



AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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Winter's champagne days at the Southernmost Tip

Between cold fronts passing the Southernmost Tip the most beautiful calm days can be experienced. A colleague called it the champagne days of winter. Prospective visitors should watch the weather patterns for breaks in the cold spells and visit the Southern Cape coast. The sun is shining, no wind and the vegetation is preparing for the usual spectacular flower show. The wetlands are full of water and birds are everywhere. Nowadays the sun is as warm as in summer.

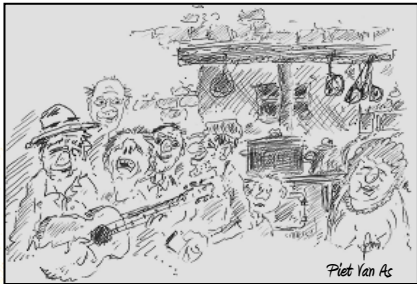


How to spend a winter's evening in the Strandveld, from Piet Van As's original writing in his wonderful Strandveld Afrikaans

With the wind howling around the house and heavy rain hitting the windows, a comforting fire is already roaring in the Welcome Dover stove. Sherry in hand and a bowl of Ma's steaming bean soup, you are now ready for a long evening of conversation and storytelling. Thick bean soup is made with brown *spikkelboontjies* (speckled beans), a few thick marrow bones, some fatty bits of pork skin, potatoes and *breekmielies* (samp). Not sure how much salt, but my neighbour suggested just a pinch. The soup is served with fresh warm home-made bread from the oven with butter and *triekel* (syrup). No other *bykosse* (side-dishes) such as vegetables and salads. Who needs that after three or four plates of the brown *lekkerte* (deliciousness) to fill your stomach? And now it is time for the stories and visiting ghosts...

A winter storm at the Southernmost Tip

On the other hand, you should experience a real Cape storm. The wind is howling through every open space in your house it can find. If on the coast, you hear the storm coming with the sound of breaking waves getting nearer and nearer. Inland the sound of blue-gum trees in the wind tells you what is going on outside. Then you are glad you sit in front of a warm fire with the said sherry and bean soup. Give a thought to the old wooden ships and their crew who sailed past, and are maybe still sailing ... Agulhas has the perfect places to experience this: Lagoon House on the coast and Rhenosterkop and Rietfontein inland. Come and enjoy!!



Root rot in Fynbos – Stephen Smuts, Overberg Botanical Society, edited by SANParks Conservation Research Centre

If you had a chance to look around the veld in the greater Agulhas area, you would have seen a small percentage of a wide-variety of fynbos species dead or dying. In the case of some species, there is a high mortality rate. It is suspected that a species of *Phytophthora* that affects fynbos, known as *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, is the culprit. It is a soil-borne microbe resembling algae that causes root rot that is spread by spores in the soil and water. It probably originated in Papua New Guinea and has spread around the world through humans moving soils and plants into every place where the annual rainfall is above 500 mm and is not too cold. It is affecting a wide range of plants. Commercially, it is a problem for many subtropical crops such as avocados, pineapples and citrus. It is also a well-known problem in Proteaceae and similar vegetation to fynbos in Western Australia. It is always in the soil, particularly poor soils like ours when there are wet, warm soil conditions. *Phytophthora* enters the plant through the root system and does not kill every plant that it infects, often only the young, old, weak and stressed are affected. It may be of interest that rainfall figures for Napier Mountain have risen over the past few years as follows: 2011 = 580, 2012 = 753, 2013 = 1,019, 2014 = 355 (to end April, theoretically the end of the dry season) which could have enhanced growth conditions for the fungus. Up on the mountain, the die-off was noticed in every fynbos family, some particular species being very severely affected, such as the popular picking species, *Leucospermum truncatum*, otherwise called *Bucksies*, but even Erica's and Restios are being infected. Although plants have died, in some places over 50%, with cooler winter temperatures, the worst now seems to be over and the veld is generally looking very good.



SANParks: Cape Research Centre comments

There are many causes for die back of fynbos. *Phytophthora* usually targets a family like Protea and not all fynbos groups. Laboratory testing of the roots needs to be done to determine if *Phytophthora* alone is responsible. SANParks has found that *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is responsible for the deaths of many Silver trees (*Leucadendron argenteum*) in Table Mountain National Park and if not monitored and managed could wipe out this species. Similarly the fynbos in Agulhas is being monitored for threats including *Phytophthora* outbreaks, so that preventative actions can be put in place in time.



Dying Fynbos in Agulhas National Park

This phenomenon of Fynbos dying in patches has been observed in the Park for a while now. The question that comes to mind is, what is the effect of planting fynbos (farming with fynbos) in natural areas, as was the case before it became a national park, as well as bringing in alien “fynbos” from Australia in particular. Could these plantings have brought in infected plants and soils? And how long does this pathogen survive in the soil? A possible aggravating factor mentioned was above average rainfall since 2009 and an average increase in temperatures in Agulhas NP over the past 50 years.

Banksia sp from Australia



Swift Tern project

Swift Terns, Geelbeksterretjies, *Sterna bergii* are one of the few locally-breeding seabirds whose numbers are increasing. To help understand the main factors driving the positive trend of this species, a team of researchers from the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology and the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town marked 500 Swift Terns chicks from Robben Island in April 2013 and 2014 with metal and individually engraved colour rings. In 2013 members of the public reported how these birds dispersed, providing information on the fledging success, survival and dispersal of juvenile Swift Terns, which were re-sighted from Namibia to the Eastern Cape. Gathering dispersal records is a time consuming but important task that relies on assistance from volunteers across southern Africa. Rings in **2014** are **orange** and **yellow** (with black text) and **green** and **blue** (with white text), and are engraved with an "A" followed by a letter and a number (e.g. AU2). Rings from **2013** are **yellow** and **white** (with black text) and **green** and **blue** (with white text), and bear a code of one letter and one number (e.g. U2). The majority of the colour rings are top-down and all are on the right leg. Juvenile/Immature Swift Terns are leaving (some already left) Robben Island and they will soon be all around the southern African coasts. If you see any ringed birds please record their location as accurately as possible (ideally GPS), the date and time of sighting, ring colour, letters on the ring (if legible) and age class (juvenile or immature). If a bird is found dead, please also record the number of the metal ring. Send the information to Davide Gaglio at swift.terns@gmail.com. (Info provided by Dr Wim De Klerk]



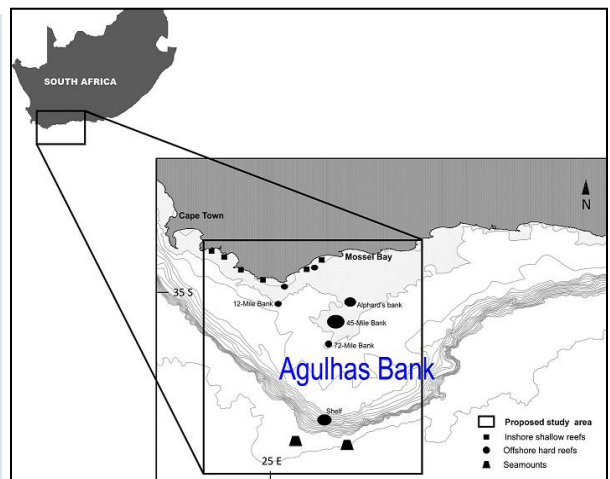
Pictures: S. Brink



Picture: H. Brink

Agulhas - Exciting new research proposal – Gavin W. Maneveldt

Department of Biodiversity and Conservation Biology, UWC
South Africa's nearly 3000km of coastline straddles three oceans (Atlantic, Indian and Southern) and is home to about 16% of all known coastal marine species. A large percentage of these marine organisms are found along the south coast and on the seamounts of the Agulhas Bank. The meeting of the cold Benguela and warm Agulhas currents at the edge of the Agulhas Bank has been reported to fuel the nutrient cycle for much marine life in the area, making this region one of the most productive areas in South Africa. While we know much about the physical oceanography of the region, comparatively little is known about the biological, microbial and chemical environment of the Agulhas Bank. Consequently, new research is being proposed for the Agulhas Bank to: discover medicinal agents (in the treatment of diseases) from marine invertebrates; document and assist in conserving the biodiversity of the surrounding seamounts; promote training and capacity development; and develop a model program for biodiversity use and its conservation. All this work, however, is funding dependant and efforts are currently underway to secure the much needed funding for these very ambitious research initiatives.



Map indicating the proposed study area (provided by Dr Toufiek Samaai, Department of Environmental Affairs).



Pictures: G. Maneveldt

Stack burning part of winter activities in Agulhas National Park



Recently stacked dry material of alien vegetation removed by Working for Water in the Springfield section were burned. Stack burning is a preventative measure for possible fires in the dry season. The Conservation section, Technical section and Working for Water were in attendance.

SANParks Honorary Rangers celebrating their 50th anniversary

2014 is a year of celebration for the SANParks Honorary Rangers celebrating their 50 years of volunteer conservation. The first 500 honorary rangers were appointed on 5th May 1964 to assist in the Kruger National Park. From this humble beginnings the Honorary Ranger group increased over the 50 years to 1320 members in 31 regions. Celebrations took place during the annual general meeting at Skukuza Rest Camp in the Kruger National Park in May. The four day Indaba was a mixture of meetings, training courses, and an opportunity to meet with other honorary rangers from across South Africa. The Lowveld region hosted the event and made a spectacular success of it. A special achievement was the overall contribution to SANParks reaching 43.3 million rand worth of funding and services provided for 2013. This contributed to a total contribution of R 248 million over the past ten years. (SOURCE: SANP Honorary Rangers Media release, n.d.; BUCKLEY, D., ed. 1994. The Honorary Ranger 1964-1994. Pretoria: NPB)



Patricia Olckers, BSP Training officer

Patricia was recently diagnosed with cancer and is currently undergoing treatment. We all are keeping her in our thoughts.



Agulhas Honorary Rangers celebrating in Skukuza



New staff appointments



Esterien Wessels
Receptionist
Previously Tourism
Trainee
Agulhas NP



Mcebisi Bokolo
Tourism Intern
Studying B.A.
Degree Tourism,
UWC

Correction

Thank you to the readers who spotted the wrong identification.



Picture: L. Wolhuter

Gordelakkedis
Cape Girdled Lizard
Cordylus cordylus

