



AgulhasNPark eBulletin



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Southern Tip Day 16 May 2013

www.sanparks.org

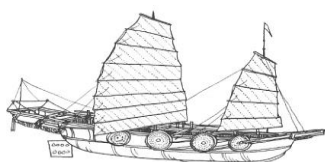
Southernmost Tip of Africa

S34°49'59" E20°00'12"

The southernmost point of Africa is recognized by the International Hydrographic Organisation as the **geographic dividing line** between the Indian and Atlantic oceans, following the meridian of 20° east. The Agulhas and Benguela currents that originate in these mighty oceans mingle hundreds of kilometres south of here over an area of some hundreds of kilometres that is not fixed in size or location. The actual southernmost tip is about 250 km further south at the edge of the continental shelf after it has wandered over the millennia because of plate tectonics. South African National Parks acquired the southernmost tip of the African continent on 14 September 1998.

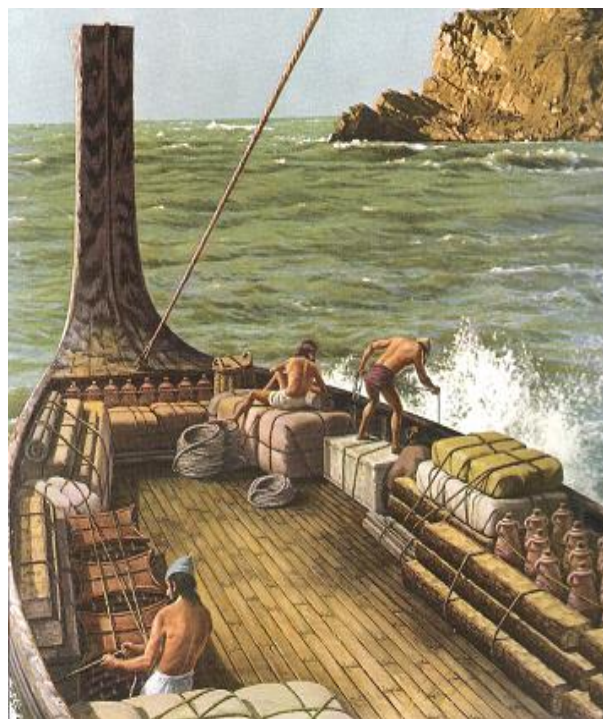
The Chinese sailing around the Southernmost Tip of Africa

In 1459 a map of the world was drawn by Fra Mauro, a cartographer working for Dom Pedro of Portugal, brother of Henry the Navigator; the first map of the world since the days of the Roman Empire. This map is held by the *Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana* in Venice. Fra Mauro correctly drew the Cape of Good Hope with its triangular shape thirty years before Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape. The Fra attached notes to his maps and one described a ship or junk rounding the Cape: "Around the year 1420, a ship or junk from India on a non-stop crossing of the Indian Ocean was driven beyond the Cape of Good Hope. After 40 days of nothingness they made their return to the Cape in 70 days." He called the Cape *Cap de Diab*. Near the note a picture of a Chinese junk was drawn. Another note described *the huge eggs the crew found when replenishing at Cap de Diab and the giant size of the birds that laid them*. (SOURCE: MENZIES, G. 2003. 1421: the year China discovered the world. London: Bantam Books.)



Did the Phoenicians sail around the Southernmost Tip of Africa first?

The Phoenicians lived on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea, more or less where Lebanon is situated today, from 1200 to 146 BC. They were known as the biggest merchants, mariners, ship builders and explorers of their time. According to the Greek historian Herodotus in about 611 BC, the Egyptian pharaoh Necho II, sent out a party of Phoenician sailors to sail from the Red Sea around Africa back to the mouth of the Nile. Necho built an early version of the Suez Canal. They



apparently sailed in three years around Africa. Herodotus wrote that the Phoenicians reported that as they sailed in a westerly course around the southern end of Libya (Africa) they had the sun on their right northward of them. Not all historians believe this to be true, but as we say here in the south: *why ruin a good story with facts!!* (SOURCE: EDEY, M.A. 1976. *De zeevaarders*. Time Inc.)



Connecting to Society

The first European around the Southernmost Tip of Africa

In 1488 Bartolomeu Dias turned back after he failed to reach the East in search of a trading route. On his return journey he passed a certain flat piece of land on the 16th May. He named it after an Irish monk, St Brendan, whose festival day it was: "Ponte de Sao Brendao".



Celebrate the history and culture of the Southernmost Tip of Africa with the Southern Tip Day Festival

Discover the history, culture and beauty of the southernmost tip of Africa at the 2013 Southern Tip Day festival – culminating with a relay race and fun walk on 11 May. The Southern Tip Day festivities commemorates the historic journey of Bartolomeu Dias who sailed around the southernmost point of Africa in 1488 and pays tribute to all the lives lost at sea in the numerous shipwrecks dotted along the Cape Agulhas coastline. From talks, lunches, shipwreck displays, art exhibitions and plenty activities for the whole family, the highlight of the festival is the Southern Tip-Zoetendals Vallei Relay Race, which takes place on 11 May. The race consists of a 14km run and a 40km mountain bike ride starting and finishing at the Bosheuvel Precinct. A fun walk of 14km is part of the programme. Prizes for the winners of the race range from accommodation to gifts of wine from local wine estates. Other activities to celebrate the festival include a talk by Ora Laubscher on Dias' historic journey around the Cape and the hundreds of treasures found in the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum from the shipwrecks along the coast. The talk takes place on 17 May at *Suiderlig Dienssentrum*, Struisbaai. The Park will in collaboration with the Shipwreck Museum, put up a display on shipwrecks and the Southern Tip in general in the Park's conference room from 11th May to the weekend of 18th May. A historical walk around the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse and the Southern Tip is also planned. For further information and details about each activity contact Agulhas National Park on 028 435 6078 or visit www.sanparks.org/parks/agulhas to download programme information.

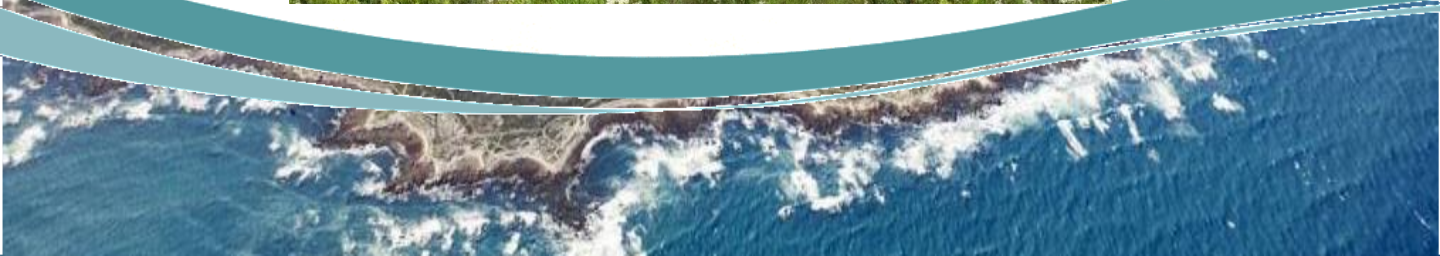
International Day for Biological Diversity, 22 May

The International Day of Biological Diversity is held every year on the 22nd of May. The day was created by the United Nations to create awareness about environmental issues. The aim of Biodiversity Day is to raise public and political awareness at national and international levels of the significance of ecosystems and biodiversity for human well-being. Water is essential for life. No living being on planet Earth can survive without it. It is a prerequisite for human health and well-being as well as for the preservation of the environment. The theme **Water and Biodiversity** was chosen for 2013 to coincide with the United Nations designation of 2013 as the [International Year of Water Cooperation](http://www.un.org/en/events/celebrations/2013/05/2013-05-22-international-day-for-biological-diversity). Designation of IDB 2013 on the theme of water provides Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the public at large the opportunity to raise awareness about this vital issue, and to increase positive action. Coincidentally, the period 2005-2015 is the [International Decade for Action 'WATER FOR LIFE'](http://www.un.org/en/events/celebrations/2013/05/2013-05-22-international-day-for-biological-diversity). For more information visit www.cbd.int.



Agulhas Biodiversity

The terrestrial vegetation is the most significant component of the biota of the Park and its protection is vital for the conservation of Fynbos in South Africa. The diversity of habitat types, wetland ecosystems, Red Data plant species and local endemics is unmatched in the Cape Floristic Region. South Africa is the only country in the world that contains a complete biological kingdom – the Cape floristic kingdom and is home to 10% of the plant species on earth, and as such we should be trying to conserve our biodiversity.



Biodiversity (Biological diversity)

The term biological diversity, or biodiversity, is given to the variety of plant and animal life, and micro-organisms, on Earth and the different ecosystems in which they live. The biodiversity we see today is the result of the natural process that has taken place over many years and which has caused changes, such as weathering and adaptation of the landscape and its inhabitants. The rate at which this natural process takes place is increased by human activities and it is this unnatural increase that can have harmful effects on our biophysical environment. There has been an increase in the loss of the Earth's biological diversity and **International Biodiversity Day, 22 May**, has been set aside to increase public awareness of the importance and value of biological diversity. Biodiversity also includes genetic differences within each species – for example, between varieties of crops or breeds of livestock. Another aspect of biodiversity is the variety of ecosystems that occur in mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, deserts and other biomes. Within each ecosystem the abiotic (non-living) elements and biotic (living) organisms, including people, interact within a complex community. To date, 1.78 million species have been identified, although the total number of species is unknown and is probably between 5 and 30 million. It is the combination of these species and their interactions with each other and the environment that has made the Earth a uniquely habitable place. Biodiversity provides a sustainable lifestyle for all inhabitants if the Earth's natural resources are utilised wisely. For more information visit www.cbd.int.

The quagga is back – Mick D'Alton

A small free roaming herd of quaggas are grazing along the tar road between Bredasdorp and Elim, rekindling the aura and atmosphere of the ancient Cape and enhancing the biodiversity of the Strandveld area. The first zebra that the early settlers to the Cape in the 1650s would have seen was the Cape Mountain Zebra or *Kaapse Bergkwagga* which may have been found on the slopes of Table Mountain. The true quagga lived beyond the Cape Flats, either up the west coast or in the Overberg. This original true quagga is extinct. When this occurred in the wild is unknown due to the confusion caused by the use of the name quagga or *kwagga* for a specific animal as well as being the common Afrikaans name for all the zebras. We do however know that the last known true quagga died in the Amsterdam Zoo in 1883. There are three living zebra species: Grevy's zebra *Equus grevyi*, only found in North Eastern Africa, the Mountain zebra *Equus zebra*, found in the mountainous areas of Namibia and southern South Africa and the Plains zebra *Equus quagga*, which has by far the greatest distribution area. (Continue next page)



Agulhas Biodiversity continue

The Agulhas fauna is less well known than the flora. Limited studies on invertebrates point to exceptionally high diversity of aquatic invertebrates and at least three Red Data Book listed butterflies. This is in contrast to the freshwater fish of which there are only three species of which one is Red Data Book listed. Of the 15 amphibian species thought to occur on the Agulhas Plain, three species (Cape platanna *Xenopus gilli*, Micro frog *Microbatrachella capensis* and Western leopard toad *Bufo pantherinus*) are Red Data Book listed. To date, twenty-four reptile species have been recorded, and a further twenty-two species are likely to occur on the Agulhas Plain. Two species (Yellow-bellied house snake *Lamprophis fuscus* and the Southern dwarf adder *Bitis armata*) are Red Data Book listed. The avifauna of the region is diverse with 230 bird species being recorded, of which 11 are Red Data Book species. Significant populations of blue cranes and, to a lesser extent, the vulnerable Denhams bustard, breed on the inland plains. Of the 81 terrestrial mammals known from the Cape Floral Kingdom, 65 species have been recorded or are likely to occur on the Agulhas Plain. The majority of these are rodents (21 species) and small carnivores (14 species). This includes four mammal species classified as vulnerable, amongst others the Bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus ssp.pygargus*), which is the least common antelope in southern Africa.



The quagga is back (Continue)

In the north (southern Ethiopia and Kenya) Plains zebras are fully striped, have no shadow stripes and have a white basic colour. In the south (Namibia and South Africa) Plains zebras usually lack striping on the lower legs, have shadow stripes and an ochre or brownish basic colour. Between these two extremes, individual races of intermediate colouration occur. The exterminated quagga, formerly of the area south of the rivers Orange and Vaal, displayed in varying degrees the very distinctive reduction in striping and the greatest brownish basic colour which led to it being considered a fourth separate species. (Read more about the Quagga Project in the June eBulletin)



Quagga by Francois La Vaillant
c1780s

“ My Bird Patch”

My Bird Patch is another exciting initiative of the South African Bird Atlas Project. You can now register at *My Bird Patch*, www.mybirdpatch.adu.org, any specific area that you monitor regularly, and online, send in your lists for this patch. This could be your garden, a vlei or perhaps your local sewage works. Patches could be registered as private or public. Private means only for private use and public means anyone from the public can enter their lists for this patch. Monitoring can be of any length, but preferably two to 24 hours. Shorter times can be entered as partial lists. Breeding must be noted. For the first time birds seen can be counted and this is the exciting part of *My Bird Patch*. More than six public patches have been registered for the Agulhas NP and the Nuwejaarsrivier SMA. More will follow soon. Visitors to accommodation in the park are invited to monitor the birds of their patch (perhaps Rhenosterkop) and in this way do their bit for conservation. For further information, contact Wim de Klerk at doc@medismedical.com.



New alien clearing strategy rolled out on the Plain

A brand new strategy to tackle invasive alien plants on private land is currently being planned and rolled out on the Agulhas Plain. The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) is playing a lead role in the ABI Alien Clearing Programme. It has seen land users, NGOs and government working together to plan this pilot programme. The Department of Environmental Affairs, through its ‘Land User Incentive Scheme’, made funding available for invasive alien clearing on private land late last year. It is the first scheme of its kind, and will aim to employ thousands of jobless people nationally through Expanded Public Works Programme funding, while addressing the increasing threats created by invasive alien plants. ABI has been awarded R18-million over the next three years. However, it is hoped this will become a 20-year alien clearing programme, to ensure gains made are maintained. The programme ensures land users are involved through their land user groups. According to Roger Bailey, Coordinator of the ABI Alien Clearing Programme, “This programme allows for a new way of working between land user groups and government – while being strategic about our clearing efforts. The idea is for the funding to be used as efficiently as possible. But at the same time, it will entail an effort and contributions from all stakeholders involved.” ABI is currently working with conservancies in the area, the Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area and stewardship sites.

BirdLife SA Bird of the Year 2013



White-winged Flufftail
Witvlerkvleikuiken
Sarothrura ayresi
Not endemic to the Strandveld.

Strandveld Flufftail
Red-Chested Flufftail
Rooiborsvleikuiken
Sarothrura rufa



Andre Du Toit

Animal and Bird Banner pictures by
Sharon Brink

