



South African
NATIONAL PARKS

AGULHAS PARK eBULLETIN

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Friends of the Agulhas National Park:

www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas/
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www.wildcard.co.za

February 2012, Volume 23



February eBULLETIN

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2012 Theme of the Year *Sustainable Energy for All*

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) declared 2012 the *Year of Sustainable Energy for All*. Sustainable energy is not one of the Millennium Development Goals but has been recognised as essential to achieve all of the eight goals. Read more about these goals at www.undp.org/mdg.



Wetlands day 2 February

Wetlands & Tourism

Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People

Hydrology of Agulhas National Park

The Agulhas Plain is unique in that a wide variety of wetlands (freshwater springs, rivers, estuaries, floodplains, lakes, vleis and pans) occur in the area. These wetlands vary in kind, origin, hydrology, morphology, and underlying bedrock, so that each is different from its neighbour. Twelve drainage basins, including the entire catchments of six unique wetland systems fall within the Agulhas Plain. These are (major wetland types in parentheses): Groot Hagelkraal (river, vleis, black water bog), Ratel (river, vleis, pans, estuary), Melkbospan and Vispan (saline pans, vleis), Waskraalvlei (river, vleis), Voëlvlei (brackish lake, vleis) and Soutpan (saline pan and vleis).

Surface water may be present ephemerally, seasonally or permanently in the different wetlands of the Agulhas Plain. Thirty-seven endorheic wetlands (nine permanent and 28 temporary systems) were identified. These endorheic wetlands are particularly diverse and range from fresh to extremely saline. Twenty-nine palustrine wetlands were identified (eight permanent and 21 temporary), generally connected to rivers and including a number of riverine marshes and floodplains. Six permanent lacustrine wetlands were identified (three brackish and three fresh) all of which

are coastal lakes, including Soetendalsvlei (the second largest lacustrine wetland in South Africa) and Voëlvlei. De Hoop vlei and the De Mond estuary are both Ramsar sites and managed by CapeNature. The wetlands of the Agulhas Plain are important conservation features not only in their own right, but also for maintaining the diversity of the surrounding landscapes that they support hydrologically.



This variety of wetlands contributes to a high diversity of wetland plants and aquatic invertebrates. These wetlands attract over 60 water bird species and over 21 000 migrant and resident wetland birds annually, with the highest numbers recorded at Soetendalsvlei, followed by the Uilkraals River estuary and Voëlvlei.

(SOURCE: Agulhas National Park State of Knowledge, 2009)

Birding spots

Nuwejaars River, Salt pans, Voëlvlei (private), Wasvlei (Nuwejaars SMA), Melkbospan, Struisbaai-Elm Birding Route (35km gravel road)



Wetland birds

Visarend, African Fish Eagle, *Haliaeetus vocifer*



The so-called 'Voice of Africa' is BirdLife South Africa's Bird of the Year for 2012. This icon of Africa creates dreams and excitement. Those images of the African bird of birds 'picking up' a fish off the water simply stands on it's own. There are several of these magnificent birds in the Nuwejaars- and Heuningnes river systems. They nest in

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the vicinity on several pans and vlei's in the area. Like all birds of prey, habitat destruction and loss are critical issues in their dramatic population decline. Although the Fish-Eagle is found throughout most of the sub-Saharan regions of Africa, they are still affected by over fishing, water pollution and development into once undisturbed habitats. African Fish-Eagle populations are constantly being monitored in South Africa as they are one of the most sought-after species for birding tourists. The birding icon of Africa deserves total protection and we should all contribute to the conservation of the African 'bird of birds'. (Anton Odendaal, Birdlife Overberg)

Vulnerability of the Nuwejaars wetlands peat to be studied

The Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area (NWSMA) is to be the focus of an extensive climate change study. Researchers plan to assess the buried peat beds that characterise the wetland, in order to determine their age and how vulnerable they are to degradation.

Peat beds are essentially layers of undecayed organic matter that have built up over time in a waterlogged environment. They are estimated to grow at just 1mm every year, which would make a metre of peat 1000 years old. In the case of the NWSMA, the peat is believed to have been formed by dense stands of 'palmiet' which have largely been destroyed by floods.

Peat is important for the healthy functioning of wetlands and provides vital ecosystem services to communities living in the area. They store water, reduce the impact of flooding and store large quantities of carbon as organic matter. If peat is allowed to dry out, this carbon is released into the atmosphere which in turn contributes to climate change.

According to C4 EcoSolutions CEO Dr Anthony Mills, whose team will conduct the research, much peat is likely to have been buried under sand from floodwaters in the NWSMA over the years. "As a result, the full extent of intact peat beds and the corresponding water storage and carbon sequestration capacity of the system are currently unknown. However, this information is important to inform management activities aimed at restoring and protecting valuable or vulnerable wetland sites in the NWSMA."

Based on the study, researchers will also be able to determine effective interventions and measures that reduce the vulnerability and restore the natural capital of the region's peat beds. Mills says these interventions will prove vital for the NWSMA and its stakeholders, including local municipalities, the Department of

Agriculture and the Department of Water Affairs. C4 EcoSolutions is currently sourcing funding for the research.

Agulhas Wetlands: "Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People", Simoné Koert – Project administrator, Working for Wetlands

For the 2011/2012 financial year the wetlands project is focusing on the rehabilitation of quaternary catchment G50C-03 (Springfield) and G50A (Ratel River) of the Agulhas Plain. Activities include the control of invasive alien plants within the immediate catchment area and in the wetland, plugging of artificial drainage channels, addressing offsite causes of degradation in the catchments, as well as raising awareness of the function and importance of wetlands amongst workers, landowners and the surrounding communities.

Deliverable	M ³ /ha
Gabions	270,4m ³
Earth structure	597m ³
Concrete structures	131,55m ³
Revegetation	896m ²
Alien clearing	124,83ha



Currently the project provides work for four teams headed by contractors, Annelise Asongo, James Mavusa, Lewies Petersen and Marilyn Kies; all workers are from the surrounding communities. The management component consists of project manager, Arnold Viegeland and project administrator, Simoné Koert. The targeted beneficiaries are households and families where women, youth and disabled persons are the sole breadwinners.

Although the project started late, the Agulhas Wetlands team (both management and operational) are committed to finish the project on time and complete all deliverables as per plan.

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Agulhas Wetlands 2012 programme

Celebrate the uniqueness of the Agulhas Wetlands together with the Agulhas Working for Wetlands Beneficiaries.



2 February: World Wetlands Day, De Mond Nature Reserve, 10:00-15:00.

Visit the Southern Tip's own Ramsar site. Presentations by Patricia Johannes (Agulhas NP), Simoné Koert (Agulhas NP), Alison Coughlan (CA Tourism), Nickie Hess (Cape Nature). Bring own picnic lunch. The programme concludes with a walk in De Hoop Nature Reserve with a tour guide.

3 February: Ratel River Wetlands Open Day, 10:00-15:00

Visit the Ratel River wetlands with Wetlands Project Manager, Arnold Viegeland, to view the structures and interventions which are put in place to manage erosion. Join Koos Swart in some Wetlands birding. Bring own picnic lunch.

10 February: Springfield Open Day, 10:00-15:00

Visit the Springfield Wetlands with Wetlands Project Manager, Arnold Viegeland, to view the structures and interventions which are put in place to manage erosion. Birding at Soutpan and along Nuwejaars River. Bring own picnic lunch.

2 – 29 February, Wetlands Display, Bosheuvel, 10:00-15:00

Wetlands display at Bosheuvel project office.

For more information contact Simoné Koert, Patricia Johannes at 028 435 6216 (9:00-16:00) and Emmerentia De Kock at 028 435 6078 (8:00-16:00).

Events Calendar

February 2011	
2	World Wetlands Day: Theme - <i>Wetlands & Tourism</i>
2 – 29	Agulhas Wetlands Display, Bosheuvel
3	Ratel River Wetlands programme
10	Springfield Wetlands programme
21	International Mother Language Day
March 2011	
19 & 23	National Water Week: Theme - <i>Water & Food security/Responding to the urban challenge</i>
22	World Water Day

Southern Tip-Zoetendals Vallei Relay Race 12 May 2012



Fun for Family & Friends

14km run
10-km canoe
40km mountain bike

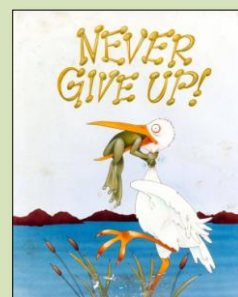
Special prizes for first three positions

Entry Fee: R150 per team of three, two or one individual



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