.org.za.

FIRE ALERT STAGES	BLUE	GREEN	YELLOW	ORANGE	RED
FIRE DANGER INDEX	0-20	21-45	46-60	61-75	76-100
FIRE BEHAVIOUR	Safe	Moderate	Dangerous	Very Dangerous	Extremely Dangerous
FLAME LENGTHS	0-1m	1-1.2m	1.2-1.8m	1.8-2.4m	2.4m+
Fire control guide.	Low fire hazard. Controlled burning operations can normally be executed with a reasonable degree of safety.	Fires including prescribed burns may be lit, used or maintained in the open air, on the condition that persons making fires take reasonable precautions against the fires spreading.	No fires may be allowed in the open air except those authorised by the Fire Protection Officer where a Fire Protection Association exists; or elsewhere by the Chief Fire Officer of the local fire service; or fires in designated fireplaces.	Subject to promulgation of Chapter 3 of the NVFFA of 1998 as amended; no fires may be allowed in the open air, except in designated fireplaces and for use for veld management purposes when due authority has been granted.	No fires may be allowed under any circumstances in the open air and Fire Protection Associations and municipal Disaster Management Centres must invoke contingency fire emergency and disaster management plans including extraordinary readiness and response plans. All operations likely to ignite fires halted. Householders placed on alert.



Warmest wishes for a
happy holiday season
and a wonderful new
year from all of us at the
Agulhas National Park!

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